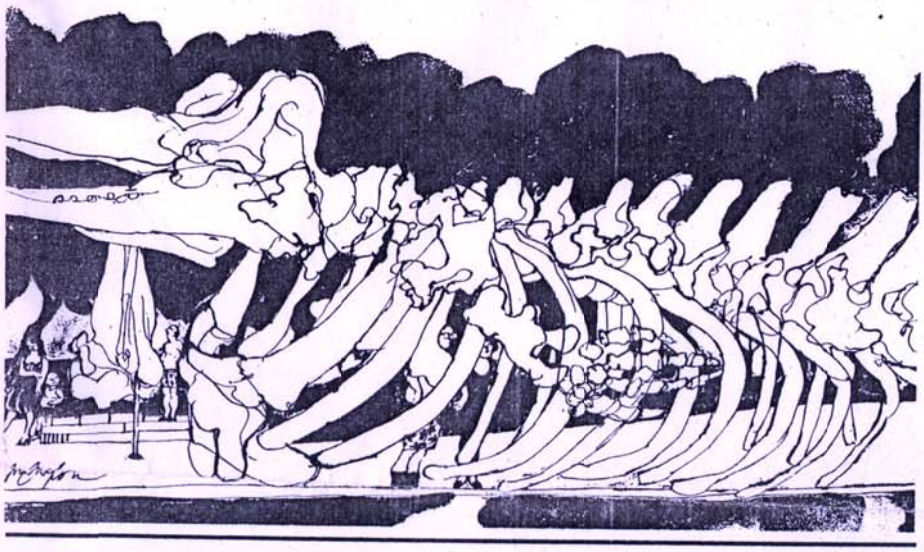
GADABOUTS

Illinois, America and the World

Alice & Bob Cromie • Irene & Franklin McMahon

More whale watchers than whales



By IRENE McMAHON

We looked out to sea. Suddenly a black humpback emerged from the waves, leapt higher. Clutching binoculars we leaned forward until we saw another, this time slapping the surface with its tail, rolling with flippers in the air. And another bringing its tail vertically clear of the water before making its deep dive. These were surely whales and this was Maui, and that old expression "Maui No Ka Oi," Maui is the best, is true of whalewatching.

During whale-running time in winter the old whaling town of Lahaina on the northwestern corner of this second largest Hawaiian island is indeed awash with whalewatchers. They jam the boats that set out from the village square anxious to get closer to the action.

We preferred to do our whalewatching from the terrace of Lokelani condominium, out past Kaanapali, sipping our Mai-Tai and nibbling our pupus, looking out over the roads of Auau Channel across to Molokai and the sunset with the whales in between.

NO ONE WOULD BE more amazed with this scene, nor the one in town, than would old King Kamehameha I who made this small village his capitol in 1802. Nor would the rough New England whalers who followed thereafter have much understanding of these strange beings in their sunglasses and shorts. Their interest in whales was only for plunder, and it is said that in 1859 over 500 whaling vessels made Lahaina home port.

Reminiscent of those buccaneer days is the prison where drunken sailors found themselves incarcerated. It is just up Prison Street from the old wooden Pioneer Inn on the main square, and near the Baldwin House, once home to a missionary family, now a museum.

The beautifully designed Whaler's Village Museum, located amongst the shops and large hotels at Kaanapali Beach exhibits artifacts and memorabilia from those whaling days. The giant skeleton of a humpback whale is as sculpturally spectacular as the nearby Hyatt Regency.

There are many good restaurants in Lahaina; The Hole in the Wall for homemade pasta; Golden Palace is frequented by the locals who know good Oriental food, and Ocean House for ribs and scampi. Catch a Hawaiian floor show at the Sheraton or the Maui Surf.

IT'S A LONG WINDING drive to drowsy bucolic Hana on the East side rewarded by one sublime vista after another, seascapes, crystal pools, waterfalls, flowers and shrubs in abundance. Ann Lindberg still lives close to the small graveyard where Charles Lindberg was buried. Haleakala dominates the center of the island with a crater the size of Manhattan. Here the space astronauts practiced for their moonwalk.

We tried snorkeling at the old Fleming Beach about 10 minutes north of Lokeland. We're told the new Fleming Beach is also a good place for snorkeling and the inlet alongside the airstrip of the Royal Hawaiian airport. You can reach out and touch the tropical fish winding their way through the coral. Whales these ain't but just as colorful. Maybe more so.

Accommodations at Lokelani are $55 a day for a one-bedroom fully equipped apartment. For reservations call 808-669-8110.

