

Combined Probus Club of Wheelers Hill Inc.

BEST OF PORT STEPHENS & HUNTER VALLEY TOUR

3rd to 9th April 2011

Commentary: Robin Bray.

Photographs: Barbara Matthews, Val Dale, Ellen Stokes, Ros White, Pam Cotton & Robin Bray.

Sunday, 3rd April 2011

Melbourne to Goulburn.

Our trip commenced at 7.00AM from Wheelers Hill in a very large coach provided by Bayside Coaches and captained by Gareth our driver for the next week. We headed off to New South Wales via the Hume Freeway with a morning tea stop in Benalla and lunch in Holbrook purchased from the local bakery. Following a brief look at the `Dog on the Tucker Box` monument near Gundagai we headed for Goulburn for our first night's stop at the delightful Goulburn Heritage Motel. This was indeed a very pleasant surprise as not only had they arranged for a delicious dinner for us but had specially decorated the dining room and placed `goodies` of nuts, sweets, apples and chocolates on the tables for our pleasure. They also arrange a lucky dip of a number of prizes much to everyone's enjoyment.



Our travelling group



Sandra, Freda, Margaret and Ellen in front of the old
`Otway` submarine in Holbrook.



David enjoying his pie from the bakery.



Lyn tucking into her roll.



Gloria and Pam lunching in the sunshine in Holbrook.



The Goulburn Heritage Motel.



Settling in to dinner in the dining room.



What a good meal and decorations too!



Leo and Sandra next to Freda with her prize.



Peter and Val were lucky winners.



Barbara making sure Russell shares his win!

Monday, 4th April 2011

Goulburn – Sydney Harbour Cruise – Port Stephens.

After a very comfortable night's sleep we were up for breakfast early. Some of us managed an early quick walk for exercise to try to stay fit and prevent gaining too many pounds!



Richard waiting patiently for his cooked breakfast.



Christine with her cereal and juice.

After breakfast we were back in the coach heading for our Sydney Harbour cruise with Captain Cook Cruises.



Waiting at Circular Quay for our cruise boat.



Ellen and Brenda with `Captain Cook`.



Dorothy with her coffee.



Lyn, Ellen, Margaret, Gwen, Allan, Trevor, Chris and Rosemary.



Christine and Pam enjoying the Sydney vista.



Pat taking in the lovely sunshine put on for us by Sydney.



Ellen and the spectacular opera House.

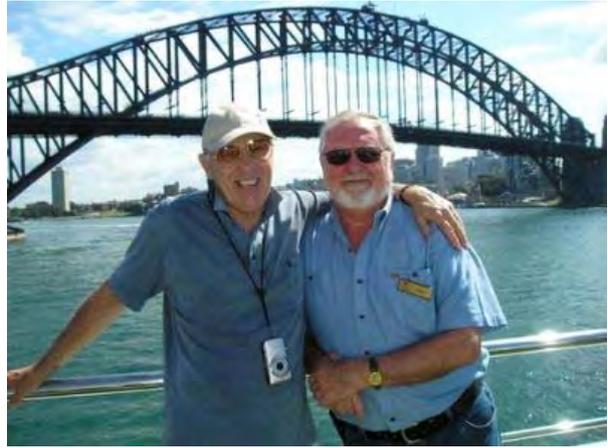


Alan, Bill, Margaret and Gloria with the Harbour behind.

It was simply glorious on Sydney Harbour. The weather was sunny with a light breeze and the water calm. A better day could not have been arranged for such a special trip. This cruise is a must for anyone with time to spare for taking in these spectacular sights of Sydney. What a great start to our week away.



Leo, Allan, Barbara and John .



John, Doug and the Bridge.



