



Desert Sky News

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



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Our 2008 program began with a very successful trip to Wilson's Promontory early March. The trip has a diverse range of scenery, ranging from the beautiful Grampians National Park to the unique coastal attractions of The Great Ocean Road.

The re-growth in the Grampians since the January 2006 bushfires is very noticeable. In total the fire burnt out 130,000 hectares and destroyed 40 dwellings, 72 farm sheds and more than 62,400 sheep. One of the great features of the Australian bush is the way it regenerates after a bushfire.

Bluestone buildings and hundreds of kilometres of dry stone walling are a feature on the landscape of western Victoria's "Volcanic Trail" which commences at Peshurst. Volcanoes in the area provided a source of basalt and bluestone, which has been utilised in buildings and paving.



This style of building can be seen in the old Hexham Hotel (above). It was built c.1863 as the Woolshed Inn, and is a two-storey structure of squared coursed bluestone rubble and a slate roof. The stables were originally used as a Cobb & Co changing station.

It is an interesting example of Victorian Vernacular—(ie architecture which is typical for an area or region).

The Queenscliffe ferry took us to Sorrento, and we made our way to Fish Creek.

Where is Fish Creek?...well it is the gateway to Wilson's Promontory - approximately 165 kilometres south east of Melbourne, and 25kms from the entrance to Wilson's Promontory.

The Promontory Gate Hotel...(or "The Fishy Pub"), as it is affectionately called, was our base for 4 days of touring around the Promontory, Waratah Bay and the Strzelecki Ranges.



One of Fish Creek's famous features is the remarkable Daliesque mullet balancing in a seemingly precarious manner on top of the pub.

The Prom, with its beaches and short walks is a great day trip.

The Strzelecki Ranges were next. Agnes Falls at 59 metres, are the highest single span falls in Victoria. Further on, the spectacular Tarra Bulga National Park features lush fern-gullies, giant Mountain Ash and Myrtle Beech trees towering up to 100 metres.

A highlight was a walk through a 300 year old Mountain Ash Forest to the popular suspension bridge, before returning to Fish Creek via the hilltop Grand Ridge Road, Port Albert and Foster.

There are probably not too many people who can claim to have celebrated their 80th Birthday at Fish Creek!

Unknown to Merv, Ruth had organised a birthday cake for us to share at dinner.

It just happened that Fish Creek was hosting a "Fun Festival" that day, so with the help of a jazz band which was playing in the hotel garden, Merv received a good rendition of "Happy Birthday". The previous night Gordon, another of our group celebrated his birthday!!

Just out of interest, some great footballers have come from Fish Creek— among them are Wayne Weideman, Barry Standfield, Ian Dunstan, and Barry Walpole.

The return home was via the Bellarine Peninsula and Great Ocean Road to Skenes Creek and the inimitable duo characters Andrew and Roger at the Skenes Creek Lodge Motel.



Hosts Doris and Andrew certainly provide a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

Left: Roger adjusts Merv's birthday hat!

Photo courtesy Andrew—Skenes Creek Motel

Over the years we have travelled the Great Ocean Road a few times—and each time we hope the weather will be good for photos and sightseeing. Well this time it was perfect! - and the 12 Apostles looked spectacular.

Kalamurina Station

Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) has secured an opportunity to purchase Kalamurina for conservation.

Kalamurina covers 667,000 hectares (nearly 1.7 million acres), connecting Lake Eyre National Park (to the south) with the Simpson Desert Regional Reserve (to the north).



By connecting these reserves, the acquisition of Kalamurina will create a single protected area in central Australia that is larger than the entire state of Tasmania. The regional significance of the property is further demonstrated by its role in hosting the confluence of three of central Australia's most important rivers: the Macumba River and Kallakoopah Creek converge with the Warburton River on Kalamurina, before flowing into Lake Eyre.

The diversity of Kalamurina's habitats supports a wealth of desert mammals, birds and reptiles. Perhaps the most significant of these animals is the Ampurta, an endangered mammal with its stronghold centred on Kalamurina.

AWC will carry out a baseline survey in 2008 which is sure to reveal many other previously hidden biological treasures. Over time, the recovery of species such as the Ampurta will be measured as AWC's on-ground management improves habitat quality and reduces the effect of competition and predation by feral animals.

At the time of printing this newsletter, AWC had raised the funds required to complete the acquisition of Kalamurina but is still several hundred thousand dollars short of the target for long-term management.

