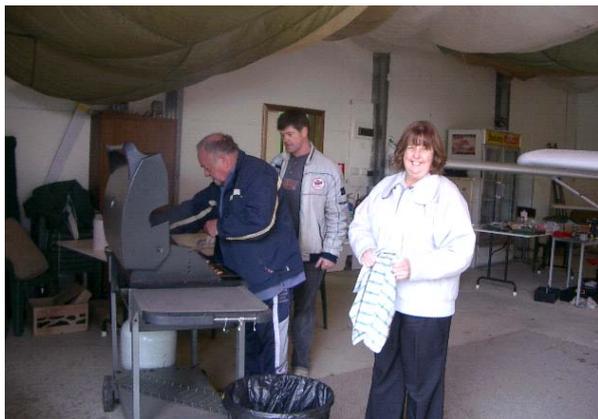


Lake Eyre and surrounds - August 2009

Day 1 - Murray Bridge to Weekeroo

The planning was done, itinerary complete, bookings made and pilots informed... it was time to head off for our Lake Eyre pilgrimage.

So, early on a Sunday morning in August 2009, we meet at RPA (Recreational Pilots Academy) at the Murray Bridge airfield (YMBD) and began our trek with a hearty BBQ breakfast.



L to R: Lawrie cooking the BBQ, James overseeing and Bev, tea towel in hand

We all had morning giggles around the table discussing options for the day. The weather wasn't 100% flash, so we had to think about getting out between breaks in the weather. Once out, it would be a good trip north to Weekeroo.



L to R: Helen, James, Marc, Bev and Vic

Breakfast over, we prepped our planes. Helen and I were the first to leave. I'd been to Weekeroo before so knew my way there and was keen to get out before the weather. This was to be Helen's first long trip in the Jabiru.

Our trip took 2.5 hours and was most uneventful... well except for trying to land.

The wind had decided to be a bit tricky. Whilst Weekeroo has two strips, picking the right one can sometimes be a challenge. Anyway... I choose the N/S strip and flew over that, then decided to reorientate myself and land on the E/W strip. With one go around to test the wind, the next one was down... a bit of a throw down on a short strip but down just the same.

On arrival John was video taping us (not the best time for a throw down landing) and of course once we taxied to the house, Pauline was there to greet us with hugs, kisses and well wishes all round.



Helen and Pauline at Weekeroo

Not long after our arrival came Marc and Bev, then Vic and James. The other travellers, Warren and Mary, Andrew, Neil and Marcus had landed at Mannahill to allow for their larger aircraft.

All planes down safely the Mannahill party drove to Weekeroo where we had a lovely lunch. As I'd been to Weekeroo before, I took Helen, Marc and Bev for a quick walk around the loop. Always nice to have a walk after a flight I think.



After lunch and the walk, a quick afternoon flight for a couple of planes and a ground tour of the

property for the rest of the travelling party. Then a hearty dinner meal and bed in preparation for an early start the next day.

Day 2- Weekeroo to Muloorina Station

During the night the wind had picked up and the planes had to be moved to shelter (thanks James and Vic). That morning James and I flew across to Mannahill to check up on the others. We'd missed them and they were driving back to Weekeroo for breakfast. I got a great opportunity to practice some really intense crosswind landings – thanks James.

So once we all got together again back at Weekeroo, we discussed our options. Originally we had planned to fly to Arkaroola for lunch and then head on to Muloorina for dinner. Andrew had left early and Doug at Arkaroola had said it was not a good day to fly into Arkaroola due to the windshear on the strip, so we best not come.

Decisions were made. We opted to fly direct to Muloorina and save Arkaroola for another time. Helen and I were again first to leave, followed by Vic and James. Neil, Marcus, Andrew, Warren and Mary left not long behind us departing direct from Mannahill.



Heading to Muloorina from Weekeroo

John and Daphne and Marc and Bev were yet to join us in the air. Human factors and pilot decisions made, the remaining four decided to spend another night in Weekeroo and join us at Muloorina the following day.

The flight across to Muloorina was amazing. It was daunting and it was scary. This was my 2nd trip since I had gained my nav

endorsement so I was both anxious and nervous about the flight, the duration, distance and what we were flying over. At times the flight was challenging and it tested me as a pilot and also tested my passenger. But we both laughed and we chatted to the others on 123.45; for me it was a real security blanket? to know I had other more experienced aviators around me, who could talk me through what was going on. For the first time I encountered dust and dust devils and that made me think twice about going on, but we persisted and the rewards... finally arriving at our destination – Muloorina Station.



Our accommodations at Muloorina

Once we arrived, we tied the planes down and settled into our quarters. The most amazing thing... if we wanted hot water we had to run the tap for 10 minutes to get the water up from the bore. For those of us who have been experiencing severe water restrictions in South Australia, we just found this hard to believe. However for hot water... this is what we had to do.

After our accommodations were sorted, some of us decided to head off on a walk and see if we could find the hot springs that were nearby.



Neil and Andrew looking for the 'warm' spring water

That night we were treated to a mass of food and we enjoyed debriefing on the events of the day. Helen, Neil and I played a few games of Rummikins and then we all decided to hit the sack for the following day.

Day 3- Marree, William Creek and Painted Desert

We were glad to hear the others had got away from Weekeroo without a hitch and so we decided we would meet them at Marree and then fly on to William Creek for lunch.



