THE RPS ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Australian Chapter
NEWSLETTER

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Welcome

Rob Morgan ARPS, Editor

Welcome to the July 2023 RPS Australian Chapter *Newsletter*.

Thank you to this month's contributors – Herman Lee and Caleb Lee, Robin Williams ASIS FRPS, our Secretary Elaine Herbert OAM ARPS, Charlie Yang and Tony Healy ARPS.

When emailing images for the *Newsletter*, the only requirement is that they are Jpegs with the long side only ~1,000 pixels. All photo editing software includes a 'Resize' or 'Image size' option. Select 'pixels' … 1000. Keep those (downsized) pixels coming in! For *non-image files* (e.g. pdfs), under 5 MB is preferred and *never* 10 MB or more.

Deadline for contributions for the next issue is 23rd August 2023.

Playing a puzzle of myself !

Herman Lee

[This article was written in Chinese by Herman Lee, and translated by Caleb Lee. Thanks Caleb – Ed.]

On 21st June the Australian Chapter played host to a famous Australian photographer, David Anthony Williams FRPS, who is currently residing in Canada. David shared a collection of his personal works documenting his journey, starting from his beginnings in photography through to being the professional photographer he is today.

David referenced a selection of famous Western paintings in his presentation and commented that in the process of creating and taking photos, it can be of great value to pay special attention to the techniques and methods used in paintings of the past. Photographers need not retain all the details, but keep the essence, which can be utilized as references.

Self Portrait at Twenty-Eight
by Albrecht Durer

During his presentation, David shared 'Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight', painted by the German Albrecht Durer in 1500. This famous painting, the earliest example of a self-portrait, affirms the value of human existence. He also referenced and drew from Diego Rodriguez de Silva

Velazquez's masterpiece, 'Las Meninas', from the 17th century. David used this reference to dialogue between art and philosophy, leading to reflections about life itself.

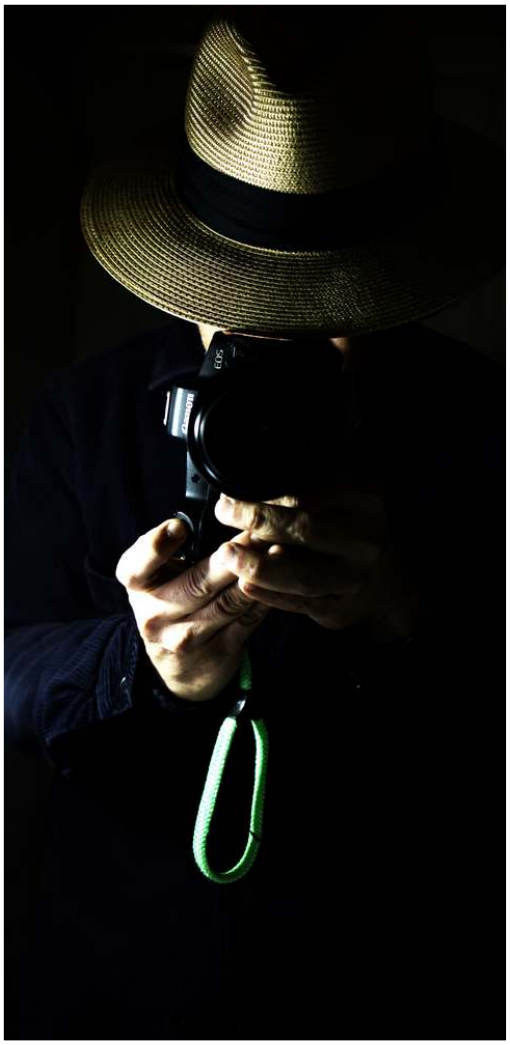
After the birth of the camera in the 19th century, the creations of famous painters were likewise influenced by the technology of photography and used photos to help build their creations. Amongst the most well known examples are the French Impressionist masters, Edgar Degar, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Marcel Duchamp. They obtained great amounts of inspiration from the light and shadow present in photos, the speed effects of the shutter, and the depth of field. The walking puppy in the famous painting, 'Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash' by Giacomo Balla, with its soaring and fast-overlapping footsteps, is just imitating the slow shutter image of a camera.

Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash
by Giacomo Balla

Recently, I have pondered this question: How does a subject see the photographer's image and inner world at the moment? I began the quest with Cubism in Western paintings. Cubism places major focus upon observing objects from different angles. The famous Cubist painter, Pablo Picasso, declared that only by resetting and collaging objects from different angles on the canvas can the essence of nature be accurately and clearly reflected.

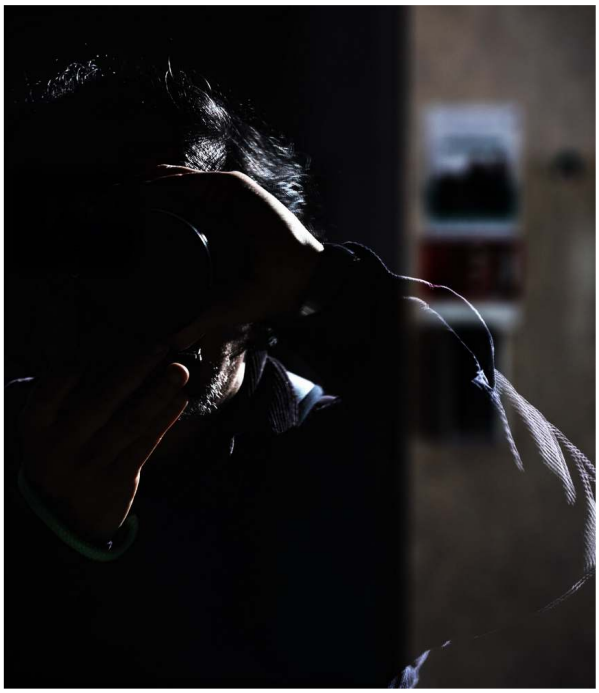
Before the camera, I took photos of various personal dynamics of myself in the midst of the photography process. Through a series of photos in which detailed movements like the eyes, wrists, clothing, and facial expressions, a photographer is magnified clearly in front of the crowd, which can lead to introspection about the inner spiritual world of the photographer.

Puzzle Piece 1 by Herman Lee



In attaining the end goal of understanding the interactive relationship between the photographer and the subject, I made an effort to capture the spirit of Cubism in my photos.

As the photographer, I in turn reversed the roles and also became the person being photographed. The photographer becomes the same as other people, and in terms of dynamics, there are many things to observe in order to understand both the subject and the one behind the camera.



Puzzle Pieces 2 and 3 (above) and 4 and 5 (below)
by Herman Lee

The Canary Down the Mine

Robin Williams ASIS FRPS

I am currently bringing to conclusion a major project on bird feathers and biodiversity that members may be interested in. Within the scientific community the importance of biodiversity and the contemporary threats to species are well understood, but in the minds of 'ordinary' people – taxpayers and voters, the influencers of politics and change – the story is confusing. We need new and better ways of communicating the message: visual methods are often more powerful than the written word, but how many more times can we see a stranded polar bear adrift on an ice flow as the image of climate change?

Many others are undertaking important work to tell the story, particularly members of the International League of Conservation Photographers. I am attempting to tell the story in a unique and engaging way by using birds – more specifically beautiful photographs of their feathers – to send a message about what's happening in the natural world.

Birds are outstanding indicators of the health of the overall environment – think of the way they used canaries down the mines – the poor little canary was more sensitive to gases than the miners, so when the canary fell off its perch it was time to get out! Birds are readily affected by physical and chemical impacts on their ecosystems, whether these are caused by natural or man-made influences. When communities of birds change this is usually the result of an ecological change. Because many species of birds have become specialised to occupy certain niches, they are responsive to a wide variety of environmental changes and can reflect diversity and trends in other animals and plants with which they coexist.

