



# POSTCARDS HOME

*Adventures Begin with the First Step*

2

W.D. MAST

# POSTCARDS HOME

# 2

Adventures Begin with the First Step™

W.D. Mast



**GREEN PIECES PRESS**  
Scottsdale, Arizona  
[GreenPiecesBooks.com](http://GreenPiecesBooks.com)

W.D. Mast



## FOREWORD

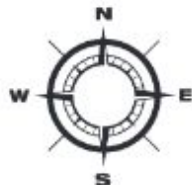
*Postcards Home 2* is a sequel to Bill Mast's very successful and award-winning book *Postcards Home*. It is not a book about postcards. The postcards Bill refers to are vignettes of his travel adventures around the world that he has captured with his stories and photographs.

Bill's desire to backpack and travel around the world is the central key that makes these books possible. Along the way, he uses his camera to capture and journal on film the exotic places he has visited. Additionally, he writes a daily journal of stories and adventures. These adventurous stories become the central core interest of these books.

While visiting these places, Bill sends picture postcards documenting his travel encounters home to family and friends which appear in the book to validate and memorialize his travel adventures. Those postcards are then returned home to Bill decades later.

*Postcards Home 2* provides exiting and colorful glimpses of life around the world captured by Bill that the armchair traveler can enjoy in his or her living room, much like albums filled with travel postcards from friends were treasured over 100 years ago at the turn of the 20th century.

Rod Kennedy  
President  
Metropolitan Postcard Club of NYC



## Postcards Home 2

### MEET THE AUTHOR

W.D. Mast, an Eagle Scout and U.S. Army veteran, is one of the most traveled photographers in the country. Earning degrees in sociology and anthropology, the author has lived, worked, and traveled extensively throughout six continents over the past five decades. These experiences include being in Iran during the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s and in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf war in 1990. During Mast's culturally diverse travels to over 150 countries, this award-winning photographer has captured over 120,000 Kodachrome slide images and has written and sent 1100 postcards home to family and friends.

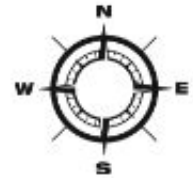
Mast also is an accomplished travel memoir author having published the original award-winning *Postcards Home* in 2013. That edition showcases select adventures undertaken throughout twenty countries. Mast also has created eight photography books highlighting his original international and local Southwestern photographs. His stunning of-the-moment, untouched artwork has been juried at art shows, galleries, and festivals throughout Arizona. Mast's photography has also appeared nationwide in a variety of magazines and books.

Learn more about the author and experience his photography at <http://www.WDMast.com>. Write the author at [WDMast8@gmail.com](mailto:WDMast8@gmail.com).



W.D. Mast

# ADVENTURES



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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### HANDMADE AFGHAN FLYING CARPET

### KABUL, AFGHANISTAN





### KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

Some ten months traveling with only a backpack as my sole companion, I find while I travel alone, I am not lonely. I have found many others along the way, choosing these journeys to teach me things I had longed to find out about others only to discover I find much more about myself. It is 1977 and this current trip has me visiting my fourteenth country.

The jet noise and the dropping landing gear alert me to the imminent arrival as I approach yet another new and exciting adventure. The Pan American flight prepares to land in Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul on this sunny November morning. My adjacent seat companion on the flight from Delhi, India is a famous Afghai actor who had been in India on a film project. We talked for what seemed like hours, learning much about each other. I learn he is an active supporter of Afghan youth organizations; especially the Afghan Boy Scouting organization. I discuss my active years in Boy Scouting in America, my love of the great outdoors and becoming an Eagle Scout and honorary Delaware Indian. The actor offers to introduce me to Scouting professionals he knows during my stay in Kabul.

Upon disembarking the aircraft, I enter the small, crowded airport and clear customs and immigration. My passport receives yet another new stamp, the pages of which grow increasingly full. My fellow traveler asks me to join him on the drive into Kabul and I do so. We proceed by car through the narrow, crowded streets into surprisingly modern central Kabul. Dirt roads yield to paved streets and large official buildings. Passing an American Express office and the American Consulate, we arrive at a government building in the city center housing several Afghan youth organizations including Boy Scouting, Explorers, and even, surprisingly Girl Scout and youth programs.

