

On Thursday September 10th 2015, 5W members joined the SE Queensland Gathering Pre Tour of Outback Queensland. Members from Germany, Canada, USA, Switzerland and the UK joined 15 Australians. Having successfully negotiated the QANTAS arrival procedures at Brisbane Airport, we headed off for the small departure lounge and the smaller plane for the flight to Longreach. Waiting together in this lounge was a convivial start to our journey.

After a bumpy landing in Longreach, via Barcaldine, we transferred to the Longreach Motor Inn, our base for the trip. That evening we experienced outback hospitality on a Thompson River Sunset Cruise. The laconic commentary from Dave our Captain was challenging for those of us not used to the Australian Drawl, however, the Australian hospitality of the tour operators was superb. Group bonding was assured as many of us joined in singing at Smithy's Outback Show. This consisted of a two course meal on the banks of the river and the local entertainer leading us through the country songs.

Next day we travelled to Winton and back to the age of dinosaurs. Perched on a magnificent mesa overlooking the plains which stretch as far as the eye can see, we visited the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum. We were all impressed with the quantity of dinosaur bones discovered in this region and the interpretive tour of the working laboratory and the collection rooms.

Later a funnier experience unleashed our inner child as we bashed random bits of metal and water hose tubing along the Musical Fence to supposedly make music. Even though this was fun, it is possible to play Waltzing Matilda if one gets the wire fence to respond appropriately.

The highlight of this holiday for many of us was the visit to historic Camden Park Station, where we gained some insight into the vagaries of life on the land. Due to the prevailing drought conditions in Longreach, the station was completely de stocked in 2013 and the Walker family has had to diversify into tourism and other ventures to maintain an income until conditions improve and they return to cattle and sheep grazing. Morning Tea on the homestead verandah and a tour of the house finished this visit.

Longreach is famous for the QANTAS Museum and the Stockman's Hall of Fame. We visited both places, at the former we learnt all about the 747 aircraft whilst we climbed up into the body of the plane, including peaking into the Captain's cabin and then we followed the story of the birth of QANTAS in Longreach through the interpretive museum. The Stockman's Hall of Fame and its extensive grounds enchanted us all, whilst the Outback Stockman's Show amazed us with the skills of the stockman and his well trained horses and dogs. His singing and guitar playing whilst sitting astride a horse and later a bull made us appreciative of his stockman's skills.

Our final excursion to the School of Distance Education gave us a glimpse of raising children in remote parts of Australia where the teacher's voice comes via modern communication technology and fellow classmates are rarely seen. There is no better way to appreciate the Australian countryside than from a railway carriage and our return trip on the Spirit of the Outback train, in first class comfort to Brisbane, certainly gave us plenty to see and comment upon.

The camaraderie of this group was the best part of our tour and new friendships were made and old friendships rekindled. Congratulations for the organisation which went into the planning of this wonderful pre tour to the SE Queensland 5W September Gathering.

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