EURAILPASS Opens the gates

By ALICE CROMIE

The late, great E.M. Forster ("A Passage of India") wrote: "Railway termini...are our gates to the glorious and the unknown. Through them we pass out into adventure and sunshine..."

With Eurailpass you can saunter happily through the termini of 16 countries without having to cope with language, the cost in local currency of a ticket to your next destination, or standing in line unless you are making reservations and/or taking a special-fare train. You are holding the ticket to a first class seat which carries your identity and no other person's and which brings a quick friendly nod from conductors whether you are in Galway on the west coast of Ireland, Alexandroupolis on the Aegean, in sunny Syracuse, Sicily, or in Narvik, Sweden, well above the Arctic Circle.

You also soon feel that you belong to an amiable international club. Eurail passersby tend to hail one another and exchange tips as well as adventures. This works even between trips: recently in Munich's always intriguing Marienplatz I arrived too late to hope for a seat for the daily free show of the mechanical clock at New Townhall (1909). All tables were occupied, and all the best leaning places (for which inveterate globetrotters develop a keen eye) were gone. But a lovely young woman was seated on a low windowsill studying her Eurail map. I immediately stood nearby and openly examined my Eurailpass. Within minutes I'd been invited to share the windowsill and tell her where I'd been and where headed, while she told me her adventures in Portugal, Spain and Paris.

FOR THOSE TRAVELING alone, a Eurailpass is almost an essential in my experience. One 24-hour trip from Nuernburg to Pisa was enriched by our passing through the Bavarian Alps, parts of Austria, and the always enchanting routes of northern Italy. But I hadn't made sure there would be a dining-car, and now I can say I've "been" in Salzburg only because of my frantic 20 minutes of trying to find a food cart-vendor, and get back on the stop-and-go train I'd charelessly chosen.

Another warning: You will find many stations, in Tuscany, for example, where you could leave your luggage at a platform table while you went to fetch food or drink at the station bar, but in Rome "Watch and beware" at all times. An artist friend boarded his extra-fare first class compartment heading for Florence, left a satchel on a seat momentarily, was asked to put it on the overhead rack by a young man just entering the space. My friend said, "The minute I lifted my arms I knew I'd been suckered." When he turned around the newcomer and my friend's wallet both were gone.

Using common sense, studying maps provided by the Eurailpass company, and always making reservations you wish well ahead, saves a world of woe and loss.

London stopover

By BOB CROMIE

Overseas airlines, unless they have mended their incomprehensible ways, add an extra charge to the total fare if you make stopovers enroute of more than 24 hours, *if* there are earlier continuation flights available. This makes it too expensive for the average traveler, who tries to keep one eye on his luggage and the other on his budget. He'd like to stop, but he keeps on going.

However, perhaps your ultimate destination is Pisa airport, not only because it's dotted with all those lonely-looking World War II bombers but because it's the most convenient terminal for your ultimate Italian destination. You'd like to stop in London, however, but not with a surchange.

Not to worry. Your air-smart ally, the neighborhood travel agent, finds a flight from Chicago to London which arrives just too late to make a Pisa connection until the following day. He also makes a reservation at an economical hotel (they still exist in comparison with ones in major American cities), and you have a portion of the morning and all the afternoon and evening-jet-lag permitting-to take pot-luck in England's lovely capital.

PARK YOUR BAGS AS at Left Luggage, first checking to see whether your next-day flight goes from the same Heathrow terminal, grab a taxi, if you're flush, a double-decker bus or, cheapest of all, the underground, into town. Check in at your hotel, then take a boat-ride on the Thames, to Greenwich and back, visit some of the ancient inns, old ships or antique shops. Or you can see the Tower of London, Hyde Park, Buckingham Palace or Fleet Street before you return to the Great Eastern or some other old-fashioned but clean and comfortable hotel. (A fine breakfast, incidentally, may be included in the charge.) Then to bed, arise refreshed, and head for Heathrow and on to Pisa.

The stopover on the way back also is simple. You leave Pisa on the proper day but on a flight which reaches London in the late afternoon, too late to make the Chicago plane. The hotel again, then to a play (you bought tickets on your previous stopover), and catch the Chicago-bound plane the following day. You've seen London twice and for a minimum extra-charge - hotel and other necessaries.

