



Desert Sky News

"It's All About The Experience – Yours and Ours "



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December 2010

The end of another year, and time to look back on what happened in 2010 !

All outback journeys have their highlights, and some of the stories have been recorded in these newsletters.

Without a doubt, the weather in 2010 would have created many highlights for anyone travelling in the Great Outback. Road closures and detours would have changed many plans, and as I write this newsletter, The Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks are closed for the umpteenth time.

One of the highlights for me was early August

when we took a trip up the Track to Birdsville with the new 4wd



vehicle. Water in the Cooper Creek meant we had to make a detour just past Etadunna to the ferry crossing. One needs to remember that water in these parts was last seen in 1990!

The opportunity to see the water and experience the ferry crossing was a momentous occasion!

Further on at Birdsville we found a lake at the foot of Big Red ...and later at the Nappa Merrie Bridge near Innamincka



we saw thousand of birds including Pelicans, Swallows and Black Darters. It made a wonderful contrast to the normally dry and dusty outback!

Then there was the abundance of wildflowers- often in places you would not normally find them !

I am thinking of the masses of Sturt Desert Pea we saw on several Arkaroola trips around Tea Tree Station to Balcanoona, and again at the sides of the Stuart Highway as we travelled to Coober Pedy on a Painted Desert trip.

In The Flinders Ranges the sprawling hills were a kaleidoscope of colour, and there was even a tinge of green on Moon Plain!

Due to a recent local minor flood and another expected minor flood coming down the Cooper, Coongie Lakes National Park will be closed until March 2011. I imagine there will be a flock of tourists wanting to visit this unique area once it opens!

So as we bid 2010 farewell, I hope your year has also been just as rewarding. Until next time, have a great Christmas break and I look forward to seeing you somewhere in the Outback in 2011!

A trip to Lake Eyre!

Our trip began when Howard picked us up from home and we met our fellow travellers, Bert and Jeanette. We were soon travelling through the Mid North where good crops were growing after winter rains. Brilliant patches of canola contrasted with the new green crops along the way.

As we headed further north we passed through dying towns, linked together by a faint memory of their busy railway days. Sadly some of these towns and smaller settlements are already gone, their hopes and history laid bare among the dry and dusty plains where only their silent burial grounds remain.

We stayed for two nights at Copley. Not much happens at Copley these days except the coal train from the mine at

Leigh Creek passing through once a day loaded with coal for the power station at Port Augusta. It returns again when emptied there to repeat the return journey of 520kms the following day. The train is 2.6kms long and pulls 161 wagons with its three engines. The Copley Pub where we stayed overlooks the railway so we were able to witness the train's passage from our balcony there.

The next morning Howard drove us on to Marree for the flight over the Lake. We were soon in the air, leaving the tiny town below us. We looked down at the vast expanse of water below. The edges of the lake were fringed with white salt, the water shining with striations of delicate pastel pink and blue. In the distance we could see the creeks and waterways outlined in snake like patterns of green vegetation growing where there had been water flowing recently. Landing back in Marree there was time for lunch and a look around before our return to Copley. The railway had reached Marree by 1885 when it became a bustling railhead where cattle from inland stations were loaded for Adelaide. In the early 1900's there were many Afghan camel trains operating between Marree and other remote places but these were soon to be replaced by motor vehicles. When the railway from Adelaide to Alice Springs was realigned in 1980 it then missed Marree altogether. The town now serves as a thriving centre serving outback travellers.

On our return to Adelaide we visited the ruins of Farina where in the early days it was hoped to grow wheat on the plains there. The plans failed due to low rainfall in the area and now only a few old ruins remain. Some interesting information boards gave us an insight into life there. We also visited the Ochre Cliffs used by the indigenous people for body paint, medicine and cultural uses.

The last part of our trip took us through parts of the beautiful Flinders Ranges. Thanks to Howard and Desert Sky Tours we had experienced some interesting areas of the State in good company, in comfort and with an informative and friendly guide.

Many thanks to Howard and Jenny and the staff at the Copley Pub.

..... (This is a letter from Mary, who was on our trip in October to Lake Eyre)

Changes to RFDS Radio Network



The method of contacting the Royal Flying Doctor Service through HF radio has changed from 1st October 2010.

The bases used to have voice grade dedicated lines to connect between their operators and the transmitter and receiver sites.

These lines were decommissioned by Telstra at the end of September, and an alternative solution has now been put in place.

Discussions were held with the Australian 4WD Radio Network VKS-737 and as a result of this, a formal Agreement was put in place whereby the VKS-737 network provides a HF radio selcall and voice call service,

There are now four ways to contact the RFDS in WA and Qld:

- Selcall the RFDS directly on either VKS-737 frequencies, or the primary frequency of the base in question.
- Call a VKS-737 operator by selcall (24 hours) who can then transfer the call to the relevant RFDS operator.
- Call a VKS-737 operator during a regular sked and ask for assistance, the operator will transfer you to an RFDS operator.
- Place a general voice call on a VKS-737 frequency and request that the person answering sends a selcall to the RFDS on your behalf.

