

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB

CHRISTMAS IN JULY (IN JUNE)

Riverwood Downs, Monkerai

TUESDAY 27/WEDNESDAY 28 JUNE 2023



Hawkesbury River for morning tea. Elizabeth recounted the drama of the fruit cake and her oven blowing up in the early stages of cooking and when her neighbour (who had no idea what he was doing) fortunately came to the rescue. Anyway, we enjoyed a slice or two whilst taking in the scenic views. Left at 10 am and it was about two hours, with roadwork on Bucketts Way, to Stroud and lunch at their Country Club.

DAY ONE: There were 31 members on this trip plus our regular coach captain, Malcolm. Leaving Peshurst just after 8 am, the weather was fine and peak-hour traffic not too bad as he travelled to West Pennant Hills and the amazing 9 km NorthConnex tunnel connecting us to the M1. Once there, it was a short distance to the Mooney Mooney Point Rest Area a popular spot on the



Our host in the club's Three Birdies Restaurant, normally closed in the early part of the week, had very kindly agreed to feed us with abundant quantities of sandwiches, hot finger food and cakes/biscuits/fruit/tea & coffee. We couldn't have asked for a nicer lunch and there was no way we could've eaten it all! And to top it off, the views over their nine-hole golf course to the distant mountains were magnificent. Afterwards, a coach tour of the town had been organised, meeting up with local guide, Alan, on Silo Hill overlooking the 25 ha Stroud Common and wonderful views of the district. Alan spoke of the history here, and taken from the Stroud Heritage Walk brochure: *Silo Hill was named after*

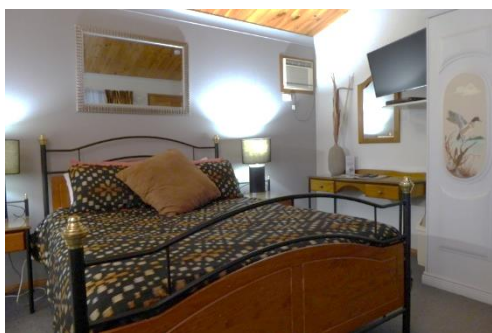
the eight inground brick-lined silos (now closed for public safety) built into the hill by convicts in 1841 as grain stores for the A.A. Company. Each bell-shaped silo is six metres deep by five metres wide and stored 10,000 bushels of grain. Originally two long roofs covered the area. Also on the hill are two Crimean War cannons, sent originally from England in 1866 (destined for Bare Island, La Perouse) to defend Sydney against a possible attack by the Russians. They found their way to Silo Hill in the early 1900's when they were offered to councils as public ornaments.



Alan rejoined us with his daughter-in-law for a tour through Quambi House, a gorgeous two-storey home now a museum since 1988. From their brochure: *Initially a slab school room and schoolmaster's residence built in 1831 and known as Lady Parry's School, it also functioned as a place of worship before the church was built. The current two-storeys date from 1841 and remained a school until 1900, then rented out as a private residence until 1973. The building was saved from demolition in 1975 by the Stroud & District Historical Society whose members restored it and it is now owned by MidCoast Council.* Our final stop with Alan was Stroud Court

House and again from their brochure: It was constructed in 1877 to replace the original 1840s police station and courthouse. Police quarters and cells directly behind the building were demolished in the 1930's. The court house is now a museum, containing original red cedar courtroom furniture, some fascinating displays and records of the town's colonial past, and is run by the Historical Society. Some of our members made the most of their time here with (hopefully) their one and only chance to sit in the Prisoners Dock! So many other historic buildings in this lovely town, but it was time to get moving to our accommodation around 30 km away.





How Malcolm found his way to Riverwood Downs is amazing. He said he'd visited once before, but there was a myriad of dirt roads (tracks in places) which he negotiated with ease, arriving around 3.45. We were greeted by the owner, her daughter and another couple who showed us to our warm, cosy and comfortable rooms where mood lighting, air-con and electric blankets had already been switched on. A little time to get settled before heading out to investigate the property and the river before darkness. A popular venue for weddings, extra accommodation had been added since we were last here a few years

back. Unfortunately, in the fading light, we didn't spy the platypus family that we'd been made aware of, but did the next best thing and took refuge, with very reasonably priced drinks and complimentary nibbles, in their bar. 6 pm was a two-course Christmas Dinner - ample servings of roast meat and vegetables plus an apple crumble dessert. Then the handsomest Santa ever (well, since our Ted) arrived to rousing cheers and happily posed for photos whilst distributing bags of lollies.