GADABOUTS

Alice & Bob Cromie • Irene & Franklin McMahon

A gadabout, in the words of the dictionary, is "one who wanders about, looking for fun, excitement, or gossip." This isn't what we had in mind when the column was named. Fun, sure. But our idea of excitement is a beautiful sunset, catching a plane by the skin of our teeth, or trying to cross Bangkok, Rome, Taipei or Tokyo by car in rush hour. Gossip, at least in the commonly accepted version, has no appeal. We won't mind tipping you off to an interesting character now and again, or telling you where you can sit down to a good meal in exotic places ranging from Round Lake (honest) to Viareggio, a Tuscan town which has more fine restaurants than any community should be permitted.

OUR IDEA OF a gadabout is someone who likes to getabout, who gets a kick out of meeting new persons or finding top-of-the-mountain places such as Cuzco, Peru, where legally you sip coca leaf tea to get adjusted to the altitude, or San Marino, the world's oldest and smallest republic where the main industry appropriately is postage stamps. Or places which live up to advance notices: London, for one; and Venice, of course, and Savannah Georgia, one of the loveliest of cities. We may drop a word of warning about those spots which do not turn out as promised; and we shall not neglect the less touted but thoroughly enjoyable destinations: Bishop Hill, Woodstock, Vincennes...

Among the finest gadabouts we've known are the late S.J. Perelman, who once remarked: "Give me 20 minutes notice and I can be in Bombay in the morning," and Ben Lucien Burman, 86 year old creator of the entrancing Catfish Bend books and many others, just returned from a three month sojourn on the Amazon, whose usual method of picking his next area to explore is "any place where there are elephants."

"TO SEE THE ELEPHANT" was a popular catch-phrase of the 19th century. Bartlett, in an 1860 Glossary of Words "Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States," said: "To see the elephant is to gain experience of the world, generally at some cost to the investigator."

O.K.? Let's be off to see the elephant—with as little cost as possible!

GADABOUTS

Illinois, America and the World

Alice & Bob Cromie • Irene & Franklin McMahon

A Felucca Captain at Aswan.

Drawing by Franklin McMahon.

Life on the Nile

By IRENE McMAHON

We boarded the Sheraton's Anni at Aswan, said to be Egypt's most beautiful city and situated at the first cataract. Here the Nile swirls into quick rapids and is bordered by those giant humps of rocks which make elephantine backdrops for the lateen-rigged feluccas gracefully parading their white sails. In this valley the desert is so close that sands gild the hills crossriver from the busy kilometer-long corniche of Aswan as full of visual images as a Fellini film.

We had motored to the Aswan Dam and sailed to the reconstructed Philae Temple. Our felucca captain, Mohammed, then maneuvered us into a breathtaking sprint to the Elephantine Island, former trading post in ivory, ebony and gold, and to Kitchener Island with its imposing botanical gardens.

Leaving Aswan in our floating airconditioned hotel we began to realize that the Nile flows "down" from the Burundi Hills in Uganda north to the mount of the delta, past Cairo and Alexandria, where this lifegiving artery opens into the Mediterranean. Upper Egypt is south and lower Egypt is north. We had to think of it as the Mississippi flowing in an opposite direction, New Orleans at the top.

WE STOPPED along the bank of the great river visiting the temples of Kom Ombo, Edfu and Esna, architectural complexes of immense historical and artistic importance. They have remained intact since the later Ptolemanic period (323-30 B.C.), when rulers of Greek and Roman extraction attempted to revive the purest Pharaonic traditions.

Tarek Swelin of Travel Plans International was our guide. Knowledgeable on archeology and Egyptian history, he had been trained as an Egyptologist since the age of seven. His father is noted for rediscovering one of the oldest missing pyramids and as Tarek stood among those sacred stones he appeared the very personification of an ancient pharoah.

Cruising downstream for five days, we found the scene was constantly changing: small sugar cane fields are worked by bare-footed fellahin; irrigating the fields are the "sakieh," wheels of jars roped together and driven by oxen; but everywhere the harsh desert encroaches. The ship moved through changes of light and shadow and sound more engrossing than any audio-visual panorama.

NOW, LUXOR, the highlight of the cruise; this modern city is the site of the two great temples, Luxor itself and the never-surpassed Karnak. And across the river within the Sahara are the hidden Valley of the Nobles and the Valley of the Kings. This colorful city was once the center of power of the Lower Kingdom. Castles of gods were built on a sublime level of art and architecture and faith; entire populations were involved in their construction.

