

Well, what a year 2012 has been. It could have been the year that Cat was an Olympic volunteer, as she was indeed offered a place (though we never found out what position). It could have been the year of many other things. Instead, it was the year we moved nearly 11,000 miles across the world, from Bristol to Australia's capital city, Canberra. For the first 6 weeks of 2012, we were busy catching up with family and friends, fitting in as many dance classes as possible, planning what needed to be packed in our suitcases and what needed to be packed in the container, getting the bikes cleaned ready to ship, and all the other minutiae that go with packing up your life. And then one cold February Thursday 3 removals people showed up at our house, and a day and a half later all our belongings (including the unmade bed) had been wrapped up and packed neatly into a container. Two days later we said our final farewells to friends in one of Bristol's pubs before heading for Heathrow, and this next huge step of our lives.

We landed into a wetter, cooler than usual summer, arriving into a grey Sydney that started to rain later in the evening as we returned to the hostel having strolled around the main sights. Deciding we didn't want to spend the extra day there that we'd originally planned, we picked up our hire car the next morning, and spent our Valentine's day driving to the city that would be our new home. Through the rolling landscape we went, until as we neared Canberra, we were slightly surprised when the satnav said we were driving past a blue expanse, Lake George - we couldn't see any water there (two weeks later, after it had rained for a solid week, it all made sense). And then we drove down into Canberra, the hills unfolded in front of us, and we were looking into the hills and across the green valleys thinking 'is there a city in there somewhere?'. It turned out there was.

We had a short-term rental through a friend of Cat's dad, in one of the northern suburbs. Cat also had a job arranged, also through a friend, which started 3 days after we arrived. That was based in one of the southernmost suburbs, so we did a lot of driving. We bought a car, and found a long-term rental (further south), explored across most of the city, bought a second car, Pete continued to jobhunt and we started to explore further afield. After all, here were all these beautiful hills so close by, we ought to go and explore them! We also worked hard to settle into life. Cat found a dancing school (two, in fact). Pete joined a soccer club (and fitted in so well he received a coach's award at the end of the season and is now on the club's Board). Cat likes to describe her spiritual connections as '3 and a half churches', although one of those takes up more time than the others - and has found time for 2 weekend retreats, one art-based and one led by a Taizé brother. Pete found a good job after a couple of months of searching. And we both started to make friends.

Having started to settle, we started to explore. First, locally. Those hills, oh, those hills. They turned out to be Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Parks. But even closer, we knew our first walk had to be up Mt Taylor, rising up over the southside suburbs. How could it not be, with a name like that? Since then, we have been out to both Namadgi and Tidbinbilla. We've also been down to the Snowy Mountains twice: up Australia's highest, Mt Kosciuszko, on a beautiful Autumn day in April, and then back to the ski slopes at Selwyn on another beautiful day late in the winter. As the weather warmed up we discovered the beautiful beaches and coastal towns of the coast (known to all here just as 'the coast' or 'the South coast', this refers to the entire coastline south of Sydney), which we continue to explore. We will spend a lot of time by the ocean over the years to come, it is a wonderful coastline. We've also been further afield, travelling up to northern Queensland for a week in July, as well as Cat's retreats in rural NSW, and we will be ending the year on the West Australian coast with Cat's family. We're looking forward to seeing them all :)

In Canberra itself, we've been to Black Mountain tower, around a fair portion of the central Lake Burley-Griffin, explored the northside and southside lakes Ginninderra and Tuggeranong, watched the Skyfire fireworks and lightning storms from Red Hill, painted garden gnomes at Floriade, picnicked at the Australian Ballet gala and at the outdoor Stage 88, been to a variety of theatres across Canberra, and learnt our way round, navigating as everyone else does, by suburb. We've found the English pubs, delighted in the 'proper' chips at the coast, been ice skating, and watched roller derby. We've discovered the markets, and learnt that it's perfectly normal to cook your meat for dinner over the barbie rather than in the kitchen. We've done so much, and seen so much, as we've started to make this city our home.

It is written 'Oh Lord you lead me, by the still waters, quietly restoring my soul'. It's also written 'I lift my eyes to the hills'. Through this year of the ups and downs that life brings you (especially when you move across the world), we're certainly in the right place for both of these. There are ponds and lakes all across the city, with plenty of places to sit and look out across them to the hills, and to the sunsets. So many of the major routes bring you yet another lovely view out across Tidbinbilla and Namadgi, and if you time it right, the sun dropping behind the hills. Every season brings new colours, and new joys.

We've done a lot, we've seen a lot, and it's very much been a 10-month rollercoaster-ride. Moving country isn't easy. It's emotionally hard work, and it's physically hard work. But we have given it our very best, and we're proud of how far we've come. We've met a lot of people and we've started some friendships that we hope will continue to deepen and last for a very long time. We've also got very good at using skype, and whatsapp, kik, and email, as well as telephones, to keep in touch with our international friends. We are extremely thankful for the technology our world now has!

Before we fly west, we have one more excitement for 2012: in spring this year we took the plunge and bought our first house! It's a lovely house with a sunroom that looks out over the garden and across the valley to the hills; we are looking forward to watching many sunsets, and hosting many barbecues in our new home (address at the top). We will get the keys 10 months to the day of our arrival in Canberra. We have a spare room, so do come and visit, and we can show off this beautiful city that we are making our home.

With all our warmest (and believe us, they're warm!) wishes for a very happy and fruitful 2013,

- Cat & Pete

**Pictures:**

**Header:**

- ▶ Sunset over Tidbinbilla, taken from Isaacs Ridge

**Footer, left to right:**

- ▶ At Lake Burley-Griffin
- ▶ Wild koala on Magnetic Island
- ▶ Spring blossom at Lake Burley-Griffin
- ▶ Rock wallaby on Magnetic Island
- ▶ Corin Dam
- ▶ At Arthur Bay, Magnetic Island

**On the sheet, starting top left**

- ▶ Bristol & our leaving drinks
- ▶ Sydney Harbour Bridge
- ▶ Lake Burley-Griffin, in the centre of Canberra
- ▶ Sunset over Lake Tuggeranong, southside
- ▶ Pete on top of Australia
- ▶ Bright yellow canola fields on retreat in Galong
- ▶ Laying a duct tape labyrinth at St George's for Easter
- ▶ Taize Prayer on retreat in Carcoar
- ▶ Dusk at Lake Tuggeranong

- ▶ Pete hugging a koala, Magnetic Island
- ▶ Out at Lake Ginninderra our first week in Canberra
- ▶ Kangaroos in Weston Park
- ▶ Cat on top of Australia
- ▶ Art retreat - hard at work
- ▶ Pete skimming stones on Lake Burley-Griffin
- ▶ Cat cartwheeling on the south coast
- ▶ Sunset over Lake Burley-Griffin
- ▶ Skiing (Cat) and snowboarding (Pete) with friends
- ▶ Sunset from Black Mountain, looking over Lake Burley-Griffin and Canberra
- ▶ Autumn leaves
- ▶ Pete snowboarding
- ▶ The Memorial fountain in Lake Burley Griffin
- ▶ Coach's award
- ▶ Our new house
- ▶ Pete enjoying the south coast
- ▶ Pete with his half-marathon medal (he's signed up for the full next year!)

