



Desert Sky News



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

Volume 12 Issue 2

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September 2010

This is the first newsletter since the retirement of our bus and the change of business to 4wd "Personalised" tours.

In July we took delivery of our new vehicle - a Toyota Landcruiser 100 Series and had it fitted out with several accessories to make for comfort and convenience. One of these items was storage drawers in the rear of the wagon to safely stow all the "essential" items required on a trip!

Early August we took our first trip with the new vehicle to Birdsville and Innamincka. with 4 passengers and everything went very well. (A report on the trip can be found on page 2 of this newsletter).

There is a maximum of four passengers plus driver on a "personalised tour", and itineraries include all our former bus destinations, plus others such as Coongie Lakes and, Skytrek—(Mt Caernarvon in the Flinders Ranges).

There has also been interest in designing a tour to suit individual requirements, and later this month we leave on such a specially designed Lake Eyre and Coober Pedy trip.

So what's happening with "The Bus"?

We had a couple who were very interested in taking over the whole business, however after several weeks they felt it was not for them. The Bus is therefore on the "for sale" market.

Life without "The Bus" (by Jenny!)

After 15 years of organising hundreds of people on various tours, it was time to say "goodbye". What a journey this has been. Will I miss it? - yes and no.....

I will miss the Christmas trip— while touring was an important part of these trips, I really enjoyed the personal friendships and fun which we had.

I have been asked many times which was my favourite trip? Every trip was special in its own way. However, I never minded how many times we went to the Flinders Ranges or Kangaroo Island.

The bus trips have consumed a great part of my life and I do not miss the huge responsibility that went with it. I remember a passenger once saying how happy I was to see everyone in the morning. I was more relieved to know that no-one had died, fallen over, had food poisoning or any other illness!!

I feel I am in a period of transition as my life changes to a different pace. I will always continue to encourage and support Howard with the 4WD tours, so I guess I have gone from a full time bus hostess to a part time office worker and trip co-ordinator!

I think it will be a few months yet until I realise all we achieved in the 15 years, and enjoy the memories.

Howard had the courage to fulfil the dream of "Outback travel in a bus" and not only did he do it, he did it so well and will continue to give people much pleasure with his 4WD trips.

I have been privileged to meet and travel with so many people - (people are very interesting!) and I have an appreciation of the Outback and it's people.



Lake Eyre update

The water event of 2010 for Lake Eyre is now greater than 2009.

Currently there is around 65-70% surface coverage, but this does not equate to volume. The Warburton Creek flows were close to stopping but due to local rains in the north east of Lake Eyre, there will be another small pulse of water entering the lake via the Warburton Groove.

Large patches of the northern and western extremities of the lake are drying out. Water can be seen close to Halligan Bay Point, at the Lake Eyre South lookout on the Oodnadatta Track, and can now be seen in the distance from Level Post Bay.

There is some water in Lake Eyre South with about 10% surface coverage due to local rains.

The Cooper Creek water entered the lake around June 28. Water is slowly filling Madigan Gulf on the south eastern side of Lake Eyre North. This will increase the water surface coverage in the lake but historically the Cooper Creek only adds about 15% of the total water to Lake Eyre. It is too hard to determine how long the Cooper Creek water will flow in to Lake Eyre and how much it will input during this event.

The water in Lake Eyre will last for some time. Even when the Warburton and Cooper Creek cease flowing, the deeper sections of the lake will hold water well into 2011.

There are several bird species on some of the islands of Lake Eyre. Some species are forming small colonies and nesting, but at this stage they are not in the huge numbers that the public expect.

Whether Lake Eyre has partial water on it, is close to full or is dry, the best way to see the enormity of the lake is from the air.

Birdsville & Innamincka trip *(August 2010)*

A week before departure, we were monitoring several road closures which included Birdsville to Innamincka, Nappa Merrie and the Dig Tree access.

Remarkably, all roads opened before departure, and plan "B", which would have involved travelling through Windorah and Thargominda, was not required!

Leaving Adelaide, we headed up to Marree for a plane flight over Lake Eyre. The Marree airstrip resembled a city airport, with planes being quickly refuelled to meet the constant number of tourists wanting a flight over the Lake.

Our group enjoyed the hour and a half Wrightsair flight, to the Warburton Groove in the northern section of the Lake.

The new dining room and bakery addition to the Oasis Café in Marree provided a great spot for lunch, following which we made our way up the Birdsville Track to the Cooper Creek.

With floodwaters forcing the temporary closure of the Birdsville Track between Marree and Mungerannie, we took a detour just past Etadunna to the Cooper Creek ferry - a once in 20 year experience!



The Cooper Creek Ferry



Bush Chain Saw - essential gear on the ferry

The depth of Cooper was 4 metres and falling. Peter was at the crossing with his boat (many will remember him from the Cooper Creek Discoverer sunset cruises), and a helicopter pilot from Birdsville was offering flights over the Cooper. The ferry takes only one vehicle at a time and it is a 7 minute crossing.

