



# Desert Sky News

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



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A personalised tour in July to Cooper Creek followed along the lines of our regular itinerary, but also included a couple of additional attractions.

The Strzelecki Track boasts a proliferation of waterholes and well sites, although some of these on the old section of the Track can be difficult to locate.

One of these - **Toolache Waterhole**, was a good test for our GPS! - but we eventually found the old stockyards, the waterhole itself- (it was dry), - and the grave of Henry Walter Smith - known as "Little Jack", a stockman stationed there in 1889.

Further along the Track, we were determined (again with our GPS!!) to find **Nappacoongie** waterhole. On a rise stands an isolated and decrepit piece of iron railing around the headstone of Harry Bird. In 1914 he was one of a party clearing and timbering wells in the area.

Nappacoongie was the deepest well (30m) they had encountered, and Harry asked to be lowered down so he could check it for himself. The walls caved in and buried him alive. Despite efforts to rescue him, the men could only fill in the well and place a monument on top. A rough wooden sign at the front of the grave reads:

"..HARRY BIRD  
Died 1914  
Well caved in.."

The track to Coongie Lakes commences in the floodplain of the Cooper Creek, then climbs between sand dunes until it reaches Kudriemitchie Outstation. This Outstation was used to accommodate mustering parties working many kilometres from the main homestead at Innamincka.

The building was re-located from *Number One*, - one of the first oil and gas exploratory rigs in the Cooper Basin. It was provided by The Kidman Pastoral Company, and has been restored by the Toyota Landcruiser Club of SA (Inc).

It makes an ideal place for a cuppa, and shelter from heat and flies!!

And so to Coongie Lakes and it is every bit as beautiful as the photographs in



Queensland had brought water down the Cooper Creek and filled the Lakes.

A 4WD track around the southern edge of the Lakes revealed the vast extent of the Lake system. There are 3 southern Lakes, the deepest of which is Coongie and measures 2 metres when filled. With an evaporation of around 3.5 metres per year, it would dry out in less than a year if the Cooper Creek stopped flowing.

The Birdsville/Innamincka July 16 itinerary was a little different to normal, and demonstrates the effect of weather on outback travel!



assessed the road conditions further south.

On the advice available, it was decided to travel the Birdsville Development Road to Betoota (yayyy!), then on to Windorah, reluctantly missing Innamincka as there were problems with Providence Creek near Cordillo Downs (*1.5 miles wide*). Just east of Betoota on the Birdsville Developmental Road is a sign to Deon's Lookout. This is a perfect place for a break and to enjoy the spectacular view.

We enjoyed an overnight stop in Windorah (at the start of the Cooper Creek), then on to Quilpie and via the Toompine Hotel to Thargomindah. With overnight stops in Bourke and Broken Hill, we arrived back in Adelaide within the 9 day schedule.

promotional brochures. We were fortunate in that earlier rains in the Channel Country of North West

*(The following article was written by Nancy Barber, who managed the Innamincka Trading Post. It was written for the Innamincka Bush Telegraph newsletter, and is reproduced here by kind permission).*

In the sixties, Innamincka was a dry and dusty Ghost Town. All that remained were the ruins of the old Hospital, hotel with the huge bottle heap, cemetery and an old tin shed, which was the Police Station.

In the mid sixties, there was a group of 6 men who planned the project of building the Hotel-Motel and the Store. Each one of the six men had their own trade which contributed to the building.

They were: Mal Gordon (Timber and joinery), Bill Howlett (Engineer), Bob Day Carpenter), Ron Waters (Plumber), Stan Hill (Electrician) and Mike Steel (Mechanic and Tour Operator).

The first foundations poured were for the Store, in "April 1969". The Store was built and operating before the foundations of the Pub went down. All the pre-fabricated Frames and materials were brought up on a truck from Adelaide nearly every weekend and with help from friends and men from the Station, they built the Store and engine shed to house the diesel engines to power fridges, lights, petrol bowsers etc.

A shed was built to live in until the Store was properly fitted out. I lived in this shed up until the Pub was built. They also made a bathroom in the ruins of what was then the old hospital and the laundry was a washing machine put on the verandah.

I was kept pretty busy when I was up there, although I didn't get many tourists through... maybe one a week. During Christmas, Easter and school holidays I would get a few more, but the drilling rigs from Moomba came through every day.

I also had a licence to fuel the planes, which wasn't all that often unless the races were on at Birdsville, which was once a year.

