

Newsletter
October 2021

THE HAZE CONCERT

The annual Haze Concert mounted by U3A Perth was held earlier this month to great acclaim. "Superb", "Fantastic", "Best concert ever" were the remarks being heard after it was over. Congratulations to the "fab four". They play the music of our youth, that's the secret. Nigel (the drummer) is a member of North Coast (Hamersley) U3A and provides the link with the band.



From left: George, Bazz, Rod and Nigel (Front)

President's Report

I wish to start by acknowledging the passing of U3A Network stalwart Don McDonald. Don was a tireless advocate for U3A and the Network, serving as president and driving the organisation in its early years. He is sadly missed.

Membership numbers based on returns from subscriptions show a slight drop in numbers partly due to the winding up of Manjimup. Once again Albany has chosen not to renew despite several reminders as well as an email I sent to the secretary with no reply. Margaret River and Armadale are continuing with steady growth despite the Covid factor.

Region	Members 2015	Members 2016	Members 2017	Members 2018	Members 2019	2020	2021
Albany		31	35			30	
Armadale	38	63	66	74	70	77	84
Bunbury	41	39	42	40	45	44	35
Geraldton	30	22	21	14	12	12	13
Mandurah	137	133	110	120	86	74	65
Manjimup	19		18	20	13	14	0
Margaret River	72	110		128	189	225	235
Naturaliste	158	212	230	280	266	262	244
UWA	951	992	995	969	1018	1052	1060
U3A Online (WA Members)	76	82	72	83	88	116	77
	1522	1684	1589	1728	1787	1906	1813

I have recently spoken with Joy Dorrell from Manjimup to discuss the winding up of that group. It seems they basically ran out of steam with members getting older and with no program for renewal the inevitable result is shutting down. Remaining funds of around \$800 went to a local guide dogs for blind group. The Manjimup group has maintained a presence in the town for many years, largely through the efforts of Joy Dorrell and Joy Phillips. I thank them all.

Recent discussions with John Kuypers in Bridgetown and Daphne Borison in Pemberton are still in early stages for various reasons and we should keep some gentle pressure on those contacts. My Ellenbrook contact Jim Zaknich has some health issues to deal with but assures me that in 6 weeks he will be ready to roll. Still no response from our Cockburn contact at the Council.

The Armadale Conference Committee will be meeting next week to finalise the budget and approve preliminary advertising material. Keynote speakers are still required on the theme of Communication in the Community.

On the national scene, the Alliance is moving towards becoming an incorporated structure with equal representation from each Network.

In my travels I had the opportunity of meeting the new team at Geraldton led by Iris Bolton and visited the Mandurah group last week to give a presentation on Antarctica. Next weekend I am a guest at the Bunbury group.

Peter Alcock

NATURALISTE U3A

We have been very lucky here in the Busselton/Dunsborough region that we have not been affected by COVID19 as many other regions in Australia have. However there have been the concerns affecting everyone about making plans and commitments. I am pleased to say that our group has bounced back almost to normal and hopefully our wider interaction with other U3A groups will resume soon.

In spite of a small drop in member numbers this year, we have managed to keep up our record of offering a wide number of courses, 38-40, being a mix of year-long, short (4-6 weeks) and workshops. Obviously, courses are our main focus but we keep our members informed through our seasonal newsletters and 4 Topical Talks during the year!

A brief example is, on any given day you, can see one of 3 classes of tap dancers tapping, a philosophy group deep in discussion, Mah Jonggers and Scrabblers concentrating, Brain Gamers laughing and challenging their memories, opinions being shared at either one of our two Book Clubs, to name just a few. Our Leaders certainly do a great job.



'TED Talks' Discussion group



Tai Chi near the foreshore

At our recent AGM, I retired from the Naturaliste Committee after 10 years on the Committee with the last 7 as President. I have learned a great deal since being on the Committee and have very much enjoyed my role as President. I have worked with a great team and no doubt will miss being on the Committee but will still run some courses! I have also enjoyed my contact with the Network and other U3A groups.

