



# Desert Sky News

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



Volume 13 Issue 1

Telephone : 08 8356 1874

April 2011

## **L**and of The Long Wide Flood Plain!

Dorothy McKellar has been proven right again - we live in a land of drought and flooding rains, and presently there are a number of northern South Australia roads either closed or 4WD only!

Moderate to major flood levels are current on the Georgina, Eyre, Diamantina and Cooper Creeks and are rising in several locations. The town of Birdsville is isolated and expected to be until the end of March. The causeway at Innamincka is still closed due to flooding of the Cooper Creek which is rising at Windorah with a current flood level of 5.1m and more water heading in that direction along the Barcoo and Thompson Rivers. This adds to a previous flood pulse which is already downstream from Innamincka along the Cooper Creek.

Lake Eyre North currently has approximately 70% coverage of water although it is only shallow for the majority but in Belt Bay it is estimated to be up to 1.9m deep and Madigan Gulf up to 300mm deep and static. Lake Eyre South is considered full with up to 2.5m of water at the deepest point.

Most of this water has come from local rain being fed in by the local creek system. Small flows are currently coming from the Macumba, Neales, Clayton, Frome and Warburton into Lake Eyre North and several creeks such as the Stuart, Screechowl, Warrina, Gregory and Margaret are trickling into the south lake.

The outback has come alive for the third year in a row and is already looking amazing with many plants beginning to bloom along with abundant animal and birdlife.

The latest Bulletin from Department Environment & Natural Resources mentions most campgrounds and the Innamincka causeway may be closed until at least June. Coongie Lakes National Park may be inaccessible for 2011

On this basis, I have contacted all who enquired about our Coongie Lakes trips and deferred departures until 2012.

### *Recent Trips!*

A busy March has seen us take trips to:

- Dares Hill
- Wilson's Promontory
- Kangaroo Island
- Mungo National Park

William Dare was the first white man to stand on a high and craggy hill known later as Dares Hill in the northern Flinders Ranges. Near the foot of the hill he built his homestead among dense woodland by the Piltimittappa Creek.

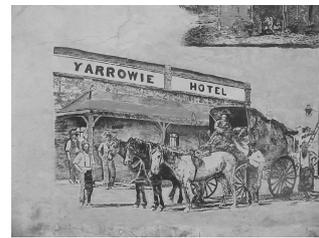
Our journey to this interesting part of the mid north began when we "Travelled in Goyder's Footsteps" . After visiting the superbly preserved historic town of Mintaro, we entered the Clare Valley through Sevenhill and Clare then a small detour to Spalding, Gulnare and Gladstone.



At Laura we found the statue of C J Dennis (the Australian poet who was born in Auburn, and spent much of his boyhood in Laura),

was missing from it's usual place outside the Dick Biles Gallery. It has been moved to the median strip in the main street and now welcomes visitors entering the Town from the Gladstone side.

We later learned that it was Dick Bile's wish the statue be relocated in the main street, and he was able to see this come true a few days before he passed away.



On to Appila, and although the main street was closed for road widening, we were able

to see the excellent murals on the CFS building next to the Hotel.

One of the great things about touring is finding the unexpected!

It was nearing lunch time, and we were on the lookout for a quiet place to stop, and we found it at Appilla Springs, a short distance out of Appila on the Tarcowie Road.

The local people have done a fantastic job in putting picnic facilities there without disturbing the natural beauty and tranquility of the place.



At Pekina, we made a detour to Magnetic Hill, and yes! - it still works, and the vehicle was seemingly rolling backwards up the incline to the large "magnet" positioned near the roadside.

**A new itinerary!!  
The Sapphire Coast  
See details page 4**

## Dig Tree 150th Anniversary



The Burke and Wills Historical Society had planned an event at the Dig Tree (Camp LXV) to coincide with the return of Burke, Wills and King from the Gulf Of Carpentaria to the Camp on Thursday 21st April.

Bearing in mind that they had only 4 days prior buried their companion Charlie Gray in a Lignum Swamp somewhere to the north, their sense of isolation and hopelessness at finding the Depot camp abandoned is so tangible that we can still sense and almost taste it across the decades.

Due to flooding in the Cooper Creek, the prospect of any organized event looks increasingly unlikely.

Vice President Richard Corke said "If it is at all possible to get to the Dig Tree, I know there will be a "hard core" of die-hard enthusiasts who will be on site - but the style of event that we had hoped to organize will simply not be likely at all. At the moment we are pulling up short of saying that the event is cancelled - we will give things another couple of weeks before we make that call."

## Snake Island (G'day Cobra?)

I was chatting with Lorraine from the Meeniyan Motel, and she loaned me an interesting book on Snake Island, which is just off Port Albert on the South Gippsland Vic coast.



Since the early 1840s, when Europeans first came to Victoria's southern coasts, cattle have grazed Snake Island. Sheltered from the pounding waves of Bass Strait by Wilson's Promontory, the 3500 hectare island holds a special place in the cultural and economic life of South Gippsland.

