

## 2007 Bourke Police and Community Outback Trek North to the Gulf – 27 September to 15 October 2007

### Prologue

The Bourke Police and Community Outback Trek originated in 1984 by a small group of people from the Bourke community deciding to raise money for charity on their annual holiday. Over the years it has grown in size and passed through many outback towns in Australia, raising money along the way for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and many other local charities. Trekkers have enjoyed the hospitality of many outback communities in their travels and as many as 120 vehicles have participated in some years.



The Trek was organised by this year's committee

accompanied by



Dribbles our mechanic and his family in the truck/workshop,



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Robbo our paramedic with his daughter and Brendan in the ambulance



the band "Sullo and the Outback Band" with Sullo accompanied by his daughter.



This core group of hardened Trekers provided the support and entertainment along the way.

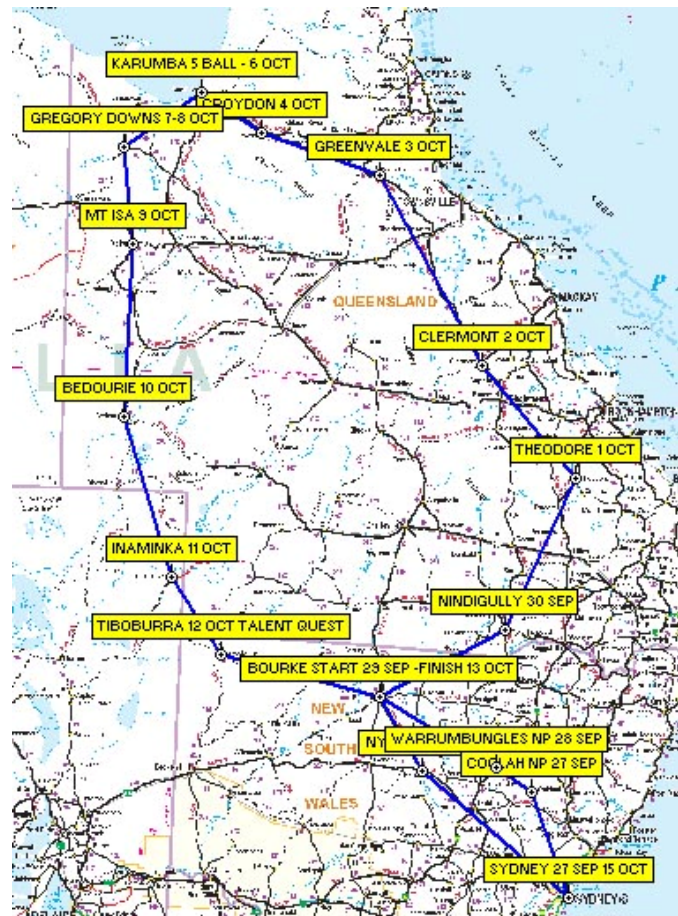
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The committee spends many hours organising and running the event each year with the generous support of many volunteers.

Further details about the Bourke Outback Trek can be found on the website at:  
<http://www.outbacktrek.com.au/index.html>

This Trek was my fourth over 10 years having participated in 1997, 2001, 2004 and from my perspective the best one yet.

The journey was around 6,000km with stops along the way at Mudgee, Warrumbungles and Dubbo. Overnight stops on the Trek included Bourke, Nindigully, Theodore, Clermont, Greenvale, Croydon, Karumba, Gregory Downs, Mount Isa, Bedourie, Innaminka and Tibbooburra.



This log details my personal experience on this 24<sup>th</sup> Trek.

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### **Thu 27 Sep - Sydney to Mudgee**

Setting off from Sydney at a reasonable hour and crossing the mountains via the Bells Line of Road for Mudgee I pulled in at Capertee for a wee stop. As I applied the brakes on my late model Toyota Landcruiser there was a horrible grinding noise followed by the front right driver's side wheel locking up.

The vehicle was not drivable in this condition so a phone call to my mechanic had me removing the brake pads to check for any problems. Nothing was obvious and with the mechanic still on the line we ran out of ideas so I phoned the NRMA. After a long wait a flatbed turned up and the driver inspected the wheel and spotted a missing bottom bolt from the brake caliper. After scouting the area to try and find it, without any luck, the vehicle was hoisted on to the back of the truck for the trip back to Lithgow.