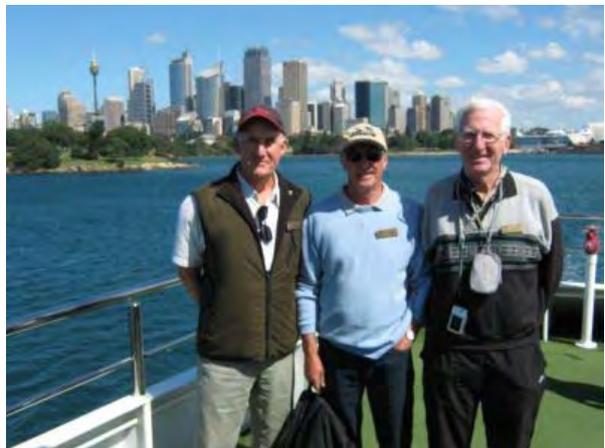
Marilyn and Colin.



Rosemary, Pam, Norma and John.



Jean, Val and Ian.



Richard, Allan and Leo with the city behind.

After cruising eastwards in the Harbour for a while we headed back, passing under the Bridge and into Darling Harbour.



Darling Harbour.



Doug and Bill and `The James Craig` .



Jean and Geoff at Darling Harbour.

Upon return to Circular Quay we disembarked and spent an hour or so wandering the waterfront and enjoying a spot of lunch before re-boarding the coach near the Opera House. We then headed for Salamander Bay on Port Stephens, approximately 2.5 hours drive north of Sydney.



The pool surrounding Oaks Pacific Blue Resort.



Robin having a dip in the `not so warm` pool.

Our next four nights were at the Oaks Pacific Blue Resort in Salamander Bay. From here we set out each day to experience what Port Stephens and the Hunter Valley has to offer.

Tuesday, 5th April 2011
Port Stephens District & Nelson Bay Dolphin Watch Cruise.

This morning we took on board the coach our local guide who showed us around the southern side of Port Stephens from Soldiers Point to Fingal Bay. Port Stephens is approximately 2.5 times the size of Sydney Harbour and is dominated by the Tomaree National Park. Nelson Bay is the main township and location of the marina for tourist vessels. We disembarked our coach here for a trip on the Moonshadow Cruises catamaran vessel `Moonshadow V` for a spot of dolphin watching. The weather was overcast early and a bit breezy but it didn't deter our hearty group.



Boarding the Moonshadow V.



Ellen, Val and Pam doing their `daily stretches`?

For the first half hour things were very thin for dolphin spotting. The mammals were keeping a low profile. However, they were soon spotted and we followed them along the various channels around the harbour. Suddenly two of the dolphins took a liking to our craft and sped along in front of the boat much to the delight of all on board. For those who couldn't make it up on deck, the vessel was fitted with an underwater camera, which televised the dolphins on a big screen in the main cabin.



Looking out for dolphins.



Ian and David suddenly spot a dorsal fin in the water.



Gloria and Freda watching for dolphins.



Ian dons his sou'wester to keep out the rain.



Two fast and friendly dolphins, ahead of the boat's bow, make a great photo opportunity.

Later the dolphins disappeared and fine weather broke through. We headed back to Nelson Bay marina.



Gareth, Peter and Peter taking in the view.



Nelson Bay Marina.

After a quick snack lunch in Nelson Bay we headed for the vast sand dunes of Stockton Beach for a 1.5 hour beach and dune adventure. This tour offers a unique insight into this amazing section of the New South Wales coastline. We travelled in three 4WD vehicles out into the dunes where our guides explained the history of the dunes and the flora and fauna living in them. The dunes are gradually shifting inland being fed by sand deposited by the constant ocean currents and wind.



Our 4WD vehicles on the Stockton Beach.



Stopping on the top of the sand dunes.



All rugging up to keep out the cool ocean breeze.



Val, Alan, Pat, Bill and Therese.



Our guide explaining the geography of the dunes.



Leo wanders along the brow of the huge dune.

As an added bonus to the tour, some of our intrepid and courageous souls took the opportunity offered to go sand boarding. The boards were provided by the tour operators. It was a long trek up to the top of a tall dune. Having walked up ... the quickest way back was down on your derriere!



Up to the top.



