



# Desert Sky News

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



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The theme of the trip was "Coonawarra - Australia's other Red Centre" - an excellent marketing logo from the Coonawarra Vignerons Association, being a group of wine companies that have joined together to promote Coonawarra and its wines, and to protect the interests of their members.

Our trip began through the Tatiara Country ("Tatiara" is an Aboriginal word meaning "the good country", and took in an historic drive through the 1870's Stations of Buckingham, Cannawigra, Wirrega and Mundulla. Incidentally, the main Adelaide to Melbourne road passed through Mundulla until 1940.



South of Naracoorte is the iconic homestead Struan House.

John Robertson had the house built in 1875 as his "retirement home". It was sold to the State Government in 1946 and is now occupied by Primary Industries and Rural Solutions SA.

The renovations completed over the last few months are in keeping with the original charm and character of the building.

A tour of the house introduced us to the story of "Frances" who died there in 1927. Her (friendly) ghost is said to be present in the building.

She was the wife of Alexander Robertson, and there is some conjecture her fall from the tower of the building

may not have been altogether accidental, as she was a former maid and he had married "below his station".

Christmas Eve was an opportunity to visit some of the many attractions in Penola -including the Mary McKillop Centre, "Never Too Old" Antiques shop and Di Giorgio Family Wines.

In March 2002 the Di Giorgio Family became the proud owners of the second oldest winery in the Coonawarra. This winery had been



known since the early 1950's as 'Rouge Homme' and holds enormous importance within the 'winescape' of Australia.

Of particular interest was a 2005 Coonawarra fortified Shiraz. Made in part from shiraz vines dating back to the original Coonawarra fruit growing colony of 1890, this wine is a great example of the heritage of the DiGiorgio Coonawarra vineyard. Staff, family and friends gathered late in vintage to hand pick the super ripe shiraz grapes.

Following open fermentation and gentle pressing the wine was fortified with pure brandy spirit and matured in old French oak. This wine can only be purchased at the cellar door.



Scottish born John Riddoch is a prominent figure in Penola's history. He settled in the area in 1861 and had a profound impact on the district.



His crowning achievement was the establishment of the Penola Fruit Colony in 1897. The magnificent two storey homestead "Yallum Park" was built between 1878 & 1880 for John Riddoch, and is said to be the best preserved Victorian house in original condition within Australia.

It features one of the largest collections of William Morris wallpapers, and has Italian painted doors and many original; furnishings and fixtures.



All decorations date from 1879.

Yallum Park was purchased by the Clifford Family in 1914 and we were privileged to have a guided tour with 91 year old Mr Glen Clifford.

A Christmas Day Church service conducted by Fr Paul Gardiner preceded the arrival back at our motel of a very convivial man in red suit!!

After a traditional Christmas lunch we took a short drive to Bool Lagoon Game Reserve and Hacks Lagoon Conservation Park. Although birds were few due to the drought conditions, we enjoyed a stroll along the very pleasant Tea Tree boardwalk.

## Christmas 2008 (continued)

Christmas night showcased the talent of our people, with everyone taking part in a “Murder Mystery”, and several dressing in costume appropriate to their allocated character!!

The Duke of Felthorpe had suffered a tragic accident while locked in his bathroom. Was his death as innocent as it seemed? And did his last will and testament remain unchallenged?

Did we find out “who dunnit”? .....Absolutely!!

Proclamation Day included touring Mt Gambier (the Umpherston Cave gardens were at their best), then on to Port McDonnell through Allendale East, where it is interesting to stop at the sink hole in the middle of the road. Many tons of stone were tipped into the sink hole opening in an effort to make a solid foundation for the road to be built.

The sink hole simply swallowed all the rubble and left a gaping hole. The road still divides around it.



Continuing on to Port McDonnell, we visited Dingley Dell—the home of Adam Lindsay Gordon, one of Australia's famous poets.

This eccentric and talented character

from Australia's past lived at Dingley Dell from 1864 until 1867 and the time he spent there was probably the most fortunate of his colourful life. It was during this time that he indulged in his two great passions, horses and writing.

Gordon was not known as an excellent horseman, but he rode with daring and instinct. The tale of his leap at the Blue Lake is part of local folklore. Gordon was renowned for training his horses to jump at angles and heights normally difficult for a horse.

On 28 July 1864 he was riding with some friends near the Blue Lake in Mt Gambier when he spurred his horse forward across the road and over a four foot high picket fence, landing at a dead stop on a narrow eight foot ledge. Beyond the ledge was a sheer drop to the waters of the Blue Lake below. This feat has never been imitated to this day.

It was during his stay at Dingley Dell that his first poem was published outside a newspaper or magazine.

Nearby is Carpenter Rocks and Cape Banks Lighthouse which is the area where the Admella was wrecked in 1859. The Admella is one of Australia's worst shipping disasters and events are planned for the 150th Commemoration during 2009.

