



Desert Sky News

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



Volume 11 Issue 4

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September 2009

August 15th saw the final Birdsville departure in our bus vehicle.

The bus will still be used for our many trips until 30th June next year, after which time we will offer a range of itineraries in a 4WD vehicle.

Birdsville has always had a special significance, as it was the destination of our very first trip—14 years ago! Since that time we have taken over 30 trips to the "little town burning in the sun between two deserts", and each has been different in its own way.

Our final trip was with a great group of people, and perfect weather. As with the July trip, "In flight service" - (freshly prepared lunch packs) enabled a number of passengers to take the opportunity of a plane flight over Lake Eyre during our stop in Marree.

Whilst our passengers were in the air, Jenny was busy on the ground preparing lunch to pre-ordered choices. This enabled us to leave for Mungerannie without too much delay after the hour and a half plane flight.

Reaching the Derwent River near Mungerannie, we were surprised to find very little

water, and learned later much of it is being used for Station



requirements. The Mungerannie wetland was created by artesian flow from a bore sunk on the Mungerannie Station in the early 1900's. The wetland extends along Derwent Creek with the main body approximately 600 metres in length.

The wetland is of high environmental and social value as an established habitat

and refuge for wildlife and a popular tourist destination.

On to Birdsville, and after a look at the Race Track we went to find John at the Birdsville Working Museum.

What a difference 3 weeks can make!

The road out to Big Red had been recently graded—a very pleasant change to the deep corrugations we experienced on the July trip.



Beer can collectors will be out of luck this year as an oversight at Castlemaine Brewery has resulted in no XXXX Birdsville Races 2009 beer cans being produced.

Once again we took the Cordillo Downs road to travel from Birdsville to Innamincka.

The Qld and SA roads were about the same condition (rough), and the SA option is about 100km shorter. Of the two roads, the SA side has more historical interest as it passes Cadelga Ruins and Cordillo Downs woolshed.

Again, a surprise as the road from Arrabury turnoff to Innamincka had been recently graded!

The Adventure Way was planned to take tourists from Brisbane to Adelaide. A section of this from the Queensland border and just south of the Burke and Wills Bridge to the Dig Tree turnoff is now bitumen, and makes for a pleasant change from the corrugations on the South Australian side of the border. Roadworks continue on this road, and at some point it will be sealed to Innamincka

and become the "Burke and Wills Way".

With thoughts of Harry Redford (Captain Starlight), we travelled the Old Strzelecki Track (sandy in parts but preferable to the Moomba Road) to Merty Merty and the "Roller Coaster" to Cameron Corner. The Middle Road through Sturt National Park to Olive Downs was the better choice to reach Tibooburra - it is more scenic and has a good deal more wildlife.

After a detour to Depot Glen and James Poole's grave near Milparinka, we continued along the Silver City Highway to Broken Hill.

I recently came across a copy of the "Story of Pioneer John Conrick as told by himself".

It is a series of articles published in the Adelaide News 1923-4.

John describes his pioneering trip from Nappa Merrie Station closely following the route of cattle thief "Captain Starlight" (Harry Redford) in the famous novel "Robbery Under Arms" by Rolfe Boldrewood, who took this country as the scene of the cattle stealing episode.



Photo: John Conrick with some of his employees after the group had successfully driven the first mob of fat cattle to Adelaide in 1878.

The man who stole these cattle was named Collins, whom I knew well in later Years", Conrick says.

Continued over

Story of John Conrick as told by himself (continued from page 1)

"It was an assumed name of course. He travelled down the Cooper with 1,000 head and sold them at Blanchewater Station South Australia. Mr Mules buying them on behalf of Mr John Baker. Before the cattle thief came to Blanchewater, he passed Mr Waurkes camp on the Strzelecki Creek and sold him an imported bull. There was nothing in either transaction to arouse suspicion, as Collins was the supposed owner.

