

SYDNEY DEPARTURE**DAY 1**

Departing Sydney about 8.30am we travel the Bell's Line of Road across the Blue Mountains, stopping for 'Devonshire Tea' at the restaurant in the Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens with its glorious morning view over the vast Wollomoi National Park away to the north. Then on through Lithgow where we join the Great Western and Mitchell Highways through Bathurst and Orange stopping for lunch in the small central west town of Molong. After Molong we leave the highway and travel cross-country west to Parkes. Thence north on the Newell Highway past the Parkes Radio Telescope and through the gold mining town of Peakhill. In the light of the late afternoon we are in the beautiful wheat and agricultural lands at the edge of the Western Slopes. At Tomingly we leave the Newell Highway for the last 50km to our first evening stop at the Peppercorn Motel in Narromine – arriving there about 5pm. Dinner will be at Buxees Restaurant (open this evening just for our group with our hosts Bev and Vicki).

NARROMINE - BROKEN HILL**DAY 2**

Today we travel those long straight stretches of the Mitchell and Barrier Highways – first north to Nyngan then west through only two towns - Cobar and Wilcannia - on into Broken Hill where we will be spending the next two nights. We stop at Nyngan to pick up the morning newspapers for those who want them, then less than 2 hours later we stop for a tour of the Cobar Museum housed in the magnificent old Mine Manager's Residence. The Museum always lays on for us a nice lunch in the grassed picnic area. Whilst most of the country today appears at first to be scrub covered and uninteresting, 'old timers' still say that the land between Cobar and Wilcannia and beyond was once some of the best merino sheep country in Australia. Beyond Cobar we have more than 250km on to Wilcannia, just beyond the vast flood plain of the Darling River – with a rest stop along the way in the Maccullochs Range. We will drive around Wilcannia on the banks of the Darling, the town with a perhaps unearned reputation for more than just its magnificent old buildings. Those buildings include the stone hospital designed by Francis Greenway, Edmund Resch's home and the site of his first brewery, the Post Office, Court House, and Wool Stores to name a few. From mid-afternoon we are on the last stretch today, 200km further west to the Charles Rasp Motor Inn at Broken Hill. Dinner this evening in the Junction Hotel – an unremarkable but typical old hotel of this city, with the best food (according to the locals) for more than 300km in any direction. Here tonight we will meet Don Mudie – a genuine Broken Hill local who is going to be our guide tomorrow.

BROKEN HILL**DAY 3**

Joined after breakfast by Don Mudie we will spend the whole of today with Don as our guide. He claims to have only two passions in life – Grand Opera and Grand Prix Car Racing – but after a day with Don and his recounted knowledge of the industrial and other history of this city you will know that he also has a passion for Broken Hill. Apart from significant buildings, monuments, a mosque and other features of Broken Hill, Don takes us out to Silverton and the enormous Mundi Mundi Plain beyond that village. Morning tea in the Silverton Café and lunch later organised by Fran McKinnon, the local president of the National Trust, in a restored Workman's Cottage. Don's love for this city makes for a memorable day, concluding late in the afternoon when we catch the sunset at the Sculpture Park on the peak of one of those granite outcropping hills to the north of the city. This evening again to the Junction Hotel, or perhaps another of Broken Hill's featured restaurants, for dinner.

INTO SOUTH AUSTRALIA**DAY 4**

This morning we don't have to leave Broken Hill early so, for those who choose, there is plenty of time for a leisurely stroll from the motel down to the main street – past the heritage listed city block and around to the modern Tourist Information Centre café for morning tea. Leaving the city about 10.30am we cross the State Border into South Australia 50km to the west. Now through wonderful undulating and open plains country (the farthest eastern edges of the geological feature that is the Flinders Ranges) through the 'whistle-stop' settlements of Olary, Manna Hill and Yunta on the Barrier Highway. These are the most unpopulated regions of South Australia outside the desert country to the north – the Murray River 200km away to the south and Lake Frome and the Cooper Basin even further away to the north. In this country the first discovery of Australian uranium occurred more than 100 years ago. A region of low rainfall there are few indications of the struggling pastoral industry that works this country. We stop for lunch at the Coffee Pot Café in the forgotten village of Terowie – and it is here that we find a remarkable connection between this village and a significant event of the Second World War. The wide main street of Terowie is still lined with tiny, and mostly now unoccupied, shops from another era – so well preserved because of the diversion of the highway around this little settlement many years ago. The country changes beyond Terowie and soon we are entering the almost treeless, but apparently fertile (in good seasons) agricultural lands of wheat, canola, barley and so many other crops. We leave the highway near Hallett to find the prettiest route west then south into the Clare Valley and Mintaro – the blue stone village with a heritage listing where 'Mintaro Mews' is to be our home for the next two evenings. On the way down this last stretch we pass the largest wind farm in South Australia.

