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Around the World with IDA

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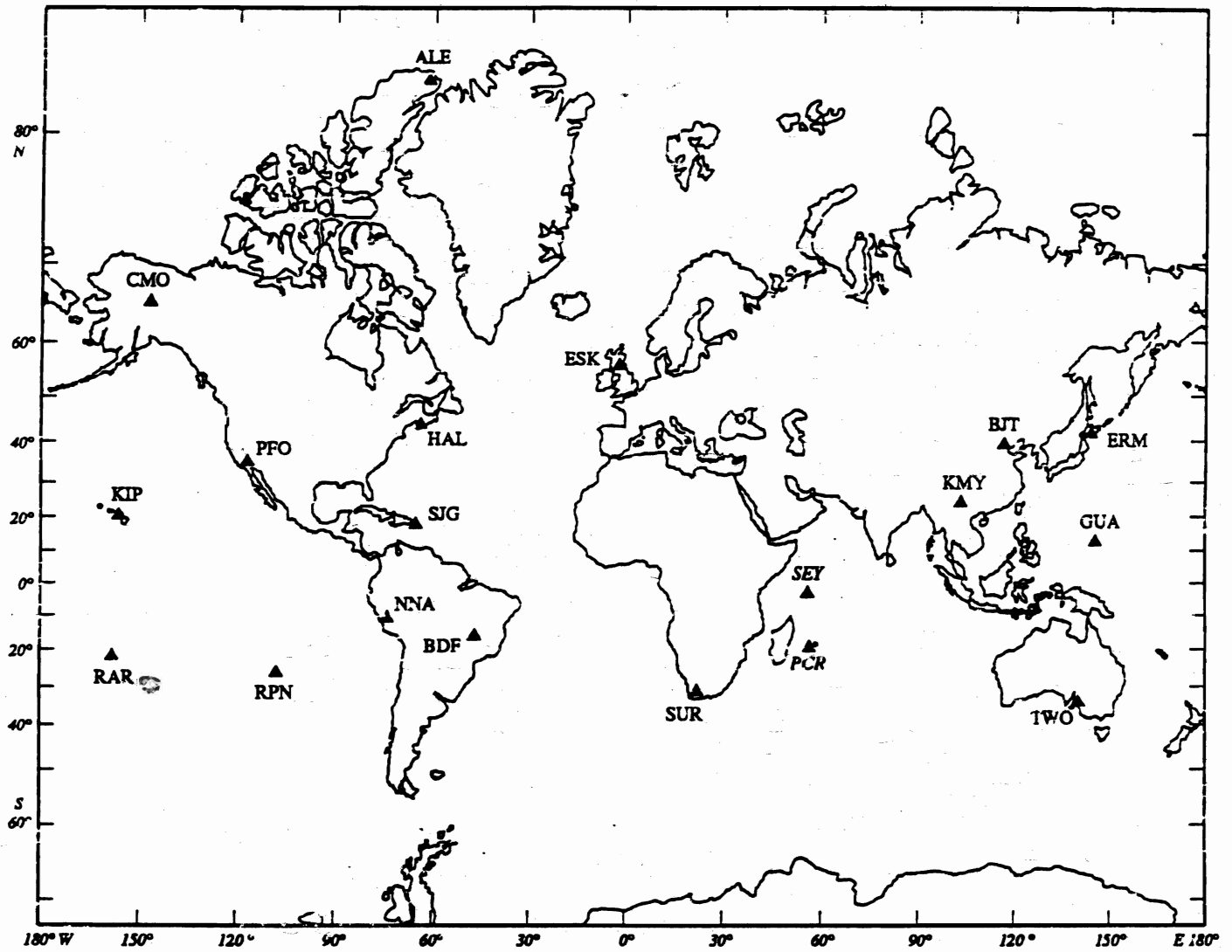
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Around the World with IDA



Don Miller

AROUND THE WORLD WITH IDA

It all started innocently enough back in 1974. An offer that I couldn't refuse was made to go "Down Under" and visit the hinterlands of Australia. How could one refuse an offer like that, especially when it provided the opportunity to see the Sydney opera house; a dream which could come true. You see, the Sydney opera house is the ultimate example of an arch form which was the conclusion of a term paper on arches that I presented to an art class at San Diego City College.