*(continued over...)*

Besides this, I fuelled the Flying Doctor plane. It came in once a month to hold a clinic at Innamincka Station. And also the planes that brought mail and supplies. One week from the Channel Country and the next week from Broken Hill. The petrol and diesel supplies came up once a week from Lyndhurst.

The only communication I had was a radio, run by a car battery. The radio was through the Flying Doctor base in Broken Hill, so all my telegrams, orders for supplies, talk sessions to other stations was done through the radio. I also had charge of the medical kit, which was kept locked at all times. Unless there was someone needing medical attention, then I would have to get on the radio and talk to the doctor, tell him the problem, then he would advise me what medication to use. All the medication was numbered, so it was easy to follow. And if I had to reorder supplies, I just gave them the number of whatever medication I needed. I think the worst thing I ever had to deal with was a man that was fishing in the Cooper, and somehow he got a fish hook through his finger. So I had to give him an injection of morphine, then cut the barb and pull the rest of the hook out. I was pretty lucky up there, as there was always someone I could call on if I needed any help. I only had to get on the radio or drive to the Station and they looked after me. Ken and Fay Kemp were managing Innamincka then, also Artie Hearn had a camp at Cullyamurra Waterhole. Artie had a plane, so he used to call in every day to see if I wanted anything from Moomba. Or, if I wanted to make any phone calls, as we had to go to Moomba to make calls, which I did, quite a few times.

I used to drive to Nappa Merrie for something to do, especially on Sunday, when things were quiet, just for the day.

When the Hotel/Motel was finished of course we had a lot more people seemed to be going through. The first Manager of the Pub was Claude Collins, who was the local grader driver maintaining the Strzelecki Track to the Queensland border. We had some special people come up here like Des Corcoran, who was Deputy Premier then, also Elizabeth Burchill, who was one of the first nursing sisters, when the hospital was first built. Also various doctors and specialists.

I never felt alone at Innamincka. I just really enjoyed the time I spent there. I must admit I found it hard to leave, because I love the bush. I came up to manage the store in 1970, up until the big '74 flood. It washed away a lot of things, including the bottle heap. All you could see for miles was nothing but water. Of course it cut all the roads in, and nobody could get in or out, including me, so I had to be flown out. I was very upset at having to leave the store and the bush, doing what I was doing. We did have a couple of minor floods before, but this was a big one.

Dick Lang flew me back after to have a look. I just burst into tears when I saw the damage. This was the end of my time with the Store at Innamincka, which was then taken over by Dick Lang.

I hope this has given you some idea of what it was like before houses were built and people moved in. When I visited there about 3 years ago, I was amazed at how it had grown and the changes, with all the mod-cons, like telephones, television etc. I must congratulate you all on the way Innamincka looks today. Especially the store, the Pub and the rebuilding of the old Hospital. I also enjoy reading the Bush Telegraph.

I am hoping to visit again, at the moment I have just had a hip replacement, so I won't be going anywhere for a while. I have not written about everything, but to do this I would need to write a book.

Cheers for now, **Nancy Barber**

*The following article has been submitted by Isobel Baker, who was on our Painted Desert trip this year. The information comes from a farmer near Owen, in South Australia, and he helped establish the Port Augusta Arid Lands Botanic Garden.*



## S ALTBUSH AND BLUEBUSH

The family *CHENOPODIACEAE* in South Australia alone has 23 Genera, but in general the "saltbush" fall into 3 Genera, as below:

1. **ATRIPLEX**—which have dry, papery fruit and include "Old Man Saltbush". There are 42 species in SA and are the most likely to dominate the landscape.
2. **RHAGODIA**—which have spikes of small succulent fruits and include the common saltbush around Owen, - *Rhagodia Parabolica*.
3. **CHENOPODIUM**—which have similar fruits and include the weed "Fat Hen". There are 16 SA species.

"Bluebush" are mainly the family *MAIREANA* With 39 SA species. The common "bluebush" is *Maireana Sedifolia* and there are several species around Owen. The fruits are winged and often colour up as they mature, and can be very attractive, Generally, they are less than 1m high.

In general, stock prefer to graze annual grasses and ephemerals and the smaller chenopods. The larger "Old Man Saltbush" and Bluebush are valuable drought reserve rather than fattening feed. Some such as "Black Saltbush" are only grazed in drought as a last resort. The "saltbush mutton" would come from grazing smaller species. \*

Many Chenopods grow in saline areas and some such as *Atriplex Cinerea* are first-line coastal sand dune plants. The "samphires" are part of *Chenopodiaceae*, as are "bindyi's" Genus *Sclerolaena* although better known as genus *BASSIA*, ruby saltbush genus *Enchylaena*, and "buck bush", genus *SALSOLA*.