DAY TWO: 7 am was a full and well-organised breakfast, before time to leave at 8 am on a dull, drizzly day. As it turned out, the damp weather wouldn't affect us too much. Back on the dirt tracks, then rough, winding bitumen roads as we made our way through Dungog which took about an hour. From there, it was back on the rough bitumen through East Gresford, with the road improving about 15 mins out of Singleton. During this time, Elizabeth ran her Christmas Quiz which was undoubtedly the hardest from any of our trips. Anyway, the smartest person on the coach was Elaine R. Arrived for a comfort stop at the Singleton Visitor Information Centre where we met our guide, Craig Benjamin, who would join us for the few hours planned in Denman. Craig runs several tours in the area, but his specialty is thoroughbred horse studs. As we drove to Denman, Craig, a former farmer of 30 years, remarked on how rain was badly needed in the Upper Hunter; a horse's favourite food, hay, is a popular crop in the area and is exported all over the world. Mining, too, creates 17,000 local jobs and there's at least 1,000 years' worth of coal left in the ground. Coal-mining is a controversial subject, but 24 km north-west of Singleton, we passed Yancoal, a Japanese coal mine which



produces high quality thermal coal as well as semi-soft coking coal. Employees work around the clock in a multi-pit open cut mine and, after it is prepared for sale, the coal is loaded onto trains to the coal terminal in Newcastle and shipped to international customers. Craig mentioned that there would be no more new coal mines and the old ones will keep going to the end of their leases - 30 to 40 years for some. We passed the disused (since 2014) coal-fired Redbank Power Station but it sounds like other uses will soon be found for the site. We were now on the B84, better known as the Golden Highway (313 km in total), which starts near Newcastle, leading all the way to Dubbo and was named after the region's canola growing.



Passing through other towns en-route, Warkworth (coal mining) and Jerrys Plains (cattle and horses), Craig explained that the Australian horse industry was worth \$52 billion and employed over 200,000 people. We eventually arrived at the Godolphin Horse Stud (Woodlands) near Denman. There was a brief pause at the gate for entry to be approved, before being free to drive around this beautiful property. Craig gave us a few facts: 300 brood mares here, many now in foal with the 1 August as their official birthday. There are two vets on site. Much later, foals are sent elsewhere to be broken in and then to training (Warwick Farm was mentioned). When asked about their outcome, Craig said that 30 - 40% end up as racehorses with 10% making it to the big time! On the drive around, we admired the life-size statue of the famous Octagon which was 24 years old when he passed away.





Craig also mentioned that horses are always buried here and not cremated, as this centuries-old tradition was seen as a mark of respect, a way to honour their contribution to society. Driving up a hill on the property to admire the views and for a group photo to be taken (see below), we spied a wedge-tailed eagle in the distance. More time was spent driving around, checking out some of the stud's buildings and admiring their new plastic



fence made from recycled plastic bottles. Looking very much like timber and expected to last 25-30 years, they are so much cheaper than the iron bark used up until now.

Back into Denman at 12.15 pm for lunch at the Denman Hotel (c.1900) where we enjoyed our pre-ordered meals. Afterwards, those that wished to get a little damp were welcome to wander around town, but it was necessary to leave at 1.45 pm to drop Craig in Singleton (via a slightly different route) before heading home. As we did so, we crossed the Hunter River the cause of the town's flooding in November 2021. Lots of cattle along the way, but Craig said that, sadly, most dairies had closed. Some sheep, wine-growing – Craig spoke about Durif an excellent red wine similar to a merlot, so we'll look forward to taste-testing that at some stage. Beautiful chocolate-coloured soil in the area. It was exactly an hour to Singleton with showers all the way. Singleton is home to over 25,000 people these days and has some lovely old homes. Back at the visitor centre, we said our goodbyes to Craig and, with a quick comfort stop down the highway at the Twin Servos and a return through the NorthConnex tunnel, it took three hours to Peshurst where we arrived a little after 6 pm. Jan L and Janice R won the Lucky Seat Prizes, and the Guess the Km Prize (a 746 km trip) went to Helen S who was the closest at 757 km. A really enjoyable couple of days.

