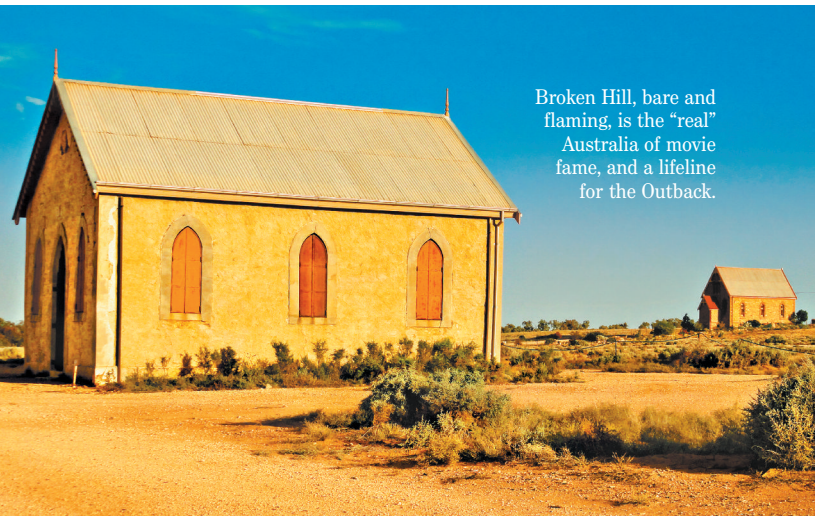
Face to face with the majesty of the world's largest tree. **N2**

Keeping young special-needs fliers safe and snug. **Gadget Guru, N4**

MAD MAX'S AUSTRALIA



Broken Hill, bare and flaming, is the "real" Australia of movie fame, and a lifeline for the Outback.

Two churches from the 1880s survive in the once-booming town of Silverton, 15 miles northwest of Broken Hill, Australia, in an unrelenting arid landscape, and are now film stars. Kangaroos are a constant hazard on Outback roads, especially at dusk. LARISSA MILNE

A Year and A World
By Larissa and Michael Milne

By Larissa and Michael Milne
FOR THE INQUIRER

The sun was setting as we drove down a dusty road in the Australian Outback. It set the landscape aglow with flaming colors we had seen only in crayon boxes: Burnt sienna, raw umber, and goldenrod rippled across the sparse terrain. We grew more alert for the kangaroos that we had learned would start hopping across our path at dusk; a marsupial collision wouldn't work out well for either animal or car.

The rental agency had provided us a red sports sedan, complete with spoiler, that was probably not the best car for off-roading. Swerving along, the wheels kicked up the orange dust that gives the area the appearance of a Martian landscape. We were approaching Broken Hill, the midpoint in our 1,200-mile road trip from Sydney to Adelaide.

The sign greeting visitors reads "Welcome to Broken Hill — Where the Outback Begins." We had driven this far to see what many told us was the "real" Australia. If it resembles the arid land made famous in the post-apocalyptic thriller *Mad Max*, that's because the movie was filmed near here.

Broken Hill sprang up overnight as a mining boomtown in 1883 after the world's richest lode of lead ore was discovered. Rem-

See **AUSTRALIA** on N4

Club Med Turkoise, which opened in 1984, was one of the first resorts on the Turks and Caicos island of Providenciales; many of the accommodations, while clean, are a bit spartan. But it's a place where vacationing alone isn't so lonely, and one of only five Club Med resorts whose clientele is limited to adults 18 and older.

A Club Med shines for a single looking for fun in the sun

By Stephanie Rosenbloom
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Hours after checking into the Club Med in Turks and Caicos, I had yet to acclimate. As I would quickly learn, this particular Xanadu was an all-or-nothing proposition. Take, for instance, the two clocks at the reception desk: One shows the correct time; the other, with a plaque beneath it that reads "Club Med Times," is an hour late. The latter, a receptionist explained, is the official time at the resort, so guests can enjoy an extra hour of sunlight each day.

Inside the gates of this 84-acre compound, fantasy reigns.

As a veteran solo traveler, I'd gone to Club Med Turkoise to see how one of the last outposts of the singles resort scene was faring. In its heyday, "Club Med" might as well have been spelled "meat market." A 1970 article in the New York Times described a Club Med in Martinique as rife with seminude swingers and a sensual atmosphere "that middle age should not be forced to endure."