After a new bolt was fitted I was away again. Late afternoon and following an uneventful journey I was in Mudgee where, after a bugger of a day, I booked into a motel. No standard rooms were available so I scored a rustic old cabin called Rose Cottage next to the Oriental Hotel.

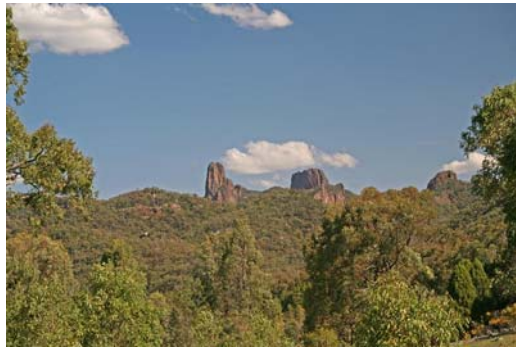
A delicious dinner of lamb shanks and a few glasses of red at the Oriental Hotel settled me down nicely for the evening.

### **Fri 28 Sep – Mudgee to Warrumbungles**

Packing up at a reasonable hour I had a chat to my neighbor who was down from Queensland and working in the local mines. The resource boom is really firing up the mining industry right across Australia and accommodation close to mining sites is often difficult to obtain without booking ahead.

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Leaving Mudgee I had an uneventful trip arriving in the Warrumbungles around lunch time. After setting up camp at Camp Blackman I took in a couple of the close by walks. The area was very dry with only a couple of small pools of water in the creek. Late afternoon I fired off a few photos of the surrounding scenery and then headed back to camp where I started a fire using firewood I had bought along. I cooked a nice steak on the BBQ over the fire for dinner.



After dinner a neighbor who was a member of a Brisbane bushwalking club invited me over to join some friends for refreshments. They told me they had just completed an overnight walk camping near the "Breadknife" and were a bit sore and sorry for themselves.

### **Sat 29 Sep – Warrumbungles to Bourke**

Away early I headed for Quambone and the Macquarie Marshes. The marshes were very dry and I stopped at the observation tower however there wasn't much activity around.

Arriving in Bourke at lunchtime I had a nice lamb pie for lunch at the bakery before booking into the Major Mitchell Hotel for a bit of luxury before the hard road ahead. I stopped at the wharf and noted that the Darling River had more water than when I came through Bourke in July.

Relaxing for a while I had a bit of a nap prior to adjourning to the Bowling Club to register for the Trek. Trekers slowly arrived at the club late afternoon and I reacquainted myself with old friends I had met on previous Treks.

We were given our traveling kit of maps and tourist information and purchased our Outback License with the money going to the Trek coffers. We were briefed about the Trek by the Trip Leader and after a Chinese feed at the club I retired.

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### Sun 30 Sep – Bourke to Nindigully

Up early for a stroll around town after packing I helped one of the other Trekers install a Perspex cover for her rear window as she was towing a camper van.



All the Trekers lined up down a main street of Bourke for the start of the Trek with some 60 vehicles in attendance.



Murray's Ford Fairlane raised a lot of interest.

The lead vehicle had left 2 hours earlier to set up signs providing directions at any confusing turns.

Heading off around 8am we set off for Brewarina and Hebel on the Qld border. The officials booked us out and we purchased tickets in the 100 club to be drawn later that night and also in the regular raffle.

Out of Brewarina we traveled on fairly rough roads to an opal mining area at Glengarry and stopped for morning tea at the "Glengarry Hilton", the local hotel.

A quick detour into Lightning Ridge was in order as I had not been there before.

Stopping at Dirrabandi for lunch and a couple of traveler pies at the pub I was surprised when told I couldn't eat them out in the beer garden as it was a smoker's area.



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Traveling through Thalon we arrived at the Nindigully Hotel early afternoon and set camp on the river. It was running a banker and was a very pleasant location. Enjoying a couple of refreshments we waited for the other trekkers to arrive.