The cultivated area would be "old man saltbush" *Atriplex Numinularia*, which some are planting as a living haystack. Best results are from grazing heavily, (back to bare wood) to enable paddock feed to establish and then allowing lengthy recovery time. The young plants come from tissue culture. Many species, especially the more colourful *Maireana* (blue bush) would make good garden specimens, especially in dry areas. I've seen them as mounds of orange, copper, plum and pink.

\* *sometimes on our way home through Burra, we have stopped at McPhee's Butchers for Saltbush Mutton ©*

**What's News?**

# P

## romenade on the Prom!

During the last Ice Age, when the sea level was lower than it is now, a land bridge linked the mainland and Tasmania. About 12,000 years ago the sea rose and submerged all but the mountain tops, which became the islands in Bass Strait.

One of these was the rugged granite peak that is now called Wilsons Promontory. Later, sands accumulated and tied the peak to the south Gippsland coast, making it a peninsula, and the southernmost part of the mainland. The area is now one of Victoria's largest and most spectacular national parks.

Our new 9 day trip departing March 23 explores the Promontory and nearby Strzelecki Ranges. Travelling from Adelaide, we have overnight stops at Halls Gap and Geelong, before boarding the Queenscliffe Ferry to Sorrento, on our way to Foster and Fish Creek.

Accommodation is at the Promontory Gate Hotel/ Motel, which we use as a base for our 3 days touring of the area.

A full day on the Promontory explores the spectacular coastal views, fantastic beaches, cool fern gullies and rock formations. There are also a couple of easy walking tracks!

Other attractions include Agnes Falls Scenic Reserve—hidden within the green rolling hills of the Strzelecki Ranges, where the meandering Agnes River cascades over rocks into a deep picturesque gorge. At 59 metres, Agnes Falls are the highest single span falls in Victoria.

During the trip, we take several scenic drives and visit some of the small rural villages in the South Gippsland area.

Our return to Adelaide is along the Great Ocean Road, with overnight stops at Skenes Creek and Mount Gambier.

The trip departs Friday March 23 and the package fare of \$1680 pp all inclusive.

**How to contact us:**

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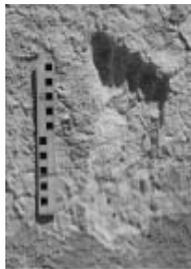
☎ **08 8356 1874**

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**Just for interest**

Human and other hominid fossil footprints provide rare but important insights into anatomy and behaviour.



Here we report recently discovered fossil trackways of human footprints from the Willandra Lakes region of western New South Wales.

Optically dated to between 19-23 ka and consisting of at least 124 prints, the trackways form the largest collection of Pleistocene human footprints in the world.

The prints were made by adults, adolescents, and children traversing the moist surface of an ephemeral soak. This site offers a unique glimpse of humans living in the arid inland of Australia at the height of the last glacial period. Mungo National Park has played a crucial role in providing an understanding of the origins of modern humans.

**A** chance to enjoy 4 full days on Kangaroo Island with our next departure **November 9th !!**

We catch the early ferry from Cape Jervis, and stay 3 nights at the Wisteria Lodge Motel—overlooking the beautiful Nepean Bay. Apart from visiting the popular tourist attractions of Flinders Chase, Remarkable Rocks., Admirals Arch, Seal Bay and the Honey Farm and Eucalyptus Distillery, we explore the beautiful western beaches of Stokes Bay, Snelling Beach and Western River Cove.

Daylight Saving hours allow us to enjoy a full day of activities!

The package fare of \$825 pp ~ (single supplement \$140) includes very comfortable accommodation, all meals, and the Sealink ferry to and from the Island!

