**AUGUST 2013** 

# ALDECCINC

Australian Long Distant Experience Coach Crews



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### It's not to offend but to amend

As you are all aware we pay our subs each year to be a member of ALDECC - \$20.00 single member \$30.00 per couple.

We all lead busy lives and some may forget to pay this small sum. Should you find a X in the following box's with a \$figure then that is what you owe.

By being a member you receive newsletters throughout the year and the right to come along to our annual Reunion organised by members for members. You also have the right to stand for Committee to help organise the continuance of ALDECC.

2011

2012

2013

New Banking Details for ALDECC

ANZ Bank BSB 012-708 Address Centro Lavington S/C

Account No 266880092 Lavington Shop 80 Griffith Rd

Lavington NSW 2641

Please put your Surname in for reference

### Presidents Report

Hello All,

We are now nearly over another winter, hope everyone is well and of course warm. Its already half way through the year, and our next reunion is only 6 months away. The committee is busy planning the 35th reunion at Tocumwal.

Don't forget to keep saving for the nostalgia trip in 2015 we are busy preparing an itinerary and booking accommodation, it will come round quick enough.

Alfie has been in Canada and the States for five weeks again, so I have been batching, the Secretary came over for a visit and we had a nice committee meeting weekend with those that could make it. It was good to catch up on all the news, and have a few laughs.

We are sending our thoughts and prayers to members who are not too well at the moment.

Till next time,

Mary Greenham President

### Secretary's Report

Hi to you all. Here's hoping that the winter months are keeping you all fit and well.

It's been quite mild here in Albury, I'm able to get the washing dry on most days and on clear days we can see the snow capped mountains of Falls Creek and Hotham in the distance.

It's good to see that a few of our Members have caught the travelling bug. Garry and Frances Higginson have hit the big smoke in America, Peter Byrne Germany, Bryn & Reen Hillman New Zealand, Lyn Higgo is off to Vietnam and Bernie Greely is at present in Onslow (WA) working to name a few.

Our 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion is coming up on Fri 31<sup>st</sup> Jan Sat 1<sup>st</sup> & Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2014. It is a big achievement for an Industry to have a group of colleagues that may have worked for one or more Companies particularly within the Coach Industry to gather every year and catch up. The many friendships, good laughs, tears and help along the way are not forgotten by the members of ALDECC. Recently I met up with a friend from the past who made the comment of how great it is that even though we all don't live in each others pockets we all remember each other and are there and available when needed.

The Tocumwal Golf Resort Motel is where we are headed once again for the Reunion so start getting the word out. Let those old colleagues know and encourage them to come along and catch up. I remember at the  $25^{th}$  and  $30^{th}$  Reunions a lot were questioning whether ALDECC would still be around in 10 years time.

The price for the reunion will be just a little higher than this year so start saving the dollars. Information can be found on the website and Invitations will be sent later in the year. Don't forget that you can contact me and other members of the ALDECC Committee at any time the contact list is always in the Newsletter.

"I realise now what a special group of people we are in the coach Industry and just how much of a bond we set up all those years ago"

Mary Purtill Secretary

### bits n pieces

Our Newsletter reflects the past 35 years of ALDECC and the Coach Industry. Garry Mathewson has been working hard at finding and collating pieces for you all to catch up and remember. Don't forget that ALDECC have a website <a href="www.aldecc.org.au">www.aldecc.org.au</a> make sure that you have a look. It makes for an interesting read of the past newsletters of which most are available on site.

Jo Wigg is doing some wonderful work with children from Uganda and has sent a message for any ALDECC Members regarding the up coming concert tours.

Hi there, just letting you know ill be singing and supporting the ACC tour of the east coast. These kids have risen from the slums of Uganda and are awesome. Details of concert dates and ticketing go to <a href="https://www.kwaya.org">Www.kwaya.org</a>. Hope to see you in either Melb, Gold Coast or Sunny coast.