The band “Sullo and the Outback Band” made up of Sullo, Cookie, Harry and Gerry who were traveling with us set up their gear and played a few songs prior to the NRL grand final.

Dinner was provided at the pub for a small fee and an auction was run for seats in the corporate box at the pub raising about \$100 a seat for the five seats available. A number of other items were also auctioned.

We all watched the game with many not knowing which team to support. After the game the band completed a couple more brackets.

### **Mon 1 Oct – Nindigully to Theodore**



A beautiful morning greeted us as we awoke. Cool and clear with an azure blue sky.



Breaking camp after breakfast we stopped on the side of the road for breakfast supplied by JD and his crew and then headed for St George through Sarat for morning tea and then onto Roma.

Taking the Taroom road we traveled through to Theodore where we set camp around the Showground. It was damn hot however it was a dry heat which was tolerable.

We had all been given a book of fine money as part of our travel kit and prior to dinner fines were announced for those who had done something silly during this leg of the trip. Dinner was curry and rice prepared by the local CWA.

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After dinner we set off on the decent walk down to the local pub where the band was playing. Following a couple of games of pool and a few refreshments it was another long return journey back to camp.

### **Tues 2 Oct – Theodore to Clermont**



Leaving Theodore behind we headed for Moura having to cross a mining road where 240 tone trucks lumbered along at about 30kph. We waited while a group of 5 trucks crossed in front of us. Stopping on the side of the road we watched a dragline strip away large gulps of overburden to get to the rich minerals below.

Traveling on through Bauhinia we stopped for a cuppa at Springsure and arrived in Emerald for lunch. After passing through Capella we arrived in Clermont early afternoon and set up camp in the Clermont Caravan Park. This was an excellent well maintained park with nice green grass.

Dinner was a BBQ and salad and the band set up out the back. Prior to dinner a number of items were auctioned including a bottle of Triple Diamond 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary port which raised \$110.



### **Wed 3 Oct – Clermont to Greenvale**

It was an uneventful trip from Clermont to Charters Towers and we stopped at Bellyano Crossing for morning tea. At Charters Towers we had lunch and topped up our supplies in this large bustling town.

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The road from Charters Towers was windy and single lane bitumen in places with plenty of road trains. On this section I was on point with Les and Surfie following.

We had just passed through some road works and waited while a double road train dumped its load. The road train then moved off slowly and as it gathered speed I called up the driver on the UHF radio to pass. I was talking to him on channel and believed he had given me the all clear to go round him on the two lane bitumen section. The bitumen suddenly returned to single lane again and the road train driver suddenly pulled straight back into the middle of the road with me traveling along outside him on right side dirt verge. After some hairy moments I was lucky that the road returned to two lane bitumen again and I negotiated around his vehicle. Meanwhile the road train driver had indicated to Les it was OK for him to pass and Les just squeezed in between the road train and an oncoming truck. I listened in on the UHF as the two truck drivers discussed in non too complimentary terms smaller vehicles on the road. I gave both drivers a serve on road etiquette and the channel cleared without so much as an apology.

Arriving at Greenvale we set up camp with some Trekers in the caravan park and others around the Three Rivers hotel. It was hot again but the dry heat was bearable.



The hotel had a sausage tree out the back which had large showy crimson flowers and huge ponderous sausage shaped seed pods hanging off it.

Dinner consisted of a BBQ and salad followed by the auction of a well used Acubra hat which raised \$300.

A rigged mystery raffle was won by Sullo who had to wear a pretty evening dress for 24 hours. The band entertained us and a few of the locals from Jervois Station, where the trek had stopped once before, came in to join us for the evening.

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### **Thu 4 Oct – Greenvale to Karumba**

Leaving Greenvale we headed for the Lynd Junction and onto Georgetown. I had lunch at Croydon where the rest of the group were staying for the night and moved on deciding to travel straight through to Karumba to get an extra days fishing.

Fuelling up at Normanton and after traveling through a light shower of rain I arrived in Karumba where it was stinking hot and humid. The barra season had just ended at 12 noon that day and this explained the exodus of vehicles and boats on trailers leaving town, as I drove in.