**Itinerary for 2007**

- Back O'Bourke**  
(9 days) ~ \$1770 pp  
Saturday April 14
- Birdsville/Innamincka**  
(9 days) ~ \$1875 pp  
Sunday July 15  
Tuesday August 14
- Coonawarra—A Brilliant Blend!**  
(5 days) ~ \$650 pp  
Saturday November 3
- Clare Valley & Dares Hill Circuit**  
(2 days) - \$295  
Saturday May 19
- Cooper Creek/Innamincka**  
(7 days) ~ \$1450 pp  
Monday July 2
- Echuca/Moama & The Barmah Wetlands**  
(5 days) ~ \$820 pp  
Thursday May 31
- Explore Mungo National Pk**  
(5 days) ~ \$820pp  
Saturday June 19
- Flinders Ranges/Arkaroola**  
(5 days) ~ \$925 pp  
Including "Ridgetop Tour"  
Thursday September 20  
Thursday October 18
- Gawler Ranges**  
(5 days) ~ \$785 pp  
Tuesday September 4
- Kangaroo Island**  
(4 days) ~ \$825 pp  
Thursday March 8  
Tuesday November 13
- Skenes Creek/Great Ocean Rd**  
(5 days) ~ \$865 pp  
Sunday February 25
- William Creek & The Painted Desert**  
(9 days) ~ \$1670 pp  
Saturday April 28
- Wilson's Promontory**  
(9 days) ~ \$1680 pp  
Friday March 23
- Yorke Peninsula & Innes National Park**  
(4 days) ~ \$590 pp  
Saturday November 24

**Personalised 4WD Tours**

**Coongie Lakes & Cooper Creek**  
7 days Tuesday July 31

**Sky Trek & Flinders Ranges**  
5 days Tuesday May 15

## Ode To Desert Sky Tours

Jenny and Howard – hosts extr'ordinaire  
 Guiding us safely from here to there  
 Jen's meals are quite sumptuous  
 Howard's knowledge, unique  
 He knows all the "high sports" from  
 "Dunnies" to creek.

We learnt much of our history,  
 Of King, Burke, Wills,  
 Of Tom Kruse's journeys o'er gibber and hills  
 Of each place of interest, Howard kept us informed  
 And never at anytime did one of us yaw n.

Our companions were friendly  
 We laughed and we joked  
 We agreed unanimously that Howard's "The Bloke".  
 Jen turned on the music with her "squeeze Box" and  
 song  
 We all raised our voices and enjoyed the sing-along.

Our overnight stays were quite different but by far  
 The best was Cooper Creek Homestay at Innamincka  
 Our "Outback Experience" is all complete  
 We've bumped and we've rattled – but stayed in our  
 seat!  
 Our memories are happy – we hope, so too, are yours  
 All due to the excellence of ...

### DESERT SKY TOURS!

©Lesley Merrett 2006



These sketches are by Glenda, who With husband Don, joined our August Birdsville trip.

The top sketch shows the reaction of her husband when we almost left him behind at the Camp LXV (Dig Tree) toilets !!!



The other sketch (left) needs no explanation!

## Outback Heritage.....

Two Hotels we came across on our Birdsville trip 16th July - each with its own character and typifying the spirit of the Outback.



### Tattersalls Hotel Barrington...

greeted travellers heading through the junction of the Matilda Hwy, Queensland, and the Kidman Way, NSW, with a warm and friendly atmosphere ...courtesy of publican Mary Crawley and her family.

We stopped at this Hotel initially to ask if we could use the toilets, and were soon taken with the hospitality (and wit!) of Mary—a lady well into her 80's who was perched on a stool behind the bar.

Over a quick drink, we learnt of the history of the Hotel and Mary's family. The Crawley family have been managing 'Tatts' since 1977, which is quite a stretch considering not only the nature of the business, but the isolation and extreme conditions of the region. However, this is a mere holiday compared to the previous family, the Lacks, who had the place for 67 years, from 1910 to 1977. Mary is not alone— usually her son is around, and oh yes! - she was looking after her 90 year old sister.

### Toompine Hotel

The South Western Hotel, locally known as the Toompine Pub, is all that remains of the once bustling community of Toompine. It is located between Quilpie and Thargomindah, and on the recommendation of John at the Birdsville Working Museum, we stopped for a look .



About 600 miners flocked to the Duck Creek and Coperella Opal mines which were discovered about 1866.

A Coach Road from Toompine to Thargomindah was used by Cobb & Co and early motor vehicles, however once the railway came to Quilpie in 1917, Toompine declined rapidly.

When the Hotel sold in January 2005 for \$390,000, the Agent said- "It needs a very specific type of person but having lived and worked with those people out [in] that area it's a great area to live in and work in but you can't get away from the fact that its 12 or 13 inches of rain per year and up to 50 degrees in the worst of summer."

### From our shop! -

- Copies of our DVD "Celebrating 10 years" are available at \$10 each.
- Desert Sky Tawny Port \$8 bottle