Joan Parke (Retired President, Naturaliste U3A)

Mandurah U3A

U3A Mandurah did a day trip to Harvey Dam, Wellington Dam and the Ferguson Valley recently.

We had morning tea at Harvey Dam before heading south to Wellington Dam. Unfortunately the weather provided a few showers but did not spoil the viewing and some sun peeped through to improve our photos.



Morning tea near Harvey Dam

The main interest at Wellington Dam is the very large painting that was done recently on the dam wall. The artist, Australian artist Guido Van Helten, used local heritage photographs with sepia type colours to emphasize that effect. Overall the painted wall is vast and spectacular.

From there we went to Evedon Retreat and enjoyed our Christmas in July lunch before returning to Mandurah via the South West highway.

Rory O'Brien



Armadale 2022– State Conference Communication in our Communities

It's a talkfest with interesting speakers on their vision for communication in communities of the future.

Estimated cost per person for the 2 days is \$60 including morning tea and conference lunch with optional excursions.

Accommodation options include the Heritage Motel.

Travel subsidies for eligible visitors within the State.

This event is being hosted by U3A Armadale

October 20th & 21st
City of Armadale District Hall

Contact Sheila – U3A Armadale –0439 9263 33 and watch for updates
at

u3aarmadalewa.org.au or u3anetworkwa.org

U3A Armadale

U3A Armadale continues to grow, with a membership now of 94, as do the courses and subgroups which are on offer to our members.

Richard Offen gave us a 5-week course on the History of Perth, which had a good turn out of over 25 in attendance. This was followed up by a historic walk around Perth. Richard pointed out places of historical interest, which often get passed by without any notice.

Phil Aked who is our Technology guru gave a 6-week technology course for beginners on the use of mobile phones and the iPad/tablets.

Rachel Johns came back for a third time to run a Music Tardis. Rachel is always popular and has everyone attending the course playing a variety of instruments And trying out their vocal cords!

Just recently we have had Kit Prendergast giving us a talk on Australia's Native Bees' conservation. This was followed by the return of Jude Scott, who is doing a 6-week course on Water Colour Painting.



These groups have been mainly funded by a raffle we did last Christmas through the Bendigo Community Bank, which raised just over \$3000. Generally, each attending member pays an affordable \$20 per course as their contribution.

The monthly subgroups continue to be successful and offer members a variety of topics. From the long running Book Club which members read a variety of books throughout the year; often taking them out of their comfort zone, to read books they perhaps would never have read. The Coffee/lunch group gives a variation of venues to try out. One such venue was the Taste of Italy, where around 28 members joined for a pleasurable lunch.

Sharing Stories with Food is proving to be highly successful. U3A Armadale works in partnership with a local multi-cultural organisation, where volunteers of the organisation prepare and cook a meal of a chosen culture and tell the story of their life back in their native country, while cooking the meal. Last month was Japanese cuisine and October will be Malaysian. In November for a change our members will be cooking up something Australian!

We also have a Movie group and a Walking group, each led by a volunteer member. In addition, we have had three one day outings this year, when we visited Fremantle Prison, A Taste of Italy in the Swan Valley and the Blind Cameleer. On all three occasions we were lucky with the weather. Our final excursion will be in November when 110 people made up of U3A members and

some of their families and friends will get together for a sail on the Leeuwin sailing ship to get a hint of what it might have been for our ancestors as they sailed to Australia.

Already, groups are sourcing out new adventure ideas, speakers and a variety of courses for 2022, to keep our members wanting to come back for more.

Sheila Shenton

Armadale U3A Trip to The Blind Cameleer August 2021

A very wet start, but the bus was early which meant we could go straight from car to bus, great!

Next stop, after Mike, our driver was breathalysed and then was stopped again for licence check, was Noble Falls for morning tea. With the sun being nice to us and finally shining on the water flowing swiftly over the rocks.

After leaving Noble falls we made our way to the farm of The Blind Cameleer.



