

## WAGGA AERO CLUB TOURS McLAREN VALE

18 magnificent men and women in 8 flying machines including Cessna 182's, a Jabiru, Mooney, Warrior, RV7A, Twin Comanche and Tecnam, launched into the air Friday morning, 30 August, from Wagga, Sydney, Uranquinty, Old Junee, Cootamundra and Illabo with their compass headings and navigation programs set for South Australia.

To begin with the countryside below was a very much a moving patchwork of struggling pastures and crops with others that still look promising, however as the western Riverina passed under wing the lack of rains soon turned the landscape to a growing shade of brown relieved by a few sporadic green circles close to the meandering Murrumbidgee.

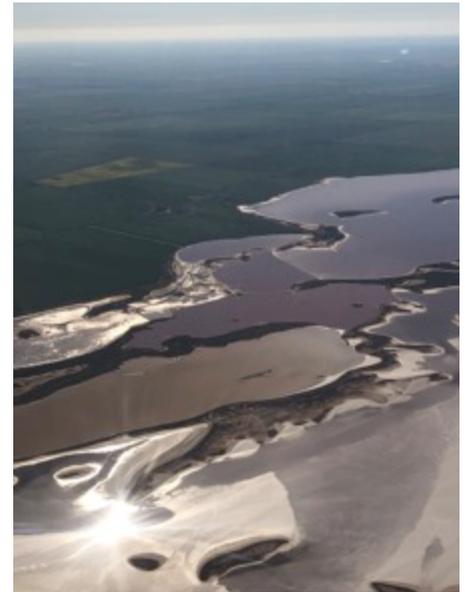
*Overhead at Junee*



*West of Deniliquin*



*Near Swan Hill*



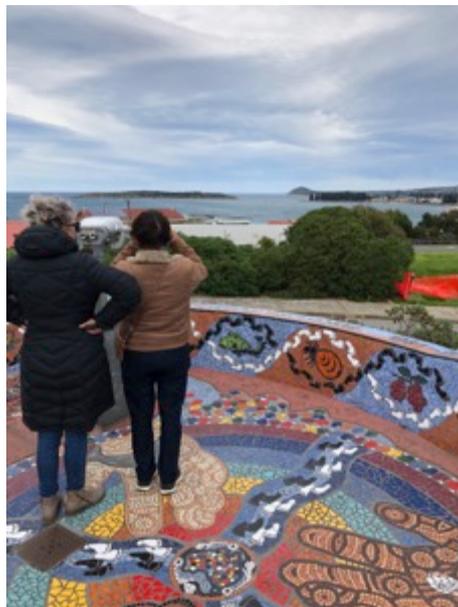
*Coming in to McLaren Vale*



Relief however, came as we flew into Swan Hill for fuel and a morning tea stop. It was indeed impressive to be buzzing over lush, irrigated paddocks thick with cereal crops right up to the edge of the runway. To the surprise of most, this incredible carpet of green continued unbroken for almost 500 km all the way to the very pretty, immaculately manicured Aldinga Airstrip in McLaren Vale, SA.

While some of the crowd headed to the shops or a walk around McLaren Vale, others decided it was Friday afternoon and settled into the McLaren Vale Hotel. This proved to be initially quite disappointing for some as their order for a thirst quenching schooner was met by a mere midi of liquid gold! They soon changed their orders to SA pints. Dinner was a 15 minute bus trip to Woodstock Winery, a stunning rammed earth building complete with an outdoor wood fire pizza oven. It was the first winery restaurant in the whole area, opening in the mid 1980's. Their large range of Woodstock varieties and vintages saw "the reds flow freely" as we munched on tasting plates and pizzas and got to know our fellow pilots and their passengers.

Day two saw us meet for a fabulous breakfast cook up at the Tin Shed Cafe in town before getting back onto the bus and off to a National award winning nursery to pick up our local “tour guides” Tammy and Terry. The blustery and overcast morning made our walk around Victor Harbour and out along the horse drawn tram bridge a challenge but a good brisk change from all the sitting and eating!