Some time after Collins, whom we will call Starlight, has stolen these cattle off Bowen Downs Station, an overseer, Lumley Hill, was appointed to follow them up. He followed the tracks right on until he came to Waurke's camp, where he recognised the imported bull and claimed him. He went on to Blanchewater and recognised the LC brand (Landsborough Company) on the cattle sold by Starlight. The rightful owner took action against Collins, who was one of the finest bushmen in Australia and a Hawkesbury NSW native, for the theft of the bull, which appears to be the only animal which could be sworn to, as the owners of Bowen Downs had sold several lots of cattle with their brand to purchasers in South Australia and could not prove that the Blanchewater cattle were not amongst those sold.

The bull was travelled to Adelaide, shipped to Brisbane and travelled to Roma, a journey of 2,500 miles. Starlight was tried at Roma and the jury brought in a verdict of "not guilty". Judge Blakeney, dashing his pen on the table and exclaiming "Thank God, gentlemen, that is your verdict, not mine". Starlight was acquitted. The case ruined Waurke, but the buyer of the cattle, who had paid 5,000 pounds in good faith, was not affected, as it was impossible to prove that these were the stolen cattle."

Conrick left old Innamincka Station Boxing Day 1874, and arrived at Blanchewater Station January 6th 1875 - just in time for Christmas dinner, their teams with Christmas luxuries having just come in from Port Augusta.

"George Marzetti, the storekeeper, met us with liquid refreshments, but nearly dropped them when I told him we has just come through from Queensland. Mr Pat Long was manager and he had with him Jerry Darmody and several other stockmen. They were all amazed to hear of our trip."

Things are now a lot quieter at Blanchewater Station.



Statue in main street
Roma, Queensland
of the white bull

Destruction in the Outback

Camels were introduced into Australia in the 1840's to help explorers travel through the Australian desert but



now there are over one million of the damn things roaming around the outback, and apparently the population doubles every nine years.

The average camel can grow to 7 feet (2.1 metres) tall and can weigh up to 2,000 pounds (900 kilograms), and although the impact of camels is probably less per beast than cattle, cattle numbers are managed whereas feral camels aren't and they are causing untold damage to the outback landscape.

According to Nicholas Rothwell of The Australian newspaper, Camels maraud Aboriginal communities; they trample fence lines, attack standpipes and destroy water tanks.

They roam unchecked across the plateaus of central and northern Australia; they fan out from creeks and riverbeds, when they are in large numbers they create a wasteland inside the wilderness, and they are eradicating native plants which seriously affects our environment and native wildlife.

Camels compete with cattle for food in the outback, but in the process, they are trampling the vegetation into nothingness, they are ripping up water pipes and rotting carcasses of drowned camels have caused problems to vital waterholes.

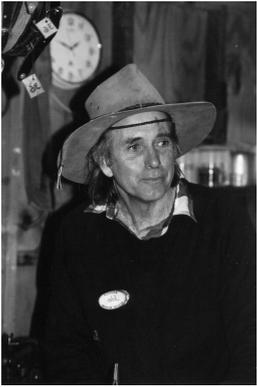
Sadly, efforts to develop a large-scale, well-managed camel industry, for live export or human or pet-meat consumption have been no more than spasmodic, as has state-run camel controlled initiatives.

Environment Minister Peter Garret said the introduced species is currently causing an estimated \$14 million dollars in damage per annum, not to mention the devastating damage to the environment and wildlife. Last month's announcement to set aside \$19 million dollars for a well managed program to help slash the camel population will be fantastic news to some, but no-doubt not such good news for others.

But Glen Edwards, who is working on the draft for the Australian Government's camel reduction program, said the population needs to be slashed by two thirds to reduce catastrophic damage.

We all have the responsibility of protecting the environment, native fauna and flora around us and it's an obvious responsibility of any government to do the same.

Birdsville Working Museum



Here's another beauty" John bellows.

