

A CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE KANGAROO-THUMP KIND (OR: THE REBOUNDED KANGAROO).

Australian outback and outer urban lore include many examples of human/kangaroo interactions, too frequently involving collisions between vehicles and our national symbol at eventide or nightfall. Overnight roadside kills are so common along some highways, such as the Eyre across the Nullarbor Plain, that road patrols carry out a daily carcass collection (a part of Clean Up Australia?), to reduce distress to overseas tourists unused to such slaughter. Injuries to drivers, even fatalities, have also resulted from collisions or attempted avoidances. Beneficiaries include eagle and other raptor populations provided they can get out of the way of oncoming vehicles in time. Our national news recently featured a kangaroo (Virgin, or Qantas?) inside Melbourne Airport's passenger terminal, being without her boarding pass. Security removed her to greener pastures.

As well as airport encounters, there's the thump variety. This one occurred on a sunny mid-afternoon along our stretch of the Strathewen Road, locally known as Hoppers Crossing. Here, the local mob have developed a frequently-used pedestrian crossing, where large male and female eastern greys, led by Qantas the Flying Kangaroo (over six feet of spring-heeled sub-orbital ballistic macropod missile) soar over the roadside fence, followed by twenty or more adolescents and juveniles through their ever-widening hole in the wire netting, straight across the road. There's little point in trying to repair the hole, the juveniles being far too smart, simply moving it along to the nearest convenient location by burrowing beneath or through your best attempts at kangaroo impedance. Verily, our national symbol can be a pain in the fence.

If they would but pause, look left or right, then cross with care, or perhaps wear fluorescent yellow jackets? They do none of these things (sigh). Indeed, Jared Diamond has noted that one reason why our Aboriginal first people never developed sedentary agriculture, was their lack of domesticable native livestock which could be fenced in, rather than decamping overnight thirty miles from the would-be-herders. Anyhow on this day it came to pass that Qantas, in total defiance of lockdown restrictions, did come a-bounding joyfully down the hill, over the fence, down the embankment, onto the Strathewen Road, thud, at full speed amidstips into the Toyota bearing your correspondent and young grandson, Liam.

Thus it was that we have never run into a kangaroo, this one ran into us. Our bemused beast bounced onto the pavement, hoisted himself groggily onto his haunches, shook his head and fist, glared at us and (no exaggeration) SWORE, repetitive grunt-snort, while his spouses/siblings/offspring/cousins and aunts joined in from the roadside. With the Toyota stationary (you might say, clean bowled, torpedoed, dead in the water?), the grandson mirthfully helpless, and being without a camera, the macropedal curses went, so to speak, through to the keeper. And so it was that this Attenborough-standard kangaroo road rage vignette went unrecorded for future generations, although such events can happen at any time, anywhere in our fair shire. Happily, rather than dragging us out and beating us up, Qantas and his entourage, with a parting curse or two, completed their crossing, bounding onwards and upwards unto our neighbour's broad sunlit uplands, whence they return at will, to and fro, over the road an unpredictable long-period kangaroo oscillation, a multiple inelastic collision awaiting the alarmed and unalert motorist.

If there be a moral to this tale: always proceed with caution, can't be too careful, and keep your camera and fur-remover to hand. And perhaps those "Beware of Kangaroos" road signs should be modified to also read "Or You'll Both Be Dented". With all best regards, and don't ignore lockdown like Qantas or the constabulary will getcha,

John O'Connor.