So, bags in hand, passport and tickets at the ready, it was off to Australia in our winter of 1974. A delightful trip which included the hoped for view of a wild kangaroo, laughing along with a Kookaburra and enjoying the food, beverage and hospitality of the Aussies. And of course it was topped off by strolling through the dim-lit outer hallways of the opera house as a powerful baritone filled the chamber with his mellow tones. Glorious! Glorious! What a start to a long and just beginning, multiple voyage around the world with IDA. And on that first trip to Australia we were all concerned about IDA'S ability to travel so Jon, Duncan and I all went along to make sure that she was up to it; she was.



IDA'S First Foreign Home. MT. Stromlo, Australian Capital Territory.

That first trip to Australia has been followed by four others over the years; each one different, the same and all interesting. Equal (almost) to the first trip was the one which involved driving IDA from Canberra to Adelaide. Staying over night in back country motels where lamb chops and eggs are standard fare for breakfast and brought to your room at the appointed hour. The white pelicans on the sluggish Murray river and the eucalyptus covered hills outside of Adelaide reminding one of San Diego (of course the trees belong in Australia and not in San Diego). Or being disappointed and surprised in a park cafe when told that they didn't have doughnuts, "why don't you have a scone with berries and cream"--beats any doughnut you can think of.

Then there was Nana, Peru. Just as the Cordillera of the Andes starts its steep climb outside of Lima there is a small Peruvian village with its bakery, children herding goats across the lane in front of the vehicle and the strange, dead looking, dried up plants (*Bromeliaceae*) just lying there among the rocks on the mountain side--not dead but surviving on the bit of dew sometimes available. They have no more roots into the ground than do the miserably poor Incas who have come down from the mountains above only to find that it is worse in the cities of Peru than in the rural areas they left behind. They too are surviving on the dew of the land, perhaps available in the early morning but soon burned off by the heat of day and they are again left looking for the night and the possibilities of the coming day.

And it is here that IDA lost one of her true and lasting friends. Gonzalo was there to greet and take care of our needs faithfully from 1975 until he died "after a long and painful illness" early in 1992. Gone but not forgotten.

Perhaps it is better that he has gone now because he would not like to see what is happening there and the increasing misery yet to be seen in Peru.

1977 was a very good year. IDA and I went to four new places that broadened our view of the world. Places like Brasilia, Brasil; Fairbanks, Alaska; Honolulu, Hawaii and Sakhalin, Russia.

Brasil brought the beauty of the beach at Copacabana, Pan de Azucar (Sugar Loaf Mountain) and the intricately patterned tile sidewalks of Rio. And out in the National forest of Brasil, where IDA set up her home in Brasilia, there are the tree-born termite nests, hard as baked mud (that's what they are). Not many trees but tall shrubs here and there housing the tree climbing insects. The Alto-Plano of Brasil, far away from the magic of Rio or the heat and humidity of the jungle around the Amazon, just high and relatively dry for her view of the world.

And Fairbanks in July is not always the "Northern Exposure" one might imagine. It can be hot (how about 90 degrees) and with extremely long days, the natives become restless. Especially if your hotel is above a bar in the heart of town. Shouting, tires squealing and general disorder throughout the "night". Oh, for cold weather to keep the people indoors. But then just up the old stream bed outside of town sit the reminders of another day as we scramble over abandoned dredges, awry and rusting away where once must have been water and the promise of fortunes in gold. That day there was only news of someone trying to blow-up the pipeline and making nothing more than a dent in the big silver snake as it winds its way over the hills from sea to sea.