"Just add water to the canister containing calcium carbide, strike a match to the port at the top and an incandescent light is formed from the acetylene flame. Often used as a light in the early 1900's but now we use a torch with batteries at three times the cost. I guess that's progress".

John holds his audience captive throughout the tour of his unique Birdsville working museum. Picking through the numerous items used in the early days by those who lived in the bush, he demonstrated to all how to make butter, heal wounds, trap flies, make candles and relieve headaches.

All items were innovative, practical and cheap and all able to be made from components that appeared to be readily available from the outback.

The Birdsville Working Museum is run by John and Judy Menzies, and John's regular tours through his incredible collection of stuff is an experience of a lifetime. He has been collecting items for over 28 years, and opened the Museum in 1993, with an official opening 1994. It is a place you do not want to miss when visiting Birdsville.

Unfortunately Judy's health requires specialised treatment, and they have decided to sell the business after the 2009 Birdsville races.

Christmas on Kangaroo Island!

We have two seats available on our 5 day **Christmas 2009** trip to Kangaroo Island. The package includes:

- Sea Link Ferry
- 4 nights accommodation in the Wisteria Lodge Motel Kingscote, with rooms overlooking Nepean Bay
- All meals - including a sumptuous Christmas Lunch
- Guest appearance by Gentleman in red suit!
- Sightseeing—Remarkable Rocks, Admiral's Arch, Seal Bay, Vivonne Bay, Snelling Beach, Stokes Bay, Western River Cove, Eucalyptus and Honey Farms.



The all inclusive fare is \$890 per person

New Book Release

Birdsville: My Year in the Back Of Beyond
Evan McHugh

ISBN/ Catalogue Number: 9780670072712

For a town with seventy residents (on a good day), Birdsville is remarkably well known – the Birdsville Track, the rodeo, the pub, the infamous races. With its ruggedness, inaccessibility and larrikin charm, this small town on the edge of the Simpson Desert has become a symbol of the great Australian outback.



What is it about Birdsville that has made it stand so large in our legends? And what's it like to live there amongst the floods and the heat and the dust storms?

To find out, Evan McHugh packed up his Sydney home, bought a four-wheel drive and headed off with his wife for a year in the back of beyond. Here, he tells us of the large adventures – midnight desert rescues, aerial mustering on vast cattle stations, relentless heat and massive floods – but also the small details of life in one of Australia's most isolated towns – like driving 700 kilometres to go shopping. As the months fly by, Evan learns about an ancient culture, sees dunes carpeted in millions of tiny wildflowers, and meets the members of an outback community facing extraordinary challenges with quiet determination and buckets of good humour

The book makes entertaining and light hearted reading. It was written in 2008 so many names of local people are familiar. The book is available at most book shops, however I obtained a copy from West Torrens Library.



Sign (left) at Marree cafe

Trip to Cooper Creek June 2009

We're going North with Humby's
Into the Great Outback,
In the steps of the brave explorers,
On the Old Strezlecki 'T' rack

The suburbs lie behind us,
Green paddocks far and wide,
We're driving through the wheat belt
With farms on either side.

And Jenny tells the history
Of the towns we're passing by,
Of the settlers and their hardships
When the crops began to die.

It's a picnic lunch at Gladstone,
The fog left at Gulnare,
We stay a while at Hawker,
View the "Panorama" there.

We spend a night at Copley,
Hot showers and a bed,
A few drinks with the locals,
And we're well and truly fed.

The good road ends at Lyndhurst,
And now it's four-wheel drive,
Innamincka lies ahead,
The bumps we must survive.

In a creek bed with a name too long
We stop for morning tea,
We pass Blanchewater Station,
Just the ruins left to see.

Mt Hopeless, then the Cobbler;
With sand dunes all the way,
At Montecollina Bore we lunch
On a lovely Winter's day.

And birds come to the water
Where they can take a rest.
We find the little mud homes
Of the fairy martin's nest.

