

THE COAST OF AUSTRALIA
ANDREW SHORT AND COLIN
WOODROFFE
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
\$150 (HB), SPECIAL DISCOUNT
FOR ALUMNI, \$120
ISBN 9780521873987

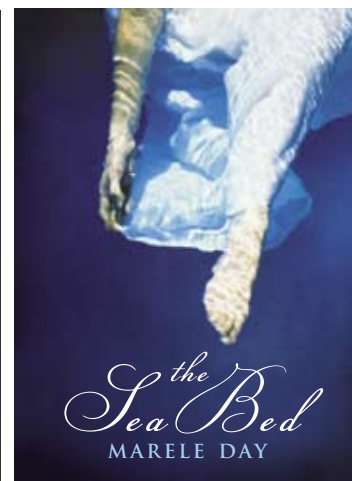
It's hard to believe that despite our energetic efforts, the Australian coastline is still one of the least spoilt in the world. This probably has something to do with the isolation, inaccessibility and hostility of much of it. It's also one of the longest coastlines in the world and, according to the authors of this beautiful book, one of the most diverse.

Andrew Short (BA'68) is Professor of Marine and Geoscience at the University and with his co-author Colin Woodroffe (of the University

of Wollongong), has spent years photographing and minutely studying Australia's edges. The result is probably the most comprehensive account of its origins, development, changes and influences.

From mangroves to wave structure, prehistoric migration to Paelsert, *The Coast Of Australia* is an absorbing source of information and stories about the part of the continent most loved – and feared – by Australians. It's not a coffee table book, although the photography is sumptuous, yet neither is it an impenetrable tome. It's seriously scholarly yet sufficiently diverse and well organised to make it a pleasure to dip into as well as study in earnest. It covers an extraordinary range of geography, flora, fauna, ancient and modern history; while social and climatic impacts – past, present and future – are also explored.

Reviews by
 Diana Simmonds
 Coast images by
 Andrew Short



Its most notable flaw is that Port Hacking and the coast of the Royal National Park don't rate a mention. On the other hand, I have to admit to bias. Others, whose favourite coastal secrets are also unmentioned, may suffer the same crushing disappointment. That aside, it's a glorious book.

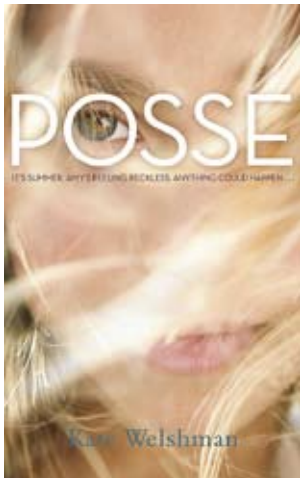
THE SEA BED
MARELE DAY
ALLEN & UNWIN
\$27.99
ISBN 9781741758412

Marele Day (BA Hons '76) is probably instantly associated with her bestselling Claudia Valentine crime novels, published between 1988 and 1995. With the novel *Lambs Of God* (1997), however, she revealed another deeper and darker side to her writing. It was a story of a stranger (a man) entering the isolated island world of three nuns and inadvertently throwing that world into chaos.

The Sea Bed continues in this "other" line of Day territory. It too is about a stranger who enters a secluded and unusual environment (the abalone-diving villages of Japan) but there the similarities end.

Chicken is a young woman whose beloved elder sister Lilli left their village suddenly for the big city. She now communicates only via postcards and letters relating unlikely adventures in exotic places. Chicken is an abalone diver, like her mother, grandmother and generations of other female relatives.

The diving women, and the abalone, are succumbing to the pressures of modern life: over-fishing, pollution and technology. Chicken now swims in an aquarium where



she demonstrates to tourists how the women used to work. One day a young monk, Yugen, arrives in the village. He is on a mission to scatter the ashes of his mentor, Sochin. This will take place in an unspecified location that he's been told he will somehow divine. Why he has come to the village and why he is drawn to the abalone divers is something he gradually begins to learn.

And the reader gradually begins to learn how the stories of Yugen, Lilli and Chicken intertwine. Yet as some mysteries slowly unravel, others arise to take their place. It's rather like swimming through a kelp bed as narrative: silky strands grab at your arms as others let go; the way ahead is sometimes illuminated, then suddenly obscured. A sense of unease is as pervasive as the rain and mist of the richly rendered coastal village and its people. Unacknowledged tragedy and secrets and a sense foreboding become all-enveloping.