Our accommodation in Penola was at the Coonawarra Motor Lodge, with meals in the Bushman's Inn. We recommend both as excellent.

Where will we go this year?? .....watch this space!

## Editorial

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2009! Jenny and I hope you have a happy and prosperous new year.

Last year was a busy time for us—and I'm in no doubt that 2009 will be just as busy., especially as this is the last year of our coach tours. Also, recent rain has rejuvenated the outback and whetted (!) the appetite to visit this remarkable part of Australia.

Rawnsley Park reported 4 inches of rain during a 4 week period to December 14th—this being mostly monsoonal moisture from the north. Up to 70mm was recorded in the Birdsville area.

Our full itinerary is printed on the back page of this newsletter, and our trips commence on 1st March to the southern most point in Australia -Wilson's Promontory. (The itinerary also takes in the Grampians and Great Ocean Road). As mentioned in our October newsletter, we have chosen the comfortable Meeniyana Motel as our base for exploring the Prom.

Later in March we have two trips to Kangaroo Island—the first of which has been filled through members of the Tea Tree Gully Probus Club.

A new trip this year explores central and southern Eyre Peninsula. The 5 day itinerary is modelled on our Christmas 2007 trip, and is based in the picturesque seaside town of Tumby Bay. It includes the SeaSA ferry from Wallaroo to Lucky Bay, a day trip around the western coast to Point Drummond, Coles Point, Dutton Bay and Coffin Bay, and visits Port Lincoln, Sleaford and Koppio.

The popular Birdsville/Innamincka and Cooper Creek trips commence in June with a trip up the Strzelecki Track to Innamincka and the Cooper Creek Homestay. We have two Birdsville departures- July and August.

2009 will be an interesting year, with the financial sector in such an unpredictable state. We do know that travellers don't stop travelling, they just look to adjust their plans and seek out travel which offers value for money.

In addition to the Coach tours, we have set dates for four personalised tours—including Coongie Lakes! These 4WD trips may also be available at other times depending on our itinerary program.

Desert Sky Tours is a secure business, a member of The Travel Compensation Fund, and does not “live on cash flow”.

## Big Red Desert Challenge

**N**ow here's something different!  
The world's toughest long-distance team walking and running event will be held across the Simpson Desert in May 2009.

The route will take participants from the start near the junction of the Colson Track and the French Line eastwards across the sand dunes to Poeppel Corner. From here the route runs east again, cross-country, staying south of the QAA Line to Nappaneric Dune, the fabled "Big Red" near Birdsville.

The six day event averages 40km over 100 dunes per day, totaling 240 km across the largest parallel sand dune desert on earth. The entry fee \$3595 includes transport from Alice Springs to the race start, a \$200 donation to The Friends of The Simpson Desert, and 10 litres of water per day but does not include food or emergency evacuation.

Entrants will need to be self sufficient for minor first aid needs, cooking, and camping.

Teams are not permitted to have their own support teams for this event. Any team seen receiving assistance from other people will be disqualified and evacuated to Birdsville.

If you would like further details, visit the website at:  
<http://www.escalade.com.au/sdindex.htm>

## Snippets from around

**F**or the first time in the long history of the Peterborough Christmas Pageant, the elements combined to cause the cancellation of the event which had been planned for months. Ironically, requirements by ETSA Utilities regarding the attachment of council's festoon lighting also meant that 2008 was the first year that the Christmas lighting could not be lit.

Snowtown residents joined in the hype and excitement of the recent opening of their new wind farm. The \$220 million, 47 turbine wind farm "will help develop a positive new image for the town".

A new housing estate will see 50 houses built at Tumby Bay in coming years. Adelaide company Kiebrox Development has opened up 50 blocks for sale on McCallum Street near the marina, with more to open up in stage two later down the track.

Iron Knob is slowly slipping back into fame and interest of researchers after a 3150 million year old rock was discovered approximately 10km south west of the forgotten town. The rock which has been informally named Coyerdoo Granite is the oldest rock discovered in South Australia so far.

Locals are optimistic that the finding could spark further research by mineral processing companies and the government.

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## Bon Bon Station

**B**on Bon Station, a 217,000 hectare sheep station west of Coober Pedy, is now a private protected bush reserve thanks to a unique agreement with the State and Federal Government.

The property has been bought by Bush Heritage Australia with the assistance of funding from the SA Department of Heritage and the Federal National Reserve System

Remotely situated in South Australia between the Great Victoria Desert and the large salt lakes of Eyre, Torrens and Gairdner, Bon Bon Reserve is a desert jewel of around 216, 810 hectares (approximately the size of suburban Sydney).

