

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB
BARGO DINGO SANCTUARY REPORT
THURSDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2023



Nooka!

Today really needed to be fine and we were fortunately treated to a stunning cloudless day. 28 of us on this trip after a couple of members called in unwell. Malcolm had us on board his coach by the appointed 8.30 am and we were off to Bargo approx. 100 km from Sydney city.

Elizabeth had planned to have morning tea at Picton Botanic Gardens, but had found out since that a coach would not be able to park close by, so she changed the venue to the Curry Reserve at Elderslie which was much larger than it first appeared and was enjoyable enough. The large covered seating area and clean toilets were all that we needed for the relaxing hour here. Plus, it was adjacent to the Camden Visitor Information Centre which some of us ventured over to, and there was a large field of vegetables growing across the road.

The next part of the trip was particularly pretty and interesting. We crossed the Upper Nepean River bridge to find ourselves on the Old Hume Hwy which led us through historic Camden and its lovely old buildings – a very pleasant suburb. Between there and Picton was Razorback Mountain and it's hard to imagine that, prior to December 1980, this was the main route for heavy vehicles from Sydney to Melbourne, and it's apparently been improved since then! After a few hairy corners, we found ourselves in the quaint Picton township. We passed the turnoffs to the very popular NSW Rail Museum at Thirlmere which might make a great day out for our club one day. On through Tahmoor, over the Bargo River to the northern part of Bargo.

By 11 am, we'd arrived at the Dingo Sanctuary, but gates to the property were securely locked and it took Elizabeth a few minutes to rustle up someone. Bob was our main guide, aided by the lovely Ella and Angus – all volunteers, and it was just our group visiting. For the next hour, they took us around the several enclosures, introducing us to the 30+ dingoes all with names, with Bob providing comprehensive commentary and hand-outs. Tiny extracts taken from those several pages include:



The aim of the Sanctuary (a public company and registered charity) is to save and preserve the pure Dingo and educate the public about the pivotal role the dingo plays in our fragile ecosystem, as it is the top order predator and facilitates in keeping in balance the lives of all wildlife. These days, Lucille Ellem is the President, but the Sanctuary was originally formed in October 1976 by Berenice Walters to promote better understanding and knowledge of Australia's Native Dog. They are also a breeding colony, only issuing puppies to Wildlife Parks and Zoos.

The Dingo was a close companion of the original inhabitants of Australia. Forced into a feral existence following the European invasion, the breed has been naturally selected for its potential to survive in the wild. The dingo may have been fortunate in becoming a feral animal over the past two centuries, as it has been able to develop naturally into an incredibly efficient survival machine of beauty, brains and health. It is a highly skilled hunting dog which is not suitable for pet owners generally. There are three types of dingo: those rippling muscled dogs from the tropical far north, the fox-like dog of the colder southern mountain regions or the smaller/finer dog of the arid regions.



Bob informed us that pure dingoes will breed once a year between March and June. The gestation period is approximately nine weeks (similar to domestic dogs) with the resultant litter producing usually between four and six pups. They come in different colours: ginger being the main, black/black and tan, white (rare), brindle and patchy. Pure dingoes are an "intermediary" between wolves and domestic dog breeds.

He also talked about the bushfire that came through the property in December 2019. Very fortunately, they managed to get all dogs out safely (one did burn his paw on hot ash afterwards), but the large shed, enclosures and vegetation were destroyed. Fortunately, the Sanctuary was rebuilt and finally re-opened in August 2022.



As we strolled around, we found most animals were shy and stayed right away from the wire fences surrounding their large pens, plus they weren't keen on groups of people and especially those wearing sunglasses! However, when we'd originally booked on this trip, we were offered the "Up Close and Personal Encounter" which maybe a dozen of us jumped at. While the rest sat or browsed the little gift shop, we certainly enjoyed this encounter with the beautiful boy Nooka. Each of us was able to sit with him for several minutes – some taking more than one opportunity to do so - and it was an amazing experience. He was extremely well-behaved (obviously chosen for this reason) but was definitely restless and running out of patience by the end of our time with him!

A bit more shopping done here and, at 12.45, it was time to say our goodbyes to these devoted people and head to the grounds of Cataract Dam for our sausage sizzle lunch. This drive was longer than we thought – possibly 45 mins – and we were getting peckish by the time we arrived. Even though she wasn't able to book it, Elizabeth had informed the authorities that we'd be using the large shelter shed which comes equipped with barbecues, a sink, and instant and very convenient boiling water. The few people already sitting in there happily eating their sandwiches, were rudely awakened and quickly moved elsewhere when they saw our coachload heading towards them.

While Gary fired up two barbecues for the (parboiled) sausages and onions, tablecloths were put on tables, plates, pre-lunch snacks and drinks (including red and white wine) were distributed to everyone, and huge, absolutely divine bread rolls were prepared and at the ready with salad and sauces. In the middle of all this, Lyn managed to sit in a huge Ibis-sized poo that the bird had deposited on one of the seats – which took a LOT of cleaning up! All was quiet for a short time while we munched on our yummy sausage/onion rolls. During this time, Elizabeth prepared tasty lemon butter tarts for dessert. Of course, there was also plenty of tea and coffee. Afterwards, some of us went walking, but it was a fair way downhill to the dam itself so don't think anyone actually got there. As well, the road to the dam couldn't be accessed by coach, so that was disappointing. Beryl did manage some pics of water/dam glimpses. Anyway, it was a pleasant couple of hours and we departed at 3.30 pm.



We headed home through pretty Appin where another large housing estate is imminent, but the koala habitat has fortunately been saved, then through Bradbury to the M31 at Campbelltown and eventually on to the M5 as far as Beverly Hills. Heather and Karen won the Lucky Seat Prizes and we arrived at Penshurst around 4.40 pm. A big thank you to Elizabeth and to all those who assisted on the day, including Rick who assisted Gary and did a lot of the cleaning up afterwards. It had been a really excellent day.