CLARE VALLEY/BURRA**DAY 5**

The stone building Mintaro Mews is Clare Valley accommodation at its best – even though some of the rooms are converted stables! The dining room was once a shop – now partly hidden from the street by a giant fig tree, with its black slate floor, that room is behind a beautifully preserved old shop front. The restaurant, which is exclusively for our party, is the kind of eating place where you will always find fresh linen on the table – and a wine cellar in the basement directly below the dining room. There may be frosty mornings when we are in Mintaro, but there is a pot belly fire in the tiny bar and all the rooms are centrally heated. Time to walk the beautiful and quiet streets of Mintaro after breakfast this morning and before going out to Martindale Hall for a conducted inspection of this remarkable mansion built by Edmund Bowman in 1880 – when he was 21 years of age. Leaving Martindale we go across country through Farrell Flat to Burra for lunch and a 3 – 4 hour guided tour. This small town set in its own beautiful valley (the film *Breaker Morrant* was made here), was established around the Burra copper mine (1845 – 1877). Burra is the only place of its kind in Australia - comprising four entirely separate and architecturally distinct villages accommodating the Scottish, Welsh, Cornish and English miners and their families. Burra today is in beautiful farming country; the renowned Collinsville Merino Stud is on the edge of the town to the north.

UP TO THE FLINDERS RANGES**DAY 6**

We leave Mintaro this morning along a nearby back road (Annie's Lane – the home of that well known SA wine) to call first at Paulette's Winery; this one famous for its Riesling, and located on the crest of a hill to command superb views over the vineyards below and away to the horizon in the east. Next, and just this side of Clare, we call in to the much older Sevenhill winery – owned and operated continuously by the Jesuit Order of priests since 1851. At both of these wineries we have an opportunity to stock up the cellars – there is plenty of room in our coach for all you wish to purchase. Beyond the wineries we travel through the clean thriving town of Clare then north through those little places, Yacka, Georgetown, Gladstone, Laura and others – each with a certain

beauty related perhaps mainly to the stone buildings unique to this part of SA. Whilst this is all undulating country it is only when we reach Gladstone that we are entering the identified southern boundary of the Flinders Ranges. Though we are not quite yet in that spectacular escarpment country that defines the Flinders, the hills hereabouts do certainly make for beautiful scenery. Up to Melrose for lunch in an old pub standing in the shadow of Mt Remarkable. One or two cottages in this village lovingly restored and converted into B&Bs. Beyond Melrose we cross the renowned 'Goyder Line'; almost immediately we leave behind the agricultural lands of our morning journey for the dry lands north of the Line. The country turns rapidly to an open scene with minimum if any tree cover. Beyond Willmington but still undulating country in the distance - these mostly bare hills do now roll into that distance. As we turn northeast, on the gravel stretch 50km across to Carrieton, the country really does appear to 'unfold' before us. At Carrieton we stop for hospitality at the beautifully restored bluestone hotel on almost the only corner in the village. No other coach ever stops here and we are always thus doubly welcome. Beyond Carrieton through Craddock and Hawker on our way to our destination at the Rawnsley Park resort. By the time we reach Hawker that recognisable purple horizon of the Flinders Ranges has risen up away to the north, indeed in Hawker itself the hills have obviously become the Ranges. Rawnsley Park has been specifically chosen as our destination for the next two evenings because of its location immediately below the ramparts of Rawnsley Bluff; that geological feature is a landmark on the road from Hawker up to Wilpena Pound.