Once inside, I am introduced to several youth professionals who work in various Scouting offices. After touring the facility, it is time for the actor to depart. I thank him for the opportunity to meet those I have as I feel fortunate being able to do so. I will not see my host ever again.

My travels through Afghanistan are just beginning. Over the next several weeks, I spend time alone exploring the city, as well as enjoying being guided by and touring the rural areas of Afghanistan with the Scouting professionals. The Afghan Scouting program is similar to the American organization in that it features awards events with skits held on makeshift stages surrounded by local townspeople and villagers, young and old. I recall some skits from my own programs performed long ago, as the locals applaud and roar their approval of the young boys' attempt to portray a humorous side of life. The scene is truly an ode to the universality of it all! The following weekend I visit many more similar outdoor programs, introduced as the 'International guest from America,' as translated into English by my hosts. These Scouting jamborees come to an end but will remain in my memories for the remainder of my life. To visit these Kurdish and Moslem areas and be so welcomed is overwhelming and treasured. Even though on several previous occasions I had met wealthier foreign Scouts at various International Scouting events in other countries, nothing would stand so memorable and educational as these times in a soon-to-become most newsworthy and controversial region of the world.

My path now returns me to Kabul. During the last few days on this leg of my adventure, I explore the capital streets, markets and shops, soaking in as much culture as possible. This cold but sunny morning I explore various dirt side streets as vehicles and horse-drawn carts pass me. I encounter numerous local artisan and craft shops which are interspersed with food stalls.



As I walk past one such shop, the shopkeeper (perhaps the artisan himself) jumps out from the doorway. Suddenly, a bright, colorful rug flies from the shop right in front of me. This 'flying carpet' sweeps through the air, nearly hitting me before landing in the middle of the dirt road. Startled by these events, I exclaim to the shop owner, "You nearly hit me with your 'flying carpet!' What are you doing throwing rugs in the road?" The artisan understood my English exclamation and calmly replies in broken English, "Making money." Puzzled by his answer, I probe the situation. "What do you mean by that?" The shop owner tells me the rug, just finished and handmade by his Afghani artisans, is going onto the road to make money. He places these masterpieces into traffic so the carts and vehicles run over them, making the rugs worn and dirty and therefore, more valuable and marketable to travelers and customers in his shop. The new becomes instantly old and hopefully yields this savvy entrepreneur a valuable return on his investment. The shop owner is very smart indeed and I now fully appreciate my 'flying carpet' encounter. I fully appreciate the situation, and I don't buy the rug.

The next day, another cold November morning, I board my own 'flying carpet,' a Pan American World Airways flight to Iran. Iran will be my next magical step along the road less traveled.

