

SILO ART TRAILS, RIVER PORTS AND OUTBACK LANDSCAPES

SUNDAY 21 – MONDAY 29 MARCH 2021

DAY ONE: It had been a wet few days and was still pouring this morning, so we left at 7 am from the shelter of the Club in Penshurst Street. Our McDermott Chartours driver was Jeff who we'd known from his time at Pegasus Coaches, and it was great to see him again. After crossing the swollen Nepean River and admiring the mini waterfalls on the side of the Great Western Hwy, there was a comfort stop just before Lawson.



By 9.15 am, we'd arrived at the Small Arms Factory Museum in Lithgow and were assisted off the coach by umbrella-wielding volunteers and led to a particularly welcome morning tea. Kerry gave a short talk on the factory's history before we were let loose to wander both floors of the museum and some saw the separate manufacturing building. There is too much information about Lithgow Arms to include here, but it opened on 8 June 1912 and, during a period of decline after WW2, they branched out into other types of manufacturing: reconditioning weapons; locomotive, refrigerator and Sunbeam Mixmaster parts; Slazenger golf club heads and Pinnock sewing machines to name a few. These days, there are over 130 full-time in the workforce which designs and produces new Australian weapons for military and civilian markets. Even those of us who are not firearm fans found this place fascinating.

After passing through nearby Wallerawang and its now closed power station, we spied our first roos before arriving in the historic cement-making town of Portland, known as "The Town That Built Sydney". At the former cement works (1902 – 1991), now known as "The Foundations", we met up with Rich and his young son Thomas who showed us around this heritage site, now privately owned. The focal point of the 86 ha was the beautifully painted silos by artist Guido Van Helten in 2018, but the massive old buildings were not without their charm and are popular for functions.



A light, but very enjoyable lunch was at the local RSL and was all we needed. On departure at 1.15, it was still pouring! Our next stop was also heritage-listed, the pretty village of Millthorpe and its Golden Memories Museum containing several buildings. Some of us had been here a few years back and it was well worth a second visit, all beautifully-kept and voluntary staff were exceptional. It took an hour to arrive at our accommodation for two nights, the Cowra Services Club Motel. Meals were not available here, so dinner on the first night was a two-minute drive to the Railway Hotel. On the return drive, Elizabeth relayed the tragic news of Sandra's passing in a Sydney hospital the previous day. Everyone was in shock and extremely upset. Sandra was an original and much-loved member of our club.

DAY TWO: Still pouring with rain! An early start with 7 o'clock breakfast (which we could smell from our rooms) just across the road at the Services Club. Even at that early hour and with a kitchen undergoing renovation, the manager



made us very welcome and the chef did a wonderful cook-up of bacon and scrambled eggs on their BBQ! The coach departed at 8.30 and it was a pretty drive across country – very dry, so this rain should green things up! The Age of Fishes Museum in the quaint town of Canowindra would be our first stop this morning. Anne, the manager greeted us, joined a short time later by Colin who gave a fascinating talk on the chance discovery in 1955, by Fred a local, of an extensive fossil bed on private land 7 km from town. Dating from the Devonian Period, this 360-370 million-year-old fossil deposit contains the remains of thousands of freshwater fish and even more fascinating is that many species were new to science. For some years following, further access to the property was refused, but recently the new owner (also a paleontologist) has allowed investigation to continue on the 50-metre-deep site. This museum is one of only two fish fossil museums in the world and is a National Heritage site due to its international scientific significance. We hadn't known what to expect, but really enjoyed our visit here.



Even though the town had been struck off the latest itinerary as being too far away, our members were keen to visit Eugowra, so we left the museum earlier than planned in order to make a dash there. We would be running late for the rest of the day, but it didn't matter in the end. On arrival, we collected sheep property-owner Ray who, at very short notice, had kindly agreed to point out the murals around town. Donating their time, the 24 mural artists worked together on these (and future projects), but unfortunately the rain made it impossible for us to take decent photos. Ray did say that the last flood was in 1990, so while they're happy with the current rain (for next oats crop), they don't want a metre of water through the town!

