2008 Bourke Police and Community Outback Trek
A Poke to Port Augusta

Prologue

Following the enjoyable 2007 Trek I put my name down for the 2008 run and fifth trek. This year’s trip was to be shorter in distance and duration to allow trekkers time to look around a little more than in previous years.

This year’s run was from Bourke through Queensland and South Australia to Port Augusta then back to Bourke through Broken Hill.

The usual events were to be held en-route. The 100 club each day run by Brushy, the ball at Glendambo, a talent quest at Tilpa and an additional event being the Yabby Races to be run at Montecollina Bore.

The committee had done a sterling job in organising this year’s trek and dealing with the logistical challenges associated with it. This was the 25th anniversary of the Trek and there was an anniversary ball to precede it.
Thu 25th Sep – Sydney to Warrumbungle National Park

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A beautiful morning and glorious day bode well for my start to this year’s Trek. The trip up the Bells Line of Road through Lithgow to Mudgee, Duneedoo, Coonabarrabran and into the Warrumbungles was uneventful and passed quickly. The country was looking good with recent rain giving the crops that much needed boost. Fields of bright yellow Canola were dazzling against the vivid blue of the sky.

Picking up a bag of firewood on the way into the Warrumbungles I arrived in the park early afternoon and set up camp. Erecting the tent for the two night stay, I was expecting it to get a bit nippy as the skies were clear. Many kangaroos and emus reside in the park and graze peacefully on the lush pasture oblivious to all the human activity around them. The backdrop of the Breadknife adds an extra dimension, making this a park that stands out above many others.

As dusk settled I started a fire and was joined by a couple from Victoria who where on their way home from a Simpson crossing. We exchanged our experiences of the travels we had undertaken before retiring.

Fri 26th Sep – Warrumbungles

I was up early for a walk around Gould’s Circuit, before the day became too warm, to shoot some close up photos of the Breadknife. Setting off from the carpark it was an easy amble up the well formed main path until I
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turned off for Gould’s Circuit and Febor Tor. The track became quite steep in sections although well marked and easy enough to scramble up. The sight of the Breadknife from the Febor Tor was magnificent. Continuing on to Machor Tor the last 50m required a bit of rock climbing ability and carrying the camera gear made it just that bit more difficult. The climb was well worth the climb and the view again spectacular.

It was a fairly easy stroll downhill to join the main track and then a short uphill walk to Spirey Lookout for some more photos before the return journey downhill the car. There was plenty of birdlife around to keep the keen photographer on the lookout.

After lunch it was off to Siding Springs observatory. The display was well worth the entry fee with a lot of information and photos available of the solar system. The telescope is huge and the lift up 3 floors to the viewing platform well worth the effort. The view from the lookout over the Breadknife and other rock formations is brilliant although no doubt better in the morning with the sun shining from behind the lookout.

Returning to camp I joined my other neighbors for a chat. They were traveling from Ipswich to Tasmania to relocate and I donated the balance of my firewood to them and bludged off their fire for the evening as it was quite cool.

Sat 27th Sep – Warrumbungles to Bourke

Heading off early for Quambone the crops were looking patchy and it seemed the farms in this area had missed most of the rain. The cattle were already feeding on some of the failing crops. Traveling through the Macquarie Marshes it was almost as dry as the previous year. Although there was a little water around, not the vast quantities needed to maintain this iconic wetland.
Arriving in Bourke early afternoon I booked into the Major Mitchell Motel for a spot of luxury before the Trek and had a kip prior to the 25th Trek reunion ball at the bowling club that night. The committee for the Trek was introduced to the trekker’s and a few speeches made. The ball was a great success and it was terrific to catch up with old faces and recount previous Treks.

The highlight of the ball was an auction of 20 yabby’s for the Yabby Races to be held at Montecollina Bore. Successfully bidding on Jerry whose colours were yellow with black spots I ended up with a passenger. We were supplied with special racing food in the form of sliced carrot to keep our yabby’s in peak condition till the race.

Sun 28th Sep – Bourke

The Trek sign on was at the golf club and John Davis the mayor from Orange and his crew had set up a BBQ for everyone to have a bite to eat. We received our information kits and purchased meal tickets for dinner at various towns along the route. There was plenty of other merchandise for purchase with the threat of non purchase being a fine on the journey from the book of fine tickets supplied. Merchandise included an Outback License, Fly Stopper, Name Tag and Cap amongst other things.