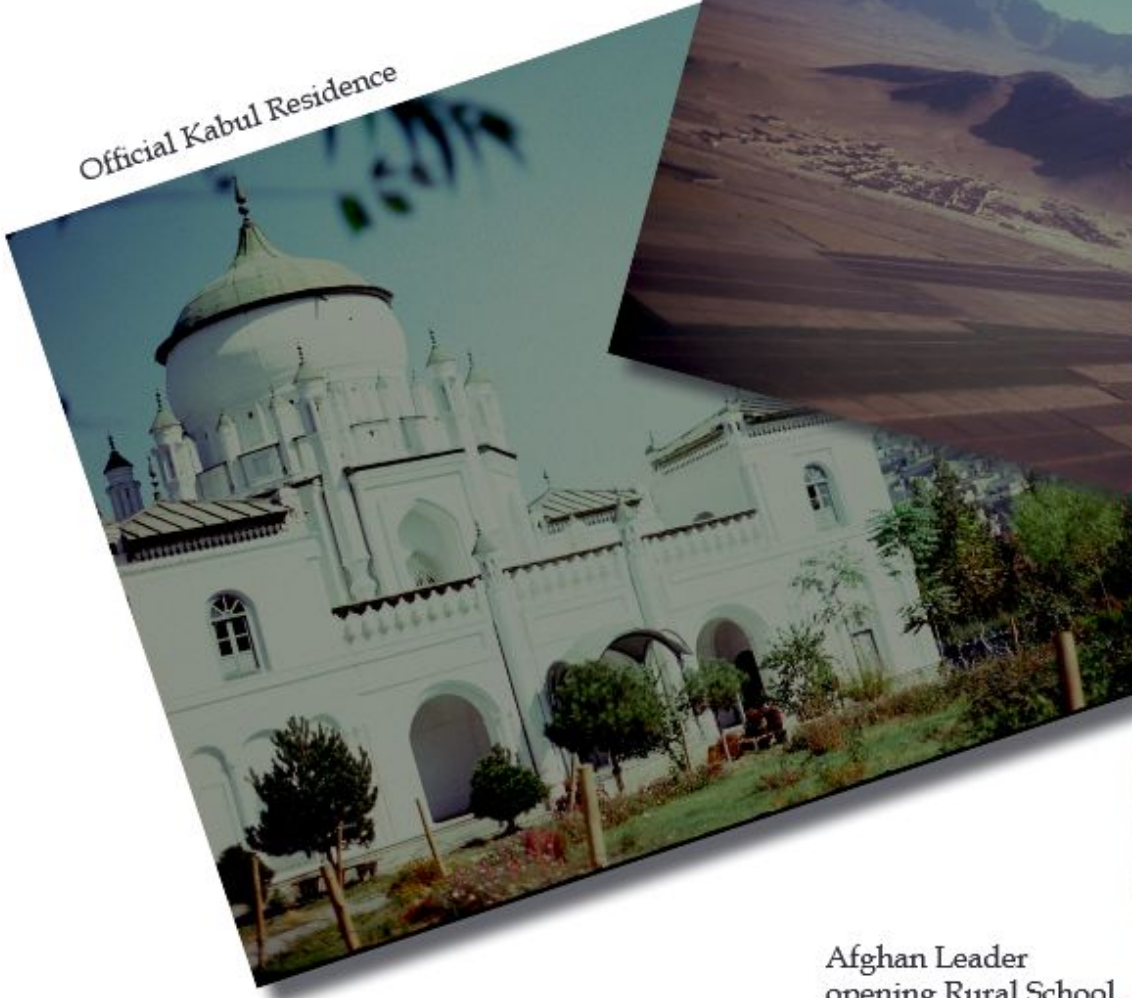
It is amazing what we learn and what we see when our steps lead us to adventures, whether near or far. We find circumstances perhaps initially viewed not as educated, developed or fortunate as we are accustomed, when almost literally hit by the realities of the world, actually reflect more of a similar life for all after all. The decades may bring new dilemmas and drama to behold, but we must continue to venture forth learning and experiencing life, lest we do nothing and hide from fear ... remember Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural address admonition: "The only thing we have to fear is ...".



