

Western Australia Tour, 2016

Day 1 - Sat 30th April - Warwick to Charleville, refuel Roma

We left at about 7am with two other local planes, and there were two more locals who had left the previous day, waiting for us at Charleville. We had an uneventful flight to Roma where we refuelled and had a cuppa.

While there the north coast/Watts Bridge connection planes started to arrive, led by the zippy little Virus.

We left as they were arriving to keep some separation and arrived at Charleville where we refuelled and were met by other club members.

We made a dash (on foot) for the motel with the intention of walking to the town and Heinenanns bakery for a pie! Fortunately we rang from the motel, because we found they had sold out of pies! Instead we enjoyed a toasted sandwich at the big servo over the road from our motel.

We all met for a tour brief at the motel before some of us headed to town for a look around and dinner. Lots of newbies coming on this trip, so very exciting for all.

I was lucky to be able to (finally) visit the Bilby Centre this trip. We watched a video, listened to some bilby facts and then saw three real bilbies. I loved it!

We walked home after a lovely dinner at Coroneo's historic hotel and packed ready for an early start the next day.

Day 2 - Sun 1st May - Charleville to Birdsville, refuel Windorah

We were up very early, so got ready and walked the 1.4 klms to the airport. We were there to watch the sunrise - very pretty.

We were away first (unusual for us!) and headed for Windorah for a refuelling stop, a cuppa and comfort stop.

The next leg was to Birdsville. It's always interesting to see the countryside change colour and appearance. As we approach Birdsville we are really getting into the desert country, but it is very spectacular just the same. This year the Diamantina basin was green and beautiful from recent rains further north. There were lots of interesting (salty looking) water holes as well, some with water and some dry.

We made it to Birdsville in good time and managed to get the pie Grah had missed out on the day before. Birdsville isn't a huge place, but fortunately it has a great pub and a great bakery! My pie was kangaroo and claret. Nice!

We all wandered around town and checked out the sights, including the new streetscape that is underway, before enjoying dinner together at the pub.

It's pretty exciting to have so many new couples join us for this trip. Everyone is lovely and there is always someone interesting to talk to.

Day 3 - Mon 2nd May - Birdsville to Ayres Rock, refuel New Crown Station

We woke to drizzly skies but all took off and headed out hopefully anyway, led by the two Savannahs today. They only travel at about 90 knots, so wanted to get a start on the rest of us.

To cut a long story short, most of us ended up going well north of track to skirt the showers as we traversed the Simpson desert. Fancy seeing it rain on the Simpson desert!

Western Australia Tour, 2016

The Savannah's travelled at 1500 feet and stayed close to, and south of track. Unfortunately we lost radio contact with Savannah Bill, so all worried about him until we eventually arrived to find him at New Crown station safe and sound, but with his radio out of action. What a relief! Fortunately we had our hand held radio complete with charge cord, so Bill was able to take that and keep going. He and Savannah Steve stick close together and keep a good eye on one another.

We enjoyed Colleen's friendly hospitality at New Crown station where we refuelled the planes and the people) and enjoyed a comfort stop.

We headed out on route to Ayres Rock midst much excitement and anticipation.

As we drew closer we were fooled by Mt Connor when it first came into view.

Eventually The Rock and then the Olgas appeared on the horizon.

We all landed safely, secured the planes and headed for our various accommodation choices at Yulara resort.

The first night we went on the Field of Lights tour, where we enjoyed wine and nibbles (crocodile and kangaroo included) high on a hill before making our way down to the lights at dusk. What an amazing experience to be surrounded by thousands of coloured lights in the dark, near The Rock. I won't forget this amazing experience for a long time.

Day 4 - Ayres Rock

We all did our own thing during the day, but lots of us ended up having lunch in the town centre before heading home to get ready for the Sounds of Silence dinner that night.

The dinner was such a fantastic experience. We had our own great waiter (Nikolas) and enjoyed sitting in the open, on a beautiful night, eating and drinking good food and wine, with entertainment from indigenous dancers, a didgeridoo player and then a very entertaining talk on the stars. We all had a thoroughly enjoyable night.

It was a tired but very happy bunch on the bus ride home!

