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Blanche Pederson Interviews An Aussie Bride

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TEA time might be anytime at the apartment home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Smith. Mrs. Smith, the young bride of a discharged army officer who is now a student in agricultural education at Iowa State, is Australian-born. "And," they say, "we both do like tea."

Due to military regulation of transportation, Mrs. Smith was unable to accompany her husband to the States and to his South Dakota home last summer. She arrived later with other Australian wives of American servicemen and joined him in Ames in November.

"It all began at the Red Cross center at Rockhampton in Australia," smiled Bob. "Besides receiving excellent care during hospitalization for a broken ankle, I met Moreen." Serving as a secretary for the Red Cross in her city, Mrs. Smith voluntarily aided the canteen staff.

The Smiths were fortunate in securing an apartment near campus. However, it is something new and different for the dark-haired bride. In Australia most people own their own homes and few apartment buildings are seen except in the largest cities.

In the Australian kitchen, tea reigns as the dietary lord. At 11 a.m., 4 p.m. and before retiring, tea is regularly served. "Before and after work it is a stimulant; when friends come it is offered in hospitality." This practice can be traced to the early settlers of Australia, the English and Irish, who transplanted many of their home customs to the newly-discovered land in the late Eighteenth Century.

Food, or "tucker," is served simply in these Australian homes. Combinations of food in salads, desserts and main dishes are not common. Fruits and vegetables are often left whole for individual servings. Fruit for breakfast can easily be found. Paw-paws and such tropical fruits as bananas and oranges grow there in abundance. An early morning walk down to the sea might be through fields of pineapple or areas of coconut palms. A popular dish for early morning in any season is steak and eggs, or sausages and bacon with eggs. Porridge would complete a winter breakfast for a working man.

"An art at home is the fashioning of candlesticks, trinket boxes, table centerpieces and other decorations from coral shells," explained Mrs. Smith. "Along the coast about 1200 miles of the world's largest coral maze has formed what we call the Great Barrier Reef. All kinds of strange tropical fish frolic here and a pearl industry is located in this area." Besides candleholders and shelf decorations made of coral shells, Mrs. Smith brought to America an ash tray constructed of native gumwood. Much of the furniture used in Australia is made from gumwood, kaari and other common native woods.

Whether they are taking active part in a game or merely rooting for a favorite team, the people of Australia love sports. Cricket is everyone's game, and a big annual event is the contest between an English team and the Australian eleven.

On Cup Day people come long distances to attend the most famous horse race in the country, the Melbourne Cup. Started in 1861, even before the Kentucky Derby began, this is an annual November holiday at Melbourne. Night trotting under lights is also held frequently during the summer months.

"Flowers are everywhere," Mrs. Smith related. "No matter how poor the family is, there is always money for a flower garden." Poinsettias and bougainvilleas hang over the sides of wide deep verandas and sunrooms of typical northern Australian homes. All tropical varieties can be seen on individual home grounds, in parks or in the central gardens of the wide city roads. Covering the countryside in early spring are fluffy yellow balls of wattle, the national wild flower of Australia.

"Flying Doctors" serve Australian back-country people. They operate from a chain of bases, each one complete with hospital, nursing facilities, a radio station and an ambulance. Free hospital treatment is provided for all citizens by a government scheme. Another national system enables the people to have doctors' prescriptions made up free of charge by pharmacists.

"Thought I enjoy thinking and talking about these things in Australia, I really do feel at home here," Mrs. Smith expressed. "I like America and Americans, but we do intend to go back to visit when Bob graduates."