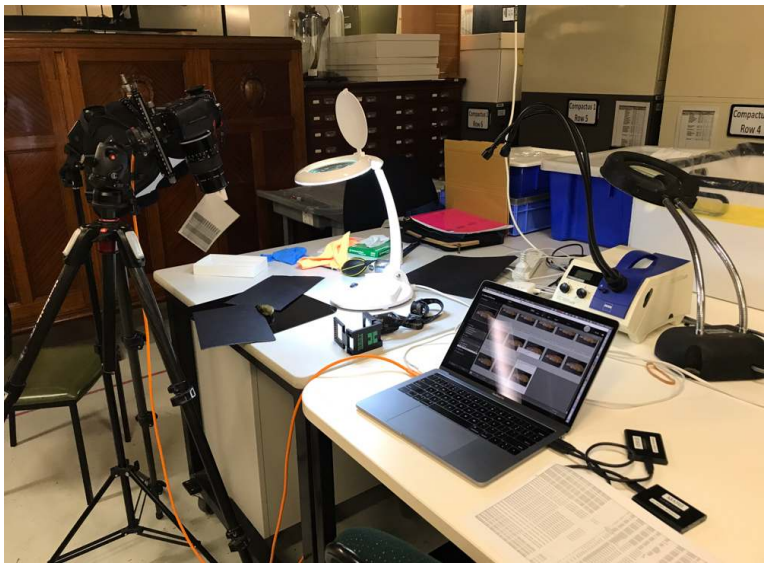
A shameful total of nine species and fifteen sub-species of Australia's birds are known to have become extinct since European settlement and a host of Australia's birds are currently threatened by a whole variety of different sources. Birdlife Australia

Ground Parrot, Mallee Fowl, Paradise Parrot
by Robin Williams FRPS

now estimates that there are 216 species of Australian birds now at risk of extinction. Extrapolate that to the general plant and animal population and you can see that we are facing a biodiversity catastrophe.

Photographing *endangered* birds in the wild is extremely difficult, often requiring permits, quite apart from actually finding them! Photographing *extinct* birds in the wild is of course impossible! So I decided to concentrate on the feathers only. Feathers are one of the most distinctive features of a bird's anatomy. Feathers are fundamental to many aspects of a bird's existence: they provide insulation essential for controlling body temperature, aerodynamic power necessary for flight, colours used for communications, and camouflage. They are also incredibly beautiful. I started the project with feathers from local road-kill or window strikes but very quickly had to make professional connections that gave me access to 'bird skins' of deceased avifauna and I am indebted to Museums Victoria, Parks Victoria and Zoos Victoria for their help in providing authorised access to materials for this project.

Superb Parrot (above) and the scanning macro set-up at the Museum of Victoria, by Robin Williams FRPS



In a technical sense obtaining such detailed and clear macro-photographs of the feathers is very challenging and requires focus-stacking of up to 100 individual photographs in order to achieve the required depth-of-field. Sophisticated lighting arrangements are also required to effectively record the range of colours; the colours we 'see' are created in complex ways – for example some are a result of iridescence.

I had to establish a working macro studio with the camera tethered to the computer so that I could check the focus-stacking, lighting, etc., in situ, before returning the delicate, and enormously valuable specimens to their permanent homes in collections. In order to avoid contamination of the specimens and exposure to the dangerous mercuric

chloride used in the treatment of the specimens I had to work 'gowned and gloved' – something that was very familiar to me as a medical photographer.

In a creative sense the project aims to engage the viewer in the beauty of bird plumage and at the same time highlight the disastrous loss of species. The project is in three parts: Flights of Beauty, Flights of Fantasy and Flights of Sorrow. In 'Flights of Beauty' images of the feathers of a diverse range of common species are presented in a way that demonstrates their extraordinary beauty.

In 'Flights of Fantasy' images of 'impossible' feather colours and combinations are presented as an amusing and entertaining set of images; I've also had a lot of fun with some 'fine-art' versions.

In 'Flights of Sorrow' we see the feathers of extinct and endangered species as a telling message about the importance of species loss. The few images published here are a tiny sample of the images I have now created for the project. For a more extensive look at them check our website: https://www.robinwilliamsphotography.com/flights

Helmeted Honeyeater, Gouldian Finch and (below) Fine Art by Robin Williams FRPS

I'm planning a possible exhibition next year, but I'd be grateful for any suggestions members may have for getting the message out more broadly. Climate change and habitat loss matter: resuscitating the canary is not enough – we need to close the mine!