So IDA selects the University of Alaska as her partner for this northern view and settles in for her period of long days followed by equally long nights. She will be entertained every summer by the annual Eskimo/Indian Olympics, with its contests of trying to blanket-toss a small person as high into the air as possible or an endurance test with a weight hanging on an ear, carried until the contestant drops or becomes concerned by the loss of blood from the ensuing ear wound. Not for the weak or faint at heart. And the tales told by the beauty contest entrants as they spoke of a childhood of hunting, fishing and sewing on a remote northern island before the white-man's liquor store opened on the nearby mainland and lured the father away forever.

Honolulu in 1977 was not quite what it was 10-15 years earlier (before the new airport and the jumbo jets) but it was still a paradise in the Pacific. IDA selected an old W.W.II ammo bunker to use as her home in paradise. An eerie place at times with its light bulbs hanging from its cavernous ceilings and the enveloping darkness beyond. But how better to view her world, away from the hustle and activity of the tourist town and buried deep under an ancient lava bed, topped by fields of sugar cane. Except for the increasing traffic jams, hordes of tourists, mountains of high-rises obscuring Waikiki beach, nothing has changed. Frank Takenouchi is still responding to our needs and the sugar cane continues to grow.

Russia. The first trip to Ronald Reagan's yet to be named "Evil Empire"; November was, as expected--cold. Sakhalin Island, where later a Korean airliner would tragically "transgress", was then just a Russian outpost with an enormous unused ski-jump to train the gold medal aspiring Olympic athletes. Friendly, that's what the people were; including us in their daily lunch plans and bringing in, especially for our pleasure, a local red wine made from an elderberry-like fruit. And how about a Russian airplane the size of a DC8 with just us aboard from Niigata, Japan to the cold winds of Khabarovsk. Although IDA found a place she approved of to spend her time, it was not

to be. The relationship never got started and ended within a year--too bad. But with perseverance and a new outlook, things have improved and new places have been found out there in Mother Russia.

Another good year followed with voyages to such far away places as Easter Island, Sutherland, South Africa and returns to Alaska, Australia and a previously established home in the Cook Islands.

For remoteness Easter Island has to be near the top of the list. Not that they don't have a big jet runway (thanks to the U.S. military and NASA) but once on the ground you had better have what you need or be prepared to wait. The first location on this remote island was just beside the primary road and the airport. Coupled with other deteriorating conditions, IDA could not stay until some years later when she constructed her very own home on a hillside overlooking the southern ocean where she dwells among the statues from another era whose records have been lost (in space?).

South Africa presented yet another southern hemispheric view of the world. In a location which is just about equivalent to San Diego's but on the opposite side of the world, IDA can see a multitude of the worlds events (and problems). In 1978 there were still "White Only" signs everywhere. They are down now but the feelings persist. It would appear now that its heading for an era of "Black Only" and more blood (red) is beginning to flow.



IDA's Associates in The Great Karoo, Sutherland, South Africa.

IDA selected a high mesa out in the Great Karoo to view the African scene. An unobstructed panoramic view across this barren African landscape. High on this remote plateau she shares her space with an array of silver domed space watchers who are searching for the mysteries of the heavens as IDA is searching for the inner mysteries of our world.

Now, for the real view of the southern hemisphere, IDA has finally outdone herself. Where is as far south as one can go? Why, Antarctica of course! So, go to the appropriate indoctrinations, get all of the physicals, send off all of your personal measurements and get ready for "The Ice".

"The Ice" is what it is called and not without justification. Imagine standing behind the pilot in the cockpit of a US. military Hercules aircraft. You are out over the extreme South Pacific at 30,000 feet; the sky is crystal clear and the ocean and sky seem to blend into one color at every horizon except straight ahead. Straight ahead it is all white and rugged. As you get closer the mountains take shape, the valleys form and the shoreline (no, iceline) becomes clear. No where in sight is there any color other than white. Shades of white if you will. The valleys are filled with glaciers which vary in length from a mile to out of sight as they flow from the peaks to the sea. At the sea they break off to become the nemesis of every sailor from Captain Cook to any one who may be so foolish as to approach these latitudes by ship. There are icebergs that from 30,000 feet still appear to be as large as the largest of the offshore islands of California. We fly for hours over this landscape and the only variance is the height of the mountains. And we are going to land down there!