Bon Bon's scenic desert landscape is dotted with shimmering salt lakes, freshwater wetlands, mulga shrublands, bluebush plains, and arid-zone woodlands. These provide a rich diversity of habitats for the region's wildlife including species that are rare or threatened.

It protects seven regional ecosystems, three of which are listed as threatened at the state level. It lies within a pastoral landscape, and provides an outstanding opportunity to safeguard ecosystems that are currently not well protected in other reserves.

While Bon Bon is regarded as being among the most ecologically intact sheep-grazing properties in South Australia, some of its habitats will need to be actively restored. Returning them to health will help improve the resilience and productivity of this arid landscape and its importance for the local wildlife

Bush Heritage aims to dedicate 1 per cent of Australia's land mass to conservation and CEO Doug Humann says that Bon Bon station is their thirtieth purchase and particularly unique.

"It's important because the landscape is so significant," he says. "This is unique because the funds have come directly to Bush Heritage from the South Australian government. Then to have additional funds from the Commonwealth was also very important".



Lake Puckridge—Bon Bon Station

## Penola News

**T**he Penola Bypass Road is a major road project planned by Wattle Range Council for the Penola Township and forms part of Council's Penola Freight Access Project.

Current figures indicate that there are approximately 550 heavy transport vehicle movements through the Penola township per day and with the narrow carriageway and significant pedestrian traffic in Church Street, these concerns are certainly warranted.

At the Council meeting held on 9th December, 2008 Council resolved to formally acquire the land required for the Penola Bypass road corridor .

Council will now undertake the formal survey of the road corridor and lodge documentation with the Surveyor-General for formal approval of the road openings by the Minister in March, 2009.

**T**hose who attended our Christmas Day Church Service in Penola met Fr Paul Gardiner. He has since stepped down as postulator for the cause of canonisation of Blessed Mary MacKillop—a role he had been in for 25 years. The new postulator is Sister Maria Casey. In a recent interview Fr Paul remarked “The best thing about being a **postulator** was it gave you a bit of status in the Vatican. When you went to see someone and they asked ‘who are you’ it was a help to say: ‘I am the **postulator**’.” (*a postulator is one who looks after the case for sainthood*)

## Lake Eyre Yacht Club

The Clubhouse Building Program is in full swing with the building lifted and construction of the wharf commenced in 2008. However materials are in short supply - in particular secondhand corrugated iron and hardwood framing timber (4x2, 4x1.5, 3x1.5). If you are renovating or demolishing a building between Melbourne and Marree, Adelaide and Broken Hill and would be prepared to donate materials they will pick up.

## Simpson Desert

**T**he South Australian Government has closed the Simpson Desert Conservation Park from 1st December 2008 until mid-March this year, and tourist officers are now waiting for the Queensland Government to do the same for Queensland's national park.

Lyn Rowlands from the Birdsville Visitor Information Centre says up to 15,000 tourists a year visit the park, but temperatures of up to 50 degrees during summer makes it dangerous to travel. "There's a lot of inexperienced drivers, especially the overseas one who half the time haven't even experienced our heat out here let alone driving through sand dunes and it just gets a little bit dicey for them ... it's not a decision that has been taken lightly, it's taken quite a few years to reach this decision and I'm just so happy they've decided on it now," she said.

## Birdsville News

The Queensland State Government has announced an historic campsite used by explorers Burke and Wills, and known as 'camp plant', north-west of Birdsville, has been protected under the Heritage Act.

In 1861, Wills buried his astronomical instruments and other gear in the hope they would return later to collect them, but both men died soon after.

No-one will be able to enter or remove anything from the site without a permit.

Don Rowlands from the Wangkangurra people says while that is welcome - it has been a long time coming and too late to recover some of the lost items.

"Well it is too late, but the bottom line is that protection is now happening and any protection is good for the site," he said.

"I guess people searching for this camp over the years have taken bits and pieces from time to time.

"It's a really historical site, so it's really sad that things have gone missing."

## Itinerary for 2009



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

Saturday July 18  
Saturday August 15

### Cooper Creek/Innamincka (7 days) ~ \$1625 pp

Wednesday June 24

### 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

### Kangaroo Island (4 days) ~ \$925 pp

Tuesday March 24  
Tuesday March 31

### Mungo/Hattah National Parks (5 days) ~ \$945 pp

Saturday April 18

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

Wednesday November 18

### William Creek & The Painted Desert (9 days) ~ \$1845 pp

Friday May 1

### Wilson's Promontory & Great Ocean Rd (9 days) ~ \$1825 pp

Sunday March 1

## Personalised 4WD Tours

### Coongie Lakes & The Cooper Creek (7 days) - \$1995 pp

Thursday May 21

### Mungo & Hattah National Parks (5 days) ~ \$1075 pp

Tuesday February 17

### Sky-trek & The Flinders (5 days) - \$995 pp

Friday August 28

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

Tuesday October 27

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