The afternoon was spent looking around Bourke with a trip to the weir where the Darling River was just flowing with about half and inch of water flowing over the weir. A short trip to the fishing reserved found good water but no one had a line in.

The rest of the afternoon was spent at the motel chatting to fellow trekker's about past trek's and the trip ahead.
Mon 29th Sep – Bourke to Eulo

It was a late start for the Trek from the Bourke Outback Display Centre and around 70 vehicles lined up for the journey. There were many different types of vehicles, mostly 4WD’s and many towing caravans and camper trailers. John Davis and his team had the usual assortment of older sedans to add a bit of colour to the event. Mort was in attendance with the Love Bug and Dot had a new passenger in her Subaru. The band had purloined two police vehicles that were ready for auction and of course Kato replacing Robbo in the Ambo and Dribbles in the mobile workshop truck.

A leisurely amble to the border at Hungerford found us at the Royal Mail Hotel for morning tea. Enquiring about a couple of acquaintances I had traveled with through WA the previous year I found they had flown out the previous morning. They have a holiday house at Hungerford and had left for a trip around some of the local properties and towns.

A short run to Eulo through Currawinya National Park had us arriving at the Eulo Queen Hotel around lunch time.

Currawinya National Park is well known for a project to save the endangered Bilby, that marsupial that looks like a rat with long ears. An area has been fenced off to keep out feral cats and other predators that are playing havoc with our native animals.
The Paroo River was begging for a couple of yabby traps so I obliged and dropped a couple into the murky brown water. Hoping for some backup yabby's in case Jerry carked it I had no luck. Only an undersized perch and a fresh water prawn both of which were dispatched back to their natural habitat.

Les and I set separate camps out the back of the hotel on lush green grass and lazed around prior to dinner which required a meal ticket to partake. A BBQ dinner was on the menu.

Sullo and the Outback Band set up their gear in the back room and entertained us for the evening with some our favourite songs and everyone had a great time. Some more than others.

**Tue 30th Sep – Eulo to Noccundra**

It was another easy day on dirt via Thargominda turning off for the 20km detour to the Noccundra Hotel and we were there before lunch. Les and myself set camp beside the hotel with most of the other trekker's setting up on the Wilson River, a better choice as it later turned out apart from the flies.

The afternoon was spent enjoying a few refreshments in the bar. John Davis had to fly out for the mayoral elections in Orange whilst a couple of
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his team from previous years flew in for the afternoon. Fireworks livened up
the proceedings and a couple of spinners let off on the pub floor had
everyone ducking for cover.

After dinner the band again entertained us well into the night and as we hit
the sack at a reasonable hour found the deafening roar of the band a little
hard on the ears. Those are the breaks.

There was a bit of drama in the wee small hours of the next morning when
Ted rolled out of bed and sustained a suspected broken hip. The RFDS had
to be called in to evacuate him to hospital. Two of the band members Whitey
and Pino took it in turns to drive Ted's vehicle for the rest of the trip. This
is one of the great things about the Trek, if there is an issue to be resolved
everyone pitches in to do what they can to help.

Wed 1st Oct – Noccundra to Monticollina Bore

This was the longest leg of
this trek at around 500km via
Innaminka to Monticollina
Bore. The Adventure Way
just before Innaminka was in
terrible condition and a much
worse than when I had
traveled it three months
earlier. Road works were
being completed and one of
the roadwork's tractors was on the side of the road with a flat tyre.

There was a fair amount of carnage with vehicles and trailers along this
section of the Trek with Dribbles having plenty of work to keep trekker's
mobile.

Most of us took the small detour into Innaminka to fuel up as it was a fair
distance to the next fuel at Lyndhurst. The Innaminka Hotel in the last
twelve months has been upgraded with the rear being transformed into a
modern dining and entertaining area.
On the Strezlecki Track I was unlucky just before Monticollina Bore with a rock penetrating the steel belt on a rear tyre. With the help of fellow trekker’s the tyre was soon changed and I was on my way. I repaired the hole as soon as I arrived at the bore and it took four plugs before the air stopped escaping. I only had two large plugs and Les kindly lent me the other two.