We appreciated the warm welcome in Mungerannie and the opportunity to clean the car windows after several muddy creek crossings!

Several more (25?) creek crossings the next day through Clifton Hills, a large detour around Pandie Pandie, and we arrived in Birdsville where we appreciated another warm welcome and opportunity to clean the car windows!

We caught up with John Menzies at the Birdsville Working Museum, and following a tour around town and out to the Waddi Trees, paid a visit to "Dusty" at the Bakery for lunch before heading out to Big Red in the Simpson Desert. The Road to Big Red (Nappaneria Sandune) was good although we were prevented from driving up to the base of the dune due to a lake!!



Water at Big Red Sandune - (Depth indicator shows 1.2metres)

(There was a 30km detour around the water to enable a crossing of Big Red).

The road from Birdsville to Innamincka via Betoota and Arrabury was excellent and we arrived at the Cooper Creek Homestay and yet another warm welcome but not so muddy windows!!!

A visit to Geodynamics geothermal "Hot Rocks" energy project next morning, then we were off to Nappa Merrie and the Dig Tree. I have never before seen so many birds at the Burke and Wills Bridge—literally hundreds of pelicans, egrets, herons, fairy martins etc.

It was during our "Dig Tree talk" a member from Channel Nine's Sixty Minutes program interrupted to seek help in retrieving their plane which had become bogged on the Dig Tree airstrip. Nappa Merrie Ranger "Bomber" was already there by the time I arrived on the airstrip, and a strategically placed snatch strap and a few fellows pushing on a wing, soon had the aircraft back on firm ground. The TV crew were filming a segment which will look at plant life in the area in 1860 compared to today, and coincides with the 150th anniversary of the Burke and Wills Expedition. Our trip returned to Adelaide through Cameron Corner, Tibooburra and Broken Hill.

Outback Race meetings

The Outback racing circuit commences with the 31st Annual Betoota Race Meeting on Saturday 28th August. Prize money and trophies total \$59,240, and a horse bonus of \$4000 with the most points over Birdsville, Bedourie and Betoota Race meetings. Birdsville Races are 3rd & 4th September and Bedourie Races 11th September.

Birdsville Mobile Phone network

For the first time, Birdsville, has permanent 3G mobile phone coverage. The town received a temporary mobile phone tower during last year's Birdsville Race meeting, but Telstra says it has now become the first town in Australia to use satellite-fed 3G technology instead of the terrestrial network for mobile coverage.

Optus has been covering the town for a year, but Telstra spokesman Matthew Mocatta says this is different technology and will improve telecommunications for locals and visitors.

"Birdsville is the first time we've done this," he said.

"We do utilise a similar sort of technology when we set up services in emergency situations.

"Normally a fibre option connection is utilised but this time we've utilised satellite, so it is a very different sort of service in the way it is set up in a technical perspective."

Diamantina Shire Deputy Mayor Barry Gaffney says any new permanent improvement to phone coverage will make a huge difference to locals and visitors.

"Most nights here in Birdsville we'd probably have 300 people in town - most of them have a mobile phone on them - whether it's Optus or Telstra," he said.

Mungo Visitor Centre Upgrade

The Mungo National Park Visitor Centre's upgrade project will soon be completed with an official launch planned for October 2010.

The Centre will look very different and provide an interactive and informative experience for visitors. It will be an orientation portal allowing people to gain the information they need to explore the park even if the centre is not staffed.

A Traditional Tribal Group's "welcome to country" will be looped on large screens to ensure visitors understand the cultural, natural and spiritual significance of Mungo National Park.

A touch screen includes a digital guidebook that can be downloaded onto portable electronic devices to take on travels around the Park. This guidebook will include content of the elders speaking on Country as well as special animated landscape footage showing the changes to the Mungo landscape that have occurred over the past 40,000 years.

The upgrade includes changes inside the Visitor Centre, an extension of the Centre into an outdoor space with a Human Fossil Trackway replica, a lunette replica viewing deck, Mungo meeting place along with new signage, a sculpture and pathways.

Burke & Wills 150th Anniversary

THE centrepiece of the 150th celebrations of the trek of explorers Burke and Wills - the re-enactment of the pair setting out from Melbourne - was thrown into disarray after the federal election was called on the same day.

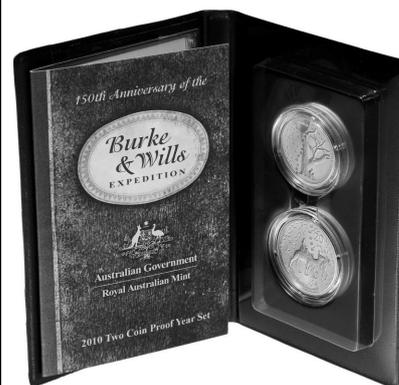
The Royal Society of Victoria, which organised the ill-fated expedition to cover Australia from south to north, had been working on the re-enactment for the past 12 months with the hope that veteran actor Jack Thompson would reprise his film portrayal of Robert O'Hara Burke.

