

Coast to Coast.

Hi John & Linda,

It's a long story, but then Oz is a big country!

Time for a flying trip, the 180/185 annual get together at Eulalia Stn near Coonamble being the catalyst and a desire to get to Perth to visit Jonathon & Karen spurring us on to do another flight across Australia.

As usual the Fly in was a great get together meeting old friends and new ones. Camping 2 nights on Marj & Lloyd's lawn and enjoying the music of a 7 piece band on Saturday night, made up of club members and some locals.

Monday dawned fine, one advantage of a drought, flying conditions are CAVU, so JR & I headed west to Broken Hill. The town is looking forward to opening of another mine and 600 or so people moving in. Next day onto Port Lincoln, the new GPS is marvelous, we were cutting across the top of the Spencer Gulf and red lines appeared on the map indicating restricted areas so we just skirted round them and got to the eastern shore of the gulf and followed the coast to Port Lincoln. A bit of a front was going through but viz was ok, Our radio was transmitting unintelligible static but I could pick up another plane somewhere, to add to the frustration Port Lincoln has L & R circuits, so we are flying overhead trying to figure out which is which, made more confusing by arrows on the ground, we got it sorted, landed with a x wind, refueled, tied up and retreated to town. Port Lincoln has Australia's largest fishing fleet of 77 plus boats moored in a purpose built marina and Makybie Diva, a bronze statue taking pride of place on the waterfront. We got an apartment at the marina and went off to Coffin Bay in search of their famous oysters. The local store had them freshly shucked along with fuel, ice, bait, groceries, liquor, cappuccino, and they were the most delicious oysters we have had other than Bluff ones. Bought an extra 3 dozen and some crusty bread, that was dinner. Took a drive to Koppio next morning where there is a heritage listed museum boasting a large display of old tractors. JR was describing to me how to start a Field Marshal with the shotgun cartridges etc and a guy who works there walked by and says "that was a very good description". The devastation of the bad fires on the Eyre Peninsula 2-3 years ago, is still obvious with burnt out houses and recovering trees. About 9 people lost their lives and 15 or so houses burnt, well that fire went right round this museum, burnt a gum tree that was in the middle of the yard, the place across the road is just a shell.

Followed the coast to Ceduna, over the first wind farm, one many that are in the windswept coastal areas we were to discover. Had plans to fly round the Bight next day refueling at a roadhouse before going onto Esperance, weather changed that idea, a front was west of the Head of the Bight so after over flying that area we tracked for Forrest and excellent refueling stop on the Nullarbor and continued to Kalgoorlie enjoying an unexpected tailwind at 2,500'. Stayed in the Palace Hotel in Kal, I love the old pubs and this was built in the 1880's has the grand staircase, 14 foot ceilings but luxury, it had ensuite bathrooms, a change from the down the hall ones of yesteryear. The skimpiers bar was across the road with its topless barmaids and super loud band.

Onto Esperance, then to Albany, where there was a welcoming committee, 3 keen aviators heard the 185 approaching and they made a bee line for the strip helped with the refueling and gave some suggestions on things to do in Albany. It was so good to see the green belt between these two places, first green grass we have seen right across Australia, this area is like the West coast in NZ, its blows and rains from one direction or the other. We met in Kal a West Coaster who has land near Esperance and he loves the place for its similarities to the coast. There are also thousands of acres of timber plantations in this area, pines and eucalypts. You have possibly heard of the companies, Great Southern Plantations and Timbercorp, well this is where they grow their trees.

Had a few days in Albany checking out the wineries and other attractions, the Tree Top Walk, a wander through the tops of 40metre, yes 40 metres, high trees, Pam didn't manage that one, it's a grating you can see down and I had visions of freaking out at the top so my feet stayed on terra firma. JR enjoyed the walk. Denmark was my favourite place, quaint village, big trees and an excellent pie shop. Next stop the lauded Margaret River, on the way we flew over Cape Leewin the most SW point of Oz, landed at Margaret River and called avis for a car, no, their office had closed down 2 years ago, mind you we felt something was awry, there were no facilities at the strip, other than a tin lean to for the flying Docs and a porta loo, so we went onto Bunbury, got a car and drove back.

The wineries are sure cheek to jowl in this area but the best thing we found was the Bootleg Brewery, their dark beer was better than Guinness. One winery gave JR a 15% discount because he is a "senior". We were getting ourselves mentally prepared for the trip to Jandakot, the light plane airport for Perth and the 2nd busiest light aircraft strip in OZ, challenging for the boys from the bush!! Weather was no problem so off we go, by the time we get there, all of 40minutes, its special VFR, our eyeballs were on stalks looking for the airport and other traffic, we saw neither, but the hardest thing is getting radio reports in, by the time we got the 2nd position report in we were way past the strip, but we got into the pattern and onto the ground no problems, tied EKM up behind a Citation, and departed to spend the night with Jan & Pen Ende, after checking out the Stearman that Jan has completed a rebuild on.

Jonathon & Karen got back from Mt Keith next day so we moved to their place, a 1930's bungalow just a stones throw from the CBD. We fell in love with the houses in his area, sort of art deco all built in 1920-30's brick, tile roofs and lots of character, big back yards but houses built close to the street. Did the usual things, Kings Park, Fremantle, and up to New Norcia a town the Benedictine monks have run for many years. It has the most amazing 2 storied pub, built from bricks all made on site, a grand staircase and super high ceilings. You can stay there, bathroom down the hall though, the other accommodation is in the monastery itself which I am assured is a really neat place to spend a night. Didn't see any monks but they are there.