Returned to Canowindra and Montrose House centrally-located in the main street. Some of us remember admiring this building on a previous visit, little realising that this gorgeous old Bank of NSW building would end up a sumptuous four-bedroom B & B and restaurant. The owner, the somewhat eccentric Tommy Jeffs and his offsider made us feel very welcome and encouraged us to wander through the pretty knick-knack filled rooms, before enjoying a lunch of delicious home-made quiche and pavlova. Tommy followed the meal with a talk about his colourful life and several risqué jokes, before he planted a kiss on every female as we headed out the door 30 minutes late. We were reluctant to leave, definitely a highlight.



A few minutes away, was Rosnay Organic Vineyard and Orchard which produces wine, olives and figs. Sadly, it was just too wet to take the planned walk through the vines, but there were plenty of red and white wines to sample plus dishes of olives and figs. Sam, belonging to the third-generation of the family, and his helper Pennie, ensured that we were well looked after and many of us purchased their produce. From there, it was a 20 min drive back to Cowra, with Jeff dropping some of us at the Visitor Information Centre to view their fascinating hologram about a local girl who tells her personal account of the Cowra Breakout. Extremely popular, this free presentation attracts thousands of people annually. The rest of us returned to the motel to freshen up for dinner, to be held at the Japanese Gardens.

DAY THREE: The amiable staff of the Services Club superbly handled an even earlier breakfast today, before we dragged our bags to the coach for the 8 am departure. Wet, wet, wet!! It took about 45 mins to reach Henry Lawson's birthplace of Grenfell and we headed straight to Grenfell Commodities' four painted silos by Melbourne-based artist Heesco Khosnaran in 2018. The silo artwork is a compilation of images representing the contemporary farming industry and landscape of the Weddin Shire. The foreground features sheep, cattle, and native birds set in a landscape adorned by the Weddin Mountains National Park. These silos had been dormant since 2007, but resumed operation once purchased by GC and continue to operate as a functional worksite.



Being so damp outside, the lovely people at the Grenfell Visitor Info Centre very kindly allowed us to set up our morning tea in their Art Gallery and even ran around finding chairs for us. Some great paintings here plus the stunning 14 ft high x 25 ft long Grenfell Community Curtain which is a permanent occupant on the northern wall. 17 volunteers worked on this project "painting with thread" which was completed in 2001. *(Photo courtesy of their website, as it was difficult to get a picture in its entirety.)* There was time to wander Grenfell's

main street, but sadly several empty shops and those that did look interesting hadn't yet opened by the time we left at 10.30 am. A shame, as they might've enjoyed the business!



Around an hour later, we were in the West Wyalong area and in the wettest part of our trip so far. According to our weather maps, there was little (if any) rain out this far in NSW, but we begged to differ! A lot of water on the road and paddocks were looking like inland seas. From there to Weethalle (arrival 12.25 pm), it was not quite so wet which enabled us to capture reasonable photos of



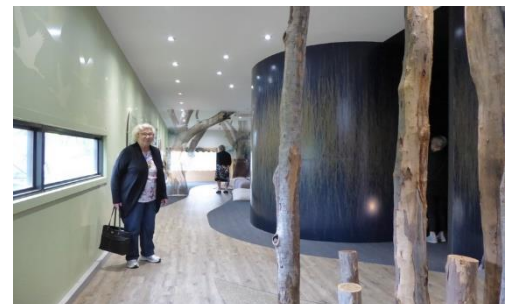
their wonderfully painted silos by renowned Melbourne based street artist Heesco Khosnaran in June 2017, and the first to be completed in NSW.



Lunch at Weethalle's Roadkill Grillz café was close by, and the extremely obliging Linda and staff had worked hard, miraculously conjuring up 30 hot and cold meals at this cute spot, pretty much in the middle of nowhere. Linda took several photos of our group for her Facebook page. Amazingly, there was a patch of blue sky as we left around 2 pm for Goolgowi about an hour away. Here we met with locals John and Alison at the Goolgowi Hall where they talked about, and we viewed, their Soft Sculpture Curtain, created by a number of local women in 1988, and which commemorates the town's pioneers and history, settlement and development of the district.

