

Wollongong and the Analysis Database

1969 was very early in the days of computing and at that time training was only available with the Commonwealth (federal) Government and the Control Data Institute. BHP had been training its staff in commercial computer systems for their large computer centres in Port Kembla and Newcastle. These courses were operated by the Control Data Institute.

It was decided to put on a 5 month Systems Engineering course for technical staff and I was assigned to this course by Head Office. On the first of July 1979, I started the course in Wollongong, NSW.

I was really nervous about attending the course as everybody else was an engineer with training in maths etc while I was just a geologist. However, it went fine and I was able to fly by the seat of my pants as always.

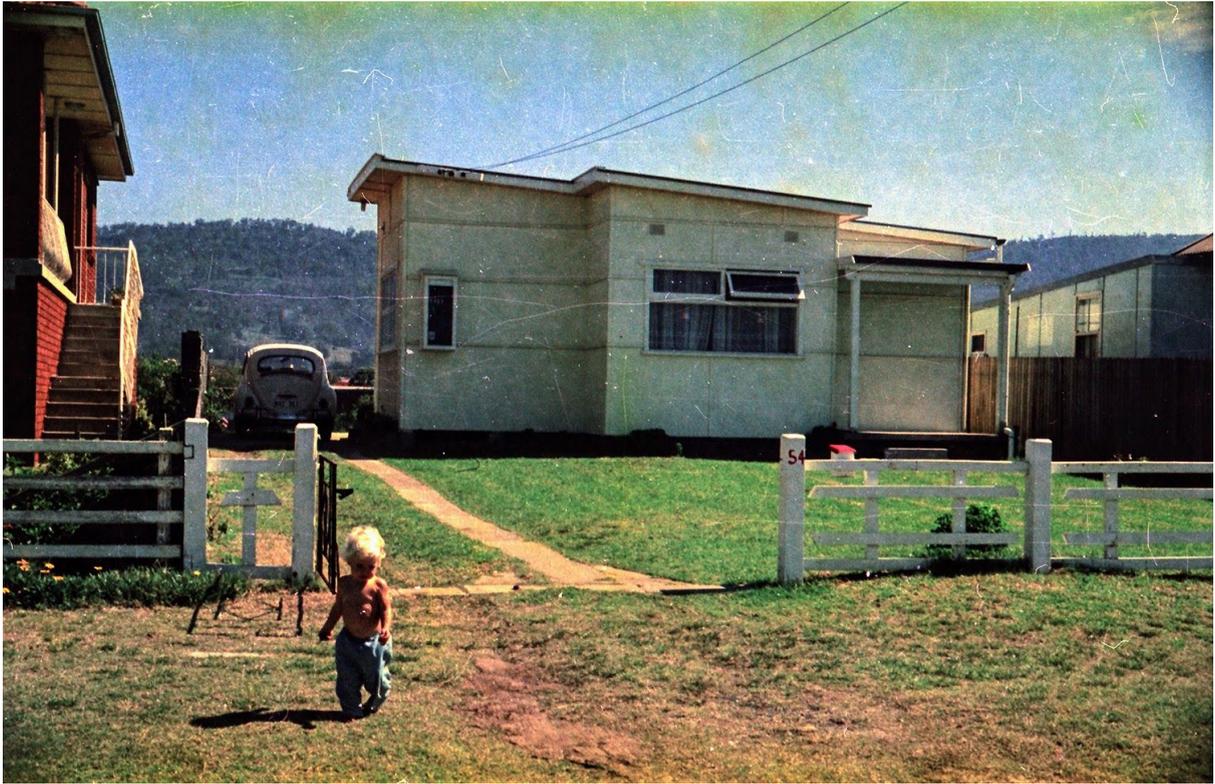
The course was under the auspices of [Cyril Brookes](#) the Information Services Manager at Port Kembla and directly run by John Roodenrys. Much of the teaching was done by Bill Hanlon who became a friend later in Perth. We learnt a variety of programming languages including COBOL, FORTRAN, ALGOL and Simula 60. I especially enjoyed Simula 60 as it is a fascinating language for simulation.

We wrote our code onto sheets which were then punched onto cards by the card punch girls in the data centre. We then fed our deck of cards into a CDC 200 User Terminal to compile and run the program. It was a tedious business and finding program errors very difficult. Often we ended up with sheets of dump printouts in octal or worse hexadecimal.

We quickly learnt that if you dropped your deck of cards putting them back into order was very time consuming so we started putting sequence numbers on the cards.

I enjoyed the course but in many ways, the highlight was the moon landing. On July 20th 1969 we all went to a nearby RSL club to watch Neil Armstrong walk on the moon.