THE FLINDERS RANGES

DAY 7

Today we are going to visit the best that this section of the Flinders Ranges has to offer – travelling through almost every part of the Range that has ever been captured on promotional film for this holiday destination. Wilpena Pound entrance for morning tea, then down a steep winding road through Bunyeroo Gorge to Brachina Gorge for lunch beneath those huge white gums of Hans Heysen fame. From Brachina Gorge past Aroona Valley thence by geological features including the Great Wall of China (with due apologies to the Chinese!) and up to Blinman to see the remains of the copper mine and to take afternoon tea in the school house. Thence west through this part of the Ranges via Angorichina Village and Parachilna Gorge, out onto that vast plain which stretches far beyond Lake Torrens - arriving at Parachilna one hour before sunset. We spend the final hour of this daylight travelling 100km down the western escarpment of the Range – the sinking sun reflecting its ever stronger colours on these mountains moving past our window for every kilometre of the end to this day. Today's route has been mapped with extreme care, to establish in a certainly memorable way, every aspect of the beautiful Flinders.

FLINDERS TO WOOMERA

DAY 8

After our second breakfast at the Rawnsley Park Lodge we travel 60km south on the way down to Port Augusta, visiting first the ruins of the Kanyaka Settlement. Then on to Quorn and more than an hour available to wander round this quaint and now small town that was once a significant stop on the Ghan Line to Alice Springs. Quandong Pie with morning tea here – the pie is an almost essential part of this refreshment stop with Karen at the Quandong Café. There are also several interesting art and craft galleries in Quorn. Then down through the Pitchi Richi Pass to the Wadlata Centre in Port Augusta for lunch - with an hour or more available to go through the Wadlata Outback Centre – a memorial to the pioneers of those remote parts of South Australia into which we will be heading the next several days of our tour. As we leave Port Augusta the large green reflective highway sign points simply two ways - 'West Australia' straight ahead and 'Northern Territory' on the turn to the north. We follow the road north for almost 200km, with a rest stop at the little known but spectacular Island Lagoon, before turning off that Stuart Highway for the last 9km to the Eldo Hotel – our stay in Woomera for this one night. A village now with maybe 500 permanent residents, Woomera was once capable of accommodation more than 7,000 people. The

tree-lined streets create an oasis, visible on approach for 10km or more, in this otherwise utterly barren treeless landscape; the Rocket Park we drive past on our way down to the hotel signals that this place is not like anywhere else in Outback Australia.

WOOMERA – ROXBY DOWNS**DAY 9**

The ambition of the tour is that this morning we may be able to travel out to the launch site that was so famous during the time of the Cold War from 1950 through to the end of the 1960s or later. Apart from the ballistic and other missiles launched at Woomera, it was out there, some 40km west of the Woomera village, that Australia became the fourth country in the world to launch a satellite. At the peak of its firing activities Woomera was launching up to forty rockets each day. While those times are now long past some very significant parts of the physical infrastructure remain in place today in that mostly silent country. If we are lucky enough to obtain access to the Woomera Range we will see some parts of Australia's history that an earlier generation of those who governed this country were most determined we should know nothing about at all. The ability for people such as our tour to visit the Range is entirely governed by defence or scientific activities at the time – even today Woomera Range is still an active military and defence facility. If we are unable to get out onto the Range we will certainly make an interesting time touring the village itself, the Woomera Heritage Centre and other such places of public access. In any event at or about lunch time we will leave Woomera to travel 80km further north to Roxby Downs and the BHP Billiton Olympic Dam mine – the largest uranium mine in the world. Tonight we stay in the modern Roxby Downs Motor Inn – a cleverly designed square set of buildings with a large irregular shaped swimming pool in its centre entirely covered by an enormous canvas pyramid. As we are now at about the half-way point on our tour, and as this is a very comfortable motel, the whole of this afternoon is 'at your leisure' – to simply swim and rest by the pool or to 'snooze' in your room before dinner in the motel this evening.