The bore has had a reduction valve installed to slow the flow of water. This procedure is happening right across the Great Artesian Basin to prevent wastage of this valuable resource.

The water flowing out of the bore is lukewarm running into a small pool which works well as a spar and then into a much larger and deeper pool cooler pool. The kids had a ball swimming while the adults looked on. Another party of trekker's set a yabby trap and caught a few to supplement their race starter.

During the afternoon another group of travelers on a tag along arrived and set up camp and were following in by two road trains so it was pretty crowded but still room enough for everyone.

The yabby track had been prepared and the Kiwis had donned there finest fashion for the parade unfortunately due to
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the issues during day and late arrivals the yabby races had to be postponed till Maree. All concerned were disappointed including the owners and trainers who were having difficulty keeping their livestock in peak condition.

During the evening the band entertained us with their acoustic guitars before lights out as there was no power for their amplifiers

Thu 2nd Oct – Monticollina Bore to Maree

Back on the Strezlecki Track we traveled down to Lyndhurst without too many more incidents stopping for morning tea at the pub. This is another old outback pub with a fairly basic caravan park but welcome relief in this inhospitable environment.

Turning up the Oodnadatta Track we headed to Marree arriving mid afternoon where we set camp in the caravan park within walking distance to pub. After a few refreshments we lazed around camp for the rest of the afternoon making sure Jerry was in prime condition for his heat of the yabby races.

The street outside the Marree Hotel had been closed off for the festivities and Jerry was in the first race at 5pm. All the yabby’s were gathered at the pub in their stalls for the frey. There were five yabby’s in each race and the track consisted of a rope circle about 6000mm in circumference. The yabby’s were placed under a bucket by in the centre and when the starter raised the bucket they were off. The first yabby to reach the rope was the winner. There were four heats with the winners of each heat in the final. In conjunction with the yabby race there was also a fashion parade with most trekker’s dressed to the nines and with prizes for the winner.
The crowd had gathered around the racing ring for the first race and bets had been placed. Bo did the honours with the bag and Don was his bookies clerk. Greg the starter lifted the bucket and they were off. Unfortunately Jerry was confronted by the crowd and took up a fighting stance rather than start racing so it was a few minutes before he got going. Boof the eventual winner was already halfway to the rope and Jerry was a distant third. Jerry did better than the two yabby's that didn't move at all.

Sullo did a great job calling the race although this may have been the start of him loosing his voice later in the trek. Laryngitis is a dreadful condition for the lead singer of the band.

The other heats were won and lost and prizes and bets collected. There was some controversy in one of the heats when an owner moved the finish line to advantage her starter however the protest was overturned on appeal. It is rumoured the grand champion was plated up with all the rest of the yabby's as his reward.
The fashion show saw some excellent kit and the Kiwis again excelled themselves with a bit of cross dressing. The kids put on an excellent show and the men's fashion was won by the undertaker with the ladies winner in a smart blue number with a yabby hat. She was escorted to the dais by the publican and the local constable who was off duty and attended the proceedings.

We had an excellent smorgasbord dinner put on at the pub and the band then entertained us out the front of the pub for the rest of the night.

Fri 3rd Oct – Maree to Glendambo

We were away early turning off the Oodnadatta Track down the Borefield Track for Roxby Downs. Roxby Downs is a fairly large mining town servicing the Olympic Dam uranium mine. Provisions were procured by those who needed them.

It was then onto Woomera where we looked over the rocket display. Well worth the entrée fee to read about the history of the rocket range. This large town only has enough residents maintain essential services so most dwellings are vacant.

Leaving Woomera we turned right at Pimba up the Stuart Highway. We arrived at the Glendambo Roadhouse early afternoon where we scored a tin shed and set up our swags. The tin shed protected us from the gale that was blowing.

The Gendambo Roadhouse was the site of the Trek Ball and the theme was to dress as a celebrity. The Doctor Who (David Tennant) mask I had made
didn't suite a full face beard and in a fit of bravado at the Montecollina Bore I had volunteered to have my four year old beard shaved off. My business suite was well out of place in this roadhouse. After the hat had been passed around in aid of the RFDS and while the band played click goes the shears, Sullo started the shearing proceedings but was battling the job. Luckily we had a resident hairdresser who took over and finished off the shearing.

