feature

WORLD TRAVELLING QUILTER

BY PENNY HOWE

Following on from her report in February, of a journey she and her husband, Bill made to France, this month Penny remembers previous journeys. The photographs, taken by Bill, show how Penny's patchwork and quilting has been inspired by their travels

Interior of the van showing recent colourful quilt cover for obsolete roof window.

Our serious travelling began in 1986 when we set off to cycle round the world. That journey took 2 years 7 months and 5 days (26,734 miles cycled) and the only patchwork involved was to worn out clothing, tent, tyres, etc. But we did visit an Amish home and view their work.

Several other major journeys followed. Patchwork and quilting was always left at home but gradually became more important to me. In 2004 we changed to travelling by classic camper, a 1974 Mercedes Benz, which meant more luxury plus room to take some sewing. We planned to meet up with local quilters along the way but this failed abysmally. We were not able to rendezvous with any of our contacts from Nottinghamshire to Cape Town, South Africa, though we did find a great button and bead shop in Cape Town.

To begin with, my patchwork was completely self-taught from books. The first four illustrations of my work were created using research, our own photos, plus very scrappy sketches - really brief scribbles made in the margins of the diary as we drove along - that I wouldn't show anyone!

Our 1974 Mercedes Benz classic camper

Penny and Bill with friend TJ. Bill is wearing the hat he requested for our next journey. It had to represent the sunshine, mountains and rivers we expect to encounter along the route.

Then I began a City & Guilds course that really excited me. Helen Stringer, our local tutor and now a good friend, really encouraged me to keep better records and notes as you can see from samples of later work. I would love to be doing the next part of the course, as my fellow students are at present, but that will have to wait till we return from this next trip.

The series of photos 6-8, stem from a project for the City and Guilds design course – design and make a cushion. Bill claims we are drowning in cushions but he did need a pillow for the campervan. I chose to use as inspiration a photo he took in Kakadu National Park. The final photos 9-11, were inspired by our African journey from home to Cape Town, South Africa.

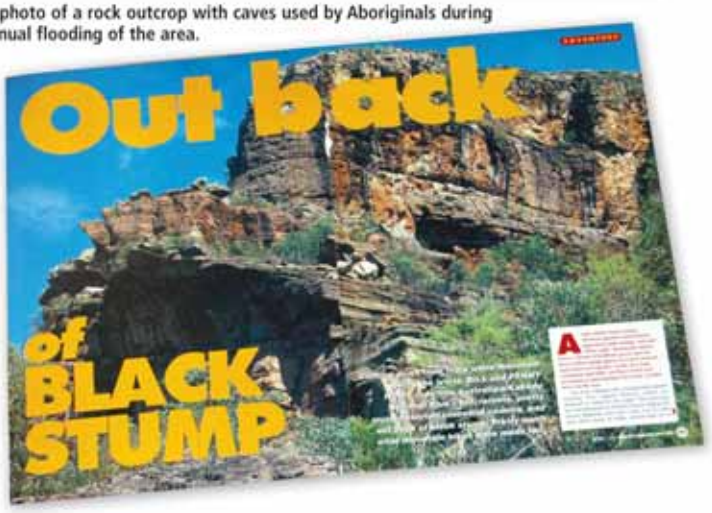
1. This door curtain was inspired by the six months spent cycling in Australia in 1988 during our round the world journey. We cycled from Darwin to Sydney, down to Melbourne then north again to Brisbane. We were strongly affected by the stories of the Aboriginal Dream Time and very grateful for every puff of cooling wind brought by the wind maiden 'Kerala' as temperatures soared to 40°C.

2. Every Christmas we go away to camp at some remote or outlandish spot, on our own. We are not Christmas people and it would be difficult to share ourselves out between our large family (14 grandchildren). This piece was inspired by a Christmas spent at 'Sunk Island' where we found this beautiful old boat called 'Serendipity'. Our only companions were the birds on the Humber shoreline.

3. My first bargello. As this came together it reminded me of cycling over mountain range after mountain range from San Diego, California, to Miami, Florida, one Christmas. The Strelitzias are a common sight in California while the alligators were just as common in Florida – quite worrying when looking for somewhere to pitch a tent! The quilting also includes both bikes, birds and snakes, plus the coyotes who sang us to sleep most nights.

4. When the terrible floods devastated New Orleans I designed this quilt to represent the musicians of that city rising from the floodwater and destruction to play again. The little figures are adapted from one seen when rescued from near drowning (only rain) by a teacher and children from an after school club in Arizona.

5. The photo of a rock outcrop with caves used by Aboriginals during the annual flooding of the area.



6. Design work for the cushion/pillow.

7. During the design course I became fascinated by the Fibonacci series and here I am experimenting with alternatives to represent the rock strata.

8. The finished pillow.

10. Inspired by the countryside of north Africa and Egypt but using the zebra stencil with acrylics and reverse appliqué.

In April 2008 we will set off again, this time to drive to Australia via Spain, France, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Mongolia, China, Laos, Thailand (possibly Cambodia and Vietnam too), Malaysia and Singapore. Possibly continuing on to the Americas.

9. This is a stencil created by cutting up a four inch square and spreading the pieces. I call this my zebra stencil.

We expect to be away for a couple of years, which is a long time to be away from my workroom and quilting friends. So we are looking for any possible contacts in any of the above countries, we already have one in both Russia and Mongolia. If you have any suggestions, we can be contacted via email at: mercit2africa@yahoo.co.uk. Our journey can be followed on our website (which at present contains the African journey) at: www.atomicsoup.plus.com and it will have a section devoted to patchwork and quilting. I am also looking forward to writing about our adventures in future issues of P&Q.

11. Further south we were struck by how green the countryside was but interestingly rough roads also made an impression and again the zebra stencil design has been used in this hand quilted piece.