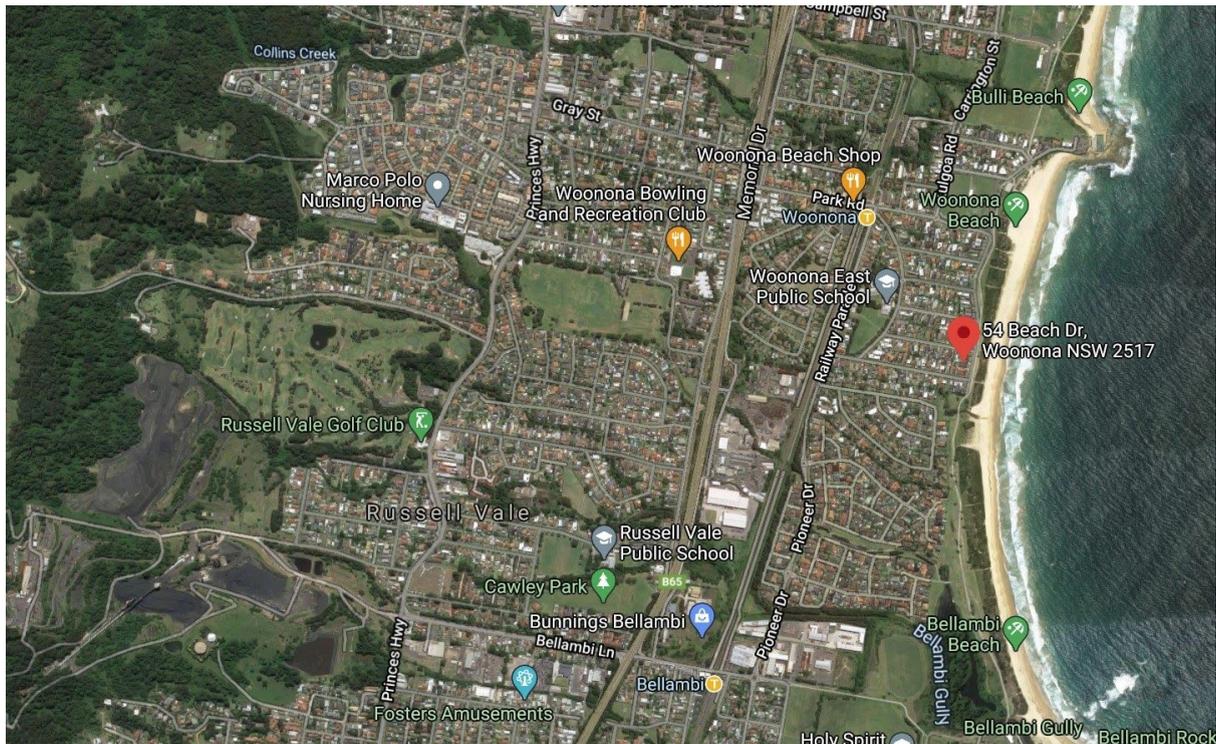
After staying in a hotel for a week we rented a house on Beach Drive at Wonoona. It was a crummy old shack of a house but right on the beach in a fantastic location.



Our house with Kyla outside



The same address today. The steps on the left have not changed.



One day we received a telegram from my brother Andrew inviting us to his wedding in England in two days time. Of course, we couldn't go and we hadn't even known he had a girlfriend.

It turned out he had met a Jewish American girl, Gloria, in a cave on a Greek island. Adam had been backpacking around Europe. He would have been about 24 at that time and young people generally did a tour of Europe. Anyway, they decided to get married. Her parents travelled to the UK and joined my parents for the wedding. I am still in touch with Gloria and I suppose there is a possibility she will read this and put me straight on any errors.

Subsequently, the couple came to Australia to stay with us. If I remember correctly they just turned up one day unexpected.

It was great having them staying with us although I had to be out all day at work. This was after the course finished. I would leave in the morning and Andrew would be sitting on the beach looking at the lovely waves you get on those beaches. When I came back after work he would still be sitting there.

With two ladies in a small house and given Lesley's highly strung nature it was not long before they fell out and after about a week, to my disappointment, they left to stay in Sydney.

They had a flat above the theatre where the musical Hair was playing and they were entertained by the music every night. This was the time of the Vietnam war and Gloria got a good job arranging trips and parties for American soldiers in Sydney on R and R (Rest and Recuperation from the war). I think Andrew got a job as a waiter, something he had some experience in.

When the training course finished I stayed on for another 6 months providing user specifications for the Analysis Database, which was the primary reason for training an ignorant geologist in IT.

Geochemistry was very fashionable at that time for mining exploration. This involves collecting thousands of samples and getting them assayed for a wide range of elements. These can then be used to map and identify potential ore bodies.

There was so much data produced that Eric Bumstead, the Chief Geochemist, wanted a system developed to manage it. After the course finished my job was to stay in NSW and provide user input into the design and development of the Analysis Data Base. On the first of December, 1969, I joined a team led by a Senior Analyst in the Port Kembla Computer Department.

On MayDay 1970 we moved to Melbourne as I was appointed to a new position in the Corporate Exploration Department in BHP Head Office with the magnificent title of Geologist Data Processing.