

An African IFLA

If you don't count trips to New Zealand and Tasmania, I'd never been Over There before. It had always seemed difficult to arrange an extended absence from work, and annual holidays meant a chance to catch up with family and friends in Australia. So I endured the travel stories of others and confirmed my impression that Oz is the best of all possible worlds.

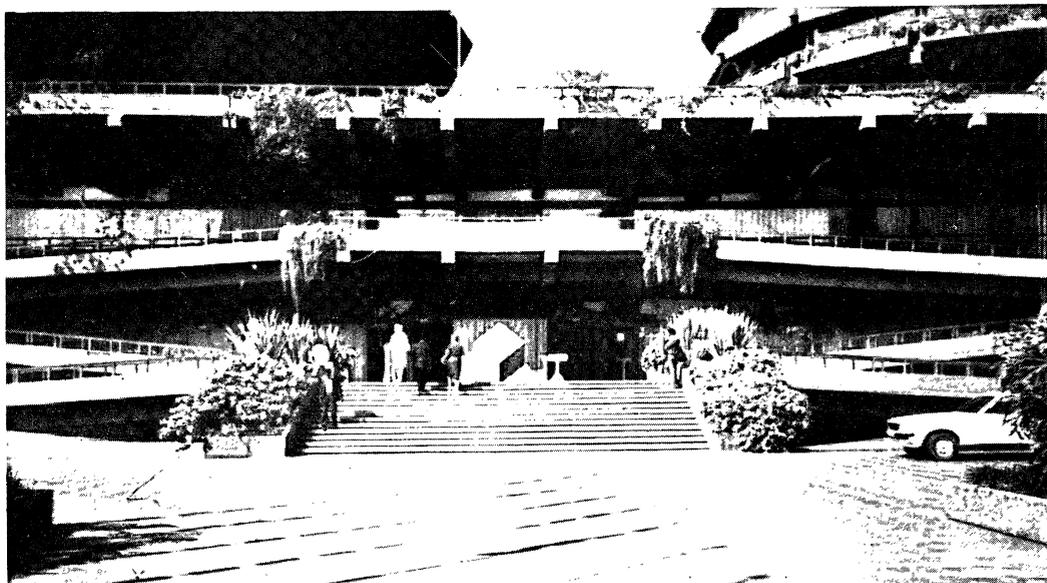
This year ACI sent me away to North America and to Europe with a brief to determine the long-term suitability of STAIRS as the basis of the AUSINET service, and to plug into the international DOBIS-LIBIS network to ensure that our major ASCIS client could take advantage of software developments emanating from IBM and from user sites.

In three weeks I travelled through the US, Canada, Ireland, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland and Italy, confirmed our software choices, and acquired a kaleidoscope of new personal and professional perceptions. Then I went to Nairobi, Kenya, for IFLA's 50th General Conference where I represented the LAA at the meetings of the Standing Committee on Information Technology.

Three weeks in the Northern Hemisphere had been stimulating, professionally rewarding, and from ACI's point of view, opened many new business opportunities. A week in Kenya was straight culture shock. Nothing in my previous experience had equipped me to deal with the social contrasts that attend the evolution of a tribal society into a 'developed nation', all in the space of a couple of decades.

I vividly recall chauffeur-driven dignitaries swishing past beggars in the streets, blocks of impressive-looking flats being built for customs officials right next to a shanty town of corrugated iron and scrap timber, taxi drivers unable to read road signs, waiting in an ancient bus for a giraffe to cross the road just 30 minutes from the centre of Nairobi, and a conference centre breathtaking in its architecture, lavish in its facilities and neglected in its upkeep.

I find it difficult to separate my recollections of the place from my memories of the Conference — just as I found it difficult to relate the concerns of African librarians to the deliberations of the Standing Committee. How do our African colleagues, often trained in the most prestigious library schools in the US and UK, apply their skills in a society based on oral, not written traditions, without established paper or publishing industries, and for a population at least two-thirds illiterate? Then in the next session it's back to familiar territory: lamentations for the lack of videotex standards; database downloading and uploading from micro-computers; and developments with UNIMARC. The Conference deals with computers and electronic information but our hosts need books and readers. 'Appropriate technology' is no longer a catch-



Kenyatta International Conference Centre, Nairobi, venue for IFLA's 50th General Conference.

phrase. What can we do? Send library materials. Without them there's no library service, and the limited foreign exchange is going on civil and military hardware. I trust that the subject of what assistance Australian librarians can render their colleagues in the developing nations will receive appropriate attention at IFLA in Sydney in '88.

Back to the Standing Committee. It's a distinguished gathering. Henriette Avram from LC, Fred Kilgour from OCLC, Cynthia Durance from the National Library of Canada, Christine Bossmeyer from the Deutsche Bibliothek, plus other leading and fainter lights. The main business was adopting a medium term programme for the period 1986-91, and deciding upon papers to be presented at IFLA '85 in Chicago.

Given the Section's interest in the application of technology to information handling, electronic publishing, trans-border data flow, and the cost effective implementation of new technology, it didn't take long to define the scope of the programme (computers and libraries) and agree to offer papers for the next Conference on UNIMARC, telecommunications developments — especially the Open Systems model, software for micros and minis, and standards applicable to information technology.

For the silicon heads amongst us, IFLA '84 brought exciting news. IV+V is the name of a software package combining library management with information retrieval functions and designed to be portable across Z80, 8086 and 8088 microprocessors. The result of UNESCO/IFLA sponsorship and 40-50 man years of effort by the Austrian Institut für Maschinelle Dokumentation, IV+V is a first for generally applicable, genuine multi-function library software. It's claimed to be user friendly (what isn't?), supports downloading and on-line bibliographic data entry, accepts UNIMARC and the Common Command Format, is flexible and portable, includes non-Roman scripts, and offers statistics, acquisitions and

circulation in addition to text retrieval.

IV+V has a P-code interface between the hardware and the applications, and uses the UCSD-Pascal operating system with a Pascal compiler which generates the P-codes. An interpreter then translates to the specific machine type for which it is optimised. There is also an IV+V operating system; it has its own development language plus a screen management system. It is a relational processor with the DBMS taking care of authorisation levels, Boolean logic and left and right truncation. There is also a communications processor for connections to external hosts and other networked IV+V systems. It supports variable length fields, has some inverted files and some tree structures. It can be implemented as a single or multiple user system. Typical configuration for the IBM PC would be 5,000 records, 10Mb hard disk, 256Kb minimum, 512Kb preferred. The larger the main memory the better the system performance. IV+V is designed to take advantage of the new 'super micros'. At present it runs on DEC, IBM, Wang, Sirius and Vector Graphics machines.

First deliveries will be in '85, gratis to developing countries, with full support and training. In 1986 it goes on commercial release and will cost roughly the same as the hardware on which it runs. The marketing policy for commercial distribution is yet to be determined, but it appears that IFLA members will have first option.

And that was my first IFLA Conference. Fascinating and stimulating and a sharp reminder of the internationalism of librarianship.

I managed to extract from the scrum papers on TRANSDOC — the French electronic document delivery project, UNIMARC, the computerisation of the Bibliotheque Nationale, and on the development of library services in Africa. If you're interested, these are now with LAA HQ.

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