Our bones are all complaining,
It's the "old" road that we take,
We pass by Merty Merty
Where the pot-holes make us shake.

When the road becomes a dust bowl,
How does Howard find the track?
Lots of laughter and hysterics
On this trip to the Outback.

Innamincka and the Cooper,
It's running fast and free.
An egret gets its dinner
And later, so do we-

We cross the gibber plains
Where the Mesa starkly stand
To the Dig Tree, a reminder
Of the perils of this land.

This unforgiving landscape
Tells the stories of the past,
The markers on the trees
Where explorers breathed their last.

Cameron Corner beckons
On a roller-coaster flier,
But nearing Tibooburra
We get a punctured tyre!

Then it's off to Milparinka
Where we visit Depot Glen
And we all try to imagine
How explorers felt back then.

To Broken Hill then Adelaide,
And so our journey ends,
But first we meet the Owl Man
And his many feathered friends.

The camp-fires and the company,
The characters we met,
And Jenny's lively music,
We never will forget.

We've seen pelicans and kestrels,
Wedge-tails in full flight,
And the desert rivers flowing,
And a million stars at night.

And we felt a sense of wonder
At the grandeur of this land,
It's vastness and its beauty,
That we try to understand.

Nancy Weisbrodt July 2009

Red Mulga *Acacia Cyperophylla*

The following is part of an article by Bill Dowling in Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide Gazette :

The normal mulga's everywhere -
It's really rather vulgar;
Unlike its mate, the much more rare
And beautiful red Mulga.

With deep red bark against the rocks
In creeks, it looks the trick.
It peels away in curly locks
Like those atop our Nic.

Red mulga loves the arid zone
As does the *Eremophila*,
It's other name's the less well known
Acacia cyperophylla

And when its seed begins to fall,
It must be time to plant.
So who's this mulga gonna call?
- Its friendly local ant.

The red mulga is one of the few Australian trees with red brown "minniritchi" bark, which peels off the stem in curling flakes.



The flakes remain on the stems and trunk, giving these trees a distinctive appearance.

Red mulga is found in scattered isolated pockets across central Australia.

It generally grows along water-courses, where it can reach the considerable height, for an out-back tree, of around 12 metres.

A remarkable symbiotic relationship has developed between red mulga trees and ants. An "elaiosome" is attached to each red mulga seed. This structure is rich in oils which are attractive to ants. The ants actually plant the seeds by dragging them into their underground nests. The elaiosome is eaten, but the seeds remain unharmed in an environment favourable to germination.

An Ode to an Unexpected Guest!

A punctured tyre on our Cooper Creek trip was quickly changed, however complications with the tyre hanger meant the flat tyre had to be placed inside the bus.

Joan was inspired to record the event as follows:



Tyrone Tyre is a most dependant mate,
He will humbly support the Humbys
forever,

BUT.....

After a while he decides with some guile,
That inside the bus is much better!

Gates!

St Peter put his yo -yo down and rubbed his saintly eyes
As through a cloud, a figure bowed, pursued by swarms of flies
Came tramping up to heavens gate, and stood there in amaze
Then dropped his swag and tucker bag and said "well spare me days"

I've humped this here Matilda, from the age of seventeen
There ain't a track, in all outback, that us two haven't seen
But when I rolled me final swag, I thought I'd cleaned the slate
Now stone the crows, before me nose, I see another gate

In fifty years of hoofing it, and covering all the while,
Twelve miles a day at least I'd say, at two gates to the mile
I ain't much good at figures, but the way I calculates,
In my career, I've opened near on fifty thousand gates

These gates they simply haunt me, there were gates of every sort
Rusted gates and busted gates, high, low, long and short,
Gates that seemed to challenge you and gates that seemed to cringe,
Lazy gates, crazy gates that hang on half a hinge

Gates timbered up with fencing wire and gates all pretty scrolls,
With patent catch and home made-latch and gates made out of poles
Wide gates and narrow gates, big carriers and small,
Sagging gates, dragging gates, I've wrestled with them all

I've opened them and shut them, till the sight of all I hate
I'd rather miss your heavenly bliss, than open that there gate
What's that? You'll open her for me. Now that's what I call nice,
And close her too when I get through. Well this is

"Paradise"

This poem by Godfrey Bedford was found under a straw palliase in Cordillo Downs Shearing Shed in 1938. It is on display in the Birdsville Working Museum

The Elizabeth Symon Nursing Home

The Elizabeth Symon Nursing Home at Innamincka was first opened on 11th May 1928.