Did a cruise down the river to Fremantle, there is a house for sale for \$85M, and if they get that price it will be the most expensive private home in Oz. There was a gunship carrier and 2 support vessels of US Navy in Freeo for R&R, the gunship was loaded with arsenal, had at least 20 blackhawk helicopters on the top deck plus harrier jets, goodness knows what was below decks. More gear than the RAAF even owns! There was an orange barrier round the ships and 3 fast cruising boats patrolling just to make sure you didn't get to close. The orange barrier we were told was in case of oil spills, somehow I think it was a bit more lethal than that, the ships unloading cargo on the other side didn't have oil spill barriers!

Johnny's week off came to an end, we decided to leave on the Friday got mentally prepared and headed to Jandakot, the weather was worse then when we arrived, not even the flying schools were in the air, after 2 hours of wandering round and hoping the weather would improve and debating whether to go or not between showers we decided to stay and go to the rugby, at Subiaco as we hadn't been to a super 14 match this year.

Sunday looked better so off we went headed for Geraldton, was nice to leave that busy Perth traffic behind, stuck to the VFR corridor heading north, which is between the coast and the road, hadn't checked if the military area ahead was active, after all it was Sunday and those areas are usually inactive Sunday, over the radio comes a call for "the aircraft at 2000' 2 miles from area R14 the area is active what are your intentions?" Not a word was said, we just deviated round it, quite simple thanks to the GPS.

The coastline is quite dramatic, there are a couple if drilling rigs off the coast and the fishing boats are anchored in what looks like very exposed areas, I wonder where they go when it gets really rough. Landed at Geraldton, there is a fleet of large helicopters based there to service the oil rigs, there are lots of rigs dotted off the coast which we didn't see, had a much needed coffee and took off for Meekatharra. I phoned the pub before we left to book a bed as the mining areas get quite busy these days and the publican wanted to know how we were getting into town, I said we would get a taxi, there is no taxi in Meekatharra, the taxi driver got caught DIC so the publican came and picked us up. A night in another heritage pub, it had the high pressed tin ceilings. Oh boy, the size of the

air conditioners, must get hot out there. Although Perth is booming, when we were there 10 years ago Perth was the poor cousin to the east, because of the mining boom that has reversed, but some towns, Meekatharra being one are suffering because a lot of mine jobs are fly in fly out with camps built at the minesite.

There had been much debate as to our return route, had even tossed the souvenir two up set from the Perth Mint to assist the decision, Broome won, but we discarded that route because ground temps were the high 30's, too hot. I was keen on through the middle, the route we were now on, back through Forrest wasn't an option they had run out of fuel. Through the middle, Warburton was the problem, there was fuel but JR was not keen on staying the night for a "cultural experience", Warburton is an aboriginal mission, but it gave us a very long day, 6 hours flying to get to Ayers Rock and flying east, civil twilight is much earlier, and a head wind would force us to stay. We got away from Meekatharra at 0730, Warburton by lunch time, there was no wind, head or tail, the weather map had one isobar for Australia, refueled and went to the store, that reminded us of being in Samoa, no one in a hurry and the indigenous folk sitting on the ground just like the Samoan's did. It was a very well stocked store, even had mask, snorkel & flippers, in the middle of the desert!! Food didn't appeal so had the lunch we had bought with us, cranked up the plane and headed for Ayers Rock a further 2.5 hours. Had plenty of daylight, well another 3 ½ hours at least. If you refuel at the Rock, spend less than an hour on the ground and don't pick up or drop off passengers they don't charge the \$55 landing fee, so we left there with 2 minutes to spare and went to Curtin Springs, 20 mins down the road. JR confessed a few days later he had visions of us running out of daylight and having to land by torchlight, he had even checked the instrument panel lit up!

Curtin Springs is a station that has diversified into tourism, well, why not when you are on the main road between Alice Springs and Ayers rock. When the Severin family went there in the late 1950's the road was a bit of a goat track and Ayers Rock was not the tourist attraction it is today. The first year they were there they had 6 visitors, 2 stock agents, 2 people lost and 2 friends to check they were still alive, these days 40 busses pass by, most stop. Peter Severin, the owner sits on his bar stool listening to the till ring, (sure beats handling stock in the hot dusty yards,) and entertaining any willing ears with his stories. The bar walls are covered with jokes, stuff that you get off the internet, he even sells them for a dollar a pop!!

After a good nights sleep it was across the Simpson Desert and onto Birdsville, there isn't much out there, not even any tracks over the Simpson, Eyre Creek with its green channels and full waterholes was a welcome sight. Birdsville is the bush with city prices, 28bucks for an ordinary steak! But I do like their sign in the bar saying "this is Australia, if you wear a baseball cap backwards a donation to the Flying Doctor is expected"

Next stop, Eric Stelzer's opal mine west of Quilpie, and a chance to get an insight into opal mining, and see what its like on the ground, from our normal vantage point the ground looks quite smooth and we reckon we could land anywhere, not so, it pretty rough, rocks, gutters, trees lots of things to make a forced landing uncomfortable. Went on his crevass walk, an area that is ever so slowly slipping, leaving crevasses all over the place. The colours are just so sharp, there is no pollution to dull them and, oh, I love the silence and to wake to the birdsong. Would have loved to stay a few days, but we needed to keep moving as business issues needed to be attended, so we took off for Charleville for more fuel, an early lunch then into the air for final 3 hour leg to Maryborough to give a total time of 45 hours. It was a real buzz getting back, we had crossed Australia from west to east in almost the widest part.

From the Happy Wanderers,
Pam & JR