The celebrities were judged and prizes awarded before the band finished the night off in the wee small hours.

Bobby had a bit of bad luck with his cruiser near Roxby Downs when the engine started making some funny noises. The vehicle was towed to Pimba and the guys got a lift to Glendambo. It was diagnosed that the vehicle would require a new engine so Bobby had some work to do on Plan B.
Sat 4th Oct – Glendambo to Port Augusta

Following Bobby’s mishap his vehicle was taken in tow by one of the other vehicles and I had Roy join me as a passenger for two days to Broken Hill. Kevin traveled with Les and they planned to catch a train from Broken Hill back to Sydney thence Newcastle and home to Foster.

Roy took the helm for the quick trip down the Stuart Highway to Port Augusta where we arrived in time for lunch. We set up camp in the Big 4 caravan park on the only bit of grass available. Whilst Bobby and his crew worked on Plan B, the afternoon was spent with a drive around town after a beautiful fish and chip lunch.

Sun 5th Oct – Port Augusta

Prior to the Trek I had booked a ticket for a steam locomotive ride on the Pitchi Richi railway from Quorn down to Woolshed Flat and return. Away early I enjoyed a picturesque drive through the magnificent Flinders Rangers to Quorn. Breakfast was railway spikes more commonly known as toast fingers at a local café which had me fuelled up for the ride.

We watched as steam engine No. 22 ‘Justin Hancock’ was shunted into position and locked onto the line of old railway carriages that would convey us down the range to Woolshed Flat and back again.
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With a blast of the whistle and a gush of steam from the funnel we were off with quite a few trekkers on board. Rattling and rolling down the track we reached the amazing speed of around 15-30kph so there was plenty of time to watch the scenery and take photographs. All too soon we reached Woolshed Flat for morning tea. After the steam locomotive had been moved to the other end of the carriages via a triangular track and points system the return journey to Quorn all too soon was over.

Prior to the trip I had arranged to meet with AJ from the Overlander Forum at Whyalla and after lunch and a view of Port Augusta from Mathew Flinders lookout I headed down the Eyre Peninsular arriving in Whyalla mid afternoon. My time prior to meeting AJ was spent looking around town, the foreshore and the lookouts on Hummock Hill. Whyalla is a large industrial port town with some 26,000 residents and large industry serving the mines. The view from Hummock Hill provides a great spectacle of the surrounding countryside and well out to sea.

AJ was attending a SA 4WD gathering at the showground and had just returned from leading a trip up into the Flinders Ranges. I caught up with him at the showground where the kids were maintaining a raging fire in readiness for the camp oven cooking competition. We had a chat and watched the contestants prepare their ovens for the bakeoff prior to me having to return to Port Augusta.

Back at Port Augusta we watched the replay of the rugby league grand final prior to retiring.
Mon 6th Oct - Port Augusta to Silverton

Away reasonably early for the trip up through Horrocks Pass and onto Peterborough the weather closed in and it became overcast and started to rain. We stopped at Peterborough for morning tea find the only place open on this public holiday was the servo where we had something warm to eat. It was bitterly cold with a gale blowing.

The journey to Broken Hill passed quickly on the blacktop and we were in town for lunch prior to the run out to Silverton. Penrose Park at Silverton was our destination and after setting camp we adjourned to the Silverton Hotel for a few refreshments.

The Broken Hill Rotary Club provided a scrumptious roast dinner and the band entertained us for the rest of the night.

Tue 7th Oct - Silverton

A late start found us back at the Silverton Hotel for the obligatory photos beside the Mad Max Falcon. We had an enjoyable mugachino at the café and then took a tour through the local art galleries and the coin carvery. The coin carver saws out the centres of pennies and other coins prior to having them gold plated. A visit to the museum finished off our circumnavigation of Silverton.
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Back into Broken Hill for a nice lunch at the Muso’s Club we then drove up the lookout overlooking the town. The lookout which is perched on top of a man made hill of mine tailings provides magnificent 360 degree views of the surrounding countryside.