(Please note that no living birds were used in this project and that in many nations it is illegal to have in one's possession feathers, especially those that are from threatened species).

From Your Secretary

Elaine Herbert OAM ARPS
Hon Secretary, Australian Chapter

John Pollard's Photography Books

We are very pleased indeed that Dr Robin Williams FRPS has offered to prepare a series of articles for the Newsletter, drawing on the books which were given to the Chapter by John Pollard's family after his death in 2018. John was a key member of the Chapter for many years. He supported the Chapter in so many ways during his lifetime, and this is an ideal way to make the content of the books which interested and inspired him available to all our members across Australia, reflecting the spirit of the gift. The first of Robin's articles will be appearing in the next issue of the *Newsletter*. Robin - thank you so much for this upcoming series of articles.

And we also say a big 'thank you' to David Oldfield FRPS who has stored John's books for the past five years. It's been much appreciated, David.

A Chapter Presence on the RPS Website

We're now making a start on our Chapter's section of the RPS website and we're delighted to announce that **Caleb Lee** will be our Web Editor. Caleb is one of our Sydney members and has experience in web editing. He's now liaising with staff at RPS House in Bristol who will arrange training for him in the particular software systems which they use for the website. Caleb, thank you for taking this on so that the Chapter will have a presence on the RPS website.

There was an excellent response from members to the call for assistance and we thank all of you who offered to help. And there's been an additional happy outcome as we've now discovered several new members who are taking great images! We look forward to featuring their work in future issues of the *Newsletter*.

Artificial Intelligence and Photography

This topic is continuing to attract a huge amount of attention. The RPS is making an important contribution to the debate, and the Digital Imaging Group is especially involved too. There is a special section of the RPS website now devoted to *AI and Photography* at https://rps.org/AI - so keep watching that site for new developments and special events being planned. One of these is a conference on Photography and AI at RPS House in October. We'll follow that with interest – and hope it will be available online.

Our own members have been discussing AI and Photography in recent editions of the *Newsletter*, and continuing this is a note from RPS Trustee Peter Walmsley LRPS after reading the article which David Williams FRPS wrote for the May Newsletter.

Peter writes:

There was a particular part of David Williams' article that got me thinking. It is his 'How will photographers make money from AI?' question. Over the course of my career I've seen this question asked many times when a new technology comes along (I was trained as an electronics engineer and turned to marketing).

It's actually the wrong question to ask because making money has nothing to do with the technology or the product. Making money is a marketing question which is answered when customer needs are satisfied. The correct question to pose therefore is 'How can customer needs (relating to use of imagery) be better satisfied by use of AI?' Actually, David already answered it: as an example, if you want a portrait in a place *you've never been to, there's no longer a need for an expensive location shoot.*

Thanks for your contribution, Peter – and my apologies for not including it in the June *Newsletter*.

I know some of our members are already experimenting with AI versions of Photoshop. So please keep sending us your thoughts and experiences with this major new development.

News of Members

We send our best wishes to **Peter Hunter OAM ARPS** who will be celebrating his 92nd birthday on 5th August. Peter was the first Convenor of the (then) Victorian Chapter when it was established in 1986. He moved to northern NSW some years ago, but has continued to take much interest in the RPS and our local Chapter. We miss you here in Melbourne, Peter, but hope you have a very happy birthday. Congratulations!

Even More on Woodbury

Our regular readers will recall that several years ago the Chapter's History Group worked extensively on a project to research the life and achievements of Walter Woodbury. For our newer members the background is that Woodbury came out to the Victorian goldfields from the UK in 1852 as a lad of eighteen. He quickly realised he wasn't cut out to be a gold miner so turned to photography and became a most important 19th century photographic inventor.

His career took him from Australia to Java where he married a girl of Dutch-Malay ancestry, then it took them back to the UK.

During our project we made contact with two of Woodbury's descendants, one of whom, Muriel Morris, has just had a book published about Woodbury, his achievements and his family. It is titled *Not White Enough: How Victorian Racism Contributed to the Destruction of a Photographic Genius.* Muriel Morris who lives in Canada is a great, great, granddaughter of Woodbury.

