

Duluth--- UMD's "ambassador extraordinary" to the continent of Australia is on the move again in that land "down under."

Dr. Lyda C. Belthuis, professor of geography, is making final preparations for a 23-day bus trip through the vast plains of Central Australia, an area few Americans have seen.

But Dr. Belthuis is no ordinary tourist. She is a careful researcher who uses pad and pencil, cameras and long experience in noting geographic, meteorological, sociological and cultural detail wherever she goes.

Dr. Belthuis was granted a spring quarter leave from her teaching duties at UMD so she could make her third visit to Australia. She left Duluth March 21 and in less than a week had flown to Hawaii, then Griffith, a city in New South Wales in southeastern Australia. She is living there with friends she made on her first trip in 1949.

As a geographer-researcher, Dr. Belthuis' prime interest is to complete her observations of one of the greatest irrigation projects in the world. It involves diverting water from the Snowy, Swan and other rivers on the east side of the coastal mountains by great tunnels to the western slopes and the plains beyond.

The massive, 25 year project in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area is about half completed and is intended to bring about a dramatic diversification in the farm lands to the west and north of the mountain range.

Prof. Belthuis has travelled by airplane, auto and on foot to observe and make detailed notes on the progress of the project. She is particularly interested in finding out how the water-diversion is affecting the lives and economy of the people in the plains area.

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The UMD professor has faced the rigors of rains, dust storms, brown snakes, kuala bear, kangaroos, dingos, emus and deserts to gather the information she needs to write a research treatise when she returns. She has interviewed engineers and governmental officials, farmers and their wives, village officials and workers to gain material.

In letters to her Duluth friends and colleagues in the UMD Department of Geography, Dr. Belthuis gives detailed descriptions of the land and people of the area. "They are far more willing to do without conveniences and comforts than Americans are. Everything in this country, and especially in the rural areas, is so very plain. Australia is like eating plain bread, only occasionally with butter, compared to a full meal served in our country."

Dr. Belthuis has become somewhat of a celebrity. In a recent letter she told of speaking at a town Rotary Club meeting, of appearing on television, and of being interviewed by an Australian newspaper woman.

It now is almost winter in New South Wales which can get uncomfortably cold, especially since so many homes and hotels do not have central heating. But Dr. Belthuis, who is an expert skier, plans to take advantage of the season and follow her long trip through the plains country with a mountain skiing holiday at Smiggens Holes in New South Wales.

By Sept. 1 Dr. Belthuis will gather together her voluminous research notes, cameras, slides, skis and travel gear and head home to UMD with new stories for her students of study and adventure in the land "down under."