Diana, Neil and Marcus, planning for the days events

In the meantime, those of us at Muloorina had a morning to fill... so we flew off to check out Lake Eyre South and to see the Marree Man. We had numerous GPS coordinates on the Marree Man and I was lucky enough to have James and Vic high enough above me, to direct me to flying straight over the Marree Man's tackle. What a sight to behold and Marcus had a wonderful way of explaining how the scrub was placed in just the right location.



Lake Eyre South – no water here

There was an amazing amount of air traffic in the Lake Eyre, Marree Man, William Creek areas and so we had to be vigilant in not only listening to the radio but also making very exact location calls so everyone knew where everyone was. What an exciting and exhilarating time. They say once you have your licence you really learn to fly. It's true. There is nothing like 'real' experiences to increase your knowledge and expedite the learning curve. I learnt so much.



Andrew refuelling the Cessna 172

Once we heard the Weekeroo flock coming in, we headed to Marree and decided to refuel whilst waiting for them to arrive. We had ordered drums of fuel which we shared amongst the flock... not cheap out there at \$2.50/litre and of course there is no way to take away any remaining fuel – drums contained 200 litres.



All craft big and small at Marree

Whilst waiting at Marree we saw many planes big and small, private and commercial operators, and tour organisers. Marree was alive with people and planes.

After we had all refuelled and the others had arrived and done the same, we headed off to William Creek for lunch.



Arriving at William Creek for lunch

Being in the outback everything seems so remote and this sign amongst others confirmed distance, desolation and isolation for us and how vulnerable we are to the weather conditions for travelling.



Bottom end of Lake Eyre North... the water was in

After lunch at William Creek it was time to decide what each of us would do. The plan was to fly over the Painted Desert. I'd certainly heard some great reviews about it and was keen to see it, but I wasn't feeling 100% confident and so Helen and I decided to stay in William Creek a bit longer, have an ice-cream and a walk around before heading back to Muloorina.

As it turned out, we weren't the only ones to make that decision; it seems John and Daphne and Marc and Bev had decided not to enjoy the Painted Desert either and had headed back to Muloorina via the bottom end of the Lake.

From all accounts, including the photos and videos we've seen, the desert was amazing! Thanks to James and Vic for their 'nearing last light landing' we had some awesome pictures of the sun setting and a wonderful display of colours of the rocks and sand.

These moments have been transferred to a DVD of the trip – which I've watched a number of times and every time I watch it, I am right back in the moment – ah, such sweet memories.

Day 4- Home via Wilpena Pound and Jamestown

So we have come to the end of our time at Muloorina and now have to think about the journey home.



Of course some obligatory formation flying

As if we haven't already had an absolute gluttony of sights, we get to see more because we are heading back via Hawker, Wilpena Pound and Jamestown.



Travelling to Wilpena Pound

What can I say, the sights are amazing once more, and the flight quite relaxed given some of the flying we had already done to date

Along the way to Wilpena we see mining sites, large dams, vast countryside and basically remain in awe of most of the sights seen. We are happily chatting away with the other aviators on the chat channel and all seems well from where we are sitting.



Flying toward Wilpena Pound

The country side stretched as far as the eye can see. From the rocky outcrops to the flats, every where we looked - there was another beautiful sight. Finally Wilpena Pound was ahead. Marcus and Neil decided to fly into the Pound and enjoy that experience whereas myself and some of the others decided just flying around it was enough.



Looking back into Wilpena Pound

With no stops planned, we continued to Jamestown for our organised BBQ lunch and chat with the Jamestown boys.



Approaching Jamestown – lunchtime destination

As we neared Jamestown the country side changes quite dramatically and suddenly there are numerous shades of green waiting to be admired. Marcus and Neil with the J230 are first to arrive, then Helen and I, then John and Daphne. So as a team, we wait for the others to arrive before we think about food or refuelling.



Neil and Marcus refuelling at Jamestown

As with every trip, there is always an interesting story to tell. This one involves Bev and Marc. They were behind a little on this leg, were taking their time and had decided to make a stop at Hawker, land, have a toilet stop, etc then aim to get airborne and fly around the Pound.



Our Hawker Heroes – Bev and Marc, before the incident

Unfortunately things don't always go to plan and once they became airborne again, they had engine trouble. We heard some radio calls on the way into Jamestown, and then nothing. James and Vic were going back to find out what was going on.

As it turned out, the engine had failed, and they had landed, safely in a small paddock by the side of the road, aircraft safe, passengers intact and no prop damage.

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An account from James later, he said they were laughing and had smiles on their faces. It seems all our training DOES pay off.

Anyway the plane was left in Hawker and later transported to Rawnsley Park where it was repaired by James and Vic at a later date before being flown back home to Murray Bridge. Bev and Marc...well for them it was an overnight stay in Hawker and then a bus trip home to Adelaide.



The wind farms at Jamestown

For the rest of us... after our bellies were full we left Jamestown and headed for home.



Saying farewell to Jamestown heading back to YMBD

The clouds were a little low as they often are but we negotiated our way safely home to Murray Bridge and for John and Daphne to Strathalbyn.

All in all, it was an amazing trip and words cannot describe the time we had or the sights we saw. Thanks to all the team members for sharing their experiences – it certainly made my flying time less stressful than it could have been.

Diana Jemson – 9th – 12th August 2009