The management priorities include:

- Appointment of experienced, practical staff as Sanctuary Managers.
- Rationalisation and, as necessary, restoration of infrastructure.
- The removal of cattle, which is vitally important for the conservation and regeneration of riparian ecosystems, particularly along the Warburton and Macumba Rivers and Kallakoopah Creek.
- Culling and removal of camels. (AWC has already participated in a regional program which resulted in the culling of over 130 camels on Kalamurina.)
- The control of foxes and rabbits.
- Developing and implementing a strategy for the management of visitors (large numbers of people now visit the Simpson Desert region every year on 4WD expeditions).

Andamooka

Andamooka's population is expected to double within three years following a flood of development applications in the town worth more than \$14 million.

The opal town is now experiencing a 'Gold Rush' for real estate.

The total development applications currently before the Building Assessment Commission provides for 520 bedrooms.

This is comprised in a number of developments for double and single unit accommodation such as the 94 unit expansion at the Opal Hotel, another 62 units planned by Unique Accommodation and another planned development on the old caravan park site.

Olympic Dam's super pit, Prominent Hill and all of the other major mine developments within the region have contributed to the expansion.

In other news, the town has grabbed relics of its past history and put them on display in a new open air mining museum on the approach road to town.

You'll now notice on the left hand side of the road in front of the playground a collection of dozers, Studebaker drilling rigs, and an old excavator.

They've been placed there by the Andamooka Progress and Opal Miners Association with the help of local residents and businesses, to recognise the town's link to its Opal mining history.

In the 1990's the Excavator was used as the backdrop to the annual school photographs and has been viewed by many thousands of tourists over the years.

APOMA President Peter Allen said much of the machinery was donated by the owners of Unique Accommodation which was clearing its block ready for building units.

"We'll lay some blue metal down and place descriptive signs up on each piece of equipment telling of the role it played in developing the opal fields of Andamooka," Mr Allen said.

"It just shows what a small town can do without all of the red tape."

Cooper Creek!

Residents of Innamincka were given a taste of things to come recently, when the Cooper rose to about 2 metres at the causeway.

Innamincka township received 27 mm of rain over two days. Scattered heavy rainfall in the area also caused many road closures.

The summer rainfall not only replenished rainwater tanks, but stimulated growth of herbage and grasses on the parched gibber plains and sand hills near the town.

The flow resulted from heavy falls of rain over the hills to the north of Innamincka which caused Oonabrinta Creek to run into the Cooper.

The high water closed the causeway to traffic between February 2nd and February 5th.

As the creek fell, water birds and birds of prey congregated to feast on schooling fish.

Opportunistic fisher people also joined the birds.



Above: Photo by Julie Matthews of the Cooper Creek Homestay

Above: A good haul of yabbies caught in one afternoon, on lines and in opera house pots, upstream of the causeway at Innamincka !!

As water levels continue to fall, experts are predicting great fishing and yabbing in waterholes along the Cooper.

Itinerary Comments

Coongie Lakes:

Within the Innamincka Regional Reserve lies the World Heritage listed region of Coongie Lakes. The track to the lakes takes us roughly north-west of Innamincka through dry sandy country. Two regions are explored along the way. Scrubby Camp Waterhole provides some excellent views of the North-West branch of the Cooper, and further along is Kudriemitchie Outstation.

The Coongie Lakes system has been recognised for its importance in providing a unique environment for plants and animals of the desert. Wading birds are plentiful, and the surrounding bush is full of other desert bird species.

We have a 4WD trip departing Sunday June 1st and travelling the Strzelecki Track to Innamincka and Coongie Lakes.

The 7 day personalised tour will take a maximum of 4 people, and we have one confirmed booking.

If you would like to see this fascinating area of South Australia register your interest now!

Birdsville/Innamincka

We have a few seats left on each of the Birdsville/Innamincka trips. The trips have double figure bookings and departures are guaranteed.

Cooper Creek

A popular trip which includes the Strzelecki Track and 3 nights at the Cooper Creek Homestay Innamincka!!

Flinders Ranges

Seats available October 12th only.

Christmas 2008

Our Christmas trip this year will be to Australia's *other* Red Centre—The Coonawarra. The base for the 5 day trip will be the Coonawarra Motor Lodge and Bushman's Inn at Penola. (we will have the Lodge to ourselves!)

