



Desert Sky News



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

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For the past two months the residents of Birdsville in the far south-west of Queensland have been cut off by road in all directions, because of floodwaters in the Diamantina River system.



Roseberth Station sits 30 metres above the Diamantina River as flood water surrounds it on three sides

The river has peaked four times and in between the rises there have been small opportunities for people to take vehicles out and bring supplies of fresh food and fuel into town.

Barry Gaffney is the Deputy Mayor of the Diamantina Shire Council, he says, the flood has been a bit unique this year.

"We had an unusual rain event out of that [Gulf rain] as well and we got an immediate flood from local water; and so far we've had four [flood] peaks including the one here now, that's gone above six metres and that's from early January until mid-march, so it's a long time."

"Normally to get a good flood here we need flooding in the Farrars Creek system which heads up on the eastern side of Stonehenge and Jundah but that wasn't so this year, all our water has basically come from local rain and from water that fell around the Kynuna area and the Winton areas and certainly

further down the river at Diamantina lakes," he explained.

He said people generally will be glad to see the water go, but he said that the overall benefits for the pastoral industry and the community in the times to come, far outweigh the little bit of inconvenience with the roads, mosquitoes, sandflies and the odd snake.

"But we love to have it because water is life out here you know, the birds and the fish and the trees and everything love it as well, so it's part of life," said Mr Gaffney.

The town is slowly coming out of the isolation period .

Juggling supply trucks in over the river has been tricky for the Birdsville business people, as there has only been a couple of opportunities to use the roads in between the flood peaks.

"The last flood peak was the longest one," said Mr Gaffney. "It was out for three weeks here and you wouldn't believe it, just as it came in - the road opened up here but the Cooper Creek went out in Windorah and that's where our supply truck was coming from."

"Nevertheless we were lucky enough to get another truck up from Adelaide and he got here last Friday (March 6), just as this flood got here and there was probably about 0.4 metres and rising fairly fast, so he didn't come into town."

So the people in Birdsville had to take their 4WD's across and unloaded all the milk and vegetables and other goods and ferried everything into town.

"So we fluked it this time round," he said.

Mr Gaffney said the commercial airline that brings passengers in and out at the moment use a Dash 8 and they're able to bring some freight in as well.

"So if there's something you need like tomatoes or bananas or something like that you can get them out on the plane, so that's pretty good."



Avgas

fuel for aircraft has been the other major difficulty with the flood lasting so long.

"The avgas situation was fairly limited here prior to the last flood, but they were lucky enough to get a truck in between the two floods."

"Windorah just opened up and the truck got out here and went back and this river closed, so we're lucky enough to do that," he said.

Long term Birdsville residents though, do seem to wonder a bit what all the fuss is about in regards to isolation with floodwaters.

Mr Gaffney said one of the biggest things that changed life in Birdsville was the building of the traffic bridge over the river in the early '80s.

"People take it for granted these days when the flood goes down and the water goes back into the channels the roads are open but go back 25 years ago, that wasn't so - you still had another month or six weeks before it went down to crossing height, which was only a metre above flow level," he explained.

He said the bridge is one of the biggest assets apart from the communication system which was upgraded in the '90s.

"Prior to the '90s the town didn't have a telephone system as such; we had radio link but that wasn't very good in the stormy seasons," he said.

Apart from being Deputy Mayor, Barry with his wife Narelle operate the Mobile Service and Post Office in Birdsville.

The above article is part of an ABC radio interview 28th March 2009

Editorial

It is now just over a month since water began flowing into Lake Eyre from the Warburton Creek.

A couple of weeks ago the Weather Bureau advice stated that "water will continue to flow into Lake Eyre for several months". This forecast has now been downgraded to "water will continue to flow into Lake Eyre during April". There is talk it will only reach 30% capacity, and birdlife is confined to "islands" within the Lake.

As we do not want to take anyone on a tour with false expectations (eg water lapping the shoreline), we are offering the opportunity for a plane flight over Lake Eyre on both our William Creek/Painted Desert and Birdsville/Innamincka trips.

If demand is such just for a plane flight over Lake Eyre, we would arrange a 3 day trip in the first week in June. The itinerary would be Adelaide to Copley, a day at Marree including plane flight, then return from Copley to Adelaide. The sole purpose of the trip would be the plane flight to view the water in Lake Eyre.

If you are interested, please let us know.

enews@desertskytrips

We now publish a separate electronic newsletter on a monthly basis!