Leo.



Pam.



Rosemary and Marilyn.



Sandra and Nick.



Russell.



Roger.



Therese.



Val.



Peter.



Rosemary.

Following this excitement it was back into the 4WD's and off to visit `Tin City`, a well equipped cluster of old fishing shacks made out of corrugated iron located right in the middle of the sand dunes. As the shacks are gradually engulfed by the shifting sand they are abandoned and left to their fate.



Bill.



`Tin City` in the middle of the dunes.

After leaving `Tin City` we returned to our pick up point for afternoon tea and found horses being trained on the sand. The vast shifting sand dunes of Stockton Beach appear so very similar to the sands of Egypt, that if one imagined the presence of camels, (instead of horses), pyramids might suddenly appear.

Perhaps it was the the afternoon tea that caused Richard to become so 'entranced' by the scene, that
.....`his imagination took over`.....!



Richard wanders off into the 'desert'.



Was he at Giza?

We eventually returned to Salamander Bay exhausted by our day full of thoroughly enjoyed activities. We had a delightful dinner and whilst many of us headed off to bed for a rest a few stayed up playing cards for a time.

Wednesday, 6th April 2011
Hunter Valley Gardens & Sisters of Mercy Sacred Spaces.

This morning we again headed off in the coach early into the Hunter Valley to visit the Hunter Valley Gardens. This property is the creation of Bill and Imelda Roche and encompasses 16 spectacular hectares of approximately 10 themed display gardens accessed by 8 kilometres of pathway. The gardens can be explored individually on foot or alternatively by motorised tourist train with commentary.

The garden themes include the Rose Garden (with bronze statues of Imelda Roche and her grand children), a Formal Garden, an Indian Mosaic Garden, a Chinese Moongate Garden, a Sunken Garden, a Border Garden, the Storybook Garden (with colourful storybook characters), the Italian Grotto, an Oriental Garden and the Lakes Walk.



The tourist train.



Waiting to `chooff-off` .



All aboard the HVG Railway!



Last train to the gardens.



Leo, Jan and Pat waving to the `tourists` .



Pam with the brumbies in the gardens.



Bronze statues of Imelda Roche and grandchildren.



The glorious Formal Garden.



Janet and Rosemary admiring the elephant.



Ian, Janet and Robin in the Oriental Garden.

We enjoyed morning tea and coffee in the Hunter Valley Gardens cafeteria and browsing in the Gift Shop before departing in the coach to Singleton to visit the Sisters of Mercy Sacred Spaces. Upon arrival we were treated to a delicious sandwich and cake luncheon and then were given a talk about the history of the Convent and its origins in Ireland in the 19th century. Our guided tour then took in the first Sisters' Chapel, the old Cottage Museum, the beautiful Motherhouse Convent, the New Sisters' Chapel and the surrounding gardens.



A talk on the history of the Convent.



In the gardens.



The Sisters of Mercy Convent.



Inside the beautiful New Sisters' Chapel.

Thursday, 7th April 2011

Kurri Kurri, Wandin Valley Estate Winery, Maitland & Morpeth.

Today we headed off again over the Hunter River and up the Hunter Valley Highway to Kurri Kurri to view a `Mural Project` initiated by the local Council to attract tourism. It has been such a success that to date over 40 murals have been painted on township buildings by local and other artists. The foremost picture depicted is the glorious mural of the Gallipoli campaign which extends some 15 metres along a wall.



The `Gallipoli` Mural.



A kookaburra from car parts in Kurri Kurri.



The Wandin Valley Winery.

After our very interesting tour of Kurri Kurri we headed for the Wandin Valley Winery for morning tea and a wine tasting.



Gareth dispensing morning tea at Wandin Valley.



Wine tasting Hunter Valley Wines.



Doug, Norma and Ellen indulging a bit of the local drop.



Enjoying lunch in the café at Morpeth.