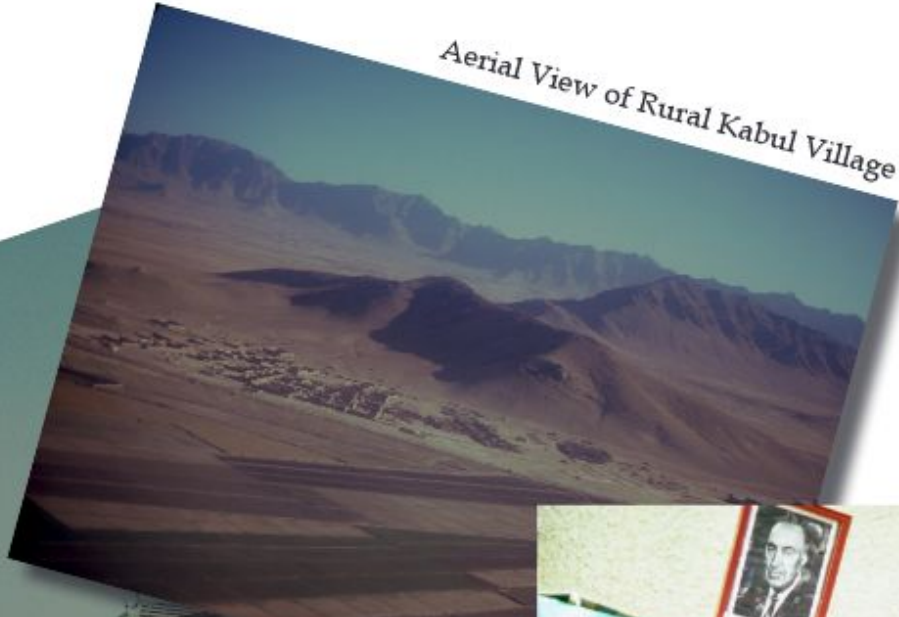




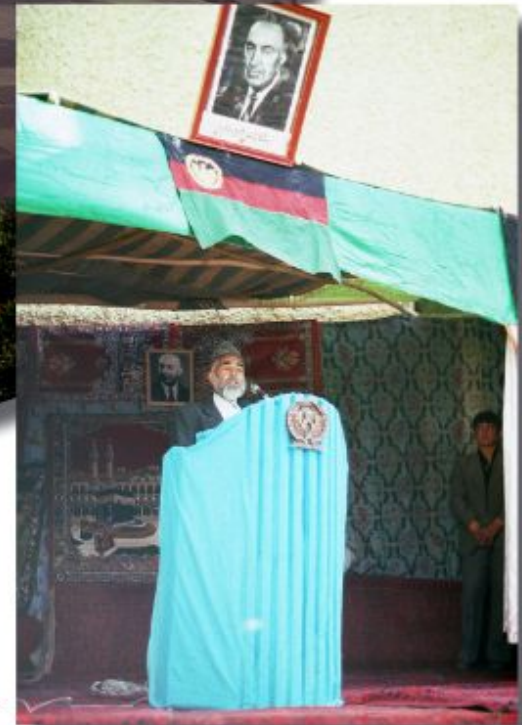
Official Kabul Residence



Aerial View of Rural Kabul Village



Afghan Leader opening Rural School

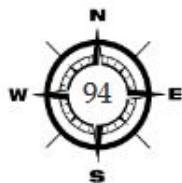




CHAPTER TWELVE  
A YANK'S WALKABOUT  
AUSTRALIA

AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION ✈️





## Postcards Home 2

### AUSTRALIA

Just after my 31st birthday, I took stock of my life. I resigned the security of a tenured state employee and acted on my desire to travel and see the world. I sold my sports car, withdrew savings, and bought an around-the-world ticket. I bought a backpack, a very good camera, a lot of film, a few clothes, and a copy of *The Lonely Planet Guidebook*. I told my family goodbye and headed for Australia, firm in my belief that adventures begin with the first step.

Landing in Sydney, I located a youth hostel, stowed my backpack, and began to explore the largest city in Australia. First on my list was Archibald Park in the city center with the massive bronze statue of the Minotaur. A short walk away, I found the Sydney Opera House built along the harbor. I had seen pictures of the building and its unusual sail-like architecture, but seeing it made me appreciate the engineering that brought the design to reality.

I bought my ticket for the next part of my journey. I planned a month and a half of exploration, covering nearly 10,000 miles of Australia by Ansett-Pioneer bus. This land “down under” is about the size of America and includes beaches, rain forests, lowlands and brush leading to the large Nullarbor Desert which would take days to cross.

Soon after boarding the bus in Sydney, I learned the bus had no toilet. This did not seem important until the bus reached the desert. The bus driver had a mission: Reach the way station on schedule. He kept checking the dashboard clock and did not want to stop for any reason. I tried making casual conversation with him, but he ignored me and kept checking the clock.

It then happened. One night, I really needed to use the restroom. I asked him to stop. He did not answer. I asked again. And again. Finally he chuckled, and said, “Oh, does the Yank have a problem?” With another chuckle, he pulled over and stopped. I flew off the bus into the pitch-black night, eager to find relief.

Immediately as I disembarked, the driver revved the engine, hit the gas and drove away. He turned off the lights and disappeared. I could not believe he had left me. In the distance, I heard dingoes barking. More unknown sounds filled the night. Before long, I was relieved to see the lights of the bus re-appear and come closer and closer as the bus backed up and the door opened. I quickly jumped on board, amid the laughter of the driver and passengers.