He was much younger than we had imagined, and absolutely passionate about his camels of which he owned over a hundred. It was fascinating to listen to him and to interact with two of his camels, one of which was very much up and personal. He showed us and explained the working of his self-invented Camel Miking machine. We then continued through his farm before reaching what appeared to be a padlocked gate, Neil was getting a bit worried by now, as we were already late for lunch, but he gallantly turned the bus around and tried another route, to no avail BUT we did get to see the nursery of baby camels, so, so cute! Finally we were told that the padlocked gate wasn't really locked. So back we went and two gallant members, after a bit of a struggle got us through and so on to Toodyay.

The Victoria Hotel gave us a very impressive lunch of roast turkey and ham followed by a really lovely dessert.

Several popped over the road to visit The 360 Shop for a little Christmas Shopping. Then thus fed, we journeyed onwards to reach our final destination. The historic Coorinja winery which has been in the same family since 1919.

Thus accompanied by various bottles of wine, honey and grapefruit we finally made our way back, saying a big thank you to Maureen for organising it all.

Jennifer Pearce (Reporter extraordinaire)

Travel Special Feature!

CENTRAL AMERICA – MAYANS, COVID AND ALL

(Based on a talk given by Bob Simkins to U3A at Hamersley)

In early March 2020 Bob and Carol Simpkins, Mandurah U3A members, set off on their Central American adventure. There were disquieting stories of a new type of flu going around but these things had happened before and hadn't amounted to a great deal. Why worry about that?

March 7 Arrived in Cancun, Yutacan, Mexico. Everything seemed normal. Plenty of people around, shops full.

March 8 Trip out to Tulim Ruins – the first of the Mayan sites we were to visit. Built late in the thirteenth century, it was one of the smaller Mayan cities, but very spectacular on a headland overlooking the 'Caribbean blue' sea. The only Mayan city built on the coast, it was a seaport, trading mostly in turquoise and jade.



Tulim Ruins

March 9 Our Intrepid Trip – 11 of us in all, all others much younger than us, left Cancun bound for Antigua in Guatemala. First stop Merrida.

March 10 Had an early start to our trip next morning to beat the 10,000 average daily visitors to the Mayan ruins of Chichén Itzá (one of the 7 wonders of the world); one of the largest Mayan cities, developed between 750 and 900 AD. We had a very good guide who knew his subject inside and out, and like the Incas and Aztecs, you have to be impressed with the amazing engineering feats that date back from B.C. up to the 1500's and the arrival of the Spanish. It's one of the most famous sites on the Yucatan Peninsula. One can't climb

the pyramids and ruins any more as ever-growing tourist numbers were damaging the structures, also because a tourist fell to their death.



Chichen Itza pyramid

March 11 Covid 19 declared a pandemic by WHO. Some people on the trip starting to worry. We kept going, arriving at Palenque. The town is just over the border into the Chiapas state. It nestles in the foothills of the mountains and is surrounded by rain forest. As it's close to the ruins it is a base for tourism as well as being a busy Mexican town. The area has a significant indigenous population of Mayan descent. Our hotel was in a lovely tree lined road.

Palenque ruins

We visited the ruins the next morning. Constructed up against the mountain, the ruins are scattered through the jungle, much more atmospheric than the more famous Chichén Itzá. One is still able to climb many of the pyramid-like structures, so our legs got a good workout, the views across the site from the largest structures were stunning.



Palenque Ruins

A famous Mayan city and ceremonial centre from about 4BC to 1100AD. The most famous ruler of Palenque was Pacal the Great, whose tomb has been found and excavated in one of the temples. After the city's decline, it was absorbed into the jungle. Only 2% have been unearthed. Like all the other ruins, there is still much to be discovered about them. Again, we had a very good guide who knew his stuff, which makes the tour far more interesting.

March 13 San Cristobal de las Casas

San Cristobal de las Casas is a picturesque town over 2000 m high in the mountains and surrounded by them.