Karnak is a monumental labyrinth of stone added to by ruler after ruler, dynasty after dynasty, until it was the largest place of worship ever known. It is the greatest of all temples built by the pharoahs to honor the gods and themselves. The horsedrawn carriages that transport passengers from the ship to the "Son and Lumiere" show at Karnak pass through the building housing the University of Chicago's distinguished research institute.

In the darkness there is a strange magic wrought by the sound and light as spotlights reveal the walls and spectral figures reflect off the ritual waters and off the "golden needle" obelisk of the wise Queen Hatshepsut, who believed in love and trade instead of war.

We had followed the Nile all the way down the river to Karnak, reminding ourselves that at the same time these great monuments were being built the people we now call American Indians were simple hunters and gatherers and the people of Europe were living in caves. This river, which five millennia before our era nurtured so many levels of civilization, still maintains its flow into the teaming life of this century and beyond.

Taiwan is a Treasure Island

By ALICE CROMIE

Taiwan, for many Americans, is a place they often hear about in the news but never think of when making holiday plans. That is a vast mistake. The Republic of China is as modern and efficient as your latest pocket computer, older than Kubla Khan, and a cunningly entrancing combination of both. The treasure-filled island is shaped rather like a tobacco leaf, though a lotus leaf seems more appropriate.

Most Westerners will feel they are truly in lotus land as they stroll through tea-gardens and parks with exotic plantings, willows sweeping over quiet pools, temples, shrines and pagodas which sport swallow-tail roofs, embellishesd with phoenixes, dragons and unicorns, amidst gold leaf galore in swoops and curlicues as if a heavenly creature of long ago had created the calligraphy.

With its 77 outlying islands, the province comprises 14,000 square miles. The Dutch and Spanish sailors arriving in the 1620s called it Ihla Formosa, beautiful Isle. And so will you—except for today's traffic in the cities. The China mainland is 100 miles west, and Hong Kong is almost due west of Taiwan's southern tip. Many tours of the Far East schedule only a day and an overnight stop here, which is never enough, but the tantalizing taste of this go-ahead nation, which still cherishes and preserves the past, probably will bring you back many times.

ON A misty, gray-green morning, soft and beautiful as a down-filled hand-embroidered pillow, while walking into a tea-garden, a middle-aged tourist exclaimed, "Wow! I feel as if I'm 20 again and also as if I'm 2,000 years old—or whatever would be the T'ang dynasty."

And an arthritic visitor packed away her cane and easily climbed some thousand steps leading to Chih Nan Temple on Monkey Mountain. A diehard grouch complained to the new gazelle, "You probably feel so chipper because we're mostly at sea level in this country." To which she scoffed, "I've limped at sea level all over the world. There's something magical here, and it's not just the climate. It could be the people. They're all so young, even the old ones."

You probably won't find a one-legged pirate, or buried treasure, but you'll discover plenty of bargains, delights, and a chance to see something for everyone—from 1700 B.C. bronzes to a live reptile curtain in Snake Alley. Don't take my word for it. Call China Airlines. Or your travel agent, who knows all the routes to Treasure Island.

Bob Cromie

A brief escape to Wisconsin

Even if you don't collect old photographs, as I do, and sometimes go questing for them in antique shops in out-of-the-way towns, there aren't any more enjoyable ways of killing a few hours than driving aimlessly through Wisconsin just above the northern edge of Illinois. But when you happen on Fort Atkinson, be certain to spend some time in the Hoard Historical Museum and its satellites.

The museum began in the basement of the public library in 1933 and went big-time in 1956 when the old Hoard family mansion (1856) was donated to the city to house the museum, which has become one of the most attractive small treasure houses anywhere.

IT HAS a superb gathering of Indian artifacts, Civil War memorabilia, toys dating back to the 19th Century, house furnishings, and, among other things, 500 specimens of birds and animals once found in Jefferson County, of which at least one-third now are extinct. There also is a bust of Gov. William D. Hoard, fashioned by Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor who cut up Mount Rushmore.

The museum is adjacent to the restored Foster House, Fort Atkinson's first frame dwelling (1841), which has glass windows brought via the Erie Canal; the Tools and Trade Museum, featuring an 1890 print shop and the Dairy Exhibit Building, headquarters for the Dairy Shrine, a national organization.

THERE IS one problem with the sign inviting you to see the latter, however; a group of bewildered tourists came into the museum recently, asking where they could find the shrine. They were Japanese.

All three attractions are closed Mondays, open 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and the first Sunday of each month. Tours may be arranged. Final note: Somewhere along the way, in a Catholic charities thrift shop, was one of my favorite signs: "We welcome well-mannered children."