Well, land we do and, as expected, it's cold. It wasn't a bad idea after all to have to wear the survival gear throughout the seven hour flight from Christchurch. The Mickey mouse boots do the job and we were welcomed.

This was February and nearing the end of "summer". Be aware of the dangers of "white outs", the man said and don't go out alone if the weather is bad--OK! The end of summer and the temperature was just below freezing but nothing to compare to the approaching winter with lows of 60 degrees below zero and piercing winds. But for now enjoy, it's unique.

Seals up on the Ross ice shelf "sunning" and crystal clear water (away from the sewer outfall) where the bottom fades away to blackness in the deep water. And standing at the edge of the ice shelf where it has broken away from the shoreline, but is

still a solid mass extending out to the sea, you can see and hear the motion as it creaks and groans responding to the moving sea beneath its wide expanse. By the edge of this and in the middle of McMurdo station the local crew had constructed a home for IDA. Needless to say, all was not well. With nearby Mt. Erebus volcanically active and the ice shelf bouncing off the shore at a 30 second rate, this was not a good home. Nine months later it was all over and we will leave it to some other time and place in the future.



A Fine Summer Day. McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

Off "The "Ice" and into the greenhouse. IDA was already in Rarotonga when I arrived there. She was settled in and comfortably under the care of Roro Taia even though the geckos had already settled in among her belongings.

A slice of old Polynesia in the South Pacific, Rarotonga is the largest of the Cook group. Being the largest is still only 30 miles in circumference. The Maori (local Polynesians) are a happy and friendly people but with a dependence upon New Zealand for most of their daily staples except papaya and bananas. I would tell you more of this lovely island but if I do you may go there in hordes and eventually spoil it for IDA and me.

Besides return visits to several sites for various reasons, 1979 was the year to go to Guam. Going to Guam has been described by a colleague as "flying for 14 hours on

a crowded jet liner and getting off in National City", not to demean National City, but why bother with the misery of the difficult flight conditions. It's hot, it's humid, it's isolated and if one cares about old TV programs, it's the perfect spot. Prime time consists of replays of last weeks programs from KTLA, Los Angeles. All of the new big hotels, with the exception of the Hilton, have been built for and cater to the needs of the Japanese tourist who arrives there in great numbers. It is strange, I would rather go to Japan--- I guess there is no accounting for some peoples' taste.

IDA was initially relegated to an old abandoned Quonset hut . The seams of the steel corrugated covering had originally been covered on the inside by wood strips extending from one concrete footing over to the other side. All was fine until some time in the past when our old friend, the termite, found out about these strips. Only skeletal shells and dangling splinters remained. IDA was not happy! Eventually, a year later, a new home in with others of her stature was found and she has been relatively happy ever since.

As was said I would rather go to Japan, so we did. IDA heard of a place on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. Far to the southwest of Sapporo and a 6 hour drive away is a small fishing village called Erimo. Up on a hillside and back into a tunnel with running water (not from a faucet) and deep under the earth, as in Nana, IDA settled in for a long stay. All of the comforts of home-- Japanese home that is. The worst first. The bathroom facility is a hole in the floor. Well plumbed mind you but nevertheless a hole in the floor. The Japanese are very good squatters (they have lots of practice) but not old American legs. Thank heaven for hand rails. Also, making the bed means rolling up the pad and blankets and storing them for the day in the closet. At least one can't fall out of bed.

An enchanting country with great scenery, good food and an industrious people--just carry along a port-a-potty.

Another trip in 1980 was equally fascinating. Mahe, Seychelles lies in the Indian ocean a few jet hours east of Nairobi, Kenya. A small granitic island populated by a mixture of Africans, English, Indians, French and a blend thereof. The Africans do the manual labor, the English own the businesses, the Indians are the shopkeepers and the French are around. And above all its tropical, pleasantly so. Every house plant which you can imagine has escaped on the island and is flourishing. Climbing up the palms, creeping through the undergrowth or forming trim hedges around the yards, are the plants we normally buy in 4 inch pots for \$2.99 only to have them expire 2 months later.

