

I've always loved Jersey granite and the sunsets at St Ouen's, but Uluru is a rock to rival our own

I enjoyed growing up in Jersey but I always dreamed of adventures in distant lands, preferably islands. I blame Treasure Island and Swiss Family Robinson

HAVE always sensed strong cultural similarities between Jersey and Australia, where I now live. Great beaches, surfing, sailing, fishing and an abundance of fresh food, obviously, but much more than that – deeper congruences, a love of nature, a tendency to irreverence, a keen sense of self-deprecatory humour and above all a feeling of gratitude for our astonishing good fortune, in a world full of deprivation and violence.

I enjoyed growing up in Jersey but I always dreamed of adventures in distant lands, preferably islands. I blame Treasure Island and The Swiss Family Robinson. I was 25 when I first sailed into Sydney Harbour, at the end of a six-month journey overland through the Middle East and South-east Asia. It felt like the promised land, but there was one fly in the ointment. I had kind friends, happy to put me up and put up with me, but just \$23 in my pocket. I called the arts editor of the Murdoch-owned *The Australian*, the only national newspaper, and with the temerity of youth, asked whether he needed someone to write about Australian TV programmes. I told him I'd worked in British TV as a newsreader and had written some reviews for *The Stage*, the industry paper.

He replied 'That's funny, our bloke's just left. Are you any good?' I said 'I'm not bad' and he said 'We'll give you a go, then. Twenty-five bucks a column.' They call Australia The Lucky Country, after a book by Donald Horne, and that job interview seemed to prove the point.

Much water has flown under the bridge since then and I'm now lucky enough to



Mick Le Moignan
A Jerseyman in Australia

spend nine months a year in Australia and the other three months (yes, the warmer ones) with family and friends in Jersey, Cambridge and other parts of Europe.

I've often wondered about writing a regular column exploring the many links and cultural correspondences I've

observed between Jersey and Australia. So I approached the editor of the *Jersey Evening Post* and was then delighted to receive a similar response to the one my Sydney Editor gave me, all those years ago. JerriAussies of all ages are warmly invited to contact me by email micklemoignan@me.com to share their experiences.

I suspect many Jersey people are drawn to Australia because they sense a kindred spirit, albeit one writ larger than life. Even the basic shape of the land mass is similar – although you could fit Jersey's 46 square miles into Australia's three million square miles more than 64,000 times.

I met an old St Ouennais, years ago, who said he'd been to St Helier once but would never go again because he 'didn't like it'.

Insularity or parochialism may be more understandable in Australia because of the distances involved, but I still feel slightly ashamed that we live in Sydney and have never visited Perth – or anywhere else in Western Australia. In Jersey terms, that's like living in Gorey and never going to La Pulente, never mind the rest of St Ouen's Bay.

So, last month, we flew to Alice Springs and Uluru for a week – round about Carrefour Selous, to stretch the analogy. I hadn't realised how ancient that part of the world is. We walked in the dry bed of the Finke River, which flowed 350 million years ago: about then, the earliest forms of life were crawling onto land for the first time.

This desert is nothing like the sandy wastes of the Sahara, because a hundred million years ago, what's now the 'red heart' of Australia was home to a vast inland sea. Some of the water is still there, but a long way down. The desert has been there so long that it's teeming with life – a whole host of plants, birds and other animals have learned the tricks they need to live in such an arid environment.

Uluru itself, utterly beautiful, breathtaking and magnificent, is more awe-inspiring than any man-made building I've ever seen, and a staggering 600 million years old. At 2.2 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, it's about the size of Alderney, and extends for another couple of miles underground. Every evening, hundreds of visitors share a sense of wonder as the fading rays of sunlight coax ever-changing colours from the rockface. I've always loved Jersey granite and the sunsets at St Ouen's, but Uluru is a rock to rival our own.