The grazing of cattle on Snake Island was and still is an event carried out nowadays by farmers, stock & horse men, women and children since the mid 1800's. Getting cattle to and from 'The Island' meant driving them approximately 10 to 12 kilometres across the 'Middle Ground' section of the Lewis Channel at the NE end of Corner Inlet.

It involves getting in the water at Port Welshpool and moving across the swashway in a horseshoe fashion. The most treacherous part of the drive is the access to Little Snake Island, where cattle and horses are required to lift themselves up on to dry land and from there push on to the yards and huts of the bigger Snake Island.

In recent years cattle are moved on and off 'The Island' in fortnightly periods that are timed to coincide with low tides and the darkest phase of the moon.

The book is titled "Snake Island and The Cattlemen of the Sea" by Cheryl Glowrey.

## News from Innamincka

*From Julie and Geoff—Cooper Creek Homestay!*

Cooper Creek peaked at 5.98m and although it is currently falling slowly, there is another rise expected soon. We are still dealing with "things that go bump (**and bite**) in the night".



The phenomenal growth prompted by this year's rain has caused population explosions in animal, amphibian, reptile, mammal, insect, fish, crustacean and bird populations.

*Above : Nappa Merrie Bridge Feb. 2011*

While this is excellent, we *do not welcome* the introduced mice and rats which are thriving around Innamincka. A mouse nipped Geoff on the finger in bed one night. Now all rooms have been fitted with mouse-proof strips and doors are kept firmly closed. There is also a rat plague on the way, although I have only seen one so far.

I wasn't bitten, but the dormant Chicken-pox virus which has lurked in my body for forty years, manifested as shingles recently. The unsightly itchy and painful rash is now fading. I finished my stint as a shop-attendant at the Trading Post when the managers, Rosie and Warren returned from their New Zealand holiday. When Bill, who was acting manager, called Geoff to do some maintenance work he sustained a red-back spider bite. Typically of Geoff, he finished the job, **then**, applied an ice-pack. Although the bite wasn't life-threatening, the unpleasant symptoms persisted for almost a week and made him uncomfortable.

Although we have returned to work after our brief retirement, I still have time to talk to my plant and animal friends and to indulge my hobby of photography.

We are currently hosting a group of pipe-line workers who work a 28-day /10-day shift. They anticipate that the job will last until at least July.

It is good to see Cooper Creek Home-stay being utilized as we intended when we built it.

We may also take in casual bookings during the times when our NACAP guests are on their break—just to keep us occupied and active !

Ali and Chris are taking over Cooper Creek Homestay in 2012, so we will spend the next few months researching options for the next stage of our life.

This time, we think retirement IS definitely an option.....

Cheers for now. Julie and Geoff.

### Cooper Creek Ferry

The Cooper Creek punt is expected to be in operation again next month, as more floodwater makes its way along the Cooper Creek from Queensland.

The Transport Department said works have been completed on the punt to allow for longer vehicles to travel on the Birdsville Track.

The Department's regional manager, Jeff Dodd, said it could be in operation for more than half of this year, because of the amount of water on its way.

"I do understand it is significant and it's going to possibly close the road for four to six months and I think they're thinking that the ferry will have to be operating until October - November when it does get here," he said.

In last month's email newsletter I suggested a 4 day trip incorporating a plane flight over Lake Eyre, then heading up the Birdsville track for an overnight stop at Mungerannie.

This would mean a trip on the ferry over Cooper Creek!!

Let me know if you are interested!

### Lake Eyre trips

Our popular Lake Eyre trip is offered again this year, with departures commencing May 16th.



The 3 day package at \$900 per person, includes two nights accommodation at the Copley Hotel, a oneand a half hour plane flight over Lake Eyre, plus all meals and touring.

Travel is in our very comfortable 4WD vehicle, through the Clare Valley to the Flinders Ranges and returning through Orroroo and the Gilbert Valley.

Among the attractions we visit are the ruins of Farina township, the Ochre cliffs, and Talc Alf.

Departures are listed on the back page of this newsletter, and other dates may be available—give us a ring for details!

### Murray/Darling flooding



I have just returned from our Mungo National Park trip, where we use Wentworth as a "base". The river is flowing strongly due to continued big flows in the Darling River which joins the Murray at Wentworth near the SA border. Also

significant rainfall in the Murray catchment during the last few months has continued to pump well above average flows down the Murray. It took us by surprise to see the flooding in the picnic area (above), and access to the observation tower was also cut.

Flows through Lock 10 at Wentworth are currently around 31 megalitres per day, with 446,000ML stored at Lake Victoria.

The Thegoa Lagoon and Reserve (the boundary of which is adjacent the Two Rivers Motel) was also holding more water than I have seen on any of our previous trips.