The telling of *The Sea Bed* is deceptive. The language and pictures of the monk's and the women's lives are as sparsely rendered yet as intricate and vivid as Japanese prints. Descriptive passages are simultaneously plain and startling:

"There were women in the fields too, bending over, in big sunhats made from bamboo, and padded leggings. The old women remained bent like this even when they weren't tending the rice. When young they were straight as trees but the wind of their lives had blown them over."

The Sea Bed is a spellbinding novel from a writer who constantly surprises.

NB: The Sea Bed is published on 3 August, order your copy now.

POSSE
KATE WELSHMAN
RANDOM HOUSE
\$18.95
ISBN 9781741663358

Kate Welshman (LLB '04) is worth a story in herself: a first-time novelist at the age of 28, she is also a Sydney barrister and a mother of three – no twins or triplets.

Posse is in the Young Adult fiction genre. Its cover is stamped with a "Parental Guidance" warning that "this book contains some adult themes". But don't let this put you off it as an adult reader, or keep you from giving it to a 15+ teenager of your acquaintance. It's a riveting read and also, while very funny, is a serious exploration of modern family and school life from the point of view of a teenaged girl.

The idea came to Welshman while working in the Family Court system. There she encountered the lies, deceit and vicious machinations of families in the throes of disintegration. Her heroine, Amy, is an obnoxious teenager whose parents split when she was young enough for it to do real damage. It remains an acrimonious divorce and Amy's place at an expensive private school is her only real respite. Not that she realises it until school is jeopardised by some teenage girl stuff gone horribly wrong.

The posse of the title is Amy's gang of friends: the beautiful but spoilt Clare, with whom she spars constantly, also Patricia, Johanna and Deborah. All are well drawn and the bane of their teachers' lives.

Posse is set at a rural summer camp where the girls are being tortured with healthy outdoor pursuits, mozzie-ridden sleeping huts, devon sandwiches and their own over-active hormones and imaginations. With a sense of humour that only barely covers deep pain and anger, Amy relates the inter-connected stories of a scarily crazy mother and even crazier grandmother; her apparent abandonment by a womanising father then, the shocking events at camp.

Adult irresponsibility, compromise and cover-ups form the adult themes of the novel (even though some might think Amy's insouciant attitude to being an out "lezzo", plus an encounter with a pastor's trouser snake might also qualify). Welshman's attitude to her material and her characters is tremendous,

however. Neither young nor older readers are patronised; what happens is frequently shocking but not for salacious reasons. The outcome is happy but not hackneyed and everyone learns some much-needed lessons. A terrific novel for all ages.

IN BRIEF

BUCKLEY'S!
KEN BUCKLEY
A&A BOOK PUBLISHING,
\$24.95
ISBN 0975786482

Historian and lifetime civil libertarian Ken Buckley was appointed to the staff of the University in 1952. His own account of an incident-packed life is full of humour and wit. In the foreword, Justice Michael Kirby writes: "Ken always confronted injustice-barging in where most prudent angels would fear to tread. Every free society needs people like him."

The last word should go to the author, who completed the book shortly before his death: "Finally, some say I am difficult. Others say I am obstinate, pig-headed and obstreperous. I agree. But if I can adapt Churchill's words about Clement Atlee, whose electoral victory brought such joy and hope in 1945, in my life I have had an awful lot to be difficult, obstinate and obstreperous about. Cheers!"

THE GIRLS' GRAND TOUR
PATRICIA A. DEGENS
ELIMATTA PRESS
ISBN 9780646472096

In 1959 Patricia Degens (BA '52 DipEd '53) and two girlfriends sailed for the traditional adventure to see the world. Her letters home tell of the naïveté of a time before emails, speedy jet travel and everything else we take for granted. It's like a time capsule of innocence: "Back at Sorrento ... instead of spaghetti for entrée we had a pizza, very tasty, like a spaghetti pancake with cheese and tomato inside. We drank two huge bottles of their beautiful iced water."

EINSTEIN'S GOSPEL by Kenneth Garven (MA '83) presents the case for scientific determinism and the falsity of free will. Should you want to think about or argue with the issues, the book is available at wildandwoolley.com.au; \$29.95 including postage, ISBN 9781740184267.

Posse is set at a rural summer camp where the girls are being tortured with healthy outdoor pursuits