

# WHO WE ARE: Greco-Roman wrestling

A column about Australia by David Dale, published in The Sun-Herald 7/9/2008

*Picture the author of this column hitting his forehead and saying "D'Oh". Or, to put it another way: "How could we have forgotten the way the Greeks changed Australia?"*

Last week I described Australia as Italy's most successful colony since the Roman Empire (national dish: spag bol, national drink: cappuccino, national attitude: Mediterranean), and pointed out that travel by Australians to Italy had trebled in the past ten years -- presumably because our Anglos keep setting off in search of the secret of human happiness, which Italians seem to possess.

Jim Barlas responded: "Greeks also have the same attitude (Mediterranean mellow) and have made a few contributions to supplying our national foods -- like Greek Salad, Greek style yoghurt, yeeros, pita bread and tzatziki dip. There's a few Federal and State politicians too (John Hatzistergos, Michael Costa, Petro Georgiou, Sophie Mirabella nee Panopoulos). Okay, maybe the Greeks haven't been as successful with influencing our national drinks, because ouzo hasn't taken over from beer yet, and the best influences on fashion and cosmetics I can think of are Alex Perry and Napoleon Perdis -- not nearly as big, on the world scale as the Italians. And Yiassou hasn't replaced G'Day yet. Nevertheless, there must be more people travelling to the Greek islands in recent times."

In fact, the Bureau of Statistics tells us 47,900 Australians visited Greece in the past 12 months, compared with 172,500 who went to Italy. So it's not yet a boom destination (although the movie Mamma Mia! is bound to boost tourism to the islands).

But then again, when they're planning a long stay, more Australians choose Greece than Italy. Among the Australians living abroad for more than a year, 33

per cent are in Britain, 22 per cent in the USA, 14 per cent in New Zealand, 7 per cent in Greece and 6 per cent in Italy.

Back home, 365,000 people in the 2006 census described themselves as of Greek background, and 252,000 said they speak Greek at home. They've been crucial in our transformation from one of the dullest places on the planet to one of the most interesting. I'm indebted to the scholar and cook Tessa Mallos for explaining the Greek role in these cultural tipping points ...

Australia's first chain of fish and chip shops. In 1879, Athanasios Comino, familiar with seafood from his childhood in the Greek islands, set up a shop in Oxford Street, Sydney, to sell fried fish and chips. It was so successful he urged his relatives in Kythera to join him, and by the early 1900s there was a chain of Comino's fish outlets across Sydney. By the 1950s, the Greek chippos were perfectly positioned to spread another culinary icon, the Chiko roll, across the land after it was invented by the honorary Greek Frank McEnroe.

The first milk bar. In 1932, inspired by American soda fountains and drugstores, Mick Adams started making milk shakes at his Black and White cafe in Martin Place, Sydney. Mick's real name was Joachim Tavlaidis. Within ten years there were 4,000 milk bars in Australia, whizzing up milk, icecream, flavouring and malt in tall tin mugs.

The Sydney Fish Market The Greeks have long been pretty good at catching fish and very good at selling them. Greek family companies got together to start most of the seafood markets in the centre of Australia's capital cities. Last Sunday saw the death of Denis Poulos, founding director (in 1994) of the Sydney Fish Market.

The first country cafe selling baklava. From the 1920s Greek families spread through the country



towns of this nation, opening eateries with names like Olympic, Paragon, and Acropolis. They deliberately didn't serve Greek food - unless you count "Mixed Grill" - because we weren't ready for it. But in the 1930s, Zacharia Simos took a chance and brought a pastrycook from Athens to his Paragon tea rooms in Katoomba. In addition to scones and meat pies, they started offering the nut and honey pastries baklava and kataifi.

The Paragon flourishes today as a monument to Australia's Greek heritage.



## Business Park to be developed on Mount Parnitha

A little over a year after the devastating fires that destroyed much of Mount Parnitha's forests; Greece's highest court approved a plan for the development of the capital's first industrial park. The park, which will be nearly 50 hectares large will be in a part of the so called 'protected area' of Mount Parnitha, part of which was burned last year.

There were previous attempts to develop part of Mount Parnitha as recent as 2006, but certain government decrees prevented development. It seems awfully ironic that after the area was burned that development will now be allowed.

PS: While establishing a business park (or several for a matter of fact) would be a plus for Athens, choosing to develop it on Mount Parnitha is upsetting and a shame. Your comments?

## Rescue Robot by Thessaloniki University

A search-and-rescue robot, a system for monitoring electromagnetic radiation and a special piece of educational software for children suffering from autism were some of the innovations developed by the Thessaloniki University Research Committee and presented at the 73rd Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF).

The robot was developed by PAN-DORA (Program for the Advancement of Non-Directed Roboting Agent) by 17 undergraduates at the university's electrical engineering and computer engineering department and earned them 9th place in an international competition held in China last July among 18 competitors.

A small device measuring just 60 centimetres, the robot has 19 sensors to help locate victims of natural disasters like earthquakes, linked to a central processor, 13 motors and a special system allowing it to move on uneven terrain, an automatic navigator that also charts the territory it is covering by the use of scanner lasers,

allowing it to alert rescue crews to the location of victims.

The robot currently operates with a battery lasting 40 minutes and the team's efforts are now focused on further improvements.

The broadband electromagnetic radiation counter was developed by the university's physics department and is the first such counter developed in Greece at a fraction of the cost of such counters currently imported from abroad.

Apart from being roughly five times cheaper, it is also capable of taking measurements over the entire spectrum, from very low frequencies to the high frequencies emitted by 4th-generation mobile phones.

Developers said it had high technical specifications for accuracy and was easy to install, able to operate autonomously and able to record electromagnetic pollution levels on a 24-hour basis through installed memory.

An additional 30 Greek counters will be scheduled in public buildings in Greece to complete a nationwide radiation monitoring network that

already has 130 counters. The next step planned is the development of an individual portable radiation counter to be used chiefly by those working with telecommunications systems.

The educational software system presented is especially designed for autistic children and can even be used without supervision by teachers and parents.

The programme, aimed at primary-aged children over four, monitors the biological reactions of the children through a special bracelet (heart rate, stress levels, perspiration and other indicators) and adjusts the difficulty of the games and questions accordingly. A small robot also watches the child's progress and rewards every successful attempt, contributing to psychological development.

According to the chairman of the research committee Stavros Panas, the new software could prove a valuable tool for teachers in special schools, while strong interest has already been expressed by parents of autistic children.