As I was staying for three days in the Gulf Country Caravan Park I set up the tent rather than just the usual swag on stretcher in the open and headed for the swimming pool to cool down.



Driving around town for a look I then headed for the Norman River heads to watch the sun go down over the Gulf.

Dinner was a seafood feast at a small restaurant across the road from the caravan park. A dozen oysters followed by a feed of prawns and half a mud crab was delicious.

Whilst I was waiting for dinner I heard a high pitched barking noise and finally worked out that it was a Gecko crawling upside down around the roof looking for a feed of insects.

The whole area is rich with insects and frogs and the flies and mossies were not welcome but were ferocious and attacked in any case. The night was sweltering hot and humid with no respite when the wind died down..... it was the start of the build up to the wet season.

### **Fri 5 – Sat 6 Oct – Karumba**

Up early to try my luck with rod and reel I drove out to Karumba Point. My first cast only scored a snag on the bottom so I moved on. In an hour or so I caught two catfish and a bearded jewfish which I couldn't identify at the time. A pelican close by quickly put the smaller catfish out of its misery and I gave up after losing another two hook and sinker rigs on the rocky bottom.

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The rest of the day was spent lazing around camp with a swim in the pool every so often to cool down in the stifling conditions. As I relaxed in the pool the other Trekers who had camped overnight at Croydon started to drift in. The pool filled quickly and it wasn't long before it was standing room only.



The evening was set for the Trek Ball at the Karumba Hotel in The Animal



Bar and the theme was school uniform. Most people dressed up for the occasion and the band played as usual.

A few people made a mess of themselves, mostly the locals who had just come back from a fairly lengthy stint on the prawn trawlers. They were very excited and almost added their weight to the reason the bar was given its name. In the end they turned out to be pretty friendly and overly so to some of the ladies traveling with us.

Saturday dawned hot and sticky again and the pool again filled very quickly. Heading out the point to drop in a line again I had plenty of bites however used all my bait and came home empty handed.

Whilst fishing I watched one of the charter boats being towed back into the river and learned that some of the Trekers had been on board when the boat had trouble with the gearbox. This occurred about 100 meters from where they were going to fish. Trekers who had gone out on one of the other boats pulled in a good haul of about 20 fish.

Joining Les and Surfie I took a trip around town again and stopped by the Sunset Tavern.

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One of the locals had set a couple of crab traps out the front of the tavern and on inspection one of the traps had two nice mud crabs that couldn't resist the bait of dead catfish. One was large whilst the other was of average size.



Following morning tea I drove around the airstrip watching the Rainbow Bee Eaters complete aerobatic stunts by flying into the wind stalling mid flight and landing back on the barbed wire fence.

After lunch I headed for the Barramundi Education Centre where a number of us listened to the guide give a talk on the life cycle of the Barramundi. This was followed by a tour of the breeding tanks where there were some meter long specimens used for spawning. We hand fed the fish and were surprised at how quickly and ferociously they would attack a fish from your hand.



Late afternoon I headed for the town wharf for the sunset cruise I had booked earlier in the day. Boarding the punt we headed off for a tour of the industrial sites along river banks. This was followed by a run out to the point to watch the sunset.

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There was plenty of birdlife on the water with the kite hawks being fed from the boat and a couple of sea eagles also coming in for a feed.

The sunset was a bit disappointing with a cloud cover on the horizon so it was back to town and then a quick run out to the tavern for the usual briefing. The band had another gig here as well.

**Sun 7 Oct - Karumba to Gregory Downs**

Braking camp early and on trying to start the vehicle I found I had flat starter batteries. One of the Trekkers kindly helped me out with a jump start and I was on my way.

The journey to Gregory Downs through Burketown was uneventful and we set camp on the Gregory River. This river which runs through Lawn Hill NP is fed by fresh water springs and runs all year round. The publican at the hotel was not very friendly having let rooms pre booked by some of the Trekkers and getting very agitated when questioned about her action.

After a couple of refreshments at the hotel it was back to the river to spend the afternoon swimming in the crystal clear waters.