ROXBY DOWNS - MARREE**Day 10**

We do not leave Roxby Downs today until about lunch time. With a guide on board from the mining company we spend two hours and more at the Olympic Dam mine – some 10km beyond Roxby Downs village. Anxious always to remind us that the primary purpose of this mine is to extract copper, and that uranium only became a surprise addition to the already identified copper resource once detailed drilling was undertaken more than 20 years ago, the guide will always deliver on a very informative tour indeed. This mine is remarkable as one of the only in Australia where the raw material is extracted then processed to its final end sale product all on the single Olympic Dam site. A visit to Olympic Dam provides such a stark contrast between the mining technologies of the 21st century and those remote and ancient lands into which we are going to travel – immediately beyond and to the north of the mine boundary. Depending on the weather and our timetable we will have lunch at Roxby Downs, or we may take a packed lunch and leave straight after the mine tour – 120km up the 'Bore Track' thence west for 15km or so up the Oodnadatta Track for our first spectacular view of Lake Eyre South. Late in the afternoon we travel for an hour or more east back along the Oodnadatta Track, running parallel always with the original Ghan Line, to Marree for two nights. Travelling this part of our journey with the afternoon sun behind the coach brings out those desert colours in the 'jump-up' and undulating red and orange desert country that is this region. Built in 1883 at the time of completion of the Ghan Line to that place, the Marree Hotel is one of those beautiful and substantial two storey buildings; unfortunately in more recent times the architecture of the place has been somewhat overpowered by the 'temporary accommodation' constructed on both sides of the main building. The demands of tourists, whenever water flows to Lake Eyre, are reflected in the prefab additions which appear to sprout randomly around this once beautiful old hotel.

LAKE EYRE**DAY 11**

For those who wish to see Lake Eyre from the air, arrangements will be made with one of the small charter companies that operates flights over the Lake. We are fortunate that the airstrip made available to our group for this purpose is on Muloorina Station - one million acres on the southern shore of the Lake. After a leisurely breakfast we follow the Muloorina Station road out to that property where, if she is able, Cindy Mitchell who owns Muloorina with her husband Colin, will join us for the remaining (and perhaps rough in parts) route from the homestead out to the Lake. Cindy who was born and bred in this country has that easy charm and grace for which so many people of the outback are renowned. We follow the route of the Goyder Channel, that channel which joins Lake Eyre South with the main Lake Eyre, up from Lake Eyre South to stop at the foot of one particular sandhill. An easy walk up that single sandhill and the enormous expanse of Lake Eyre will open before us at the threshold crest. Travelling back to Muloorina Homestead we have a picnic lunch by the permanent waterhole located at this part of Frome Creek. The charter plane then operates a shuttle service taking those who wish on flights over the Lake, while the rest of us enjoy the tranquillity of our surroundings – apart from the birdlife which is often quite noisy around this water. By late afternoon we are all back at Marree for our second evening in the Marree Hotel.

MARREE to INNAMINCKA**DAY 12**

Today we will travel the length of the Strzelecki Track to Innamincka. South firstly from Marree this once gravel road is turning in recent years into a bitumen highway (perhaps unfortunate but simply a reflection of the tourist demands of Lake Eyre in good seasons). On the way down to Lyndhurst we will make a short detour to the ghost town of Farina – many of its stone buildings now being meticulously restored by enthusiasts who regularly travel up the 350km from Port Augusta. Then another short distance off the main road to the site of an Ochre Pit which appears to have been of substantial significance over thousands of years to generation upon generation of Aborigines from much of Central Australia and beyond. At Lyndhurst we drop in for morning tea to the one hotel that marks the start point of the Strzelecki Track. Travelling north east for the first 200km and more the Gammon Ranges (the northern Flinders Ranges) are off to the right of the coach about 20km for the first few hours. The spectacular stony plains country is cut occasionally by clearly defined and tree-lined water courses. Then the Track turns more north into forbiddingly barren white sand country ‘the Cobbler’ sand ridges. In this otherwise godforsaken country we stop for lunch at Montecollina Bore – a large permanent water storage sourced from the Great Artesian Basin. After lunch we pass close by the Moomba Oil and Gas refineries – a reminder in this remote place that we are in the 21st century. Then 2 hours or less beyond Moomba we enter the distinctively red stone country which was the last barrier for early explorers to the Cooper Creek. Spectacular ‘jump-up’ country appears to the north as we drive the last few kilometres down to Innamincka on the banks of the Cooper – for two nights at the recently completed Innamincka Hotel/Motel.