After the Wandin Valley Winery visit we headed off for a guided city tour of the historic City of Maitland. It was amazing to see how many hotels and banks were built in the 19th century, many of which have been taken over by other commercial enterprises and restored to preserve their uniqueness and the heritage of Maitland. We then drove to Morpeth an historic riverboat township on the Hunter River for a bite of lunch and wander around the art and craft shops and specialty stores. We then returned to Salamander Bay for our final night at Port Stephens.

Friday, 8th April 2011
Port Stephens – Goulburn.

Today we headed along the shores of Lake Macquarie to Wangi Wangi and the former home and studio of Sir William Dobell one of Australia's greatest and perhaps controversial artists.



Enjoying a talk on the life of Wm. Dobell.



His controversial prize winning painting of Joshua Smith.



Nick in Dobell's gallery.



Doug helps with the re-enactment of the Dobell court case.

After leaving the Hunter region we headed south to Parramatta for a spot of lunch and then on to Bowral to experience the legend of our late cricketing hero, Sir Don Bradman, and the wonderful Bradman Museum established in his honour.



Autumn colours outside the Bradman Museum.



A bronze statue of `The Don`



Margaret and Bill check out a mural of the 1948 `Invincibles` .



Brenda, Charles, Pat and Jan at our last dinner in Goulburn.

We finally arrived in Goulburn for our final night on tour and readily settled in to evening dinner at the Goulburn Heritage Motel. Once again the staff had put on a marvelous spread with decorations and `goodies` as before. This is real first class service.



Ros, Dorothy and Nick at dinner.



Leo makes a thank you presentation to Barbara.

At dinner Barbara made a presentation and a memorable speech to our safe driving coach captain Gareth and President Leo thanked our Barbara for arranging and managing a terrific tour. It was much appreciated by all and we thanked them both with much acclamation.

Friday, 8th April 2011
Goulburn - Melbourne.

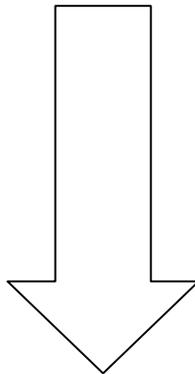
Well it was time to head home to Wheelers Hill after a wonderful week away with wonderful company. We journeyed back along the Hume Freeway diverting through Bonnie Doon, Yea and Yarra Glen and arriving home safely in rain around 6PM.

A very special thank you to Barbara for organising and managing our wonderful trip.

Best of Port Stephens & Hunter Valley Trip.

Our trip was provided by TRADE TRAVEL *'Group Travel Specialists'*
Coach by Bayside Coaches, Coach Captain – Gareth, a job well done.

Now read on for "Coach Tales" by Ian:



COACH TALES PORT STEPHENS 2011 By Ian D.

Early one Sunday morning 50 souls set sail for Port Stephens from Wheelers Hill with our driver Gareth in control of 460 horses pushing us up the Hume Highway.

* * *What happens on tour stays with Probus !!!!* * *

- Two of our number were delayed due to India winning the World Cricket Cup as their cab failed to arrive on time.

- After 3 stops we arrived at Goulburn Heritage Motel to be met by she who must be obeyed! "You will do this and that, there will be NO deviation allowed!"

- At dinner there was artificial long stemmed roses on each table. Janet suggested, "Oh these would tickle your fancy!" but when Ian tried they didn't.

- A plastic bag mysteriously appeared and the lollies on the table jumped into it to be enjoyed by all on the bus the next day.

Monday, off to Sydney and our cruise on the Harbour.

- Bill and Peter D were fooling around sparring at the toilet entrance when an Asian man walked between them and appeared terrified.

- Robin and Rosemary thought they were first onto the bus but were actually last.

- At coffee stop Val D was seen talking to a NSW Paramedic while Ian D was talking to a Tibetan Monk.

- Barbara C was able to clarify the following: 11 was a racehorse

2 2 was 1 2

1 1 1 1 race

22 1 1 2.

Try saying that after the Jacksons homemade Irish Cream.