Then it was around an hour to Hay, driving through flat, flat and more flat, almost treeless plains. Some scrub, emus, sheep, cattle and goats. The Murrumbidgee River was a welcome variation. By just after 5 pm, we were checking in to the Bishops Lodge in Hay. Very nice – large room and bathroom, and dinner was great.

DAY FOUR: Breakfasts were definitely getting earlier and this one was at 6.30! It was cool, however it was a collective sigh of relief when we spied the clear skies. Bags packed and, by 8 am, we were heading for Balranald 130 km away. This involved driving along the Sturt Hwy through the Hay Plains which looked not dissimilar to the previous afternoon, but this time we spied some roos. Even with delays from road markers going about their work, it was a good 110 km road and we'd arrived at the Balranald Discovery Centre by 9.30 am. This was interesting to visit, but the best-ever slices for morning tea in the adjoining café are what stole the show. Absolutely yum and, unfortunately, I neglected to note the lady's name who served us and who had made them. She'd rustled them up for us the night before apparently. Some people are so talented! It was now a little cloudy and windy.



Balranald to our next stop Gol Gol was around 155 km. We couldn't help noticing that the soil was getting redder and the country was extremely dry with few trees, mostly scrub and brown grass. However, the sheep let loose in these tough conditions appeared to survive well enough. Olive and grape-growing were particularly popular as we neared the Euston area and there were, what looked like, hundreds of acres of grapevines. We did wonder why some vines were covered and others were not, and Jeff put us out of our misery: table grapes are covered to protect from frost etc, while wine grapes are not. We also saw what we thought were plantations of almond trees. More roadworks further along, this time installing new safety barriers (interesting to watch) and more line-marking and, by now, there were light showers interspersed with sunshine. Just before Gol Gol, we entered Sunraysia Country with more grapes (and lots of them) and citrus. We passed the entrance to Trentham Estate Winery that we would visit during the afternoon on our Murray River cruise.



At Gol Gol, lunch awaited us at the Golly Pub, but was too rushed to enjoy, as apparently we were running a little late for the cruise. We pretty much ran across the grassed area at the back of the pub to catch the paddle-vessel "Mundoo" that had come from Mildura on the Victorian side to collect us. Once on board, we relaxed for the very pleasant one-hour cruise to Trentham Estate. This estate is located in a stunning spot on the river and the weather was now good enough for us to sit in their pretty gardens outside the main building. However, our proposed wine-tasting was a debacle. Only 10 of us were able to take part in that, while the rest of us sat waiting. The too few staff on duty were pushed to the limit by other visitors making purchases, and our group appeared to be consigned to the "too hard" basket. So, most of us reboarded the boat an hour later without sampling even one tiny drop! An hour on the boat back to Gol Gol, with just a 30 min drive to our overnight accommodation in Wentworth, the Wentworth Grande Resort. Lovely staff member Kim was there to greet us, plus the resort provided assistance with our suitcases which was particularly welcome. Dinner here was excellent.



DAY FIVE: A slightly later breakfast time of 7 am this morning, and departure for long-awaited Mungo National Park at 8.10 am, a distance of 145 km, and it would be a good, almost traffic-free bitumen road for the first half of the trip. 15 mins from Wentworth, we spied the Darling River, before driving on through flat farm country with some crops (perhaps young wheat), small to medium trees, reddish soil and extreme dryness. No doubt, the farmers would dearly love the rain and there was plenty of cloud around, but selfishly we were praying for fine weather, as the unsealed latter part of this road is closed when it's wet. About an hour into the drive, we turned right onto the dirt section. The road wasn't bad really, considering the umpteen cattle grids and corrugated surface, with Jeff keeping up a cracking pace except when he stopped briefly to spray two flies that had taken a fancy to him. The roughest part of the road was just before Mungo Lodge where we arrived at 10 am.