It was designed by Adelaide architect Thomas Macadam, and was similar to the AIM Nursing Home in Alice Springs. Money for the building was donated by Sir Josiah Symon (of Beltana), and it was named after his mother.

The Home closed in 1951, as by then the Royal Flying Doctor was providing many of the services which had been available at the Home.

Also, there were less people travelling, the Stations were suffering because of drought, and the town was dying.

The building was dismantled and the materials sold to Arrabury Pastoral Company. A Manager's house was built using them on Mt Leonard Station. Only the concrete walls of the Innamincka Nursing Home remained.



The ruined building at Innamincka stayed that way for over 40 years.

In the early 1990's, Department of Environment and Natural Resources came up with the idea of re-constructing the building and using it as an office and visitor information centre.

On our Cooper Creek trip in June this year, we had on board Joan and John, who were volunteers with the Australian Geographic and National Parks

and Wildlife Service SA. Their job was to help with the landscaping and final preparation of the now restored Australian Inland Mission Hospital at Innamincka. They presented us with a record of the official opening ceremony held on Friday 22nd July 1994

The following is an account of the opening reported in the Australian Geographic Magazine:

"The restoration and the crowd so impressed the Rev Fred McKay, AIM founder the Rev John Flynn's successor as superintendent, who officially dedicated the new structure, that he described the event as a miracle.

"What a congregation," he exclaimed, drawing cheers from the crowd. "I've never seen one like it in Innamincka - I feel like taking up a collection." When we did pass the buckets around later that day, they quickly filled with \$17,234. Boosted by a \$6,900 donation from McCafferty's, the sum took us past our fundraising target—a remarkable feat, proving what can be achieved with dedication and hard work.

Encircled by a broad, screened veranda and fitted with large fireplaces and evocative pressed-metal ceilings, the building is now a comfortable visitors' centre, office and seasonal headquarters for a ranger from the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

A detailed interpretative display that traces the Region's history has been mounted downstairs and the department hopes the centre will help attract more visitors to the 13,820 sq.km Innamincka Regional Reserve."



The crowd at the opening of the restored Elizabeth Symon Nursing Home Innamincka.

Friday 22nd July 1994

Itinerary for 2010



Back O'Bourke (9 days) - \$1875 pp	
Saturday	April 24
Kangaroo Island (4 days) - \$975 pp	
Thursday	March 18
Mungo/Hattah Kulkyn National Parks (5 days) - \$995 pp	
Saturday	April 10
Cooper Creek & Innamincka (7 days) - \$1675 pp	
Thursday	June 24
William Creek & The Painted Desert (9 days) - \$1895 pp	
Saturday	May 15
Wilson's Promontory & Great Ocean Rd (9 days) - \$1875 pp	
Monday	March 1

Personalised 4WD Tours

Birdsville/Innamincka (9 days) \$2925 pp	
Saturday	July 31
Coongie Lakes & The Cooper Creek (7 days) - \$2045 pp	
Sunday	18th July
Flinders Ranges & "Skytrek" (4 days) - \$1150 pp	
Saturday	August 21
Flinders Ranges & Arkaroola (5 days) - \$1650 pp	
Monday	August 30
Yorke Peninsula & Southern Flinders (5 days) - \$995 pp	
Saturday	October 16

Other Personalised tours in a 4WD vehicle can be arranged on other dates by request!

How to contact us:

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