The lagoon is approximately 30 metres above sea level with a surface area of around 80 hectares and a capacity of more than 600 Megalitres. The floodplain Reserve bordered covers approximately 445 hectares.

I mentioned Lake Victoria and the Rufus River. Driving from there towards Renmark, travellers pass a rather uncommon tree ..(left) It is adorned with various items of apparel!

### Moving around!

- The Wisteria Lodge Motel Kingscote has been updated and is now know as the Kangaroo Island Seaside Inn. It was good to catch up with new manager Chris and son Alex.
- We wish Merryn, Doug and family all the best as they leave the Two Rivers Motel on 10th April. Whilst not moving very far (Buronga), they will have new interests.
- Many will remember the great times we had with Doris and Andrew at the Skenes Creek Motor Lodge. New owners Lorna and Trevor made us feel most welcome on our return from Wilson's Promontory.

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## Showcasing our Itineraries 2011 !!



### Flinders Ranges & Arkaroola (5 days) \$1950 pp

**Monday September 5**  
**Sunday September 18**

Rawnsley Park, Wilpena Pound, Bunyeroo Valley, Brachina Gorge, Blinman, Arkaroola, Ridgetop Tour, Nooldoonooldoona Waterhole, Gammon Ranges, Moralana Scenic Drive.



### Flinders Ranges & Skytrek (4 days) - \$1400 pp

**Saturday August 27**

Rawnsley Park, Wilpena Pound, Willow Springs Station, Skytrek, Arkapena Scenic Adventure & Chace Range Spectacular, Moralana Scenic Drive.



### Birdsville & Innamincka (9 days) - \$3250pp

**Saturday July 9 & Friday August 5**

Clare Valley, Leigh Creek, Marree, Mungerannie, Birdsville, Innamincka, Cameron Corner, Sturt National Park, Tibbooburra, Broken Hill, Old Pastoral route to Burra, Adelaide.



### Lake Eyre (3 days) - \$900 pp Includes Plane flight!

**Monday May 16 & Monday May 23rd**  
**Monday May 30**  
**Friday June 17 and Monday June 27**  
**Monday July 25**

Clare Valley, Leigh Creek, Marree, One and a half hour plane flight over Lake Eyre, Farina Ruins, Ochre Cliffs, Hawker, Orroroo, Terowie, Burra.



### The Sapphire Coast (8 days) - \$2950 pp

**Sunday October 23**

Portland, Great Ocean Road, Otway Tree Top Walk, Apollo Bay, Metung, Lakes Entrance, Eden, Twofold Bay, Pambula, Merimbula, Bega, Victorian coastal towns, Meeniyan, Camperdown, Dunkeld, The Coorong.



### Kangaroo Island (4 days) \$1650pp

**Tuesday November 15**

**Tuesday November 29**  
**(Includes Sealink ferry)**

Penneshaw, Antechamber Bay, Cape Willoughby, American River, Kingscote, Flinders Chase National Park, Cape Borda, Admirals Arch, Cape De Coudic, Seal Bay, Emu Bay, Stokes Bay, Snelling Beach, Western River Cove.



### Dares Hill Circuit (2 days) \$650pp

**Saturday 1st October**

Gilbert Valley, Terowie, Peterborough, Franklyn, Ketchowla, Dares Hill, Mt Bryan, Clare Valley



### Mungo National Park (5 days) - \$1525 pp

**Monday May 9**

The Riverland, Wentworth, Old Zanci Station, Mungo Woolshed, Walls of China, "Grand Canyon", Perry Sandhills, Paddle Steamer through Lock 11 Mildura, Red Cliffs, Hattah Kulykne National Park, Lake Victoria, Rufus River.



### Tumby Bay & The Eyre Peninsula (5 days) \$1525pp

**Saturday October 15**

Port Germein, Arno Bay, Port Neill, Trinity Haven Scenic Drive, Poonindie, Port Lincoln, Sleaford Bay, Tod Reservoir, Cummins, Mt Hope, Point Drummond, Greenly Beach, Dutton Bay, Coffin Bay, Koppio Museum. Enjoy a Clydesdale Horse and trolley ride!

Return is via Horrock's Pass to the Flinders Ranges, Orroroo and Burra.



### Limestone Coast & The Coonawarra (5 days) \$1500pp

**Sunday November 6**

Tintinara, Mundulla, Naracoorte Caves, Penola, Mary McKillop Centre, Kalangadoo, Tantanoola, Pt McDonnell, Cape Nothumberland, Mt Burr, Millicent, Robe, The Coorong.

During this trip there is opportunity to visit a number of wineries, including Rymill Coonawarra, Di Giorgio, and Mt Benson.

Other personalised tours  
can be  
arranged in our 4WD Toyota  
Landcruiser vehicle, with a  
maximum of 4 passengers!

#### How to contact us:

✉ **PO Box 683  
GLENELG SA 5045**

☎ **08 8356 1874**

✉ **enquiries@desertskytours.com**

🌐 **www.desertskytours.com**