Tomorrow our group of thirteen planes will split, with one plane waiting for a battery at Ayres Rock, one pilot heading back to Warwick, six planes doing the shorter tour via Kings Canyon and the other five planes heading west.

Day 5 - Wed 4th May - Ayres Rock to Warburton

We left Ayres Rock by doing a flight around The Rock and then The Olgas before we headed west to Warburton for an overnight and refuelling stop.

Arriving in Warburton was a real culture shock. The town is a wreck, rubbish everywhere!

We stayed at the roadhouse and as we were booking in to our accommodation there were lots of aborigines coming in for take away food. They were driving cars with half flat tyres, no rego, falling to bits! The people doing the work are all white people. It's a dry community so we didn't see or hear any trouble, but the aborigines don't seem to have anything to do. Maybe they could be encouraged to clean up the town?

We had a comfortable room for the night and our dinner was delivered, so we ate together in the camp kitchen, along with Pete and Macka from the Kimberley's. They

Western Australia Tour, 2016

were heading home and were telling us about their job culling feral camels all over the west. It was Pete's birthday so we helped make the night a bit more interesting I'm sure.

Day 6 - Thurs 5th May - Warburton to Meekatharra, refuel at Leonora

We woke to showers so decided to change course from Carnegie to Laverton to skirt the front moving through central WA.

We checked with Carnegie station manager, who had specially ordered a drum of fuel for us, and fortunately they can use the Avgas now that we are having to head for Laverton. Once there we will decide our next move as it will be fuel dependent.

We landed at Laverton and the terminal was locked up. After chasing up the council a couple of friendly workers knew the gate code so we were able to get to the toilets.

They told us they thought Leonora had Avgas, so as it was only half an hour away we headed there next. Once again a couple of local shire workers came to our rescue with a gate code and with Avgas, which had to be hand pumped from 200L drums.

We used two full drums and had an interesting chat with the men before heading north for our original intended destination tonight, Meekatharra. We are just a few hours later than planned. Fingers crossed the weather blows through and we can get on with our original plan.

We all arrived safely in Meekatharra where we had hired a bus to get us the 7 klms to town and back. We had dinner all together and retired early ready for another early start the next day.

Day 7 - Friday 6th May - Meekatharra to Shark Bay, via Carnarvon.

We were all out at the airport bright and early and we loaded up and headed out en route to Carnarvon. It was a long leg (two and a half hours) but the country is so interesting it's surprising how quickly the time and miles tick by. There were huge mines all around Meekatharra and as we headed north we were basically back over desert country. The people who live on the remote properties we flew over have my admiration. We have fun looking for all the private strips, with the help of AvPlan. We were flying with a headwind today until we got close to Carnarvon and descended when the wind turned around to almost behind us. We were first in to Carnarvon for refuelling and it was windy! It's a beautiful place with the bright blue ocean one side of the town and lots of small farm plots on the other side, stretching out either side of the Gascoyne River.

From Carnarvon we flew south along the coast until we were almost opposite Shark Bay and we turned west over the water (about 20 miles across) to pass over Monkey Mia for a landing at Shark Bay. Everyone made the crossing easily and we were picked up and delivered to our accommodation by Maria, where we dropped our luggage and headed to the restaurant for lunch.

After lunch we caught up with our washing and photo downloading etc and the events boys made a couple of calls re fuel ahead, busses etc before we headed back to the Monkey Bar at 5pm for happy hour, overlooking the beautiful ocean where dolphins were playing just off shore. Then it was off to the Boughshed restaurant for dinner.

Western Australia Tour, 2016

Day 8 - Saturday 7th May - Monkey Mia

We started the day with the heavily regulated dolphin feeding session followed by a bush walk up behind the resort which came out on the beach. When we returned to the resort some dolphins were hanging around the jetty again much to everyone's delight.

We enjoyed lunch at the restaurant before having a lazy afternoon resting up before our 4pm briefing leading into happy hour and dinner at the Monkey Bar.

Monkey Mia is a beautiful spot and it was friendly and relaxing. Nice!