**Mon 8 Oct - Gregory Downs**



Up early for the 100km trip out to Lawn Hill NP, I found the mining road to the Zinifex mine site good and then it deteriorated for the rest of the journey.

Arriving at the park I was surprised at how dry it was away from the river banks. The river banks were lined with Pandanus Palms and there were reeds and some

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water lilies down near the Cascades.

Taking the walk up to Indarra Falls I found many Trekers already frolicking in the refreshing water. Some had walked whilst others had hired canoes to travel the kilometer to get there. The two large



waterholes are joined by a small rift in the gorge valley floor and a number of waterfalls cascade over the rift. A refreshing swim and relaxation the

spar pool readied me for the hot return journey.

Heading back to camp I again spent the rest of the afternoon in the creek with many of the other Trekers. One of the Trekers had two punctured tyres and I assisted by plugging them as a temporary measure until we reached Mount Isa.

The band again entertained us at the pub in the evening and we enjoyed various pastas for the Italian Night theme. The publican made up for the earlier problems with a generous donation to Trek funds.

That evening whilst some of us were at the pub the kids were told to keep away from the water as a Treker had sighted an eight foot King Brown slithering around near the water.

### Tue 9 Oct - Gregory Downs to Mount Isa

Ted had been having trouble with his gearbox the previous day and it finally gave up the ghost so the Kiwis in the F250 hitched up a solid towbar to drag the Nissan Pathfinder to Mount Isa. I hitched up Ted's camper trailer to my vehicle with Ted traveling with the Kiwis his wife traveling with me and their grandson in another vehicle.

The plan had originally been to travel down the dirt towards Camooweal however we were advised the road was not suitable for trailers and so traveled via the Burke and Wills Roadhouse and Cloncurry to Mount Isa. We stayed in the Argylla Caravan Park with the band playing across the road at the Overlander Hotel. It was a late night with everyone having a great time.

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### **Wed 10 Oct – Mount Isa to Bedourie**

We left Ted and his passengers at Mount Isa and headed for Boulia and then onto Bedourie for the night. Surfie who was an insulin dependant diabetic was having a few a few problems and the flying doctor was called in at Bedourie to take him back to Mount Isa to be stabilized.

We spread out at Bedourie with some camping around the roadhouse, others set up in the sports hall and the rest of us camped in the park. A number of sprinkler heads were close by and I placed some buckets over them in case they went off early in the morning as they did on the 97 Trek in another town. A nice dinner was provided at the roadhouse consisting of cold meats and salads and the band played a few quiet sets.

### **Thu 11 Oct – Bedourie to Innaminka**

Departing at the usual time we found this section of the Trek to be a bit of a horror stretch. It was originally planned to travel via the Cordillo Downs road however we were advised it was in very poor shape and so it was decided to do the Walkers Crossing road instead.

A good run down to Birdsville found us there just after the pub opened. A few Trekkers headed out to Big Red to have a go and this included the ambulance.

The bakery was closed for the season and I enjoyed a pub squash and curried camel pie for brunch. Contemplating what was in the pie, I thought it might have been one of the losers in from the camel races run earlier in the year at one of the close by towns.



Heading down the Birdsville Track we turned off for Walkers Crossing. The turnoff was not marked and only the OBT sign put up by the lead crew gave us any indication where it was.

This was a pretty rough track and we could only manage around 50/60 kph. Near the crossing we noticed a couple of OBT signs with a down arrow on a cattle grid. They marked a 6" step in the grid which my vehicle didn't like when I hit it.

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Les and I deviated from the route and traveled straight into Innaminka on the mining road in via Moomba. This was much smoother than the marked route and although longer in distance took about the same time.

Later we heard that Murray's Ford Fairlane had come to grief on the cattle grid with the bull bar hitting the grid and driving the radiator into the fan. The Fairlane was towed into Innaminka by one of the other Trekers.

Dribbles broke a leaf spring four times on his camper van welding it up three times. Whilst we got in about late afternoon many of the other Trekers didn't arrive till late evening. Dribbles spent the night near Moomba on the track as he was not able to repair the spring a fourth time.

