

Aussie-mandias

By Pam North

I met a woman in a rugged land
Beside a pit toilet
We stood, waiting our turns.

“Travelling up the coast,” I said.
She nodded.
Her eyes lone and level.
“I used to live in Canada,” she said,
And I listened for home,
Eager to carve my place,
But instead I noted
Her grey hair and youthful body and
Strange accent
Scattered into space
Between us.

“Canada and Australia:
Two great countries stand...
One of forests, one of sand.”
I offered; she smiled.
And we went our separate ways.

She drove a van,
Covered in and stuffed with things
I couldn’t see.
I watched her wash
Tin pans in the ocean.

She wet her hands and waved.
Later she squatted by our fire
Warming her back,
“Feeling the pulse of an ancient culture,” she said.

I’d seen the signs:
‘Middens’, ‘Please Respect’
The kitchens and tools and names
Long dead.

I was a traveller in a foreign land
And became troubled.
“Don’t despair,” she said
But didn’t.
Though stamped and re-read

Those passions washed between
Rock and sand, wind and rain
Remain
On that Mighty Coast

I stood
The next morning she drove away.

Pam North