“Guess you’ll learn to hold it, eh, Yank?”

When I sat down, I told the Aussie sitting next to me, “sure thought he was going to leave me.” “Fair dinkum.”

“Fair dinkum?”

“Yeah mate. We Australians use the phrase to mean ‘no lie.’”

The night passed and the bus pulled into the way station. Just a few houses surrounded the small wooden building, which served as a convenience market with beer and sodas. Tired of the nuts and dried fruit I’d had on the bus, I longed for a Cattleman’s cut of prime rib and a stuffed baked potato with sour cream and bacon bits.

The station-master’s wife had baked meat pies and cooked large beef sausages and French fries—‘bangers and chips.’ The food smelled



delicious and I was so hungry, even some raw camel would have been tasty. I settled down with a big plate of food and ordered a Foster's lager. My uncle had asked me to save beer cans from around the world for his collection, so as soon as I emptied it, I tossed the can in my duffel bag with the growing collection. I was amazed to learn of so many different beers in Australia – and I intended to sample every one.

The bus driver signaled time to re-board, heading for Perth, and he yelled out, "Hey, Yank, check out the toilet now. You know I don't like to stop." The bus moved along through the night, stopping every once in a while for gas. Just about sunrise, I saw a herd of six camels. Another passenger commented on such a strange sight and wondered about them. I explained that the British had brought them over for desert transportation, but some had gotten loose and become wild.

As the bus pulled into Perth, I was refreshed by the welcoming oasis of the city. The Indian Ocean beckoned and I enjoyed the sun and the beach. I struck up a conversation with two brothers who studied at the University of Western Australia in Perth. Coincidentally, I had been offered a stipend to attend the university and work on my Master's degree. I intended, the following day, to visit the campus and speak to the Dean, declining the offer. I planned to continue my travels.

The brothers invited me to join their family for dinner. We told stories until late in the night and I felt like a foreign exchange student talking about America and hearing about their country. I also took advantage of the opportunity to add more beer cans to my uncle's collection.

After enjoying three days in my favorite Australian city, I boarded the bus, heading toward Sydney. Reaching the southeastern edge of the Nullarbor Desert and the town of Coober Pedy, located 900 kilometers north of

Adelaide, I learned the name translates from the Aboriginal language to the 'White Man's Hole,' referring to the opal mines dug by foreigners.

About 2,000 residents occupy the town, including foreign miners, small shop owners and their families, as well as a few Aboriginals. Desert dwellings, many of them dug into the hills or reclaimed from abandoned mine caves, extend the town limits. For miles around the town, the digging trenches for the mines – especially the famous 'Eight Mile Field' – cover the landscape. Known as the opal capital of the world, with possibly 97% of the world's opal supply, the land is barren and remote. First discovered and mined in 1915, the rush started in 1956. A semi-precious stone, the opal is treasured around the world, and represents the birth stone for those born in the month of October.

The bus stopped at the Ansett-Pioneer bus station, next to the small post office on the main street. Fortunately, it was fall. Instead of typical summer desert temperatures reaching over 105 degrees Fahrenheit, temperatures were now varied, with cooler days and cold desert nights.

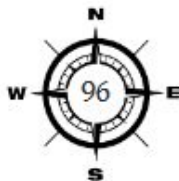
I stepped off the bus and was greeted by a short, wiry man in his thirties.

"Welcome. Where ya coming' from?" The man had a heavy German accent.

I immediately replied, "America. And you?"

"Germany. A German national. I'm Helmut Schwartz. A miner here in Coober Pedy."

Although I realized he was meeting tourists in hopes of striking up some gemstone business, I was the sole traveler from the bus. We struck up a



## Postcards Home 2

conversation, and in a short time, he invited me to visit his home, meet his wife, and examine his collection of polished opals. I was eager to visit a local dugout home, make new friends, and perhaps buy an opal.

A short walk brought us to their home. I met Maria, a shy woman who looked like she had never missed a meal. "She's a good woman," Helmut said. "Helps me cut and polish my opals. Look at these fire opals."