It took 14 hours and 350 speed bumps to get there but it was an impressive drive through mountains and past waterfalls, travelling ever higher into the mountains and getting cooler the higher we went. Got to San Cristobal de las Casas at dusk and went straight out to dinner. We'd only just reached the central square when the earthquake warning sirens went off, but fortunately, it was just a tremor.



San Cristobal de las Casas

We visited the Jade museum which was very interesting. Jade used to be the most valuable precious stone in ancient times, as the green colour was associated with everlasting life and rebirth. It was used for face masks for the corpses of rulers, and the decorative jewels they wore.

There was now absolute confusion as what to do and it dominated all of our group's conversations, because everyone was affected differently. A few days before El Salvador had closed its borders, so Intrepid was trying to figure out how to reroute our trip through Honduras instead. Then Honduras closed their borders so we were informed that our next two Intrepid trips down to Panama would be cancelled.

Finally Guatemala (where we were heading) decided not to allow some Europeans in, so our German couple needed to leave us. Then they said British couldn't enter, so four more needed to try to reroute their journeys and go home from Mexico.

This only left us and the Swiss couple (Guatemala seemed to think the Swiss were OK!) who were still planning to continue our trip. They had a flight booked out of Antigua to Costa Rica where they had booked an expensive stay to celebrate their wedding anniversary. We were also hoping to get a flight to Costa Rica as at that stage they still had open borders, and there were a lot of wildlife places we were keen to see.

We were all set to leave as planned next morning, but we and the Swiss got cold feet about it as they were threatening to close the border, so we sent our trip leader on his way back to Guatemala and booked ourselves another night there to figure out how to get out.

Trying to get back to Australia. The short version.

We had a flight booked and paid for from Sao Paulo (Brazil) to Australia at the end of May with Qatar airlines. Big problem was that because Flight Centre had made the booking with Qatar Airline only Flight Centre could change the dates, so we needed to get hold of our travel agent who was unfortunately on her honeymoon.

Urgent emails and WhatsApp to Flight Centre resulted in the great travel agent we have used there in the past (just returned from maternity leave) contacting us - who said the earliest she could get us a flight was March 25 and it would have to be from Sao Paulo back to Perth, we couldn't change it to Mexico (Qatar have agreed to change the dates of flights booked until the end of May).

Plus, we kept running into brick walls on line and as we had a number of other flights booked and paid for, we wanted to try and get refunds (we can get credits for them but need to use them before Dec 30!) Also needed to try to cancel some accommodation, most were obliging.

So we got ourselves a flight up to Mexico City, with the intent of going into their offices to sort things out. Next trick was to get a flight from Mexico City to Sao Paulo. Easier said than done as most of the South American airlines had stopped flying due to the borders (except for Brazil and Mexico) being closed to non-nationals.

One airline that was still flying was COPA (Panama airline) whose border was closed to non-nationals, but so long as you stayed in the transit lounge, that would be OK (we hoped!!!). So, we took the metro out to the COPA office, where we had to queue for over an hour to see a human (not a computer). Their office had a 1 metre barrier between the customer and consultant and lots of hand sanitiser everywhere. Only 3 people were allowed into the office area at a time and the queue was out of the door. COPA had 5 flights a day out, but the earliest she could get us on would be in 3 days' time and they only had 2 business class seats left, which we took.

Really don't think I like Mexico City much, it doesn't have the charm of other Central / South American cities. It does have some magnificent buildings around the old Centro area, but is overall quite run down.



Mexico City Cathedral

It also felt more scary than others so we really didn't want to get stuck here if the border closed! We would rather get stuck in Sao Paulo if we had to be locked in somewhere. Walking around the city here we saw the occasional person with a mask, and everyone else was just going about with not a care in the world. All restaurants / shops / hotels etc did have large containers of hand sanitizers available to staff and customers. I tried to buy small containers to take home, but it was not available anywhere. Qatar Air allowed us 2 bags each in checked luggage so we planned to buy another case each and fill them with toilet paper, and hand sanitizer if we found any! (Messages from home said supermarkets were running out!)

