

The Grand Old Gal (River Murray from the air - Dec 2009)



It was my second flight with Diana and our flight plan was to head up to Morgan following the Grande Old Gal – the River Murray, from Murray Bridge airfield. I was a little wary as I was recovering from a recent fall and wasn't sure how I would travel. Diana, however, was very mindful and reassured me that we could take as short a trip as we needed if I felt off-key. It was a test run for me and I had been looking forward to it as I love the idea of flight and felt quite privileged that Diana had asked me along as her passenger. Later into the flight a good distraction was being handed some maps and my training in topography and geography was again awakened as we flew over the Murray observing clouds, river and land formations. What a wonderful way to see the world!



It was curious to become familiar with maps again and the new markings and symbols of flying references – the silos, transmission lines, landing areas, etc. It was fun to play navigator and tracker of the flight-course - to focus on orientation, viewing the map and the territory and their relationship first hand and then forecasting next points of interest.

And then of course, there is the wonderful perspective and aerial view – that makes you feel like Cortez in seeing a new land for the first time. On the wings of the Jabiru you are given a much more personal experience of the land. It is a more intimate space in the plane and the detail you can see of the land enhances the experience, especially when landmarks and information about the plane and flying is shared with you. Being piloted by Diana was great – she is so very capable, confident, friendly and knowledgeable. Her enthusiasm for flying is very evident and infectious! I saw new perspectives and learnt information about flying in such an easy way. For me the first hand experience in participating in the flight (although I knew she knew where she was going) made it that much more exciting.

The beauty of the landscape was remarkable -

although we know the trouble and issues associated with our River Murray. She is a grand old lady. Her finery was revealed with the changing colours of dress - the teals, honeys and golds, glistening jades and bleached yellows beckoned you and spoke of glorious days and possibilities. And beyond, the land was patchwork flats, rolling hills, softened toffee tones melting into deep forest greens here or bronzed flat plain there. And as far as the eye could see the land spread out and the river snaked lazily bringing life to land as regular shapes of townships and river boats and trees and activity could be seen at her lower reaches. Sadly as we followed her trail in-land they were also broken lines of flow and distressed banks with exposed sands, abandoned bends and deep cuts into earth. Here the stark dead trees stumps, dried green bushes, brown dried beds and deep red land spoke of pain and anguish. She had seen better days and was looking quite bedraggled now, not the magnificent beauty of before.

We had circled and began making our way back to 'the Bridge' (Murray Bridge) and landed relatively easily with a little cross wind activity occurring. Diana's skill in handling the descent was a pleasure to watch. Once back on land and after 'parking' the plane back in hangar we headed off to get some lunch and reflect on the trip. It's a great way to re-live the journey and share insights. My excitement was hard to contain – the anticipation, the flight itself, a delicious meal, and great company – what more could you ask for! I was really content with the experience. It was exhilarating and I would highly recommend it to others.



Author: Judalyn Baldrey, December 2009