



Desert Sky News



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

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An overnight stop in Copley provided opportunity on our recent Coongie Lakes trip to visit Gerry Agnew at Outback Souvenirs & Collectables. He has a collection of old telegraph insulators, depression green glass, garage memorabilia and antique bottles and tins. Our main interest was the telegraph insulators, as one of our group (Alan), has his own collection, and was keen to compare. After a good look around, and an exchange of business cards we were on our way to Lyndhurst and the start of the Strzelecki Track.

Mount Lyndhurst was the first stop. In the 1880s this was a successful sheep station for the Beltana Pastoral Company. Situated in largely saltbush/bluebush, it was the first homestead along the Strzelecki Track and was a regular stop for camel trains on their journey north. The stone camel yards



(pic) are visible a short distance from the Track.

We continued over several creek crossings and the Dog Fence for a morning tea stop in Koortanyaninna Creek. This is a substantial creek - characterised by an unusual coloured rock, and like many of the creeks in the area it flows into Lake Blanche. A little further on beside the MacDonnell Creek are the ruins of Blanchewater Station.



The station was taken up by John Baker in 1857, and he has the dubious distinction of

being Premier of South Australia - for 11 days!

Passing Mt Hopeless, we were soon in the Cobbler Desert - between Lake Callabonna and Lake Blanche. The Cobbler was named by shearers who travelled (on bicycles!) from Cordillo Downs, 176 km north of Innamincka. The last difficult sheep to be shorn by shearers is called "The Cobbler".

Montecollina Bore is a popular camping spot, where an artesian bore overflows into a large dam, attracting many birds. The western entrance from the main road is sandy and rough, but an alternative track on the eastern side is in better condition. We made this spot our lunch stop - to the delight of another of our group who is a keen bird watcher!

The Strzelecki Track from Lyndurst to the point where the Strzelecki Creek crosses was in good condition, however after the crossing the Track becomes rough with a number of large bull dust patches and pot holes. At Merty Merty we crossed to the Old Strzeleck Track, which although sandy in a few places was still a better option than continuing on the Moomba Road.

I always enjoy the Old Strzelecki Track more anyway, as there is more interest.

We called in to Toolache waterhole and the lone headstone of "Little Jack" - a reminder that the Strzelecki country can be unforgiving. Another 24km to Nappacoongie where on a rise stands an isolated and decrepit piece of iron railing around the headstone of Harry Bird. On a piece of tin attached to the railing someone has written "well caved in".

It was somewhat sad to see the small timber and galvanised iron dwelling that was part of the station now lying in a heap of rubble.

And so on to Innamincka and the Cooper Creek Homestay - our "base" for the next few days.

The official count of birds seen on this trip was 60 species, and many of them were seen at Coongie Lakes. The water level in the Lake was higher than I have seen in past years, and this has attracted the birds. We drove to the end



of the vehicle track and took the 2km walking trail to the northern edge. (I have uploaded some of the photos to our website album).

An interesting return from Camp LXV (the "Dig Tree") is the loop road through the Innamincka Mesa country. This scenic route had us stopping a number of times for photographs. (This country is similar in many ways to the Painted Desert).

Guests at the Homestay included a group who had kayaked from the Burke and Wills Bridge at Nappa Merrie to within a few kms of Coongie Lake. Although lost for a short time in a swamp just past Innamincka, they regained their bearings through GPS and achieved the result in just under a week. Hopefully they will post a report of their trip on a website.

The "roller coaster" from Merty Merty to Cameron Corner can be exhilarating, but care was required on the section from the yellow double decker bus to Bollard's Lagoon. A number of the sand dune crests have severe washouts on top.

We couldn't resist the steak sandwiches at Cameron Corner, then continued on a reasonable but corrugated road through the Sturt National Park to Tibooburra.

Continued....

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Mavis at the Granites Motel Tibooburra does it so well! - a warm welcome and great evening meal (which included a "self serve" home-made trifle!!). We decided we needed a walk down the street afterwards, and met the new managers (the Toole Family) of the Family Hotel, which has the Clifton Pugh murals.

A stop at Milparinka - 40km south of Tibooburra provided opportunity to look around the oldest proclaimed township in the Corner Country.

Nearby is Depot Glen, where Capt. Charles Sturt and his men were forced to spend six months trapped by drought on the banks of Preservation Creek.

Depot Glen, as the campsite was named, remains an iconic attraction today. We found a small pool of water at the site. A short distance away is the grave of James Poole, Sturt's second in command who died of scurvy.

Heading down The Silver City "Highway" - a stop at Packsaddle Roadhouse (for another steak sandwich !!), and about 16km out of Broken Hill we crossed Stephens Creek.

I was aware that the keen birdwatchers in our group had been watching out during the trip for a Grey Falcon, and a Barking Owl. Well, we had not seen either of these birds, but as we crossed the creek lo and behold there was an owl! - a giant ceramic barn owl to be exact.