Recently seen out and about at the recent Nuptials of Chris Devlin was our own Brian McLauchlan (McGoo).

Apparently by the end of the evening there was a real tilt to McGoos's Kilt. Looking very sharp McGoo love the legs.

Our thoughts and good wishes are with Peter Byrne who is currently in Germany having treatment for Cancer. It is an ongoing fight for Pete and one that he is determined to battle through.

John Thornley has had a couple of trips to the local Hospital lately. He asked the doctor for a brain scan and was a bit upset when told there was nothing to look at.

To anyone to has been unlucky enough to catch the horrible viral flu that is presently attacking all parts of Australia. We hope that you get well soon. There is nothing worse than the racking cough and feeling like a tonne of bricks has hit the body all over.







2009





2003 Past Committee's 1993





1995 1992



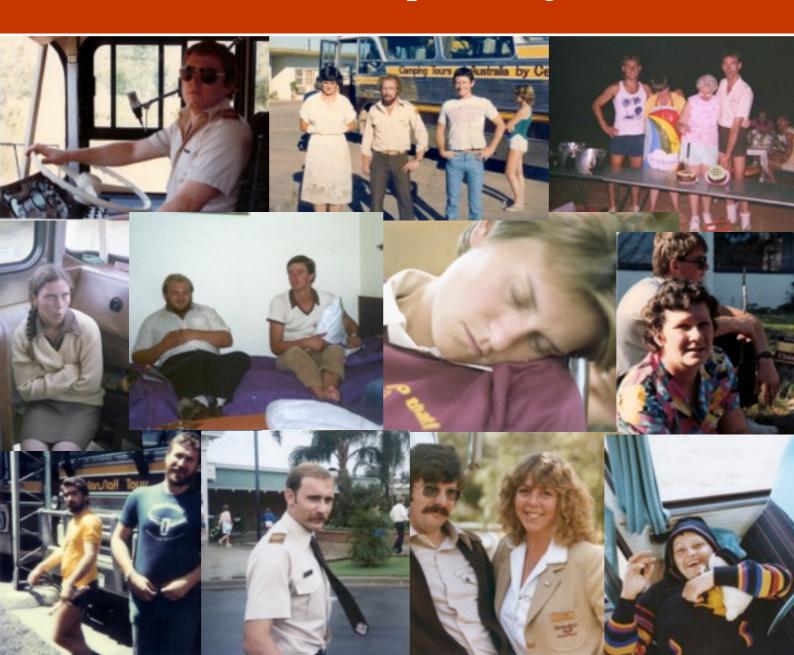


1996 1998



1980 - 81

# REMEMBER..... 30+ years ago...?



### THE RAM---EWETRIP

By: George Wieczorek

Firstly allow me to introduce myself, my name is George Wieczorek and I was a Centralian Staff courier---tour escort between 1975 and 1981. During that period I worked alongside many Coach Captains and Cooks on a vast array of Centralian Staff Tours throughout the mainland, Tasmania and yes, even a trip to Europe. I suppose I could write a book about some of the tours, coach crews, passengers and unusual situations I encountered during the time I was at Centralian Staff.

However what I do want to tell you about, is a 16 Day Under 30's trip I did with Eric Ashenden and Dot Hamilton back in 1978 that turned out to be a classic case of "When things go wrong they go wrong BIG TIME". Enjoy.....

**The Itinerary:** 16 Days Melbourne---Flinders Ranges---Birdsville---Plenty Highway---Alice Springs---The Rock--- Coober Pedy---Melbourne

The Crew: Coach Captain Eric Ashenden, Cook Dot Hamilton, Courier George Wieczorek

The Company: Centralian Staff Coach Camping Tours

The 'Seriously out of Pocket' Coach Operator: Casey's Coaches Oakleigh Victoria

**The Coach:** a triple deck Denning, part of the Centralian Staff fleet for three years. The Coach "Lady Sarah's" first trip with a newly fitted lazy axle --- added because of too many overweight tickets being incurred by Casey's Coach Captains.