Flash forward to 2012. The image on the cover of this year's Club Med brochure? A mother gazing into the eyes of a baby.

See **SINGLES** on N5

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Top 10 List

Last week, the Travel section centered on cruises, but you can also enjoy trips on the water when you visit land destinations. National Geographic (travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel) offers this list of the Top 10 City Boat Trips.

1. Vancouver Ferries, Canada
2. Staten Island Ferry, N.Y.
3. San Francisco to Sausalito, Calif.
4. New Orleans to Algiers Ferry, La.
5. Star Ferry, Hong Kong
6. Brisbane CityCat, Australia
7. Bosphorus Ferry, Istanbul, Turkey
8. Venice Vaporetto, Italy
9. Naples to Capri Ferry, Italy
10. Mersey Ferry, Liverpool, England

Geoquiz

Question: You can change one letter in the name of a Scottish river to get the name of its estuary. What is the estuary?
— *Chicago Tribune*

(Answer below)

Answer: The Firth of Forth extends from the North Sea.

Gadget Guru

Safe and snug

Several years ago, Kids Fly Safe invented the Child Aviation Restraint System (CARES), a harness-style seat belt designed to provide in-flight upper-body support (in lieu of a car seat) for children weighing 22 to 45 pounds and up to 40 inches tall. Now, the company has gotten FAA approval (with some restrictions) for the Special CARES Flight Belt, a similar harness designed for bigger special-needs children, as well as special-needs adults up to 6 feet tall. The harness, which attaches to the seat with a strap that slides over the seat back, functions like those used by flight attendants and pilots, keeping the chest and shoulders from jerking forward during sudden stops. The FAA requires that those using the Special CARES flight belt be seated in the back row of their compartment, and get a special permit in advance from the FAA (Kids Fly Safe has details on its website). There are no such requirements for children meeting the size and weight limits of the standard CARES belt.

Both models weigh about a pound and stuff into a small included pouch.

CARES or Special CARES Flight Belt is $74.95 at www.kidsflysafe.com; 800-299-6249.

Web Buzz

Free HD phone calls

Name: Vonage Mobile.

What it does: It allows you to make high-definition calls and send texts for free to other users who have downloaded the app in more than 90 countries using WiFi/3G and 4G networks.

Cost: Free.

Who's it for: iPhone and Android.

What's hot: You don't need to be a Vonage customer to use the app, but calls to any Vonage number are also free. And there's no crazy code to dial first.

What's not: The recipient has to have downloaded the app. If not, you could face humongous roaming c arges

— *F*

Driving on the other side of the road is no problem where there are no lines — Australia's Outback. LARISSA MILNE

Exploring Mad Max's Australia

AUSTRALIA from N1

nants of the boom years are reflected in the ornately flamboyant architecture of the oldest buildings. Shops, restaurants, and B&Bs line the 19th-century town center, providing a welcome oasis in the unrelenting arid landscape. The gussied-up Palace Hotel occupies a prominent spot in the center of town. In another movie connection, three cross-dressing road trippers stopped here for the night in the cult film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

More than just a mining town with historic accents, Broken Hill serves as a commercial and service hub for those living on the far-flung sheep and cattle stations that (sparsely) populate the Outback. This is an area so vast that stations are measured in square miles. Some properties are larger than American states. Reaching people so far away requires the air, in more ways than one.

Broken Hill hosts one of the main branches of the School of the Air, founded in 1951 to provide distance learning to children living on these remote Outback stations. All teaching was done via shortwave radio until 1993, when satellite technology was introduced. Before then children sat in their homes wearing a large set of headphones while facing a large metal microphone that looked like something used by Howdy Doody. Today, students park themselves in front of computers, where they can see their teachers via video, but as yet the teacher still can't see the students. Principal Mark Fisher is hoping to add that feature in the near future.

The School of the Air serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Visitors can observe one of their classes, such as the kindergarten math lesson we saw. Sitting near the teacher, we listened to her audio feed while the children answered with correct radio protocol, as if they were landing a jet. We were particularly enamored with little Hayley, who responded in her pixieish Australian accent, "Um, I believe the answer is 12, over."