After spotting a few breaching whales and their calves at Middleton Beach, it was on to Goolwa where we boarded the Spirit Coorong vessel for a 3.5 hour tour up the channel under the controversial “secret women’s business” Hindmarsh Bridge and then through one of the five barrages separating Lake Alexandrina from the Ocean.



We passed Bird Island teeming with hundreds of resident swans, pelicans, oyster catchers, ibis, cormorants and ducks, who will soon be joined by migratory species some of which fly non-stop for 8-11 days from Siberia. We then punted past the dredging to keep the mouth of the Murray River open where it enters the Southern Ocean. Due to the lack of flow down the River, the dredging has been going almost constantly with two machines, 24/7 since the early 2000's, with a short break for a few years between 2010-14 thanks to flooding and rains. We then beached the vessel a little further along to take a short walk over the dunes to view an extremely and unusually calm Southern Ocean. Our guide Rupert was a wealth of historical information about the area as was his assistant regarding local bush tucker, aboriginal and settlement heritage, the local flora and fauna and facts about the two "Storm Boy" films made in the waterways.

After a brief nana nap for some on returning to our motel, it was back on the bus at 6:30 for the Old Bush Inn and a terrific pub meal at Willunga.



Sunday morning saw most of the Dads stepping away at various times to take Father's Day calls as we prepared for a fun day wine tasting at a mere 3 of the 84 vineyards in the area! After a brief stop at the d'Arenberg "Cube" an



amazing architectural and sculptural building housing an extensive sculpture and art collection featuring works by Salvador Dali, Australia's Charles Billich as well as local artists. The significance of this enormous black and white, "unsolved" rubics cube-like structure is to represent and epitomise the puzzle that is winemaking.



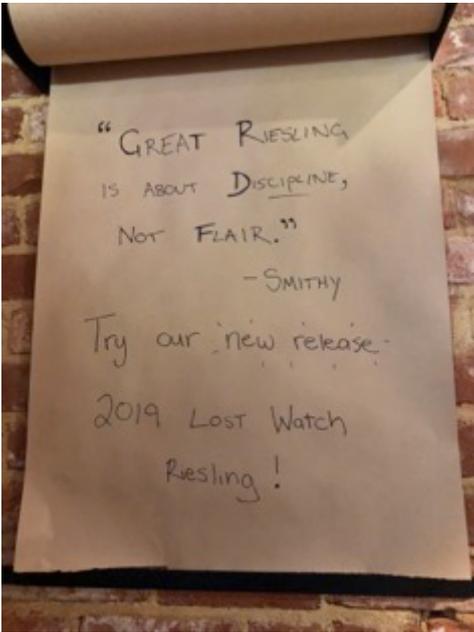
It was then on to Lloyd's Winery and Olive Grove for a look about their cellar door, also featuring

locally made rusted metal sculptures, and tasting before our lunch time booking in the lovely, rustic setting at McCarthy's Vineyard. This small family vineyard featured organic, traditionally made wines, home grown produce, great coffee served in ceramics made by the vigneron's wife and all enjoyed in a quaint, recycled materials tin shed and large wooden deck chiseled and moulded around the trunks of gum trees.

A lovely afternoon was spent sipping on Monkey's Bum Shiraz, Lolly Legs Cab Sav and homemade apple and pear cider.

To top the afternoon off, cause we hadn't tasted quite enough, we spent the remainder of the afternoon in the gardens at Wirra Wirra wines.





For most it was then a quick power nap between 5-6 and a somewhat lighter meal at the McLaren Vale Hotel for dinner to wrap up a great few days.

By 8:30am on Monday our weary, over-fed crew were packing their extra bottles of wine and untying their planes at Aldinga Airport, making plans to head home via Mt Gambier, Victor Harbour, Horsham or back via Swan Hill.

Huge thanks goes to Smithy for the amazing job with bookings, itinerary and coordinating a very busy and terrific weekend.

Thanks also to Bill who drove "DES" our bus for most outings and to all who came along. A fabulous Wagga Aero Club adventure. See you all next time.