Day 9 - Sunday 8th May - Shark Bay to Bunbury

We were in the air by 7.45am heading for Geraldton for a refuelling stop. It was quite a long leg (2 hours) but the scenery was absolutely beautiful as we flew down the coast, some of us just over land and some just over the ocean. We landed at Geraldton and were met and refuelled by Cory before heading off on the next leg (another couple of hours) which took us down the VFR route past Perth. We flew over the water at 1000 feet and saw how spread out Perth is as we flew by. The views we had were fantastic. We turned inland after Fremantle and headed for Serpentine where we were met by some of the Serpentine aero club members who had offered to provide lunch for us. It was quite cold by the time we arrived (having left Shark Bay in summery weather) so the beautiful homemade soup we enjoyed was very welcome indeed. After lunch we collected the oil that had been delivered there for us and did a tour of some of the hangars. There were some amazing old planes there, as well as a cute little vintage car.

Eventually we reluctantly loaded into our planes and said our farewells to our Serpentine friends. We then headed for Bunbury and a three night stopover. It was only a short leg, but all up we flew over five hours that day.

Days 10 & 11 - Monday and Tuesday, 9th, 10th May - Bunbury

The boys set off for the airport after breakfast to service the planes, so we girls headed for the shops (only a couple of blocks from our very comfortable accommodation). We regrouped after lunch and went for a bus ride to Ferguson where we eventually found a winery that was open for tastings. We went for a drive around the port area and chose a spot to have fish and chips for dinner overlooking the water on Tuesday night.

We all headed to Roses pub for happy hour (great cocktails) and dinner before retiring for the night.

Tuesday morning we met at the bus bright and early to head for the Margaret River area via Busselton where we wanted to have a look at the jetty which, at 1.8 klms, is the longest wooden post jetty in the Southern Hemisphere. It has its own train line to take tourists out to the end. We had morning tea at the Goose cafe looking out at the jetty. Lovely!

We then headed for the Margaret River area for our first stop at the Chocolate Company factory and shop. Wow, I've never seen so much chocolate in one place!

Western Australia Tour, 2016

We all bought some bits and pieces and then headed for the MR Providore where we tried samples of all sorts of condiments and their chocolate liqueurs.

We drove to Prevelly beach where we watched some huge waves and some very brave surfers.

Then we headed for Margaret River township and lunch. We spread out and found something we all liked before regrouping for a run to the very pretty Brookland winery where some of us had a coffee and some a glass of wine.

After that we headed for home (well over an hour away) to get sorted before heading down town for dinner. We had our pre-dinner drink at the Trafalgar hotel tonight and some of the group headed for Roses for roast of the day and the rest of us had fish and chips at Al's Fish and Chips. It was really enjoyable.

Tomorrow we are on the move again as we turn for home and stopover in Albany for a couple of nights. We will have a bus again so can head for the Valley of the Giants tomorrow afternoon. Thursday will be our trip on the Kalgan Queen.

Day 12 - Wed, 11th May - Bunbury to Albany

As we left Bunbury I took an aerial photo of the hockey fields where our son had played hockey and won the national titles as Captain of Queensland Country team several years ago. We over flew Busselton and saw the amazing jetty from the air, then we tracked in from the coastline to Walpole and began our easterly heading where we over flew Denmark.

When we arrived in Albany, there was a Busy Blue Bus waiting for us again (like magic thanks to our intrepid Events committee). We loaded our gear and all of us into the bus and back-tracked to a quaint little Denmark where we enjoyed a morning tea/lunch stop. It's a very pretty area and we are lucky to be here when the autumn leaves are turning and falling.

From Denmark we drove further west to the Valley of the Giants where we did the tree top walk. What an amazing experience. Just the logistics of building the walkway was interesting, but the huge Karri trees were beautiful.

We arrived back in Albany after a stop at the honey shop along the way (ice creams, mead and liqueur tasting, not bad at all!) and booked in to our Motel before heading down to a nearby pub which overlooked the waterfront, for dinner.

Day 13 - Thurs, 12th May - Albany

Grah and I got up early to deliver one couple to the airport so they could head for Esperance to visit relatives. The rest of us will catch up with them in another 24 hours.