While teachers use the airwaves to reach their remote charges, doctors use airplanes. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is another way Aussies have adapted to their unique environment. The Flying Doctors get the call when someone hundreds of miles away needs urgent medical care. Often such a call involves landing on a makeshift runway. This being Australia, the pilot signals 20 minutes before landing so any stray kangaroos can be cleared away.

Visitors can observe the dispatch office, then tour the hangar where the planes are kept. A well-maintained museum conveys the history of the service as well as its role in Outback life today. One of the highlights is a recording of an actual communication when the service talked a woman through emergency medical care for her husband until the plane arrived.

After learning how Australians handle the harsh Outback environment today, we took a trip into both past and future at the semi-abandoned ghost town of Silverton. Located 15 miles northwest of Broken Hill, the town is a star of film and television in its own right. In addi-

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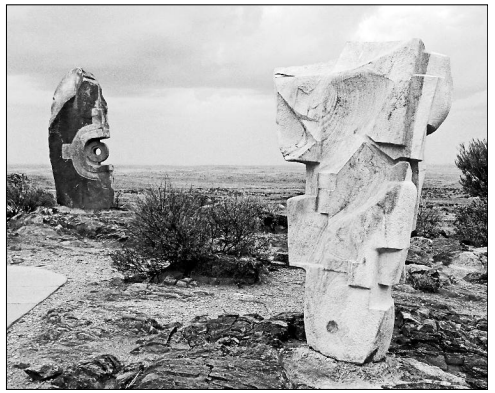
peared in westerns in the 1950s.

The starting point for a self-guided tour is the Silverton Hotel. We drove gingerly around a few way-



The sculpture garden of Living Desert State Park, 12 sandstone works from world artists, overlooks Mundi Mundi Plains.

Getting a plane for the Royal Flying Doctor Service ready for a mission. The pilot signals 20 minutes before landing so stray kangaroos can be moved.

ward donkeys and parked out front. The weather-worn building has been in more than 50 films and commercials, each time taking on a different persona. It was once even called Chuck's Diner for an American beer commercial. Near the entrance out front is a copy of the car Mel Gibson drove in *Mad Max II*.

The walls inside are plastered with photos from the films and TV commercials that have been shot in Silverton. We mused about what had happened to some of the *Mad Max* memorabilia when the fellow sitting at the bar next to us piped up, "They gave me the rifle back."

Gary Raymond happened to be visiting Silverton the same time we were. He provided the weaponry for the first *Mad Max* film for the grand total of $160. When the film wrapped, Max's sawed-off shotgun was returned to him. With the modifications it was now an illegal weapon, so he threw it out. "Too bad," Gary said. "I could get quite a bundle for it on eBay."

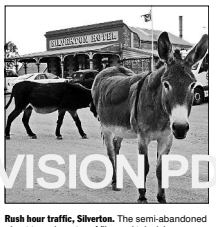
We meandered around the town, or, more accurately, the parched dirt roads to look at the few buildings remaining. Some have become art galleries and shops as Silverton's historic past and movie connections have begun to draw visitors.

Enough of civilization, such as it was. It was time for a glimpse of that vastness that inspires artists and cinematographers alike. A few miles outside of town, Living Desert State Park houses a sculpture garden, a series of 12 outdoor sandstone sculptures from artists around the world, that crowns one of the area's rare hills.

Our bright red rental car took on a rusty pallor from the orange dust as we carefully dodged kangaroos and climbed to this vantage point over the Mundi Mundi Plains. From here the Outback seems to stretch beyond forever — the view is so vast that the curvature of the Earth is visible on the far-off horizon. A distant gray thunderstorm created a stark contrast to the Crayola glow below us. It was difficult to decide which was more inspired: the enigmatic sculptures or the unending landscape beyond.

Larissa and Michael Milne are traveling around the world for a year and will be reporting in regularly about their journey. You can follow them at www.ChangesInLongitude.com To comment, e-mail TravelTalk@phillynews.com.

SOURCE: ESRI Associated Press



Rush hour traffic, Silverton. The semi-abandoned ghost town is a star of film and television.

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