INNAMINCKA & THE COOPER**DAY 13**

Today is about enjoying Cooper Creek. We will not travel more than perhaps 200km in total this day. Covering those parts of this stream from the Dig Tree across the border in Queensland to the east, to the place where William Wills died in 1861 some 20km west of present day Innamincka, the idea today is to see this country almost exactly the way that Burke and Wills saw it in the middle years of the 19th century, to find the beauty of parts of the creek where the river gums grow to enormous heights out of white sand, to wonder how those explorers could have possibly perished in this life-affirming environment, and to understand why the word ‘Creek’ is such a misnomer to any proper description of what the Cooper really is. One or two or three hours will be available to walk along the banks of the Cooper, to sit under a Coolibah or River Gum, to boil the

billy, to look for turtles on waterholes that are up to 100 feet deep, or to watch the birdlife that is everywhere on this Creek. It is a very peaceful place; there is an evocative saying about the Cooper – *“If you cross this creek three times it will never leave you”* We will cross it at least three times today.

ON TO TIBOOBURRA**DAY 14**

Hard and all as it will be to leave the Cooper we begin today to turn back towards our final destination. From Innamincka we follow our inward path back past Moomba and down the Strzelecki Track for an hour to that east turn which takes us soon past Merty Merty Station and a stop at the largest of all the red sandhills in this part of the Strzelecki Desert – it is actually possible to drive the coach up to collide with the sandhill. After morning tea here we set out to cross more than 200 sandhills east to Cameron Corner, that place where the borders of NSW, Queensland and South Australia, all meet. Then through the Sturt National Park after lunch, down the jump-ups and into Tibooburra for our second last evening together at the Granites Motel. Visit the Family Hotel where the likes of Clifton Pugh and Russell Drysdale have used the walls of the Lounge Bar (!!) as the canvasses for some of their less well known artwork.

TIBOOBURRA TO WHITE CLIFFS**DAY 15**

We are going to travel only about 250km today; thus we have time to visit Depot Glen out of Milparinka, a place so significant to the Sturt expedition which discovered Cooper Creek and other significant parts in 1840. The old pub is the only occupied building in Milparinka and we will stop there for lunch. Rolling and open hill country the predominance of white quartz stone perhaps should have indicated the presence of gold in these parts; indeed it was gold that brought the first white men to this remote part of NSW but the gold finds lasted for only 1 or 2 years. From Milparinka we go down the Silver City Highway which links Broken Hill with Tibooburra, turning off some 50km south of Milparinka for White Cliffs. Following back roads across country we will arrive at White Cliffs and the Underground Motel late afternoon. This is some motel – with up to 40 underground ‘rooms’. (Note there are no en-suite toilets at this motel – it is apparently against the law to place such ‘conveniences’ underground!). If we are early enough into White Cliffs we will spend maybe an hour driving around the old opal diggings.

WHITE CLIFFS TO NARROMINE**Day 16**

Regard today as perhaps one of the most restful aboard the coach. From White Cliffs we are on bitumen roads all the way back to Sydney. 100km south from White Cliffs we re-join the Barrier Highway at Wilcannia, then east along the straight bitumen all the way back to Cobar for lunch. This time however rather than the museum we will have lunch organised for us on the banks of the surprisingly big Cobar Lake. It will likely be just after sunset when we arrive back at the Peppercorn Motel at Narromine for our last evening together. Once again Bev and Vicki will have dinner ready for us at Buxees.

BACK TO SYDNEY**DAY 17**

A large brunch today (about midday) in the gracious setting of Duntryleague at Orange – this old homestead a grand monument to its first owner; and a fitting place to end this tour. Then back over the Blue Mountains returning to Sydney along Bells Lind of Road about 6pm – with of course an afternoon tea stop (apple pie and cream with coffee or tea) at Bilpin on the way down the mountains.