Mexico City to Sao Paulo via Panama

It felt a bit like being on some survivor movie, so few Europeans/Aussies/Americans were left in Mexico and Brazil (the only countries still with open borders in Central and South America), and all trying to get flights out and back home. One Belgium couple we met yesterday couldn't get any flights home at all except by paying tens of thousands of dollars, and many are in the same boat, or locked into countries for 30 days, so we were lucky.

We only just made it through Panama in time, no flights in or out of it from midnight the day we left Mexico City. Copa is Panama's airline. We had a slightly stressful start to the day (to put it mildly!!) - booked a taxi to airport at 9.30, so I went down at 8.30 to get front desk to print boarding passes and tickets. Read my emails and one from Copa told us our boarding gate number, and a few minutes later an email from Copa said our flight had been cancelled,

Panama closing shop for a month until 31 April. Panic!!!!!! [stomach churning moments]. Then read email better and they were talking about a future flight we had booked for our original trip in April. Whew, but it wasn't clear whether any flights were still going???. Grabbed our bags and headed straight to airport.

Next problem, as the hotel hadn't been able to print our docs we didn't have paper copies; we presumed the flight went from the main international terminal 1, we left in such a rush we didn't have time to check, but no, no Copa there, they went from terminal 2, luckily a local bus linked them (like Perth airport, a long drive to other side of airport). Next problem, as we have read before, some airports insist on paper copies of boarding passes and tickets. As we were such high-up passengers (being business class!) they kindly checked us in and gave us boarding passes for both legs of the journey.

We still weren't really sure that our second leg from Panama to Sao Paulo would be going that night as Panama was closing shop. Great relief to get there and see our Sao Paulo flight still on the board amidst many other cancelled ones, the Copa flight after ours was cancelled. Bit scary though as all the shops and duty-frees seemed to be closing around us - and the Copa Lounge we had been promised, as business class passengers, had closed shop too for 30 days. 😞😞. Oh well, we really didn't need more food in the 3 hours between flights. Would have been fancy though (for us plebs who always travel cattle class)!

Sao Paulo, Brazil (Carol tells this bit of the story)

Landed in Sao Paulo around 7am, and had coffee at airport while we went on-line to find out if Qatar Airlines had an office in the city, found out that there was an office at the airport, but it only opened in the afternoon. Our Perth travel agent was monitoring the Qatar flights for us, but we had heard that Qatar was cutting 75% of their flights so were scared they might cancel those to S America as no one would be flying in. We decided we'd return in the afternoon to try to change for an earlier date, the 25th was too far away.

So we headed to our accommodation, a small hostel, in a nice safe neighbourhood on the other side of the city, sounded a lovely area to explore (under better circumstances).

As the airport was quite far out of the central city, we took the train from the airport. We figured out the many different coloured train and metro lines. Some 5 changes of line later, and many escalators up down and over, we arrived, and pulled our roller-bags about 1km to the hostel. We rang the bell on the gate, and waited, and waited. A nice young woman in a flat across the street saw us and came across, she rang the owner for us, he said he was coming down from upstairs, 5 mins later still no one, so she rang again, and he finally came to the gate. He told us that unfortunately, they were closed because of the corona virus, he had told Booking.com, hadn't we heard? 'No, we've been flying'. (We'd only made the booking two days before and he'd replied personally to confirm it).

The nice woman suggested a hostel next door, she also told us that many accommodations, restaurants etc had already closed down and others would soon too. Anyway, we rang the bell, the woman who answered the intercom asked if we had a reservation, 'No, but we'd like to make one'. No, she only opens the door to people with a reservation. 'Could she talk to Mario her neighbour who could explain that we had a booking with him?' No was the abrupt reply. There were other accommodation options around we could have tried, but as everything was closing, we decided to retrace our steps all the way back to the airport. We were also worried that all public transport might shut.

One good thing, as Over 60's we didn't have to pay for public transport at all in Brazil, just have to show proof of age. Train and metro are both pretty good systems, and all connections thankfully had the option of escalators (not like Madrid's historic metro system). Luckily it was a weekend so they weren't crowded. One small hitch on the way back at one connection was that the doors close very quickly and Bob made it on but I almost got squished and didn't get on. So off he sailed with the precious metro map in hand.



