

Welch in the wilds

Lee Welch is back in foreign parts again

Last year (*inCite* 3 1992) we gave you *Welch in the Wasatch*, Lee's story of her Snowbird Leadership course in the Wasatch Mountains of the USA, and noted that she filed her dispatch from, of all places, Ethiopia. Since then she has been back in Australia, and has now returned to Ethiopia. A bright newsy account of her activities in the ALIA SA newsletter *Inter Alia* (No 1, Feb 1993) seemed too good to miss, and with the kind permission of the editor we now reprint some excerpts. Lee writes:

If you have seen any part of Ethiopia on the 'box', you've probably seen endless tracts of dust and devastation. The cameras seem to miss the rolling plains of the wet season, the lush mountains in which Addis Ababa nestles, the plateaux and canyon that dwarf the Grand Canyon according to the bush pilots that pass through. Our patch, 600 km east of Addis Ababa and not too many stones throw from Somalia, is about 2 500 metres high, with an idyllic climate rather like an endless string of balmy late spring days, and short torrential rains. The mountains of the Karamarra Ranges and the plains that stretch to the Red Sea sit on our doorstep.

So much for the travelogue. What does a librarian do in these parts? Well, I had a go at a life of leisure—it lasted four days. On the fifth day I was asked to advise in the establishment of a tiny



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community library in Addis Ababa. This library was, and still is, in boxes. But very soon it will go into a brand new building—when the shelves arrive!

The library will be stocked with books provided by Book Aid in the UK, and will also house video and audiovisual collections. It is a brave project and receives great community support. Many of the staff are volunteers on short term contracts, and their efforts to establish the library have spanned all the usual problems, including more or less re-inventing the Browne circulation system.

Closer to home, the dozen or so Non-Government agencies operating in the Eastern Harerghe are busy dealing with the problems associated with the

decades of war and some 800 000 refugees, returnees and displaced people. Our town of Jijiga is home to sub-offices of the likes of the United Nations, Save the Children, Oxfam and many more.

The small community of expatriates and their local colleagues work closely together, sharing resources and information on a daily basis. Their activities led me on to my second project for the year, a study of information needs and use by field staff in humanitarian aid organisations. Same old problems everywhere: little coordination, a lack of current information, and few information gathering skills or resources. I hope the results of this study will include a checklist of factors for the planners of relief operations to consider when resources are allocated.

Yes, it was a great culture shock to come home. I actually came via England, and was rendered completely speechless by the first supermarket I saw there. Roads not choked with camels, cows, donkeys and people—in fact roads themselves—were a pleasant novelty. And I have never smelt the roses so keenly as I have this spring.

I will also admit that through the last ten months I have eagerly awaited and read every word of *Inter Alia*, *inCite*, *ALJ*, and the *Adelaide Review*, when they turned up with the monthly courier—they are all a great way to keep up to date! ■

Notes from Central Australian Regional Group

Roslyn Cousins has sent these notes on some early days

The Central Australian Regional Group of ALIA is still quite young but its establishment in 1990 reflected the long standing commitment librarians in this region have

towards cooperation. Even before ALIA began, librarians regularly greeted and farewelled colleagues with the most congenial of lunch meetings. Committees often met to work on cooperative promotional activities such as Book Week or Library Week.

The move into a formal regional group of ALIA continued to provide the support of colleagues with informed sympathy, suggestions for dealing with problems and intelligent praise of work well done. The new bonus which ALIA gave this group was the opportunity to increase professional development activities and an enhanced ability to participate in debate on national issues.

Ongoing professional development is a major emphasis of the Centralian

Regional Group. Using the financial guarantee of the NT Branch a most successful Indexing Workshop was conducted by Des Tellis from the Australian Mineral Foundation. The Regional Group participated in the National Professional Development teleconference.

Meetings are often held in different libraries, allowing host librarians to demonstrate technology new to the Alice and to share some of the highs and lows of its development.

Despite occasional amazement at the level of paperwork sent to us by ALIA, the group has provided critical responses to several draft policies including the proposed standards for Special Libraries. ■

Book Reviewers wanted for *Australian Library Review*

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