Behind this strange vision is the burnt out shell of a pub, with some sheds out the back, and a sign that says "Stephens Creek Art Gallery and Owl Barn". This is where Mitch lives.

Mitch Powell's late wife, Valerie, had a penchant for owls. At last count, Mitch shares his living quarters with 3,640 owls, and that includes an owl suit. He's fond of popping on the owl head and surprising his guests.

Inside the 'Owl Barn' is what can only be described as a temple, solely devoted to the humble owl.

There are furry owls, ceramic owls, shell owls, crystal owls, owls on tea towels, carpets, pens and windchimes - there are real stuffed owls, giant owls, scrap metal owls, and an owl that hoots when you walk past it.



There's not a lot of tourist attractions on the road from Broken Hill to Tibooburra, but even if there was, a visit to Mitch Powell's Owl Barn is an experience you won't forget in a hurry. The Owl Barn is open 10am to 4pm every day except Thursday, and Mitch can be contacted on (08) 808 85301

Our return to Adelaide from Broken Hill was via the old Pastoral Route which passes through Harriedale, Loch Lilly, Oakvale and Quongdong Stations. The road is unsealed but graded, and makes a more interesting drive than along the Barrier Highway.

Hot Fractured Rocks—Habanero 3

On April 26th Geodynamics Site Manager, Mr. Bill Austin, met local residents in the Outamincka Bar at the Innamincka Hotel to explain recent events at the Habanero 3 well head. The following Media Release was handed to those attending:

April 25 2009 Well Incident at Habanero 3

Geodynamics as operator of the Innamincka Joint Venture today advised of a well incident at its Habanero 3 well site, located near Innamincka in remote South Australia.

Geodynamics Managing Director Gerry Grove-White said, "Importantly no-one has been injured and the site has been secured to ensure the safety of personnel and the public".

At 8:30pm local time on 24 April 2009 (9 pm AEST) a loud noise was heard. It was identified that water and steam were flowing to the surface at the Habanero 3 well head.

"Geodynamics is taking the matter extremely seriously and we have today mobilised an expert well control recovery team comprising specialist engineers," Mr. Grove-White said.

Geodynamics is working with relevant authorities in response to this event and will provide further updates as they become available. We observed a "large hole" when we passed the site on our May 21st Coongie Lakes trip.



Aerial photo above shows a detour around the Well site. The main track is the Dillon Highway from the Strzelecki Track to Innamincka.



Photo above—Habanero 3 at the height of the blow out

News from Innamincka

On April 30th, the solar electrical system at Cooper Creek Homestay was commissioned.



Owners Geoff and Julie Matthews believe the system will supply all their power needs for the coming tourist season.

There are 40 collector panels, providing enough power during the day to

run all the lighting and power requirements at night. No more noise from generators, and no need for torches!!

Power lines have been installed in the street of Innamincka in anticipation of "free power to residents" from Geodynamics Hot Fractured Rock Project. Commissioning of the plant could be delayed for up to nine months, following the well explosion problems.



The cost of diesel used by residents to provide power was estimated last year to be \$15,000 per month.

Terowie Institute 130th Anniversary

Saturday 26th September—The book "*Terowie Institute 130 years*" is to be launched at approximately 5.30pm by Peter Goers of that great institution, The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), after which the usual scrumptious tea will be served in the Supper Room—oh yum!

But wait. there's more! - A big treat will follow at approx. 7.30pm, with a great show by Judy Lewis and her Whyte Yarcowie Troupe!!!. This energetic group has raised many thousands of dollars for charity.. Guests are encouraged to wear period costume..

If you would like to come up to Terowie, we have a package offer!!

- Pick up at Franklin Street Bus Station
- Afternoon tea at the Coffee Pot Cafe on arrival in Terowie
- Terowie Hotel overnight accommodation including breakfast Sunday morning.
- Attend the book launch by Peter Goers at approx 5.30pm following which a light tea will be served in the Institute Supper Room.
- Entrance to the Judy Lewis and Whyte Yarcowie Troupe Show, following which supper will be served (for those wanting it).

TOTAL COST OF THIS PACKAGE IS \$90 !!!!!

Where else could you go for a **great weekend** at that price???

Seats are limited and a deposit \$20 is required on booking.

Lake Eyre

We returned a couple of weeks ago from a 3 day trip to Marree and plane flight over the Lake.

Comments from all passengers was the flight was definitely worthwhile, and provided opportunity to see the different colours of water and vastness of the Lake.

Approximately one third of the Lake had water coverage, and some birds were seen as dots on the "islands". The plane flights were arranged through Central Air Services and our base for the trip was the Leigh Creek Hotel in Copley. Terri and Mick at "The Copley Pub" are perfect hosts, and new chef Milo looked after us with excellent meals!