Setting camp on Coopers Creek we headed to the pub for a dinner of roast meats and salads. A couple of the band members played a few quiet brackets with Sullo's daughter joining. There was no sound equipment as it turned up late with the truck.



### Fri 12 Oct – Innaminka to Tibooburra

Although Les and myself had topped up with fuel when we got into Innaminka, many were too late into camp and had to wait till the pumps opened. The owners of the general store seemed to have a bee in their bonnet and watched as all the vehicles lined up. They refused to open the pumps until their official opening time. Another fuel supply was soon located and as all the vehicles moved off the owners opened the pumps rather than lose all the business.



A search party was sent out looking for a replacement radiator for the Fairlane and one from a Falcon was located and squeezed in and the vehicle was back on the road again. Amazing what bush mechanics can do.

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Away a little late because of the fuel issues we headed back down the Moomba road, that Les and I had come in, for Merty Merty. We stopped for lunch at Cameron's Corner and found Bill, who had entertained a different group of us while rained in for two days on a previous trip, still in residence. A closest to the pin golf game was played by a number of Trekers.

Hitting the roller coaster sand hills into Tibooburra we arrived early afternoon and enjoyed a couple of refreshments at the old pub which had been a bordello in earlier times. Admiring the wall paintings we were told by the publican they had been completed many years ago by artists including Clifton Pugh and Drysdale who were there for a gathering of artists.

Adjourning to the pub across the road the guys from the South Coast sponsored \$1 drinks prior to dinner in memory of Hilton, who was an avid Treker, prior to his passing away.



Following dinner we settled down for the talent quest where many of the Trekers espoused their talent and put on a good show for us with the band taking a back seat for



a change. It was a great night and we packed up very late.

### Sat 13 Oct – Tibooburra to Bourke

Although the road was good dirt the late night turned this section into a bit of a challenge. We arrived in Bourke early afternoon and I again took up residence in the Major Mitchell Motel. This was just down the road from the Bowling Club where the final Trek function and major auction was to be held.

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There were plenty of items to be auctioned and most vehicles put in bids for one item or another with some Trekers spending more than they anticipated. The Kiwis had a flag signed by all the Trekers which sold for \$450 and an air conditioner went for \$1850.



The band entertained us for the rest of the night. The crowd slowly subsided with Trekers wishing each other a fond Adieu till next time.

### Sun 14 Oct – Bourke to Dubbo

I was away early again and stopped off at the Bourke Weir where the water was flowing over the wall. The leg to Dubbo where I planned to visit to the Western Plains Zoo was uneventful.



Many years had passed since I had been to the zoo last and I took this opportunity again. Reserving a camping spot in the Big 4 caravan park close to the zoo I headed there late afternoon buying a ticket which was valid for two days. The afternoon was hot and there was not much animal activity so I used this visit to plan the following day. A number of exhibits were closed with animals such as the Zebras related to horses being removed because of the

Equine Flu outbreak.

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Returning to camp I set up the swag and stretcher under the stars and settled in for the night. I chatted to a number of caravaner's who were headed off to Forbes the next day for a rally at which a thousand vans and motor homes were expected.

### **Mon 15 Oct – Dubbo to Sydney**



Prior to heading to the zoo I drove down to the Macquarie River which was flowing and relaxed in the cool shade under the trees on the bank whilst waiting for the zoo to open.

The zoo is a great place for photograph opportunities with the open spaces and a big lens. Following another look around for the morning I had some lunch and

headed for Sydney and home.

### **Epilogue**

The next Bourke Outback Trek in 2008 will be the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and I certainly intend to participate. The route at this time has not yet been finalised.

From my perspective the Bourke Outback Trek epitomizes the outback spirit in our great land and gives us the opportunity to travel in the footsteps of the great Australian explorers.

It allows us to enjoy the hospitality of the people in the outback communities along the way and value the camaraderie of fellow Trekers from all over the country and walks of life.

Finally it contributes to the support of the many charities which provide services in the outback.

The photos in this log and many more in a file size suitable for quality printing will be put onto a disc which will be available for purchase with a donation to Trek funds. Information about this will be made available on the website.

<http://www.outbacktrek.com.au/index.html>