Although staff hadn't expected us for morning tea, they rustled up refreshments in the impressive lounge/dining area with its large fireplace, polished floors and wrap-around verandah. Too early to check in to our cabin accommodation, Michael and Steve accompanied us on a guided tour of nearby Zanci, a homestead site, some parts in ruins and others having been refurbished. We also admired the old woolshed & pens which enjoyed distant views of the Walls of China that we would visit later. Time was also spent at the new woolshed and Visitors Centre.



What is of most importance to the area are the Mungo Lady and Mungo Man. The cremated remains of the Mungo woman were discovered first in the late 1960s by young geologist Dr Jim Bowler who called in a couple of archaeologists for assistance. Dr Bowler also discovered Mungo Man in 1974 whilst continuing his studies. According to our guides, these are perhaps the most important human remains ever found in Australia, with Mungo Lady the older of the two by 2,000 years, at 42,000 years. Unable to be reburied due to sand dune erosion, the remains are now kept under strict lock and key in the area.

Back to the lodge for lunch and check-in to our cabins which were quite

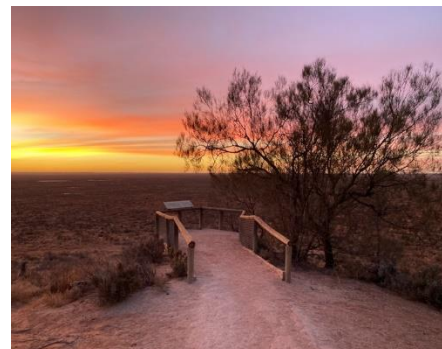


separate to the main building. Simple structures, but lovely inside with own bathroom, very comfortable beds, lounge, TV, verandah etc. There are 17 rooms here and we occupied the lot, with some of our singles sharing for the night! After a couple of hours to relax, it was a 5 pm dinner so that we arrived at the Walls of China to view the sunset. Our coach followed guides Michael and Lee(anne) out there in her ute.



There was a one km easy walk with them from the parking area to the Walls and only a handful of us weren't up to it. However, there was a spot to sit and take in the amazing surroundings whilst we awaited their return just before dark. A lovely experience! The lodge's main building was closed, so it was straight back to our rooms where, despite the comfortable beds, it was a fitful sleep for some, and one of our group, Judy, had a nasty fall in the early hours.

DAY SIX: An early morning rise for many, with Jeff driving us a few mins away to take in the sunrise, then returning to the lodge for breakfast. Travelling from Wentworth, an ambulance arrived shortly afterwards and, after spending a good deal of time checking the patient, the fortunate decision was made to take Judy to Mildura Base Hospital. At that time, we were hoping that she would be well enough to re-join our tour back in Wentworth, but she suffered a serious set-back in hospital and would spend a couple of weeks there, before being flown back to Sydney for further treatment. We departed Mungo after breakfast and would be spending the rest of the day back in Wentworth.



We met up with guide Linton just before 11 am at Junction Park, a pretty area that overlooks the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers. Morning tea here, before a very comprehensive coach tour of the town and surrounds. At Fotherby Park, we had a break from the coach to see the life-size statue and hear the story of The Possum. On the website it says: *when disgruntled by life during the "Great Depression" Possum took to living off the land in and around Wentworth. He slept in trees (thus his name), walked many miles, swam the rivers, living the life of a hermit and avoided human contact for some 50 years before his death at the age of 81 years. A proud man, "Possum" worked for the graziers in exchange for food and clothing, although he would always wait until the folk had left for town before he began his work. He was known to upset some of the property owners when he let the dogs loose because he felt sorry for them.* Adjacent, was PS Ruby, an old paddle-wheeler which had been derelict for a number of years, but was restored and is now operational - although, she didn't look like she'd been anywhere for some time!!



We were warmly welcomed at the Bowling Club with a sandwich and scone lunch. Very pleasant and lovely people. Next stop was Wentworth Gaol with their guide, Paul, showing us around. Across the road, some of us spent time in the Pioneer Museum. Before he left us, Linton wanted us to see the Perry Sandhills, 6 km out of town on the old Renmark Road. On the way, he talked about William Charles Wentworth, an Australian explorer and one of the leading figures of early colonial NSW. Linton then left us, with the assurance that we would catch up with his wife, Sandra, working at Orange World the following day. Back to Wentworth Grande Resort to check in, this time for two nights, and again the staff were extremely helpful. A pre-ordered dinner was diagonally across the road at the heritage-listed Crown Hotel. It was a very busy Friday night, coupled with a live singing duo, but staff were particularly friendly and helpful.