IDA'S first home on Mahe was with the U.S.A.F. on a site along side a road and tended by the Corporal-Of-The-Day. Needless to say it was not the best of times. A year later she moved into her own little home on a mountain top but this time directly under all of the various RF transmitters that Cable & Wireless could possibly jam onto a roof top or string a wire across. We tried every way to make things acceptable for IDA on Mt. St. Louis but to no avail and she finally abandoned this botanical paradise and is eagerly awaiting a promised return along with her new associate IRIS, but more about her later.

1980 was memorable for many reasons. During the year there were 2 trips (also one in 1979) that required visits to several locations so widely separated (Hawaii, Guam, Japan, Mahe and South Africa) that it was easier to continue a trip once started than to return to home base. So, continue we did and 3 trips "around the world" were the result. Trips that were from 18- 24 days in length and not a missed flight nor lost bag (not that there haven't been misses nor losses in the process).

The last of the around the world excursions included the first visit to China. IDA had 2 companions on that trip as we met Jon in Beijing prior to proceeding to our mutual destination of Kunming. Waited on hand and foot, provided with every amenity (almost) and given a tour of the Stone Forest, nothing was omitted. A few meals included some items on the plate which could not be identified by our limited western experience, but it did not in the least deter from a delightful and fascinating trip. And IDA is doing just fine there too--thank you.

Our neighbor to the north, Canada, had caught the eye of IDA some years earlier (1976) and she had nestled in at Dalhousie University in the shade of the pines and the stone walled library. But IDA had some sort of problem in Halifax which had not been seen or recognized before. IDA had a containment problem, which when finally diagnosed, was remedied without too much pain. The problem recurs from time to time and remedial action must be taken as we go from place to place.

Puerto Rico, Beijing and another pole trip in 1982. Beijing was a repeat of Kunming, but on a grandeur scale.

The memorable trip of this year was the pole. This was not another trip to Antarctica but one to the Canadian far north. 82 degrees north is 8 degrees closer to the North pole than McMurdo (74 degrees south) is to the South pole. Not a significant difference in location or climate but a major difference in flora and fauna. Antarctica has no flora and no land animals. Alert, IDA'S Northwest Territories home in the Arctic, offers a vast array of flora and fauna (at least a half-vast array). Grasses and flowers in the summer. Rabbits, Arctic foxes, wolves, a stray musk-ox and any other

creature which may wander north during the summer (including an intrepid explorer or two trying to ski, skate or motor boat to the north pole).

The same old military Hercules airplane and cold weather gear are in order for transport and survival but it is more like having gone too far north than being stranded on "The Ice". Alert is a military base but unlike old McMurdo, it is "coed". One obvious effect of this is that there are frequent parties which last well into the night. Of course night in October is approximately 23 hours so not much time is left for work...

A dirty grey-brown animal in the summer becomes the pure white black-tipped-tail Arctic fox in the winter. Always shy but still scampering around from building to building, ever on the alert for food and the ominous Arctic wolf (he's big). And IDA has her Arctic igloo on the permafrost kept just warm enough so as not to melt away her support but warm enough to stay comfortable with her personal heater at the ready.

Puerto Rico is a US. territory but so predominantly Spanish that it feels like a foreign country. IDA and I went there to visit our partner in other ventures, the U.S.G.S. They had prepared a spot just for us on the nearby hillside. At night we were serenaded by "co-key", the little creature which is always singing but is seldom seen. Our man in Cayey, the town where the U.S.G.S. is located, is Victor. Victor has been building a house since our first visit and he has completed it to the point that they can live in the basement. Things move slowly there. It's the humidity.