- At dinner, many went crook waiting for their chook.

- Who was it seen drinking a South Australian Shiraz through a straw? He said he wouldn't let alcohol touch his lips.

- John cut his finger helping people with their cases. Bleeding stopped until he put on his new white shirt and it started again ...Oops.

- Freda and Sandra had trouble with the plumbing and flooded their bathroom.

Tuesday was Dolphin Watch and Stockton Sand Dunes day.

- At breakfast Christine thought the large raisins in the cereal were cockroaches - she admitted she was not quite awake yet.

- Charles was heard to say, "You don't have to rush you just have to be quick."

- David had trouble with Alan's dongle and invited him to his room to play with it. He said it did not work when he inserted it. Pam and Pat couldn't help either.

- Sand dune 4 WD driver had a device to record date, time, driver, speed, gear etc. we went up and down dunes. The nervous passengers were not impressed when a smart Alec asked if that was for use by the Coroner.

- Alan's 4WD got bogged. Could it have been that he was sitting over the front wheel?

- 16 souls trudged to the top of a very high dune and hurtled back down on their toboggans-WOW!

- A cuppa would have been nice but 10km down the beach it was discovered that there were no cups.

- Various naughty people were sprung packing their morning tea and lunch at breakfast time.

- Sandra and Freda had the plumber visit their room 3 times? To fix their water problem. Sandra said he is now coming to Melbourne to fix her washers!

Wednesday to Hunter Valley Gardens and Sisters of Mercy.

-Trevor and Christine's 43rd wedding anniversary. When asked what was the secret of their success Christine piped up and said, "Because he does what he is told!"

- At the Roche Gardens the rain stopped but the sprinklers didn't.

- Lunch at the Convent saw some disrespectful people eating before grace was said.

- Sister of Mercy guide said to Ian D "I bet you have never been in a Nun's bedroom (cell) before." Ian replied to the shocked guide "Plenty of times." (Explained it was as a Paramedic).

Thursday to Kurri Kurri, Maitland, Morpeth and Wandin Valley winery.

- At breakfast Freda told Val D that a beetle type insect had walked over the table. We think it was one of Christine's big flat raisins.

- At Morpeth Gwen commented, "There is a horse going home." Asked how she knew she said, "Because its tail is up." We saw a few cows' tails up but they were not going home!

- Due to a very long wait the previous night a lottery was held by one table on the time dinner would be served. Barbara C and Russell were closest at 6:56 pm from a 6:30 pm start.

- One gentleman was asked if he would be at Happy Hour. He said, "Really, I like a bit of hanky panky before dinner." This explains why his wife was frantically trying to get into the next-door unit on our return to the resort.

Friday to Sir William Dobell's House and Sir Donald Bradman's Museum.

- Barbara M said the hair in her bathroom was Asian. When asked how she knew she said, "It was long and black, not short and !" - John got lucky. He bought a Baby Doll cocktail for Barbara M.

- Dorothy confided that she has a teetotal dog. Then proceeded to state, "As you get older the floor starts to move." Ros asked, "What do YOU drink?"

- Doug L found himself in court and had to defend himself as Sir William Dobell. He was acquitted!!

- Was it Doug who put sugar in his Mocha then turned to Margaret and said, "It's your fault, you know I don't have sugar in Mocha."

- At the Bradman Oval Freda let out an almighty scream as she nearly trod on a condom! Her scream was followed by "gee it's a big one!". She was presented with a new one on the bus as a keepsake.

- At dinner, presentations were made to Barbara and Gareth in appreciation of their efforts in making the trip one to remember.

- Saturday back to Melbourne via Albury and Bonnie Doon.

- Halfway back to Melbourne Charles discovers a motel key in his pocket and accuses Brenda of planting it there without his knowledge!

- The rain starts as we get closer to home but it did not dampen our spirits.

-The presentation to Barbara M was a decorative owl, which was appropriate as the trip was a HOOT!

****Thanks Barbara M (John) and Gareth****