

SYDNEY part 2

DAY 20 – 13th July 2008

This morning started early, with our Sunday Mass at 6.30 am. Father Neil Evans presided, and was ably assisted by Father Phillip Harries and yours truly. Then after breakfast we set off for a full day's touring.

Our first port of call was to Featherdale Wildlife Park. This was almost like any other petting zoo, but in this case the animals were all native to Australia, and in that case it became a fascinating visit.



We saw wallabies and kangaroos, koala bears (who spend about 20 hours a day sleeping, perched precariously in trees) and wombats, as well as dingoes and crocodiles.



Dominic was happy to pat the wombats and kangaroos, but for some reason an emu decided that it would chase me! And there was no sign of Rod Hudd at all! The rest of the pilgrims were fascinated with the wildlife, and, as is often the case, we ran out of time, and were actually late getting back to the coach!



Our next port of call was to the Blue Mountains, to the west of Sydney. The name comes from the blue haze that comes from the evaporating oil of the eucalyptus trees that are found everywhere. The sights are stunning, and again, it is good to see that the people of New South Wales are doing their best to preserve not just the wildlife, but also the environment. Just to emphasise this we were shown an IMAX film showing how this is done and why.



We then moved on to the town of Katoomba and the nearby Echo Point where we were able to view the national park's valleys and steep cliffs, as well as "The Three Sisters" – a rocky outcrop said to be formed from three aborigine sisters over whom a witch doctor had cast a spell.



After a sandwich for lunch, and a rendering of the didgeridoo by an aborigine warrior, we headed for the fun part – the descending to the valley floor by the Scenic Railway. It looked OK to begin with, until we had to bend low to sit on the seats and bow our heads since there was netting above us. Then we set off, and immediately went into an almost vertical drop on what we were to learn was the steepest railway in the

world! It was more than frightening, and several people (even from our party) were visibly shaken by the experience!



We were given the opportunity to wander around on the floor of the valley – in the remains of what was a mine – and then we had the ascent ahead of us. This time it was by cable-car, which was much more acceptable. And to complete our visit we then took the Skyway – another cable-car ride across the valley and back to our coach.

We returned to Sydney, knowing that at about the same time the Pope was landing in Australia to begin his duties in the lead-up to World Youth Day. In fact he landed at an air-force base at the foot of the Blue Mountains, and if we had timed it correctly then we might have seen his convoy heading for his private retreat for the next few days!

This evening I accompanied James Torrance to register and receive his accreditation as Media Officer for the Diocese of Menevia at World Youth Day. When we went yesterday we were lucky to be able to walk straight through, but this evening there were over 100 people waiting, and so we had to wait for a while before James was able to pick-up his photo id.

In the meantime some of the party went to the local church of St Benedict, particularly Father Neil, where they were having a Solemn Mass to commemorate his feastday this week. We all met up afterwards and went for a pizza. Again, an early start tomorrow means an early night tonight!