

The Whittle Story

A Live Book

Moving to Australia

By Jeff Whittle, November 2018

My wife Ruth and I were born in England, met and married in England, and had our first four children in England, but in 1961 we moved to Australia. Why?

This was at the height of the cold war and, although we never thought that a nuclear war was likely, it was certainly possible.

I had trained as a physicist and was working for the Medical Research Radiobiology Research Unit at the Harwell Atomic Energy Research Establishment in Berkshire. This gave me ready access to what was known about the likely effects of a nuclear conflict, and it wasn't pretty.

The standard thermo-nuclear weapon at the time would produce an explosion equivalent to that of half a million tonnes of TNT, and the bellicose Russian President, Nikita Khrushchev, had "promised" England eighteen of them in the event of a war.

The explosive power of each bomb would be devastating, but the radioactive pollution it would leave behind would be far worse. A corridor two hundred miles downwind and twenty or thirty miles wide would have life-threatening radiation levels for weeks or months.

It was easy to see where such bombs would go. In the event of a war, there would be a couple on each of London, Birmingham and Manchester, with the other twelve dotted all over England. England is not very big and, with the downwind pollution, not much of it would allow survival.

We had been concerned about this possibility for some time and then, one Wednesday morning, we read that Russian troops were massing on the Turkish border. That did it! With four small children you think differently. Time to get out. Time to try to insure our children's lives. But where to go?

I knew that the northern and southern hemisphere atmospheres didn't mix much - it takes about four years for even 50% mixing to take place - and any nuclear war at that time would have taken place in the northern hemisphere. Ergo we go to the southern hemisphere. If we wanted to speak English, that gave us the choice of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

I had an uncle and aunt in Melbourne whom I had never met because they had emigrated before I was born, so that was our choice. Although I didn't know them, it was a point of contact.

Since it would be difficult to pack up a house with four small children living in it, the original plan was for Ruth and the children to sail, and then for me to fly, having packed up the house and worked out my notice so that I could get a job reference. However, Ruth was nearly 6 months pregnant and they wouldn't accept her as a ship's passenger. We only just managed to get her on a plane two and a half weeks later.

I followed a month after that, and we started our life in Australia. Frankly, we hadn't expected to like Australia. That wasn't our reason for going - your children's survival is everything. However, we love Australia and it has been very good to us socially and professionally.

To read Jeff's bio please scroll to the next page...



Jeff Whittle AO, FAusIMM, FACS

Jeff Whittle's involvement with the mining industry began in 1979, by which time he had had 17 years of technical programming experience. He has since written a series of optimisation programs which are now widely used throughout the mining industry.

Since about 2000, he has concentrated on the simultaneous optimisation of mine scheduling, cut-off optimization, capital expenditure, mining rate and a range of other factors that influence mine value. This has resulted in the Prober series of optimisers, which are used by Whittle Consulting Pty Ltd. Prober has now been used in over 100 optimisation studies of single mines and mining complexes world-wide.

Jeff is an Officer of The Order of Australia (AO) – awarded in 2018 for services to international mining. He is also a Fellow of AusIMM and the Australian Computer Society.

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