The next year saw return visits to Nana, Puerto Rico and Mahe plus a new home established on the island of La Reunion. La Reunion is east of Madagascar about 500 miles. It could be called the Hawaii of the Indian ocean because of its climate and volcanic nature. At its higher elevations, where IDA wanted to stay, it does snow in the winter and there are steep green volcanic peaks with deep canyons all formed by a volcano second only to Moana Loa in annual activity.

IDA'S choice of homes here turned out to be a hole in the ground. It did have a concrete floor to keep her feet out of the crumbled lava but everything else was makeshift and temporary. So, of course, the rats now had a new warmer-drier place to set up house; much to our detriment and discomfort. So much to our detriment in fact that the temporary wood-beamed roof caved-in due to the activity of the rats and we were forced to pay a return visit. Rats! Well it wasn't too bad, for in our spare time a trip to the active area of the volcano was arranged. A view into the crater and a random whiff of sulfuric gasses as they were emitted from the fumaroles was the reward.

Again, rats, fires and benign neglect forced the decision to leave this picturesque environment in the south Indian ocean.

It's hard to believe that I did not meet up with IDA at Eskdalemuir until 1983 but that's what the records show. She of course had been set up on the grounds of the old Scottish mansion since 1978. Out there among the rolling hills and the hard working sheep farmers she had been there without outside contact for 5 years. It is clear to see that again she wanted to keep such a secluded picturesque site all to herself. Well, the secret is out. Try ,if you can, to find your way there among the sheep, the hills, the rivers and the now nearly abandoned woolen mills with memories of an industry now transferred to another part of the world.



The Observatory, Eskdalemuir, Scotland.

So that was it for new places to go. No new locations for IDA and me from that time on. There have been numerous visits to many of the original places, 3 in 1985 and 86, 5 in 1987, 2 in 1988, 3 each in 1989,90 and 91. IDA has probably reached the end of her travels to new places and may come away from a few of her original sites. Although not the young and vibrant lass of her youth, she retains her character and as always, calibrated to remain constant and designed to last, she will endure if she is welcome.

In the meantime a new girl has appeared on the scene. IRIS, like IDA, is a woman of the world but much more sophisticated (so her associates say). Why they even try to call her NEW IDA but it will never be. IDA has accepted the fact that she has some limitations and will, in the name of progress, admit IRIS into her world. So they have taken up residence together in a few locations but Russia has been IRIS' area

of heavy concentration. She was there at the start of the fall of the "Evil Empire" and remains there today (although precariously in some instances).

And who is this IDA of the world? Named after her benefactor and forever grateful, she remains the only worldwide normal-mode monitor of worldwide seismic events. As we said, forever grateful to the now departed namesake, IDA GREEN, she lives on in the hearts of all of us, planners, designers, installers, analyzers and operators -grateful to a person.

As for me-- Why, as her companion, I've seen the world.

Don Miller

October 25, 1992, Solana Beach, California.

Note; for those of you who may wish to relate the places in the narrative to those shown on the front cover in order of appearance they are;

TWO- Adelaide , Australia (originally Canberra, Australia)

NNA- Nana, Peru.

BDF- Brasilia, Brasil.

CMO- College, Alaska.

KIP- Kippa Gulch (near Honolulu, Hawaii).

YSS- Yusno Sakhalin, Russia. (not on the map but just above ERM)

RPN- Easter Island, Chile (originally EIC).

SUR- Sutherland, South Africa.

MCM- McMurdo Station, Antarctica (not on the map--74 deg. S by 170 deg E).

RAR- Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

GUA- Guam, U. S. A.

ERM- Erimo, Japan.

SEY- Mahe', Seychelles.

KMY- Kunming, China.

HAL- Halifax, Nova Scotia.

ALE- Alert, Canadian Forces Station, North West Territories, Canada.

SJG- Cayey, Puerto Rico.

BJT- Beijing, China.

PCR- Plaine de Caffre, La Reunion, France.

ESK- Eskdalemuir, Scotland.

PFO- Pinon Flat, California (not mentioned as it has such a long history that it is a story by itself).

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