#### The Trip:

<u>Day One:</u> Was totally uneventful, Melbourne to Hay, pick up the Sydney passengers who joined us that evening. Get them into the camping routine; go out for dinner, the real stuff starts tomorrow.

<u>Day Two:</u> The morning sped by and we were making excellent time out thru Mildura with plans to have lunch at Renmark. However our plans fell short near the VIC/SA border when Eric casually mentioned that the accelerator cable had parted company with the accelerator pedal. Totally unfased by his comments we rapidly organised a roadside lunch whilst Eric made repairs as truckies thundered by just meters away.

On wards through Morgan, and up to Burra, for a view of the old copper mining town from the local lookout. First one out of the coach, my gaze became riveted by the ring lock on the front offside tyre. The ring was doing its best to part company with the tyre, so the quick photo stop was extended whilst we changed the tyre. We reached our overnight destination Peterborough without further misadventure, but a protracted session with the ring failed to straighten it out before we turned in for the night.

<u>Day Three</u>: Departure was slightly delayed whilst we attempted to secure a replacement before leaving Peterborough. The itinerary was pretty tight even without delays, and the hour lost that morning didn't help. The upshot was that we bypassed Wilpena Pound, and headed straight up from Hawker, through Leigh Creek to Marree.

By the time we reached Marree, the sky was heavily overcast, and the local cop was in a likewise mood when we mentioned we were heading up the Birdsville Track. Finally we convinced him that we had enough brains not to ignore the implications of the weather, and he agreed to let us go up the track as far as the old Lake Harry homestead and camp for the night. About 1 am, a huge deluge erupted which thankfully only lasted a few minutes, but even so I thought, 'are we pushing the envelope again?' with possibly adverse road conditions up ahead.

<u>Day Four:</u> Dawned clear as a bell, the road surface absorbing the previous night's rainfall without a trace. The Birdsville Track was generally in very good shape, and we were extremely fortunate to find the Inside track from Clifton Hills via Goyder's Lagoon to Birdsville open. This was a huge saving in time as the outside track meandered through sand hill and gibber country en route to Birdsville.

However just to keep us on our toes, we experienced a flat tyre (inside rear dual as bloody usual) at just about lunch time. Overnight in Birdsville saw the usual raucous visit to the pub and the accompanying hangovers the following morning.

<u>Day Five:</u> An uneventful day spent travelling from Birdsville through to Boulia. Nursing a collective coach hangover (which meant passengers and crew alike) we made it into Boulia Caravan Park for the night.

<u>Day 6:</u> Today we were meant to be travelling west to the Northern Territory border via Tobermorey and eventually bush camping for the night along the Plenty Highway.

It was now not usual for the majority of the passengers to start walking on the way out of wherever we camped the night before. It was the only bit of exercise a lot of them got, and it also prevented people just hanging around the coach whilst we did the final packing before departure. As we stopped to collect the last of the walkers, a loud grinding noise started in the coach differential. Somehow we struggled back to the Boulia Caravan Park and set up camp as we knew "WE HAD A PROBLEM". After some exploratory surgery, blasphemy and diagnosis Eric declared the rivets had been stripped off the diff's crown wheel.

Eric rang Warren Casey the coach owner with the bad news, and without batting an eyelid Warren proceeded to organise a replacement diff. A subsequent phone call indicated it was leaving Melbourne later today (priority freight paid) for Brisbane, and would be in Mount Isa by lunch time tomorrow courtesy of TAA (Yes it was that long ago!). We were requested, "Could we somehow organise to get it down from Isa to Boulia?" "No worries", and we started to scrounge around town and yes the local BP Fuel agent was heading up to Isa in the morning for a load of fuel and he'd be happy to bring an 85 kg diff down for us by tomorrow night.