Once back at the motel we loaded and headed for our cruise with Captain Jack on the Kalgan Queen. The Pelicans and Osprey were very friendly and Jack had fish for them all. We visited Montgomery wines for tasting and then Jack fed us tea/coffee and savoury damper when we returned to the boat. It was a lovely, relaxing morning. From there we went to visit the ANZAC memorial, which is in Mt Clarence parklands and overlooks Albany and King George Sound.

We enjoyed our dinner that night overlooking the jetty in a lovely restaurant.

Western Australia Tour, 2016

Day 14 - Fri, 13th May - Albany to Esperance

We were up early and out at our planes ready for the next leg of the trip after a two night stopover in Albany.

We flew along some beautiful coastline and over the Karri tree forests and a couple of beautiful towns along the route.

We landed at Esperance and refuelled before flying the short hop to Myrup Airpark where we had pre-arranged to leave the planes for the night. I was lucky because my pilot flew me over the amazing Stonehenge on the way for some aerial photos, which wasn't very far from Myrup.

Our next Busy Blue Bus was there to meet us in and we drove back to our motel which was on the Esplanade in Esperance. We had a beautiful view of the harbour and the port where a couple of big ships were anchored.

We headed off for some morning tea/lunch at the local French Bakery where they actually sold Beestings – a family favourite.

As we walked back to the motel we found the museum which featured the Skylab crash - a satellite that crashed near Esperance in 1979.

After lunch we went on a bus tour up along the coast where we saw some spectacular coastline before checking out a couple of huge wind generators at a close enough distance to hear the whooshing sound they make.

We turned around after this and headed for Esperance's own Stonehenge on the Lazy K property east of Esperance. It's an exact replica of the original Stonehenge in England (only newer). It was such a highlight. Just standing in the middle of the circles of huge granite rocks was awe inspiring. We had a lovely talk about how it all came about from the owner Jillian whose husband Kim had worked out the angles etc so the summer and winter solstices aligned with the alter rock.

I would have to say that if asked for a single highlight of our trip it would be impossible to choose, but this would be almost equal with the Field of Lights at Uluru. It was just so well done and special as we have also seen the original in the UK. Needless to say I took lots of photos!

We enjoyed a lovely meal at the hotel almost next door to the motel before retiring for the night.

Esperance was one of the prettiest places on the trip so far.

Day 15 - Sat 14th May, Esperance to Border Village Roadhouse

Another early start and a fuel stop at Caiguna Roadhouse where we flew over the longest straight stretch of road in the Southern Hemisphere, the 90 mile road. It was straight in each direction as far as the eye could see, from 3500 feet up. We refuelled before having cuppa and something to eat at Caiguna. The roadhouses are in very good condition and Caiguna toilets were spotlessly clean! These places are so remote, they really are great for travellers!

We took off again on our eastward bound trip and by now we were looking at beautiful coastal views on the right side of the plane and basically desert from the left!

We flew over the Eucla airfield - or should I say airfields! There were eight runways! Apparently many years ago it was an old RAAF strip.

Western Australia Tour, 2016

We landed at Border Village, fuelled up and then had to tie the planes down to pallets, rocks, lumps of steel, whatever we could find because the ground was too hard to drive our pegs into! We were welcomed at the roadhouse by lovely friendly staff who booked us in. We settled into our rooms and returned to the roadhouse for lunch.

They serve huge meals at the roadhouses, we assume because they are used to catering for truckers.

The next morning we were out getting ready in the dark! We had turned our watches forward an hour and a half to Central time, so were a bit ahead of ourselves.

Day 16 - Sun 15th May, Border Village to William Creek

Once daylight arrived we all took off for the first stop of the day and some brekky, the Nullarbor Roadhouse. We were basically tracking along the coast or the Eyre highway around the Great Australian Bight. We flew off the coast at 300 feet for this stretch and it was truly spectacular. It's a bit worrying just how many land slips there are though. Australia is falling into the ocean! We crossed back to the highway before 113 klms east of Border Village to check out an emergency runway which is actually marked on the highway. Very interesting.

We turned inland after our stop at the Nullarbor Roadhouse where we enjoyed another great feed and found the facilities to be spotlessly clean.