I admired the large collection of highly polished gems, noting how the milky white stones caught the light, sparkled, and shone a rainbow of colors. They were so beautiful that I had a difficult time choosing. Helmut insisted he had the best quality available and that he was one of the best gem cutters in Coober Pedy.

I agreed the stones were really beautiful, but on my budget, couldn't afford some that I really wanted. Like diamonds, opals are graded by carat and quality. I finally selected a few of the color and quality I liked and bargained with him for a price I could afford.

I told him, "Since I'm buying four stones, I should have a discount." Helmut agreed. I paid him and he offered to package the gems to be shipped to my family's home America. "I'll take you to the post office so you can mail them." I gathered up the beer cans I'd been collecting, scribbled a few postcards, and walked with Helmut into town.

At the post office, I filled out the customs declaration for mailing, indicating 'Empty Beer Cans,' taped it to the box, and gave it, along with the postcards and the gemstones, to the postmaster. He looked at the customs form I attached to my uncle's package, and abruptly asked, "What's this you're shipping, Mate?"

"As it states on the form, I'm declaring empty beer cans. My uncle collects them, and I send him those cans I gather from my travels."

"You Yanks! You make a collection of almost everything. Crazy Americans! And you're not even sending him the beer!"

Helmut nodded. "You're spending a lot of money," he said, "sending those cans to America. What a waste of money."

Postal business concluded and local insults aside, Helmut and I left the post office and stepped into the warm sunshine. "It's a Three Dog Night!" Helmut blurted.

"Oh, really! Three Dog Night's playing here in Coober Pedy? Tonight?"

"What are you talking about?" I explained they were a world-famous American rock group.

He scowled indignantly. "No! No such thing. I'm telling you, it'll be so cold tonight, outside in the desert, all the Aboriginals will have three dogs on them keep 'em warm."

He started to leave, but turned and asked, "Why don't you join Maria and me for lunch tomorrow? Then we'll drive out to the Eight Mile Range. I've contracted a drilling rig to perform a deep bore on my mining claim. You'll bring me good luck."

Agreeing to meet at his house later that evening, I spent the remainder of the afternoon exploring a few shops, the lone grocery store in town, and a couple of bars to replenish the beer can supply.



The next day I made my way to the Schwartz's dugout for lunch. Helmut greeted me at the door and invited me into his home.

"These caves are in demand. They give year-round comfort. They're cool in the summer and warm in the winter. They're moist from the sandstone, so it's humidity-controlled comfort."

I followed him along a narrow, dark hallway to their small kitchen and sitting area. Maria was preparing a typical German lunch. Following European custom, their afternoon meal was large.

The frying schnitzel smelled delicious, and before long, Maria invited us to sit down at her table. She set out a great meal, consisting of large portions of the schnitzel, boiled red cabbage and potatoes, crusty brown bread, cheese and a cold beer.

After lunch, we climbed into a truck and drove outside Coober Pedy past Five, Six, and Seven Mile Fields to our destination at Eight Mile Field.

Indicating the excavations and diggings, the piles and piles of dirt and sand, Helmut said, "Anyone can stake a claim here. You give your passport and a deposit of two hundred dollars, Australian. That'll get you a claim, 200 x 200 feet. Why don't you find a spot, put down your rucksack, try your luck?"

I nodded, but thought I sure wasn't about to stop and stake a claim out here in the desert.

Helmut continued. "Any of the lands that were once mined and abandoned can be reclaimed. The original single bore may be only a few feet away

from a rich vein of opals. Miners keep looking for that elusive vein, the 'mother lode.'"

I wondered aloud if anybody ever struck it really rich. "A few miners do. I haven't," Helmut said. "But I make a decent living cutting, polishing, and selling gemstones."

I remembered reading that the mother lode is actually where the rivers of underground silicate have turned to stone. One vein is about thirty-five feet deep, and the other is about sixty-five feet. These two veins converge at about forty-five feet into one large, valuable, high-grade opal deposit.

Arriving on-site, Helmut, Maria, and I greeted the drilling rig operator. I realized his rig was similar to those I'd seen used to drill for water. However, the drill bit was much larger, about the size of a man's shoulders.