Meanwhile the passengers began exploring the delights of Boulia on foot, and the local shopkeepers soon began to realise that they had a readymade cash cow x 30 in town. Prices began to escalate rapidly in all sorts of places including the Pub where we had to buy ice to keep perishables cool as the coach fridge was now inoperable. Luckily the Burke River next to the caravan park had plenty of water in it, so there was ample time for swimming, plus a couple of nice size yellowbelly out of the caretaker's drum net just off the riverbank for dinner.

<u>Day 7:</u> Whilst passengers killed time, Eric and one passenger Tim Collins (who happened to be an apprentice diesel mechanic) drained oil lines and removed the tail shaft and axles. The tricky part now was how one removes an 85kg diff lying on ones back underneath a coach? Extremely bloody difficult, according to Eric, but somehow he managed the task (not without considerable difficulty, and risk to his personal safety). So there we were waiting for the fuel agents return from the Isa. Imagine our disappointment and dismay when he told us that the replacement diff had not arrived in the Isa that afternoon. When Eric rang Warren Casey he went ballistic as the parts had been sent priority paid (which even back then would have cost a considerable amount).

<u>Day 8:</u> The events of this morning went along the lines of Warren Casey tearing strips out of TAA freight, and having to order a replacement diff which would not arrive in the Isa until tonight. He then also had to wear the expense of chartering a light plane to fly parts down to Boulia tomorrow morning.

\*An interesting side---note re the missing diff: As far as we're aware it's still missing! It was never found, probably lying forgotten in the cavernous depths of some out of the way cargo shed somewhere in Australia. I never got around to asking Warren if he ever got a refund on that freight consignment

<u>Day 9</u>: Finally today things started to go right. The charter flight arrived this morning with all the diff bits and pieces, and some kind soul provided the transport to get everything down to the caravan park. Eric repeated the herculean task of getting the reassembled diff (all 85 kg of it) back to where it belonged. How he didn't do permanent injury to himself in the process I still don't know.

By late afternoon it appeared that everything was going to come together, so whilst camp was being pulled down I rang Norm Brown who was Centralian Operations Manager at the time. I told him we were going express through Isa---Three Ways---Alice Springs, forget the Plenty Highway as we were three days behind schedule already. Brownie in his usual unflappable way wished us well and said he'd let Warren Casey know of our progress.

7 PM that night, coach road---tested, passengers fed, everything loaded and fuel tank full to the brim, we roared out of Boulia leaving behind the shopkeepers to gloat over their cash windfall.

# PERHAPS NOW IS A GOOD TIME TO HAVE A CUPPA, GRAB A COFFEE, OR PERHAPS A LARGE BUNDY OR CORUBA RUM, BECAUSE YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED NEXT!

Approximately 40kms north of Boulia just south of a vermin proof fence (the cattlemen tell you it's to keep sheep out of their beef country), we were barreling along enjoying a singsong when Eric spied a small mob of sheep on the left hand side of the road. And as all good suicidal sheep will do, they charged across the road right in front of 20 tons of Denning coach hurtling down the road at 90kms an hour. The coach missed all but two big Mitchell Grass feed woolies which instead of being brushed aside by the bullbar, went straight underneath the front of the vehicle.

This started a chain of events which went something like this:---

The force of the impact together with the combined mass of the two sheep snapped the retaining chain that held the spare wheel in place. The wheel rim smashed into the front axle causing the body of the coach to lurch over the rim which then smashed into and ruptured the fuel tank. Continuing on its path of destruction the rim then buckled the front luggage bins before mangling the sump guard beneath the engine (the tri---deck carried a mid---mount engine). And last but not least the rim finally ripped out one of the rear maxi brakes before emerging from beneath the rear of the coach. All we heard was one almighty bang, alarms going off and Eric struggling to maintain the vehicle in a straight line until we rolled to a stop. As first one out of the coach all I could hear was the sound of 450 litres of diesel fuel draining onto the bitumen and down off the roadside. There was total silence onboard; no one could believe what had just happened! However a brief inspection soon revealed we were not leaving here in a hurry. Time to get the brain working and come up with Plan A, B, C, and D, and if none of them worked, get the Coruba out and throw the bloody cork away!