The Metro, Sao Paulo

I was a little concerned we might never find each other again. I tried to text him but there was no reception underground. I scratched my brain a bit and pictured how we came, and luckily got off at the right station to make our next connection (very complicated system, one seemed to have to keep on changing from one coloured line to another every couple of stations), we were both more than somewhat relieved! Back to the airport, and a free shuttle bus back to our terminal 3 where we had a struggle finding the Qatar office, it wasn't visible anywhere. We finally ventured through a very 'staff only' looking door to an elevator that said airline offices, and voila! there were some offices and the Qatar one was open with quite a few people waiting to be seen to. The guy (Brazilian not Qatarese) was so helpful, it took more than an hour; after some trying he seemed not to be able to do it because our travel agent had booked it and she seemed to be trying to change it (surely not at 2am?!). Slight panic, especially as she'd said it would cost us over \$800 each to change and he said it wouldn't cost us anything. He dealt with someone else, and came back to us, much typing and inputting data and explaining to the computer why he wanted to change flights, and he eventually had success. Whew, we could fly that night. He obviously enjoyed a challenge!!

We were at the airport just under 3 hours before our flight, queued up and were plucked out of the queue as there was a priority check-in row for those over 60!!! Great country Brazil!! So things were looking rosy. But the computer system was having a problem and wouldn't print our boarding passes, apparently, they normally have to access data from Doha to confirm people's status for entering the country. So they were having to override the system one country at a time and Australia seemed to be last, so we waited there more than an hour, and only just got through to the boarding gates just before time to board.

March 26 Once again, lovely Brazil let over 60's board first, even before 1st class!! The plane to Doha was about 2/3 full and the one to Perth half full. And so we went into isolation for 14 days. At least we were home.

Footnote

*All Central and South American flights were refunded - eventually. Most airlines went bankrupt and have been bailed out by various governments.
We made a conscious decision to let Intrepid hold our money as we will resume our trip in 2021!!!!
This of course has become 2022. Fingers X ed.*

Bob Simpkins

FROM THE EDITOR

I rarely write an editorial but feel moved to do so on this occasion. As a member of some 22 years' standing and having held many senior positions in the movement, I feel qualified to make a few comments.

The figures showing U3A numbers in WA in Peter Alcock's report show we are, in the main, keeping our membership but there are some not so good signs. One group, Manjimup, has closed due to the ageing of members and the lack of new recruits. Other groups are struggling. Mandurah has had a hard time through City restrictions on the number of people allowed into meeting rooms. Margaret River and Naturaliste are success stories. Armadale is doing well. In Perth the numbers have grown slightly. There are 10 regions with an average membership of just over 100 which seems healthy enough but some are much larger than others.

Overall, in WA, total U3A membership has not grown while the population of seniors has increased fourfold in the last 30 years. Why is this? Other states in the East have much more flourishing networks. (100,000 members in Victoria, for instance).

There are only two ways to increase memberships – ***existing groups to recruit more people through publicity and attractive programs or the formation of new groups.***

Several attempts have been made by the WA Network to encourage new groups to form in recent years but so far they have withered on the vine. It is not easy to do this – some local interest from people with leadership skills is essential – but I believe attempts must continue. The more groups there are the more the U3A "brand" will become known. There are large areas in metropolitan Perth, especially, that could easily sustain a U3A group once it was started.

Recruiting for existing groups is essential, just to maintain numbers. Younger retirees are the key, otherwise the group will become moribund. Many U3A groups seem to reach a certain size, a sort of natural limit, and stay there. This is probably a result of the format where the main activity is talks, whether by guest speakers or from the membership. The larger groups tend to be those which run courses catering for a wider range of interests. Both formats are quite successful although a combination could achieve better outcomes.

Keep up the good work everyone. U3A is a great organisation! Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all.

Peter Flanigan

Deadlines for 2022: 15th of April, July and October