It is important to note that the two tone Emergency Calls ("Red Button" will presently only operate through Charleville & Mt Isa and will be discontinued after December 2010.



For further information on this and the VKS-737 network, visit their website at VKS737.on.net

And...talking of the Australian 4WD Radio Network, I flew with two others to Perth last month to attend the 4WD and Adventure Show in McCallum Park. The purpose of our trip was to promote the VKS-737 Network, particularly in light of the change to the Flying Doctor Radio bases.

It was a great time, and we spoke to many people who visited the 3 day show.

If you have an HF radio, give us a call sometime—I am often on Charters Towers Base!



Dig Tree 150th Anniversary



Vice President of the Burke & Wills Historical Society, Richard Cork, reports plans are going well for the Dig Tree Event in April 2011.

"Throughout the inception and growth of the Society, probably the single most common thread that binds the members to the Burke and Wills Historical Society and all that it engenders is a love of the outback. When that love (and awe and fascination) is blended with some knowledge of the historical facts surrounding Burke and Wills, and an insight into the isolation and unforgiving nature of the area in which the two explorers who gave their names to the legend lost their lives in the battle to survive (as they had observed the local aboriginal tribe do) comes an understanding of the overwhelming sense of occasion which the 150th anniversary of the return to the Depot Camp LXV (now better known as the Dig Tree) of Burke and Wills and King represents.

Bearing in mind that they had only 4 days prior buried their companion Charlie Gray in a Lignum Swamp somewhere to the north, their sense of isolation and hopelessness at finding the Depot camp abandoned is so tangible that we can still sense and almost taste it across the decades.

So there were always quite a number of us in the Society who had definitely and independently decided that we simply must be at the Dig Tree on the evening of April 21st 2011 to mark the 150th anniversary of the most poignant aspect of the whole tragic Burke and Wills saga."



The event will not take the form of a structured series of Presentations, but rather a series of lively discussions, campfire debates etc., and there are plans for a "walk in" to the Dig Tree on the evening of 21st April to commemorate the

return of Burke and Wills and King in a similar fashion.

It is hoped to have a series of "way points" or pickup points available whereby participants with varying degrees of fitness and/or enthusiasm might walk in from start points which will range from some kilometres away to maybe a mere few hundred metres. Unlike the original participants of 150 years ago the walkers will be assured of a warm welcome upon arrival!

If you would like further information regarding this Event, please let me know and I can provide details.

How to contact us:

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Innamincka Causeway

A project is underway to improve fish migration via the Innamincka Causeway at times of decreased flow while maintaining functionality of the weir.

The first stage is to cost the design of a rock ramp.

Ironically several planned field studies with the design consultant and the Innamincka community have been affected by floods and rain!



As soon as favourable flow conditions return a subsequent event will be scheduled. The next stage will involve securing funding for on-ground works to commence. The project is a collaborative effort between the NRM Group, PIRSA, SARDI, SANTOS, and DENR

Sealing of Birdsville Track??

Rohan Ramsey, Member for Clare, is helping lead a charge to upgrade the Coopers Creek Crossing with the building of a bridge or appropriate box culverts as well as seal the Track from Birdsville to Lyndhurst.

Diamantina Shire Mayor Cr Rob Dare says "This is a very exciting challenge to have something done to a road that has been going backwards for the last 30 years; if it keeps up at this rate there will be no road at all, just a couple of wheel tracks.

To complete a project like this would take up to 30 years and businesses would have time to grow as demand grows, alternative tourist tracks would be developed, the grazing industry would have an option to send stock when they want to instead of "when the roads open", people of outback Queensland would have a better life, we could travel to Adelaide in a conventional non-fuel guzzling vehicle, freight could become cheaper or at least stay minimal. It is the most positive announcement I have heard, just when I thought the Federal Government had completely forgotten about outback Australia."

Great Tracks Brochure

An informative and concise brochure for travellers on the Strzelecki and Birdsville Tracks is close to completion with the final version due in early 2011. This full-colour, 12- page brochure promises to be a useful resource and includes a summary of history and origin; environment and ecology; contemporary landuse; maps showing points of interest; and contact information. Further Information can be obtained from— NRM Officer Lisa Taylor 8648 5977 ■

News from Birdsville

With the continuous wet weather, our works program has been pushed back a couple of months.

The Construction Crew have been doing gravel resheet on the Lake Machattie road while the Cuttaburra has been in flood, and they will be working between the Cuttaburra and Glengyle over the next month- gravel sheeting low formation and topping up floodways, etc.

A bitumen jet patcher truck has been hired to fix damaged bitumen, the truck will be working from Bedourie towards Birdsville and then out towards Betoota There has been a lot of failed areas of road with the constant wet weather and the heavy movements of cattle trucks

New cricket pitches have been built at Bedourie and Birdsville with synthetic turf.

The Birdsville pitch was used in a game between Bedourie and Birdsville last weekend, all reports were that it was a brilliant pitch that earned Birdsville a favour of a win.