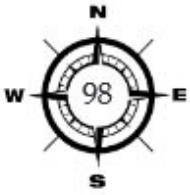
"Where do you want me to drop this shaft?" the driver asked. "It can make you rich."

Helmut showed the drill operator the spot he had chosen to drill, and the truck was moved into exact position.

The big bit began to bore deep into the earth. Moving up and down, up and down, the drill brought up soft, sandy soil to the surface on each return. Some time later, I watched the bit bring up some colored pieces of stone — raw, unpolished opal.

"Holy ... Opal!"

Helmut immediately examined the stone fragments unearthed.



## Postcards Home 2



Geodetic Station Plaque atop Uluru, Ayers Rock

W.D. Mast



Left: Former Opal Dugout converted to Residence, Coober Pedy

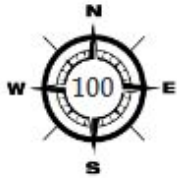


Ayers Rock Cave and Aboriginal Painting Entrance



Ayers Rock at Sunset





## Postcards Home 2

At an approximate depth of thirty-five feet, the drilling began producing more and more colorful pieces of fire opal. Helmut continued to check the color, quality, and grade of the material. Holding one such piece, he turned it over.

"Huh. Just potch."

My surprised expression must have startled Helmut. I thought we'd struck it big.

In unison, they informed me that 'potch,' a term coined by miners, described a low grade sampling of opal. Some of the stones would be usable, but the material was not the valuable, high grade opal stone they sought.

The miners continued to drill deeper and deeper into the hill, but the drill bit returned with more potch. They kept drilling deeper, until the rig reached a depth of nearly sixty-five feet.

I hadn't brought Helmut the luck he'd hoped for, but he seemed to have another idea. He shrugged and directed the operator to change the drill bit to a cable seat.

"I want to go down and look for myself," he said.

The driller fixed a wooden seat on a cable loop and positioned it over the newly bored hole. He handed Helmut a mechanic's light on a very long extension cord. He steadied the cable while Helmut adjusted the seat and told the operator to lower him down the hole.

At about thirty feet, Helmut reported seeing the color vein, but insisted on being lowered further. Just past the forty-five foot mark, we heard his muffled voice. "That's enough. Bring me up!"

Wet from the humidity and water at such depths, Helmut emerged from the hole and into the daylight. Blinking against the sun, he wiped the sandy clay from his face. He paused, apparently pondering his next move..

"How adventurous are you? Want to take the seat and go down in the hole and see for yourself?" Helmut asked.

Without fear or hesitation, I agreed. "Sure." I held onto the cable, settled into the seat, and reached for the mechanic's light. They slowly lowered me down the freshly bored hole. Not realizing the potential dangers of the soft silicate sands, I continued the descent which seemed to take forever. When I looked up, the opening was getting smaller and smaller.

By twenty feet, my glasses had completely fogged over, with water run off from the extreme humidity. It was hard to breathe since the air was so heavy and moist. Surprisingly, the shaft was much warmer than I'd expected. I directed the light to the sides of the shaft, but due to the humidity, I could barely distinguish any color. I reached the bottom of my descent at about forty-five feet. When I looked up, beyond the absolute darkness, up toward the earth's opening, I could only see daylight about the size of a quarter. I yelled, "Okay, bring me up."

They started the power winch, and I slowly began the ascent. On the way up, as my shoulders brushed the sides of the shaft, I began thinking about the possible dangers. What if the fragile walls caved in? What if the cable



broke? What would happen? I realized any rescue would be impossible, and I would be buried in the sand. I looked up and saw the light growing bigger and brighter. I was relieved to reach the top of the shaft. Stepping onto firm ground and into the bright Australian sunlight, I finally was able to exhale.

“You made it, Mate. Ready to stake a claim?” Helmut reached down, picked up a handful of potch and handed it to me. Maria smiled at her husband’s offering and nodded at me in approval.