DAY SEVEN: Sunny, and at 7.15 a delicious breakfast in our motel. So nice not having to pack today. At 8.45, we were off to Orange World, with the population seemingly still asleep in the towns along the way. Just 25 mins later, we'd arrived and owner, Mario, directed us to his tractor "train" for a tour of his property. Mario handed out a few prizes and gave useful answers to our myriad of questions. He did say that Valencia oranges were the best juicers and Imperial were the best mandarins. This very informative tour was followed by morning tea that included a beautiful orange syrup cake made by his wife Maria. And, yes, we did catch up with Sandra who helped with our many purchases.





A short drive from there to the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens at Buronga, the first semi-arid botanical gardens in the southern hemisphere. We enjoyed listening to a fabulous band whilst we waited for their tractor train, with driver Vic, to take us on the hour-long journey around the gardens. Our tour actually took much longer than an hour (including time out to find a hat that had blown off and a few minutes to stroll around the rose garden which features over 1600 bushes), but there is no way that we could've covered the distance on foot. The final leg of the tour saw us passing their stunning Sturt Desert Pea garden which completely blew us away! A plentiful sandwich and cake lunch was held on the property, in a lovely old barn-like structure with what looked like hessian walls, before it was time to head to olive-growers

Varapodio Estate close by. Family owned since 1962, owners Donna and Joe looked after us here, with Donna showing us the equipment used in the olive processing and Joe supervising the olive oil/dressing tastings. We bought up big time in their wonderful Cellar Door/Cafe.

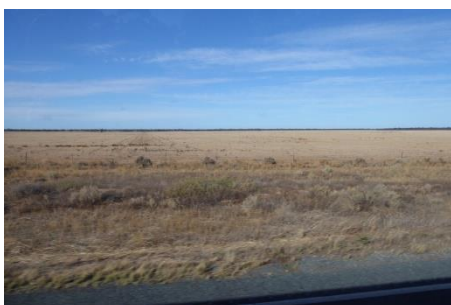


Not on the itinerary today, was a quick trip over the Murray River border to Mildura via the George Chaffey Bridge built in 1985, though it looked newer than that. Jeff took us on a cook's tour of Mildura, a really pleasant city with wide streets and spotlessly clean. He dropped us at their very impressive Information Centre located with the Library and Aquatic Centre which contains both wave and lap pools. Here, we also met up with Gerard from Trade Travel who was very kindly making regular visits to Judy in hospital and was updating us on her progress.

It was time to return to Wentworth and, still on the Victorian side, we hopped off the coach with Jeff to take a closer look at the Mildura Weir and Lock 11. Construction of the Mildura Weir began in August 1923 with the aims of raising both the water level and the pressure from the Mildura and Red Cliffs irrigation pumps. Lock 11 was completed in 1927. We also drove past the magnificent two-storey home Rio Vista which was first occupied by WB Chaffey and his family in 1892. The Spanish name Rio Vista, which means 'River View', reflects the Californian experiences of William Benjamin Chaffey, known to all as 'WB', and his brother George (of Bridge fame). Travelling on the Calder Hwy, we passed through Merbein, miles and miles of grapevines and back over the smaller Abbotsford Bridge into NSW – with no Welcome to NSW sign anywhere to be seen! Dinner was at 6.30 pm, again across the road at the Crown Hotel.