Desert Sky "enews" is intended as a supplement to our quarterly newsletter, and provides a means to distribute current information more quickly. It is also a good way to "keep in touch" with the growing number of people who have internet access.



The electronic newsletter commenced in February, and two editions have been published to date.

Copies of "enews" can be found on our website www.desertskytrips.com - Click "Newsletters", or you may subscribe directly by completing the "join our email newsletter" box on the home page!



Talking of technology—anyone into Twitter (a social networking site) might like to check out "desertboi2" for an update of "what we are doing right now".

Kangaroo Island trips

Our year commenced with two trips to Kangaroo Island—the first with the Tea Tree Gully Probus Club, a happy and caring group. The trip was along the lines of our regular itinerary, but also included a combined dinner meeting with the newly formed Probus Club of Kingscote.

President of the Tea Tree Gully Club, Bob Zoerner, presented the Kingscote Club with a pictorial record of his club's activities and a copy of the booklet "Tea Tree Gully Probus Club Inc. History". The Tea Tree Gully Club recently celebrated its 25th Anniversary.

A Desert Sky record was set with 7 of the party climbing and reaching the top of the highest sand dune in the Little Sahara. This is an area of spectacular vivid white sand dunes, surrounded by natural bush vegetation. Climbing over the first ridge, you are confronted by a second and much higher dune, which when scaled, does not expose the coast as one would expect, but more sand dunes flanked by natural Australian bushland.

The challenge now is to hire ski boards from the nearby KI Outdoor Action and set a record for a more dignified descent!

The second trip included a lady travelling from Perth. She was caught up in the QANTAS baggage handler strike and eventually left Perth Airport on the Monday minus her luggage! The arrangement was that her luggage would be sent to Kingscote and the Wisteria Lodge Motel. After some rather anxious moments, we were able to celebrate the arrival of the luggage 4 days later on Thursday night!



Enid & Elaine make it to the top!

The record set by the first group for climbing Little Sahara Sand Dune still stands, however it must be mentioned that 3 members of the second trip climbed to the top of the Dune, and at the time of the attempt it was around 32°C

Once again - a great meal on our return at the Cape Jervis Tavern. It certainly makes things easier to have a meal after the ferry crossing, and let the traffic clear.

ADVANCE NOTICE—CHRISTMAS 2009

We are delighted that our Christmas trip this year will be on Kangaroo Island, staying at the comfortable Wisteria Lodge Motel. Whilst some of the activities will be along the lines of our regular itinerary, there will be.....

Some added features!!!

Dry Lakes Racers—Lake Gairdner

The 2009 Dry Lakes Racers Speed Week was held on Lake Gairdner 9th –13th March.

Access to the Lake was delayed by KIA motors filming an advertisement on the Friday beforehand.(They were supposed to finish at lunchtime, but did not leave until sunset). Preparation started Saturday 7th, with dragging of the Lake Surface. The salt was very hard, about an inch thick with a dry layer of soil underneath, then more salt.

Racing was abandoned on Monday 9th, as strong winds overnight had pushed water onto the track from the start to the 2 mile marker, and the 5th mile was very wet.

Next day, Tuesday—track conditions had improved and 28 short course “passes” were held. A full day of racing Wednesday, although only on the short course again with 137 passes.

Thursday was an almost full day of racing except for a couple of hours in the afternoon when a large storm threatened to destroy everything in it’s path. Fortunately the storm travelled south and dumped 6 inches of rain on the property adjoining the south end of the Lake. High winds and rain caused havoc at the main camp, and there were only 92 passes for the day.

Friday there were 74 runs before the crew packed up around 1.30pm.

Fastest speed was 227.373mph recorded by Alan Fountain in his 1950 Lakester Belly Tank. This also broke the previous record (211.50) for a vehicle in the same class.

A brave fellow called John Lynch has recorded Lake Gairdner’s fastest time –301mph - (that’s 484k/ph) in 2005.

Snippets from Birdsville

The Simpson Desert National Park in south-west Queensland will remain closed for several more weeks, due to continued flooding in the outback.

Ranger Don Rowlands says the park has been closed over summer because of the danger posed to tourists travelling in the remote region during the hot weather.

Well we've got record floods out in the Georgina - or Eyre Creek as it's known as it passes Birdsville out in the desert ... there's been two rises out in the Georgina at this end and some of those big lakes are full to capacity," he said.