So we got the trusty Honda generator out, got some lighting on the scene, and decided to set up camp wherever people could pitch a tent on the far side of the road away from the fuel spill. I hadn't mentioned it before, but I had three trainee couriers on board with me, so now was an ideal time for the three of them to see how they could perform in an emergency. I said "you organise the campsite, help the cook set up her kitchen, unload all the necessary gear and make the group feel like they are on a pleasant, relaxing, trouble---free South Seas Cruise."

Whilst this was happening, the mournful strains of Eric's favorite song could faintly be heard from somewhere behind the fuel tank. Whenever I heard that tune, I knew the news wouldn't be good as I soon found out. The wheel rim had stopped us in our tracks and it would mean a heavy duty tow job to at least Mount Isa to effect repairs. So how were we going to make that happen 40kms north of nowhere in the pitch black dark? Well plan A was already in place, camp was set up, someone had a fire going, various bottles of assorted beverages were starting to be consumed, so the passengers were the least of our worries.

Plan B was to get to a phone, have a conversation with Warren Casey (ouch!!!!!!), inform him of what had happened, organise a tow truck to come from wherever to tow the coach to the Isa and more importantly, get in contact with a local bus company in Mount Isa to charter a coach capable of carrying all the group plus all the gear into Mount Isa for the foreseeable future

The first part of plan B materialised about half an hour later when headlights appeared on the road coming from Boulia. Stopping alongside the coach two very plastered shearers were full of sympathy towards our plight, and readily agreed to give me a ride back to Boulia to make that phone call. Eric had worked out exactly what parts he needed to replace and could Warren source a workshop in the Isa to do the job. So with my life in my hands, I headed back to Boulia travelling at the speed of light with these two very sloshed blokes who regaled me with stories of their expertise with a shearing blade.

At 11pm at night it's hard to muster three dollars' worth of twenty cent pieces to make a three minute trunk line call so I rang reverse charges. When Warren answered the phone he seemed to think we were still having problems with the diff, however I hastily assured him that the diff was working fine, and that we had just gone to DEFCON FOUR with a whole swag of new issues. Having finished telling our tale of woe, there was a loooooooooooooooooog silence on the other end of the phone, and he finally said in a resigned 'well I give up' tone of voice, "what do we do now?" "Can u please organise a tow truck and a charter coach to get us to Mount Isa" I asked. "Ring the owner of Campbell Coaches, they should be able to answer all your questions, we'll try to contact you tomorrow morning to find out what's happening your end." With that I hung up and the two very obliging and now relubricated shearers sped me be back up the beef road to our roadside camp. We fed them a strong brew of coffee and with a loud "no worries mate see ya!" they vanished into the night.

<u>DAY 10</u>: There wasn't too much more we could overnight so we eventually turned in only to be woken every now and then by road trains hurtling by, the drivers wondering what the hell we were doing haphazardly camped all over the place in the middle of nowhere. Next morning we had a visit from the Boulia constabulary with the news that a tow truck and coach were on their way from Mount Isa, but he didn't know when they would get here. I don't know where he got his information from but he also seemed to be of the opinion we were broken down on the access road leading out to the Plenty Highway, and he wasn't looking forward to having to be involved in helping us out of our mess. This was in complete contrast to the likes of Gordon Thomas down at Birdsville who did whatever he could to help anyone stranded in the bush. Eventually both the relief coach and the tow truck arrived early afternoon. It took some organising to get all the gear onto what was essentially a school bus, but as it was our ticket out of here, nobody was complaining. We left Eric and the tow truck driver to sort out a towing procedure and headed for Dajarra. A phone call to Melbourne to advise our progress, and we made it into Isa about 8pm that night.