From Birdsville Police Officer Neale McShane- "National Parks Ranger Don Rowlands and I, assisted by Peter Barnes have conducted four rescues in the Simpson Desert and one at Haddon's Corner in the last month. The rain continues to fall as it has for most of the year and looks like continuing. All rescues had a happy ending with all persons safely returned back to Birdsville. All of the persons commented to me even though they were stuck in Birdsville whilst their vehicles were repaired or awaiting flights out they thoroughly enjoyed the local Hospitality".

Thankyou for sending me Desert Sky Newsletters
I wish to make the following amendment:

- Please cancel newsletters and remove details from your data base. *JK*
- Please send me your email newsletter only.

Name

Address

Phone number

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Please tick box(es) and return to :

Desert Sky Tours
PO Box 683
GLENELG SA 5045

JK

Showcasing our Itineraries 2011 !!



Flinders Ranges & Arkaroola (5 days) \$1950 pp

Monday September 5
Sunday September 18

Rawnsley Park, Wilpena Pound, Bunyeroo Valley, Brachina Gorge, Blinman, Arkaroola, Ridgetop Tour, Nooldoonooldoona Waterhole, Gammon Ranges, Moralana Scenic Drive.



Flinders Ranges & Skytrek (4 days) - \$1400 pp

Saturday August 27

Rawnsley Park, Wilpena Pound, Willow Springs Station, Skytrek, Arkapena Scenic Adventure & Chace Range Spectacular, Moralana Scenic Drive.



Coongie Lakes & The Cooper Creek (7 days) - \$2450pp

Tuesday May 10 & Sunday May 22
Sunday June 5

Old Strzelecki Track, Innamincka, Coongie Lakes, Camp LXV, Cameron Corner, Sturt NP, Tibooburra, Broken Hill, Loch Lilly & Quandong Stations, Burra.



Birdsville & Innamincka (9 days) - \$3250pp

Saturday July 9 & Friday August 5

Clare Valley, Leigh Creek, Marree, Mungerannie, Birdsville, Innamincka, Cameron Corner, Sturt National Park, Tibooburra, Broken Hill, Old Pastoral route to Burra, Adelaide.



The Back O'Bourke ! (9 days) - \$3250pp

Wednesday February 16

Broken Hill, Mutawintji NP, White Cliffs, Wilcannia, Tilpa, Louth, Bourke, (accommodation Bourke Riverside Motel), Lightning Ridge, Gilgandra, Cobar, Balranald, Murrayville, Pinnaroo.



Wilson's Promontory (9 days) - \$3225pp

Tuesday March 1

Grampians NP, Halls Gap, Penhurst, Mortlake, Colac, Queenscliff Ferry, Sorrento, Meeniyana, Tidal River, Waratah Bay, Walkerville, Agnes Falls, Strzelecki Ranges, Tarra Bulga NP, Grand Ridge Road, Skenes Creek, The Great Ocean Road, Mt Gambier, The Coorong.



Kangaroo Island (4 days) \$1620pp

Tuesday March 15
Tuesday March 22
(Includes Sealink ferry)

Penneshaw, Antechamber Bay, Cape Willoughby, American River, Kingscote, Flinders Chase National Park, Cape Borda, Admirals Arch, Cape De Coudic, Seal Bay, Emu Bay, Stokes Bay, Snelling Beach, Western River Cove.



Dares Hill Circuit (2 days) \$650pp

Friday April 29

Gilbert Valley, Terowie, Peterborough, Franklyn, Ketchowla, Dares Hill, Mt Bryan, Clare Valley.



Tumbly Bay & The Eyre Peninsula (5 days) \$1525pp

Saturday October 15

Port Germein, Arno Bay, Port Neill, Trinity Haven Scenic Drive, Poonindie, Port Lincoln, Sleaford Bay, Tod Reservoir, Cummins, Mt Hope, Point Drummond, Greenly Beach, Dutton Bay, Coffin Bay, Koppio Museum. Enjoy a Clydesdale Horse and trolley ride!

Return is via Horrock's Pass to the Flinders Ranges, Orroroo and Burra.



Limestone Coast & The Coonawarra (5 days) \$1500pp

Monday February 7

Tintinara, Mundulla, Naracoorte Caves, Penola, Mary McKillop Centre, Kalangadoo, Tantanoola, Pt McDonnell, Cape Nothumberland, Mt Burr, Millicent, Robe, The Coorong.

During this trip there is opportunity to visit a number of wineries, including Rymill Coonawarra, Di Giorgio, and Mt Benson.



The Painted Desert (9 days) - \$3250 pp

Sunday April 10

Clare Valley, Leigh Creek, Marree, William Creek, Coober Pedy, The Breakaways, Painted Desert, Woomera, Roxby Downs, Andamooka, Port Augusta, Arid Land Botanic Gardens, Horrock's Pass to the Flinders Ranges, Orroroo and Burra.



Mungo National Park (5 days) - \$1525 pp

Wednesday March 30

The Riverland, Wentworth, Old Zanci Station, Mungo Woolshed, Walls of China, "Grand Canyon", Perry Sandhills, Paddle Steamer through Lock 11 Mildura, Red Cliffs, Hattah Kulykne National Park, Lake Victoria, Rufus River.