

Murray Magic Tour - April 2019

Our first major trip as a Club. Early starts, long train and bus trips, much to see, lots of laughs and socializing and best of all a good chance to get to know each other better.

In the pre-dawn darkness on Easter Sunday morning two commuter buses toured the Hills District picking up our Probus members for the start of a week's adventure. On arriving at Central Station bags were checked in, and after the usual coffee we boarded the XPT for the long trip to Albury. As it was Easter Sunday, we were lucky enough to have several Easter bunnies on the train to hand out Easter eggs.

At Albury we were greeted by our host, Clint, and boarded his bus for the over 3 hour drive to the motel at Barham. On the way we went through a thunderstorm before arriving to be greeted by Kristy-Lee, Clint's wife and our hostess for the week. A quick supper in our room then off to bed after a long day.

Next morning Kristy-Lee advised us that due to the public holiday there had been a change of plans and we would be swapping the schedules for Day 2 and Day 3, which meant we were off to Echuca.

We then had our first taste of interstate travel by simply crossing the old lift-span bridge from Barham to Koondrook on the Victorian side of the Murray River. Along the way Clint told us about the local area and the irrigation schemes before we stopped for morning tea at Torrumbarry Weir. Arriving in Echuca first stop was the National Holden Museum where we viewed a light hearted video on the history of Holden's and were given an air bag demonstration before looking at the extensive range of Holden on display. While Echuca was busy with holiday-makers we found some good places for lunch before boarding the century old paddle steamer PS Canberra for a cruise on the Murray river, with a running commentary on the area and the history of the paddle steamers on this section of the river. In its day Echuca and its NSW twin, Moama were an essential transport hub for the development of the area and were still important tourist and commercial centres.



PS Canberra



Peter shows Lynn the way at Echuca

On our return to the motel most of our party decided to check out the nearest hotel for a few drinks. The locals were rather surprised by this influx of noisy but happy seniors but took it all in good spirits. At our good wholesome dinner, Kristy-Lee advised us that the next day's activities would be mainly local sight-seeing.

Next day we crossed the river to Koondrook where we viewed the chain sawed sculptures along the river, saw the disused old wharf and the old tram and had a look at the Arbutnot red wood sawmill which has been operating for 130 years.



Old tram – Koondrook



Eagle sculpture



Murray River - Koondrook

Unfortunately, we could not tour the mill as it was closed for holidays, but we could view it through the fence and read the numerous informative signs, before we had morning tea on the river bank. Back in Barham we saw a citrus orchard as well as the local golf club and new housing developments. In the town centre we were able to get our lunch before visiting the "Fly Wheelers Club" which is a volunteer run museum of old farm machinery, with quite a few items in working order. We then returned to the motel for an early mark. Most of the party took the opportunity to have informal "happy hour" in the motel courtyard, with jokes being told, stories shared and even some impromptu performances of singing and "poetry" (?).

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Next day was a long day as we had to go to Bendigo which was over 2 hours drive away. On arrival we toured the Bendigo pottery works which have been operating since 1858. After the informative tour it was time to look at (and buy) some of the merchandise and enjoy coffee and cakes. Next stop was the "talking tram" which took us to the gold mine before returning to the city centre where we left the tram to get lunch. After lunch back on the tram to the tram museum where we were given more information on the trams and were able to have a look at the various trams on display.



Then back on the bus for the drive to Barham, for more socializing and a good meal.

Next morning about half the party had a very early start as we attended the ANZAC day dawn Service at the Barham cenotaph. This was a simple but moving event, and we were quite impressed by the 11-year-old bugler who played the Last Post and Reveille, and the size of the crowd with about 300 people braving the early morning chill.

After breakfast back on the bus for that day's trip to Swan Hill. On the way we stopped at Lake Boga which was a RAAF flying boat base in World War 2 and is now a museum (complete with a Catalina flying boat) run by the local Lions Club. While there we attended the 11:00 AM ANZAC Day service which featured the local schools, Scouts and Guides. In Swan Hill most of the eateries were closed for ANZAC Day but we all managed to find somewhere to have some lunch. After lunch we visited the Pioneer Village to get a taste of what life was like for the pioneers.



This was followed by a quick afternoon tea in a local park before returning to Barham, for a social get together and dinner. At dinner time Kristy-Lee advised that there had been a change of plans and for the activity next day we would be visiting the Spanner Man.

The visit to the Spanner Man was an unexpected highlight of the trip. John (the Spanner Man) was crippled by polio as a child but this did not stop him being a successful farmer and then on his retirement becoming a sculptor using old spanners.



John and his wife



A bull Sculpture



Fighting horses

These are welded together in all sorts of shapes, including a life size bull, several deer, a horse and dray, as well as smaller figures. In addition, John has a collection of Macaws and other exotic birds and a few old machines as well

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as a collection of children's trikes. He has been featured on several TV shows and while off the beaten track gets up to 10,000 visitors a year. On return to Barham a few ladies took the opportunity to have some retail therapy before we all adjourned to the local hotel for a few drinks.

At dinner Kristy-Lee excelled herself by providing party hats and whistles as well as a birthday cake for Bill Walton's special birthday. Peter Noreen, on behalf of the party, thanked Kristy-Lee, Clint and Simone for their efforts in looking after us so well and making this trip a week to remember. President Robert then thanked all the party for participating and making this, our first Probus trip, such a success. He also paid tribute to Ron and Kerri Harding for their hard work in organizing the trip. Well done Ron and Kerri!!



Next morning back on the bus at 7:15 for the trip to Albury and the long train trip home.

Report by Margaret van Emmerik