"We won't be able to cross the desert I don't believe until the end of April, mid-May."

There have been reports of fewer waterbirds in South Australia's Lake Eyre this year, and the prolonged drought in the region is being partly blamed.

But Diamantina Mayor Robbie Dare says that is not the case around Bedourie and Birdsville, with ibis, pelicans and other birds in huge numbers due to plentiful food.

“It's definitely a sight to see and anyone going down there just pull up at any creek crossing and you'll see millions of birds - fair dinkum it is unreal.”

Innamincka News

Rosemary and Warren have been managing the Innamincka Trading Post since June 2008. Their arrival in Innamincka was delayed when they were stranded in Birdsville for four days by road closures following heavy rain.



For three years prior to coming to Innamincka, Rosemary and Warren managed an Aboriginal store on Mt Swan Station, a cattle property 300km north-east of Alice Springs. They say that although they are no strangers to the outback, Innamincka presents a different set of living conditions to those they experienced in the Northern Territory.

Both Rosemary and Warren enjoy the variety of visitors they meet in their job, and that despite their delayed arrival under trying circumstances last June, they really love the area, and look forward to a long and fruitful association with Innamincka and its community.

Their feathered friend “Dork”, also loves Innamincka. He is a special favourite of the female staff from the hotel next door, and is a very sociable bird. His raucous greeting of “Hello Dork” to all and sundry adds a friendly atmosphere to the Trading Post.

Visiting Innamincka recently was snake handler, cameleer and adventurer Ryan McMillan, (known to some as the Solo Man” for his exploits on the Cooper some years ago).

Ryan is returning to work at the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, where many would have met him as a driver and guide on one of the Ridge Top Tour vehicles.

He is planning a camel trek into the Simpson Desert later this year.



Ryan with his pet pythons

Coongie Lakes

The manager of the S. Kidman owned Nappa Merrie Station, Peter Degoumios, says floodwaters in the Lower Thomson River and Cooper Creek have just reached his boundary near Innamincka.

The water has travelled from above Longreach in Queensland's central west and he's expecting it to spread out over a 15 to 20 km wide front as it crosses Nappa Merrie.

The Station was stocked in January, and it is expected the country will produce a good growth of clover. The waterbird diversity at Coongie Lakes is high for an arid wetland. It is a significant feeding, resting and breeding site for an enormous number of birds that migrate to the area.

This personalised 4WD tour includes Coongie Lakes, Cooper Creek and the Corner Country area. The return home from Broken Hill is via an early pastoral route through Harriedale, Loch Lilly Station, Oakvale and Quandong to Burra.

We have 2 seats available on this 7 day fully accommodated trip departing 21st May.

Tumby Bay/ Eyre Peninsula

This 5 day trip includes a SeaSA Ferry crossing from Wallaroo to Lucky Bay Using the Tumby Bay Marina Motel as our base for three nights, we explore attractions on Eyre Peninsula—including Trinity Haven, Poonindie, Port Lincoln, and Sleaford Bay.

The West Coast has further attractions as we travel through Cummins, on our way to Coles Point, Greenly Beach, Dutton Bay and Coffin Bay.

Our return home is via the Lincoln Highway through Arno Bay, Cowell and Whyalla for an overnight stop in Pt Augusta. The departure date for this trip is 18th November.

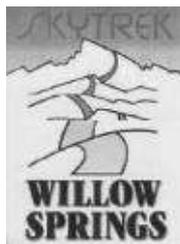
Sky Trek

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.

We have 2 seats available on this trip departing August 28th.

Cooper Creek

We have some seats still available on our 7 day Cooper Creek trip departing June 24th.

This trip travels along the entire Strzelecki Track (from Lyndhurst to Innamincka), explores the historic sites of Camp LXV (Burke & Wills Dig Tree), Burke's and Will's markers, and the Innamincka area before heading to the Corner Country of Cameron Corner, Tibooburra and Milparinka.

Accommodation at Innamincka is at the delightful Cooper Creek Homestay, the Granites Motel in Tibooburra and Old Willyama Motor Inn Broken Hill.

An interesting trip that will return you visually impacted and educationally enriched.

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

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

Wednesday November 18

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

Friday May 1

Christmas 2009

Kangaroo Island

(5 days)
Wednesday December 23

Personalised 4WD Tours

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

Thursday May 21

Sky-trek & The Flinders (4 days) - \$995 pp

Friday August 28

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

Tuesday October 27

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

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