I'll let our readers know more about this book after I've obtained a copy. Meanwhile, my thanks to both Alan Hodgson Hon FRPS and Michael Pritchard FRPS for alerting me to its publication.

Exhibition: An exhibition by a group of members of the Melbourne Camera Club has been running at the Wolfhound Gallery in Brunswick St, Fitzroy, but it finishes on 30 July so it will have finished by the time this reaches you. However, the exhibition, *Visual Foray,* shows the work of eleven photographers and the gallery's website gives some examples. So go to www.wolfhoundgallery.com.au for a glimpse.

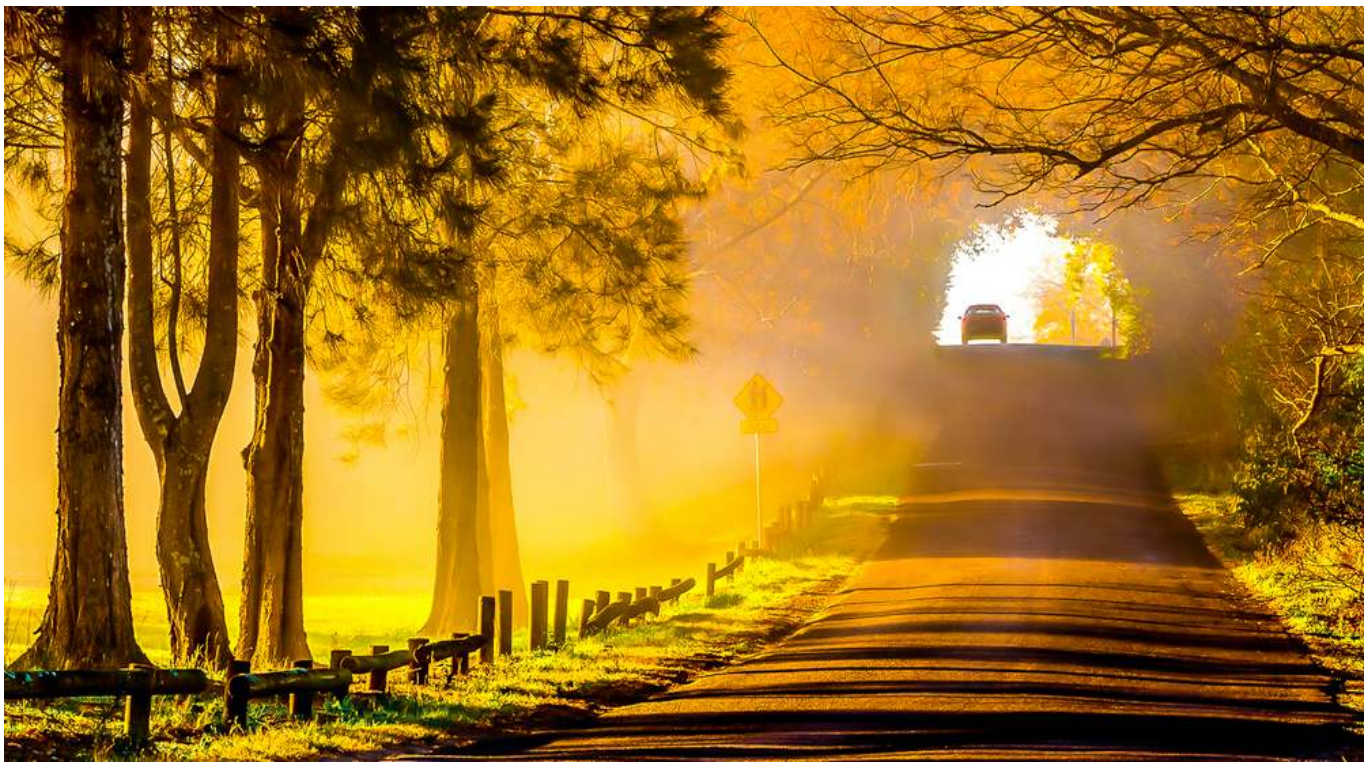
Members' Gallery

Charlie Yang

Here are some more of Charlie's great images. Ed

Images by Charlie Yang

Images by Charlie Yang

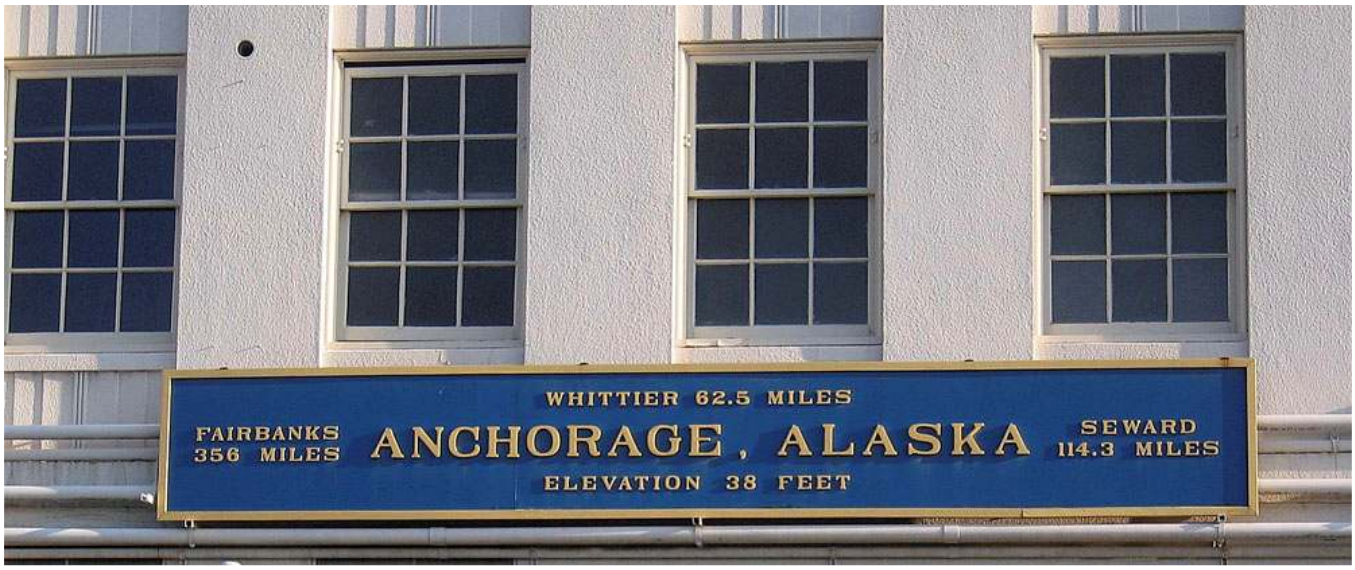


Alaska

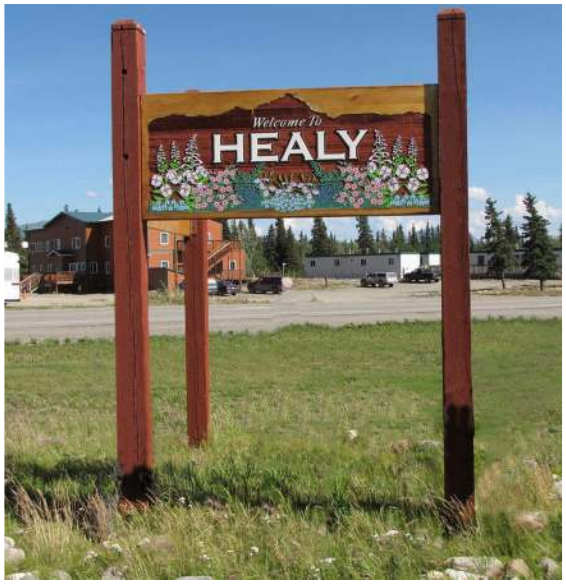
Tony Healy ARPS

In 1867 when Russia sold Alaska to the US for $7.2 million, it would have to have been the sale of the century. Although there were Russians in Sitka, and Norwegians in Petersburg in the lower part of the country, no one seemed to care. Back then the upper part of the country really was a last frontier.