Itinerary for 2008



Birdsville/Innamincka (9 days) ~ \$1950 pp

Tuesday July 15
Wednesday August 13

Cooper Creek/Innamincka (7 days) ~ \$1525 pp

Friday July 4

Flinders Ranges/Arkaroola (5 days) ~ \$995 pp Including "Ridgetop Tour"

Tuesday September 9
Tuesday September 23
Sunday October 12

Gawler Ranges (5 days) ~ \$830 pp

Saturday August 30

Kangaroo Island (4 days) ~ \$875 pp

Thursday November 13

Skenes Creek/Great Ocean Rd (5 days) ~ \$925 pp

Sunday May 11

William Creek & The Painted Desert (9 days) ~ \$1745 pp

Sunday April 27

Yorke Peninsula & Innes National Park (4 days) - \$620 pp

Saturday October 25

Personalised 4WD Tours

Coongie Lakes & The Cooper Creek (7 days) - \$1925 pp

Sunday June 1

Sky-trek & The Flinders (5 days) - \$975 pp

Saturday June 14

Yorke Peninsula & Southern Flinders (5 days) - \$975 pp

Thursday October 2

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

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Australian Commando Memorial



During World War II the Tidal River area of Wilson's Promontory was closed to the public and No.7 Infantry Training Centre for army commandos was established in February 1941.

The location was chosen because of the rugged terrain and its remoteness from civilisation.

The title "No. 7 Infantry Training Centre" was a cover to hide the fact that "commando" training was taking place.

In 1940/41 the Australian Army needed to quickly reinforce our military strength in Australia. At that time our four AIF Infantry Divisions were overseas in the Middle East and then Malaya.

A British military mission, headed by Lt. Col. Mawhood, came to Australia in 1940, to assist with a strategy to reinforce the Australian Army. The outcome was to raise a number of Independent Companies.

Independent Companies were special units, which were much smaller than an Infantry Battalion. They were highly trained in raiding techniques, sabotage operations and conducting guerrilla warfare. They could operate for long periods in remote locations without normal lines of communication.

Volunteers were called for from the 1st Armoured Division and any AIF reinforcements still located in Australia.

Volunteers were told they would be involved in special duties in units where high level of physical fitness was required and a higher than normal level of danger was likely to be encountered.

One of the first tests at Commando Training at Wilson's Promontory was for new arrivals to climb Mt Oberon (558 metres). Those who failed to make it to the top were returned to their previous units.

Physical fitness was an essential component of training at the Commando School. Training included demolitions, sabotage, night movement and operations, infantry minor tactics, patrolling, setting of ambushes, scouting, weapon training, and operating solo or in small parties

There were initially eight Independent Companies and these were often referred to as "Commandos". The men of these independent companies saw themselves as carrying out

independent guerilla operations and did not appreciate the term Commandos which they believed was the role of the British Commandos in Europe.

In late 1943, Australian Army Headquarters decided to amalgamate the divisional cavalry regiments from the 2nd AIF infantry divisions with the independent companies and re-designate them initially as "Independent Companies".

They then became known as "Cavalry (Commando) Squadron"; but this soon changed to "Commando Squadron"

Section 29 of the National Parks Act requires that the cairn at Tidal River commemorating wartime commando training be maintained. The Army buildings at Tidal River became a holiday village after the war.

The road into the area was finally sealed in 1970/71.

Coober Pedy goes Solar

Australia's largest solar power station is to be built at Coober Pedy, in South Australia's midnorth, to provide more than 10 per cent of the city's electricity needs.



Coober Pedy was chosen because it is not connected to the electricity grid and gets all its power from diesel generators. The solar power station will cut diesel use in the town by 520,000 litres, saving 1,500 tonnes of greenhouse gases.

The new power station is expected to begin generating electricity by the end of 2009.

For the scrabble players!

This is very clever It was devised by someone who is deadly at Scrabble.

DORMITORY:

When you rearrange the letters becomes
DIRTY ROOM

PRESBYTERIAN:=BEST IN PRAYER

ASTRONOMER= MOON STARER

DESPERATION=A ROPE ENDS IT

THE EYES=THEY SEE

GEORGE BUSH=HE BUGS GORE

THE MORSE CODE = HERE COME DOTS

SLOT MACHINES=CASH LOST IN ME

ANIMOSITY= IS NO AMITY