DAY EIGHT: Our bags were left for collection outside our rooms before breakfast at 7 am. It was cool, but fine, as Kim came to see us off at 8 am. We were now on the return to Sydney and heading back the way we came on the Silver City Hwy. Just near Buronga and the junction of the Sturt Hwy, we stopped to allow Gerard (Trade Travel) onboard for a few minutes to update us on Judy and to thank Elizabeth for her co-organisation of the trip. Morning tea was from the coach in Balranald, but this time in a park and we left there around 11 am. On across the mostly-barren Hay Plains and were amazed to see the road-marking



guys working, even though it was Sunday. In Hay, we were booked for a light lunch and a sheep-shearing demonstration at Shear Outback – Shearers Hall of Fame, a very impressive multi-million-dollar interpretative centre and a large separate woolshed. They also had a wonderful shop! We were there for a couple of hours before a quick visit to the painted water towers in Hay which we'd noticed in passing a few days back.





In a few short days in December 2020, Melbourne artist Matt Adante painted these locally-born real life characters in a magnificent tribute to Australian servicemen and women. Their tear-filled eyes were beautifully depicted.

A couple of hours then to Narrandera and, since the trip out, we'd worked out that the hundreds of acres of trees were indeed almonds. Looked like some cotton growing too. Lots of cattle, some emus and more sheep. As we neared town, it looked as though they'd finally received some of the recent heavy rain, with healthy dams and creeks and lots of roadside puddles. Grapes were growing on the only hill in many miles. We passed the dilapidated wooden railway bridge, as Jeff spoke of the Narrandera floods (2012) during one of his trips to the area.

Once there, we took a drive around town, admiring the lovely old buildings before heading up to their water tower which contains two artworks: The Lizard and The Koala, both are significant icons in the community. Completed in 2019 and taking 11 days, over 120 litres of paint was used by the four artists from Apparition Media in Melbourne and was inspired by the artwork of Narrandera artist and Wiradjuri man, Owen Lyons. Our final night's accommodation was at the Narrandera Club Motor Inn and we were greeted by the very friendly and helpful owner/manager (neglected to get his name). Dinner was right across the road at the RSL Club and food was lovely, but the gentleman on reception seemed a little frosty!



DAY NINE: 7 am breakfast back in the RSL and, unsurprisingly, we were 15 mins late leaving the motel at 8 am. However, it was a beautiful day with cloudless skies. Of course, it was morning rush hour as we arrived in Wagga Wagga (place of many crows) and there was a problem finding the Cadell Place murals, even on foot. Eventually, thanks to directions from a local florist, we found a couple in a laneway off a carpark! Back on the coach, it took a bit of doing to eventually find the steep Willans Hill and its water tower

murals. These days needing some TLC, this was spray painted over 2½ weeks in June 2016 by Trina Collins, aka Poncho Army. The mural is all about the actual use and function of the water tank and to represent that the Riverina Water is safe to use unfiltered. The children depicted are from Sturt Public School.



We found ourselves in Junee by 10.45 am and were able to park right outside the Licorice & Chocolate Factory housed in the magnificent old flour mill. Beautifully restored and very popular, the building contains a couple of shops, café/restaurant with internal and external seating, and an area where our group was seated for a talk and tasting. This was probably our last chance to shop and Easter was around the corner, so it didn't take much persuasion for us to add to the local economy!

Another of Liz's quizzes, as we headed through the first undulating and green country in days to historic Bowning for lunch (changed from Jugiong at the last minute) at the Rollonin Café. A brilliant choice, it was just gorgeous here. Our plentiful High Tea-style lunch, with bottomless cups of tea and coffee, was inside the quaint replica slab hut which took three years to complete, opening for business finally in December 2008. It sits on a large parcel of land with some animals - Mac the draught horse stole the show - and other small Australian outbuildings that children (in particular) would enjoy seeing. The colonially-dressed ladies working here were a delight, but sadly the owner is now needing to retire and the business is up for sale. We do hope that the new proprietors follow in her footsteps. Very reluctantly, it was time to leave and our next break was at the twin servos at Pheasants Nest. From there, it was around 1½ hours to Peshurst, arriving a little after 6 pm. Lucky Seats were won by Sue M and Lesley W. The total trip kms were 2,864 and the closest was Lois S with 2,800. A great trip!! Huge thank you to Gerard and staff from Trade Travel, and to Elizabeth whose long-standing desire to visit Mungo National Park finally got us there. For many of us, that was the highlight of the trip.