In 1903 it was decided that a railway was needed to cater for those who had arrived and were located in the more distant interior. With starts and stops throughout its chequered development, the railway was finally completed in 1923 linking the coast to inland Fairbanks. Today it transports many tourists to the interior, with two important stops being Talkeetna – for flights over the snow fields and views of Mount McKinley – and Denali – for nature adventures and other trips into Denali National Park. March also brings those keen to see the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.



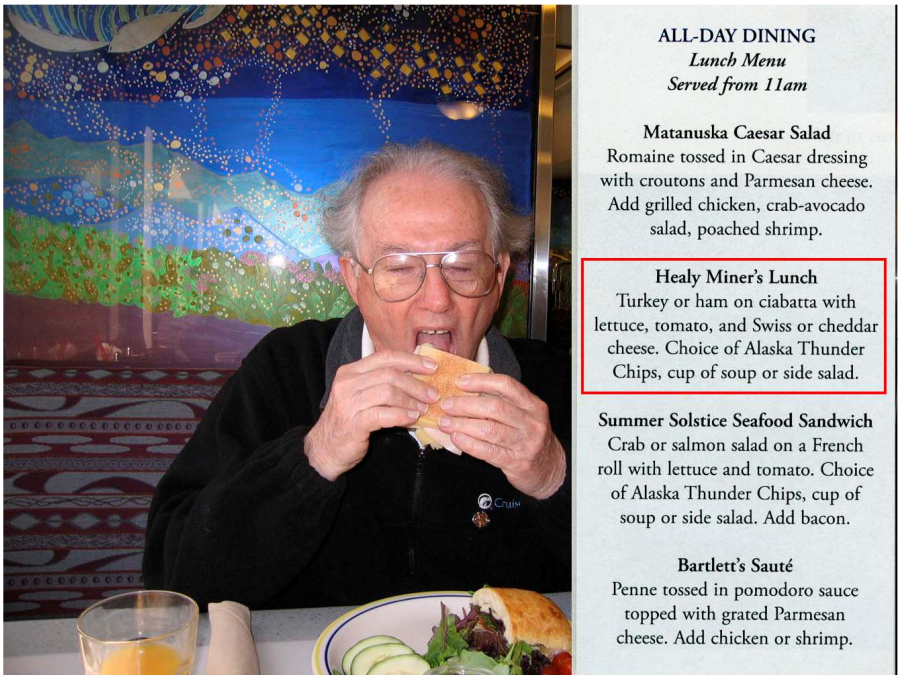
The railway starts at the port of Seward, south of Anchorage. At the other end, Fairbanks is close to the centre of Alaska. The line is 470 miles (760 km) long and most of it is single track. Those companies servicing the tourist areas have their own train carriages, as well as their own buses to meet tourists at Denali. Part of the decision to build the railway line was the discovery of low sulphur content coal just south of Fairbanks. The railway delivered the coal to Fairbanks for heating, and to Seward for export to Korea. This is all part of the Alaskan economy.



The coal mine was at a town called Healy.

Images by Tony Healy ARPS

Alaska Railroad offers day trips to Talkeetna, Denali and Fairbanks, as well as to other destinations nearer the coast. For the long haul between Anchorage and Fairbanks, a train leaves each place at 8 o'clock every morning. Both trains pull into by-lines at around the halfway mark. Staff from the Fairbanks train swap with staff on the Anchorage train, which means they all get back home for the night.



This halfway swap occurs north of Talkeetna, which allows the day trippers to Talkeetna to have their scenic flights and then catch the return train, which started in Fairbanks, to take them back to their hotels in Anchorage.

Mount McKinley is the highest mountain in North America, but is only clear of cloud for about 20% of the time. On our trip we were lucky enough to have three consecutive clear days. To some extent Alaska is still a last frontier.

Images (mostly) by Tony Healy ARPS:
Your reporter tucking into his namesake lunch;
The festival drop in centre, Talkeetna;
Mt McKinley;
The Alaska Railroad train curving through the landscape.