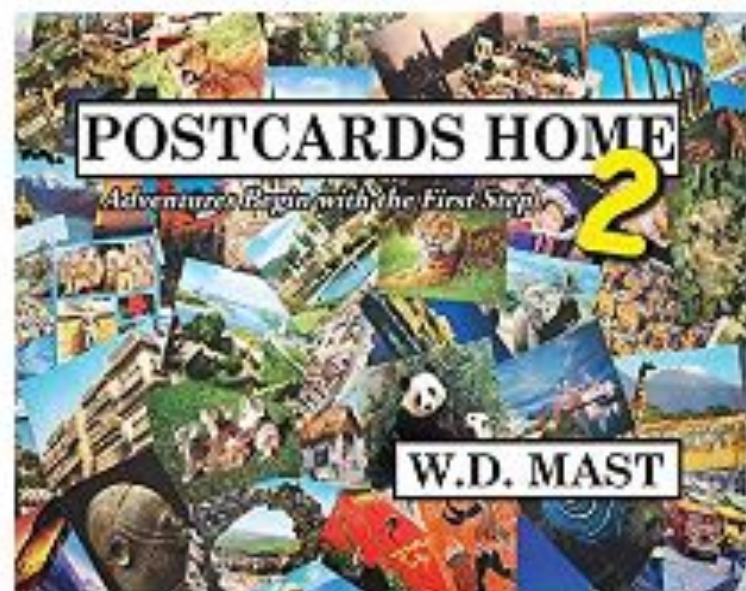
I gladly accepted Helmut’s offering as a souvenir of my adventure. “Thanks. Now how about I buy the beer when we get back to Coober Pedy?”

Sitting in the small neighborhood bar, I was comfortable with my new friends. They added a few new brands to my uncle’s collection, and I promised them a postcard from one of my next destinations.

Walking back to the youth hostel, I reflected on my adventurous day. I realized how lucky I was to be able to travel and meet interesting people from different cultures. My walkabout truly cemented my belief that adventure begins with the first step.



Coober Pedy Opal Fields Drilling Rig with Helmut and Maria, (center) and the Exploration Team



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by [W.D. Mast](#)



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Non-Fiction - Travel

144 Pages

Reviewed on 01/08/2021

# BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Jon Michael Miller for Readers' Favorite

In *Postcards Home 2* by W.D. Mast, a sociologist and anthropologist, we are fortunate to take two trips around the world, documented by actual postcards—with their writings—as well as Mr. Mast's flowing commentary. So, let's take a quick tour of his travels in this amazing book. In the first circumnavigation, we learn to ski with him and his friends in Switzerland. Next, it's Calcutta where besides visiting the Taj Mahal, he learns to eat with his hands. In Malaysia's Temple of the Azure Cloud, he's attacked by a toothless king cobra, and in China, he wows kids with the magic of Polaroid photography. In Australia, a kangaroo with a joey in its pouch helps him par a golf hole, and in Bali he spends almost a whole day bargaining for a woodcarving of a goddess. Kabul teaches him about Afghanistan scouting and to watch out for antique carpet salesmen, and in Dharan he learns about watch vendors. We find him swimming with porpoises and toying with piranhas in the Brazilian Amazon. He's nearly kidnapped in Karachi, and in Taiwan he receives a hotel massage from a blind woman. After a break, his lust for travel takes him around the globe once more, to Australia again where he's frightened by wild dingoes, in Algeria he meets the "blue people" of Tamanrasset, in New Zealand he's doused in beer, and in Iran, he's almost caught up in the Revolution. Finally, at the outset of his North American tour, he becomes acquainted with the "crazy" drivers of Boston.

But this book, with W.D. Mast's wonderful stories and the accompanying photos and actual cards, is much more than a world tour. After reading it, you will feel as if you met a new friend. Mr. Mast is a marvelous role model for all travelers. He tells us that as much as he learned from the multifarious friendships he makes, he has learned more about himself. As we do, right along with him. His curiosity and his love of mankind move him not only to see the sights but to make friends, to appreciate other cultures. And his writing is downright splendid, direct, and to the point so that we learn about him as a person not from what he says but from what he does. He's funny, observant, sharing, curious, and caring. His genuine goodwill is infectious. When asked about his favorite place, he at first mentions the "immense scenic beauty" and the "generous, good-spirited people" of New Zealand, but then comes back to the unparalleled beauty of the good old U.S.A. Postcards Home 2 is a superb manual for any world traveler, not only for what to see but for how to be.