



South East Queensland Gathering Pre-Tour of Outback Queensland - September 2015

Members from Germany, Canada, USA, Switzerland and the UK joined fifteen Australians. After a bumpy landing in Longreach, we transferred to the Longreach Motor Inn, our base for the trip. 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.

Next 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 impressed with the quantity of dinosaur bones discovered in this region, 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. 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 Stockman's Hall of Fame. We visited both places; at the former we learnt about the 747 aircraft whilst we climbed up into the body of the plane, including peaking into the Captain's cabin and then followed the story of the birth of QANTAS in Longreach. 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.

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. **Catherine, South East Queensland, Australia**