Journeying out to the Living Desert we accomplished an invigorating walk to a hilltop where a number of sculptures are on display. These sculptures were completed at a sculpture’s symposium a number of years earlier. Large rocks up to 12 tons had been carted to this location for the artists to carve.

Back to camp we relaxed for the rest of the afternoon prior to dinner at the pub and a quiet evening.

Wed 8th Oct – Silverton to White Cliffs

Away again early for the trip via good dirt to Menindee we found the lakes almost empty and after morning tea moved on.

Heading for White Cliffs we arrived for lunch setting up camp in the Caravan Park. The caravan park is fairly basic but has good amenities.
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Adjourning to the hotel for the afternoon we enjoyed a few refreshments prior to dinner and entertainment from the band. During proceedings Greg auctioned off a few items including a bottle of Triple Diamond anniversary port.

An excellent night was had by all with festivities finishing well into in the wee small hours.

Thu 9th Oct – White Cliffs to Tilpa

The road from White Cliffs to Tilpa was a bit ordinary in spots and a few trekkers’ punctured tyres.

We stopped at Willcania for lunch which we enjoyed in the park near the bridge over the Darling River. There was very little flow in the river.

Arriving in Tilpa we had a BBQ lunch at a reserve on the river just out of town. Back to town we set up camp opposite the hotel and had a walk around prior to dinner and the talent quest. The Tilpa Hotel is another classic outback pub which is well worth a visit if doing the ‘Darling River Run’.

Robbo who normally drives the ambulance but couldn’t make the trek this year and was replaced by Kato made a guest appearance.
After dinner the talent quest got under way with the kids putting on a good show and every child winning a prize. It was then followed by the adults with some regulars and also new talent providing a mixture of drama, poetry and singing.

Fri 10th Oct – Tilpa to Bourke

We were away early again for the short run to Bourke via Louth where we had a cup of coffee for morning tea at the Louth Hotel. Near Bourke we were checked in by the boys in blue who had an RBT setup. This put a bit of a dampener on this leg of the journey for some trekker's but they were only doing their job.

The major auction and dinner was the final trek event and Greg started warming up his voice late afternoon. There were around a hundred items to be auctioned and bidding was brisk for all the items with most trekker's bagging something.

The highlight of the auction was Sullo's fine alligator skin boots. They were borrowed by an anonymous trekker and traveled the countryside with photos
being taken at various locations along the way. Howard Steer drew a caricature on the soles and signed them in Broken Hill. It was all in the spirit of the Trek and Sullo put in a substantial bid to reclaim ownership.

**Sat 11th Oct – Bourke to Mudgee**

The run down the Mitchell Highway was uneventful although my eyes were peeled for kangaroos with memories of the one I scored on the way home from the 2001 Trek. Listening to Tiddles and Dribbles, who was on the side of the road on his way to Bathurst, discussing footy on 2WEB passed the time away and they also gave a plug to the Trek. I had lunch at Nyngan and ran into the Kiwis who were also having a bite to eat.

Stopping off at Narromine I called into the mate who I had missed at Hungerford and we had a bit of a chinwag before I departed for Mudgee. Pulling out from Narromine I found I was behind the Love Bug but was unsuccessful in hailing them. The countryside was looking pretty lush on the back roads into Mudgee and I arrived on dusk booking into a motel so I could get an early start in the morning.

**Sun 12th Oct Mudgee to Sydney**

Away early for this last leg on a glorious spring morning there was mist hanging over the valley as I rolled through fields of grape vines just starting to come into leaf. Up over Cherry Tree Hill
and onto the lookout just after Capertee I stopped to view the valley below and the Blue Mountains in the distance. Moving on through Lithgow and onto the Bell's Line of Road there was not much traffic about as the Bathurst Races were on. I arrived home safe and sound after a trip of some 5,000KM averaging around 12.6L/100KM and only one puncture.

Epilogue

To my mind this was the best trek yet of the five I have now completed since 1997. It's not so much the journey but the trekkers you meet on the way and they come from all walks of life, cities, country towns and farms. Everyone is thrown together in this mixing pot of personalities and there is a camaraderie that is not often found in such a large group of people. If someone needs help, there is always a helping hand from another trekker and that’s what makes this Trek so special.

Another successful trek is over and ideas are being tossed around for the next one. It’s already in the diary for next year.