The expedition of 18 men, 25 camels and 22 horses carrying two years supply of food, set off from Royal Park at 4pm on August 20, 1860.

But because that date falls on a Friday, and trying to stage such an event in peak hour in Melbourne would be enormous, organisers had settled for the following day. With the election held on August 21, the Royal Society abandoned plans to stage the re-enactment on that day.

The Burke & Wills Historical Society instead organised a social function for the Society at Bridie O'Reilly's pub in Brunswick. The pub was built in 1854 and was originally called the 'Sarah Sands Hotel' after the ship that the owner, Robert Barry, arrived in Australia on.

Newspaper reports of Burke and Wills' departure in 1860 mention the expedition marching in the direction of the Sarah Sands Hotel on their way to Essendon. In addition, Dr Wills had originally planned to travel to Australia on the SS *Sarah Sands*, so it seemed an appropriate place to meet.



There are many events being held throughout Victoria in conjunction with the 150th Anniversary. If you would like details of the events, (which continue until November), or a list of memorabilia including Royal Mint and Perth Mint commemorative coins

stamps/merchandise please let us know.

New name for Diamantina Shire Creek

A previously unnamed creek approximately 100 Kms North West of the town of Birdsville in the Diamantina Shire is to be named 'Plant Creek'.

Extensive research by the applicant has revealed that in 1861 explorers Burke and Wills buried their surplus equipment at a site nearby the unnamed creek. Burke and Wills called that site 'Plant Camp', hence the proposed title for the unnamed creek.

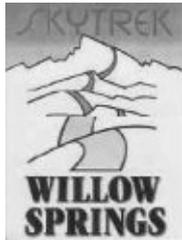
Sky Trek 4wd adventure

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.

Lake Eyre trips

There has been great interest in plane flights over Lake Eyre, and we offer the following package:

3 days Adelaide—Marree return \$850pp (including hour and half plane flight over Lake Eyre with Wrightsair).

The itinerary includes travel from Adelaide through the Clare Valley to Copley, with meals and accommodation at the Copley Hotel. The day trip to Marree will visit the Ochre Cliffs out of Lyndhurst, Farina ruins, and the visitor lookout at Leigh Creek mine.

There is a minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 passengers on this trip.

How to contact us:

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- ☎ **08 8356 1874**
- ✉ **enquiries@desertskytours.com**
- 🌐 **www.desertskytours.com**

Upcoming trips....

The following 4WD trips have definite departures:

5 days Flinders Ranges/Arkaroola \$1650 pp (Including Ridge Top Tour)

Monday 6th September (Fully booked)
Wednesday 15th September (1 seat available)

The itinerary includes travel through the Clare Valley to Hawker and accommodation at Rawnsley Park. We visit several Gorges including Warren; Bunyeroo; Brachina; and Italowie. Highlights in Arkaroola include the world renowned Ridgetop Tour, and a drive to the Pinnacles; Bolla Bollana and Nooldoonooldoona!

Leaving Arkaroola we travel through the Gammon Ranges to Copley, Leigh Creek and Parachilna, and the beautiful Moralana Scenic Drive which crosses between the Elder Range and the south western side of Wilpena Pound.

Our return to Adelaide is through the northern towns of Craddock, Carrieton, Orroroo, Peterborough and the Gilbert Valley.

The tour includes all meals, and accommodation in the Mawson Lodge at Arkaroola and very comfortable ensuite cabins in Rawnsley Park.

Future Newsletters

With the change from coach to 4WD trips, we are mindful that not everyone on our mailing list may wish to receive our regular printed newsletter.

Some months ago we set up an "electronic" newsletter which is sent via email.

Bearing in mind many readers may not have internet access, we are more than happy to continue mailing a printed Newsletter so you can keep up with what is happening in the Outback!

If however you no longer wish to receive a Newsletter, or you would like to transfer to the emailed version, would you kindly complete the form opposite and mail it to us. Thanks

Departure dates

Flinders Ranges/Arkaroola (5 days) ~ \$1650 pp Including "Ridgetop Tour"

Monday September 6
Wednesday September 15

Flinders Ranges/Skytrek (4 days) ~ \$995 pp

Monday October 25

Lake Eyre

(3 days) ~ \$850 pp (Including hour and half plane flight)

Monday October 11
Monday October 18

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

Thursday November 4

Kangaroo Island

(4 days) ~ \$1200 pp (Includes Sea Link ferry)

Wednesday November 24

Mungo & Hattah National Parks

(5 days) ~ \$1125 pp

Tuesday March 30

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

Sunday May 2
Sunday May 23

Dares Hill Circuit

(2 days) ~ \$495 pp

Wednesday December 1

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

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