

Lake Mungo is where they found Mungo man and Mungo Woman.

- <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/blogs/on-this-day/2013/02/on-this-day-mungo-man-fossil-found/>

After many emails, phone calls, meetings and arrangements (thanks Judith) we departed Thursday morning leaving a greyed skied Melbourne behind; hoping the RFGW (Request For Good Weather) made it into the weather people on time. It had. Phew...!

A couple of cars loads of people were meeting fellow Camera Club travellers in the Balranald Caravan Park. Daryl (our capable driver), Di and myself left around 9:00am. Stopping off in Kerang for lunch at what seemed to be the only bakery in town because the bakery was so busy. One of the few I've ever been in to that didn't have a menu on the wall. So any lunch items were guessed at in an effort to make sure we didn't hold up the line...

Balranald is about 100km's from Lake Mungo, about 100km's away from Swan Hill and about a five and a half hour drive from Frankston. We made it in good time and found a few interesting places to drop back into on the way home...

Balranald is a small township seemingly on the decline but having lots of beautification works underway. Apparently - according to a local fella we met - this may be due to mineral mining surveys currently underway to determine the viability of full-scale mining. There were a large number of signposts around town with names of locals who went off to the World Wars and it made you realise what an impact they had on small townships that lost a significant amount of their populations...

Around the Caravan Park is a fairly new gravel nature path with a new wire-sprung bridge crossing the river. Once on the other side of the river, it takes a while to get your land legs back from the spring in the bridge... From here there are roots in the river bank and an old wreck of a car that according to a fella we met (who I think was wondering what the bloody hell are all these people doing hanging around my Sister's property...!!??) said the car had been there since he was a kid – over 54 years ago...! We thought it must have been a fancy car by the way the roof was exposed – sunroof style; but this may have also been for shooting Roos; or more likely bunnies. They were a big problem in the early days with up to 10,000 per week being bought in during the eradication programs. They are meant to be down to about 5% of the population of those plague ridden days. The car was a good place to try setting up cameras and getting our creative eyes in.

Friday's tour was to Yanga National Park and Woolsheds before visiting the original local area homestead. This had one of the first, if not the first, telephone installed in Australia which was also installed by a nephew of Graeme Alexander Bell. The phone is still hanging on the wall in the homestead. We had set up for sunset photos here before a BBQ dinner prepared by our guides from Geo Outback Adventures (German and Pauline : <http://outbackgeoadventures.com.au/>). All the food we had on the trips was great.

On the way to Lake Mungo we visited Paika Station which is a natural flood plain and home of migratory birds. Up until 2011, the plains had been dry due to irrigation diversions. With the recent Government changes to the Murray Darling water policies, Paika Station was able to secure an Environmental water allotment. This took around 12 months of backward and forward paperwork, breaching a 12 mile long levy bank originally installed to divert water for farming, fencing to ensure cattle and other animals were not disturbing land allocated for

environmental purposes and re-routing power lines that were installed across the dry flood plains when the levy bank was installed.

Lake Mungo itself is pretty amazing. You drive into and across the bottom of what were once large, deep lakes and inland seas. While people walking along the sand dunes should be accompanied by a Ranger or Tour Guide (of which, we were). However, there is no real fencing restricting access. The silence when people stop talking is un-nerving at first, but very easy to get used to and quite a bit profound and inspiring.

The image of me in shadow on the dune was sent with this :

Standing on the Lunette Dunes of Lake Mungo, the discovery place of Mungo Man and Mungo Woman; waiting for the sun to set and the full moon to rise; contemplating over 30,000 years of footprints leaving their marks before mine. And the silence! So quiet; like the world's largest anechoic amphitheatre. Interrupted briefly, by the chirp of bantering Swallows.

It was great to get away.

If only I remembered to pack my spare camera battery, I would have had quite a few *more* photos. Instead, it was kind of like old school film days. I had to plan my shots, take them, then turn the camera back off again to conserve power.

Doh!!

The corrugated roads proved an interesting challenge for some new technologies. Some mobile phones have pedometers to measure how many steps you take and calories you burn during a normal days activity. According to some, sitting in the back of the bus riding for about 20 kilometres over rutted and corrugated roads, some passengers managed about 20,000 steps and burnt about 200 calories. We think we've come up with a plan to get fit and lose weight by sitting down and talking and handing out lollies to fellow passengers. Quick! Patent That Idea! It's a winner !!

On the way home, Daryl, Di and myself took quite a bit longer to get home as we stopped at the places we had ear-marked on the way up. Swan Hill's Big Cod. The Catalina Museum at Lake Boga was an interesting journey into a once Top Secret Aircraft Repair and Maintenance Facility that had a significant impact on World War II by maintaining Flying Boats that were critical to the war effort; in-land and far south of major conflicts and away from obvious coastal ports.

Next stop we thought might have been a detour through Bendigo as we went via Eagle Hawk on the way up. We again wondered if Lake Charm was a likely place for an American style B Grade horror flick of teenagers skiing on a lake filled with giant rogue water beasts... But before we could suggest many menacing plots and twists with imaginary beasts, we saw a sign leading to a bird watchers paradise that we had missed on the way up. The Kerang Lakes are a Ramsar listed site (<http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/wetlands/ramsardetails.pl?refcode=17>) which makes it a very special place to stop and watch water birds. The viewing hutch is a two storey, well built and comfortable space for bird watchers and photographers.

I was checking the inside of my eyelids for pin-holes most of the way home after that. Until Bendigo where stopped at the Sacred Heart Cathedral. What an impressive structure. Inspiring! Another practice of image stitching here.

Apart from the rainbow that appeared to never move, the rest of the trip was uneventful in a relaxing a safe driving kind of way thanks to Daryl. I did notice that while I did ask for the Sun to be turned on for our trip home and was assured that it was on, it did appear that we left the good weather behind us. But that didn't matter, the weather was good where it was meant to be.

Take it easy.

See Ya!,

Brendan