Most of us found the strip here, but one experienced pilot decided to be different and landed on the road beside the roadhouse. I won't mention any names!

We flew over the Great Victoria desert en route to Coober Pedy where we were stopping for fuel. Two Wrightsair planes landed after us and the RFDS plane took off. It was rush hour at Coober Pedy! Nine planes on the Tarmac at once!

Once we refuelled we all headed for William Creek and our next overnight stop. The desert is really a picture after recent rain and we are very lucky to see it looking as good as it is. At this stage we were running ahead of a weather trough, so it was a bit cloudy early in this leg.

We settled in to our accommodation at William Creek after refuelling and tying down the planes. We stayed in the Camel Hut because they had accidentally booked us into a single room. We enjoyed TV (ABC News 24 only) and satellite WiFi. Lucky us!

William Creek has grown and improved since our last visit. The pub is the same icon it always was and the staff members are friendly and helpful.

We saw a beautiful western sunset and then had a lovely meal at the pub and an enjoyable night before heading off to catch up on some sleep after our early start.

Day 17 - Mon 16th May, William Creek to Noccundra Hotel

We had a more leisurely start to the day today and met at the pub for coffee and brekky at about 7.30.

Trevor Wright came and chatted to us before we left for our flight over Lake Eyre.

He now owns all of William Creek and our accommodation and meals were great. He and his pilots couldn't have been more helpful with where to fly, how high, where the

Western Australia Tour, 2016

bird life is etc. It was interesting to hear that he has recently employed 10 young pilots! What an incredible chance he gives these young, aspiring commercially qualified pilots.

We flew at about 1500 feet and it's an experience which is hard to describe. The water and the sand and salt all blend together until every so often you see the water sparkling. There was quite a lot of water coming down the

Wharburton Groove, which runs in from the north east corner of the lake and then down through the middle until it eventually spreads out and evaporates.

As we flew along the Groove, the landscape changed to normal countryside but with hundreds of rivulets wriggling through it.

It's always spectacular flying over the Cooper basin and then over the Channel Country.

We landed at Innaminka and refuelled. We were lucky to get a lift into the pub with the fuel man. We had a lovely, early lunch where we were greeted by friendly staff yet again.

We got a lift to the air field in the pub's courtesy bus and headed off to our overnight stop at Noccundra hotel.

We all arrived one after the other (precision flying) and were booked in to our dongas. This was probably our most basic accommodation, but was ok except for the lack of drinking water!

We tried to go for a walk to the nearby waterhole but the road was covered in water from recent rain, so we couldn't get through. There has been a lot of rain out this way which we were lucky enough to miss whereas the other group were caught up in it and had to alter their travel arrangements.

Finally we were given enough water and were able to have a cup of tea together before heading to bed for another early start to our final day of flying and home sweet home.

Basically the accommodation was adequate and our meals nice so one shouldn't complain too much!

Day 18 - Tues 17th May, Noccundra to Warwick

We were all up bright and early - earlier than planned in fact and ended up sitting around waiting for daylight so we could take off.

The sunrise was beautiful as we loaded up. Everyone was in the air by about 7.30am heading for our first fuel stop at Thargomindah. We were met by a friendly council man who helped everyone refuel. We headed off again only to discover that our radio was playing up. We ended up being able to communicate on the chat channel only, which was better than nothing!

Thankfully other pilots in our group were able to give our calls as we landed at St George to refuel and finally at home in Warwick. It's nice to be flying with a group when something goes wrong!

We arrived home about 1pm and unpacked our trusty little Jabiru, said our goodbyes to the others and came home to our dogs and cat.

Western Australia Tour, 2016

It was an absolutely fantastic trip and I'm still amazed at how much we saw and how different our country is! We flew beautiful coastlines as well as over deserts and farming country.

The tour went off like clockwork thanks to our great events team. A massive amount of time and effort goes into the organisation of something this big and complicated. Our group had good weather but for a couple of showery days where we were able to divert around the rain. We had no major issues with the planes, no pre-booked accommodation changes and no illness! How lucky are we?

A great time was had by all, but I have to say it's always nice to come home.