The trip also provided an opportunity to see artist Jeff Morgan's new Flinders Ranges Panorama at Hawker, and to inspect the restoration work being done at Farina under the guidance of convenor Tom Harding.



An information bay has been built and will include historic photos and stories about the town, which once had a population of more than 300 people. A visit was also made to the Ochre Cliffs and sculptor Talc Alf at Lyndhurst, plus visitor viewing area of the Leigh Creek coalfields.

The all inclusive cost of the 3 day package is \$800 (including the hour and half plane flight).

If you are interested in this trip, we are planning another in the second week of July.

Other Outback news

- The Toole family has taken over management of The Family Hotel In Tibooburra. I understand former manager Peter Petrovich is still in Tibooburra.
- The Lake Eyre Yacht Club has announced the regatta site was inspected on May 9. Unfortunately the predicted 2m flood has peaked at 1.5m. With the northern rivers flow now less than the evaporation rate of the Lake the flood is now over. Perhaps next year?
- Hey! - if you are travelling in the Broken Hill area, why not call on Mitch at the Owl Barn Stephens Creek and really make his day! Entry is free and there's lots to see!
- Arkaba Station is the latest property in the "Wild Bush Luxury" portfolio. According to CEO Charles Carlow, the property will provide an exclusive wilderness experience supported by key luxury standards. It is scheduled to open November 1st 2009.

A day at the Zoo!

On a beautiful Saturday morning last month, we headed off for a special 80th Birthday celebration at Monarto Zoo.



Arriving just before 9.30am, we were "first in line" - waiting for the gates to open!

Having left Adelaide just over an hour before, naturally it was time for morning tea - and what a great spread it was!

Our guide Richard came aboard the Desert Sky bus for an hour and half tour, during which time we came up close and personal with many animals, including Bison, Zebra (are they black with white stripes, or white with black stripes??), deer, cheetah, and the magnificent giraffes.

At the lion enclosure, the keeper was uncertain how the animals would react to our vehicle, so he allowed us to stop along the boundary, and called the lions over to us.

Following a 3 hour lunch, we made our way back to West Beach for afternoon tea and birthday cake! Wow !-all day grazing!

Monarto Zoo has excellent picnic facilities and the staff are knowledgeable and professional. The tour is terrific, and they have their own buses for visitors who are not part of a group.

This was one of those "special" days.



Two forms of Desert Travel meet!
Photo courtesy of Noel

Sky Trek

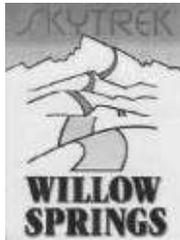
Willow Springs Station is a typical working sheep station, 21km north east of Wilpena Pound.

It is home to one of Australia's most exhilarating 4wd Journeys - SKYTREK.

This 4WD experience takes you :

- through majestic tree lined creeks
- groves of native pines and black oak
- bluebush plains
- rugged mountain valleys
- ascending a mountain range
- culminating in reaching the highest vehicle access point in the Flinders Ranges—Mt Caernarvon (921 metres above sea level)

The "eagles view" of the surrounding Flinders Landscape is a breathtaking and truly unforgettable experience.



Our 4 day Personalised Flinders Ranges tour includes a full day exploring Sky Trek.

We have 2 seats available on this trip departing August 28th.

The Stuart Collection

The John McDouall Stuart Society Inc has established the **Stuart Collection** in the Adelaide Masonic Centre, 254 North Terrace, Adelaide.

The Stuart Collection aims to house artefacts, objects, memorabilia and published materials relating to the lives and times of Stuart and his Companions. Committee members maintain the museum, and have been trained in museum standards and practices.

The Stuart Collection is catalogued and indexed.

Tours of the Centre are conducted on Thursdays at 2:00 pm. 08 8223 1633.

Electronic newsletter

We publish a monthly electronic newsletter which is emailed to subscribers. If you would like to receive a copy, join by visiting our website, or send us an email requesting addition to the mailing list.

Itinerary for 2009



Birdsville/Innamincka (9 days) ~ \$2050 pp

Saturday July 18
Saturday August 15

Flinders Ranges/Arkaroola (5 days) ~ \$1050 pp Including "Ridgetop Tour"

Sunday September 20
Wednesday October 14

Gawler Ranges (5 days) ~ \$895 pp

Monday September 7

Lake Eyre (3 days) ~ \$800 pp (Incl plane flight)

Wednesday July 8

Terowie (2 days) ~ \$90 pp

Saturday September 26

Tumby Bay & Eyre Peninsula (5 days) ~ \$845 pp

Wednesday November 18

Christmas 2009

Kangaroo Island (5 days)

Wednesday December 23

Personalised 4WD Tours

Sky-trek & The Flinders (4 days) - \$995 pp

Friday August 28

Yorke Peninsula & Southern Flinders (5 days) - \$995 pp

Tuesday October 27

Other Personalised tours in a 4WD vehicle can be arranged by request

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