<u>DAY 11</u>: For the group it was an unscheduled chance to do washing and go into town. For Dot a heaven sent opportunity to restock on supplies as people still needed to be fed regardless of the circumstances. Eric and the coach arrived under tow overnight. Arrangements had been made by Campbell's Coaches management to "borrow" a diesel fitter /welder from Mount Isa Mines to assist with repairs to the fuel tank. Eric was also aware of a 671 inline diesel engine that was being currently stripped down in Alice Springs, and we could use some parts for our badly mauled vehicle. A phone call to the Alice and yes, they could put those parts on a flight to the Isa this afternoon. The plan now was get the parts installed overnight and be on our way to the Alice early tomorrow morning.

So out to the airport we went about 5.30 pm in another borrowed vehicle (did a lot of vehicle borrowing on this trip) to meet the Ansett (yes it was a long time ago!) flight from the Alice. I know you are starting to think this sounds like bull dust when I tell you the parts never showed up! An investigative series of phone calls followed. Yes the parts were delivered to Alice Springs airport, clearly labeled to Mount Isa. Two flights left the Alice within a couple of minutes that afternoon. Ansett to Mount Isa, TAA to Sydney, you guessed it, they went to Sydney! The earliest we could expect them back in the Isa was midday tomorrow, another day behind schedule.

This was getting beyond a joke, so a couple more phone calls and Campbell's Coaches became the official coach carrier express overnight to Alice Springs with two drivers. Eric said he'd catch up with us when he could. This was starting to sound like the Burke and Wills expedition, breaking down into smaller groups and both heading for disaster!

<u>Day 12:</u> I think the original itinery had us leaving the Rock today heading south and here we were just arriving in the Alice. Set up camp at Heavitree Gap Caravan Park by late morning and spent the remainder of the day doing a local tour and organizing alternative flight arrangements for a couple of the tour group that had international flight connections.

<u>Day 13:</u> Overnight Eric somehow managed to nurse a clearly sick coach nonstop to the Alice. Before this trip had even begun, arrangements had been made with CATA in the Alice to have some work done on the engine whilst we were in town. The overhaul was still scheduled to happen despite the fact we had all the other disasters happen to this point. Pushed for time the workshop mechanics did what they could, but advised to do repairs properly could take at least two days with no guarantee of a successful outcome. Eric's response was "we don't have that luxury of time, put the bloody head back on and I'm out of here."

<u>Day 14</u>: Finally after more delays than what I care to think about we had camp packed up this afternoon, everything ready to be loaded as soon as Eric arrived with the coach. It was also time to say goodbye to my three trainee couriers, who were flying back to Melbourne later that day. It was one hell of a baptism of fire into experiencing the ways of dealing with outback tour work.

So we finally left Alice Springs around 3pm, way behind schedule, a sick coach that had to be nursed all the way back to Melbourne, and just to keep us on our toes the South Road was closed between the SA Border and Coober Pedy due to local heavy rainfall.

We decided a roadside evening meal was in order, so pulled into a roadside parking area at the old Erldunda turnoff to Ayers Rock. Just a couple of 44 gallon rubbish bins and a huge desert oak, no roadhouse and definitely no bitumen road into the Rock. We had barely left our roadside dinner stop when the coach stripped its alternator belts. From here to the Rock we'd be running our headlights on what the batteries could provide.

The further we progressed the worse the road conditions became. Huge sheets of water covered the road, and it wasn't long before we encountered Ansett---Pioneer's passenger service between Alice and the Rock bogged to the axles well off the road. Obviously the driver was either a rookie or a dickhead, because leaving the hard pack centre of the road was a recipe for disaster. Slipping and slithering on our way, we finally made it into the Rock way past midnight on the last of our battery power.

<u>Day 15:</u> I had to hand it to Eric, he was the best scrounger I ever came across, and that morning he had sourced replacement alternator belts from God knows where. Time was tight, so after packing up of camp we allowed the passengers to climb the Rock, and as far the Olga's were concerned, "well take a good look at them for the top of the Rock because that's the closest you'll see them". We departed south that afternoon, gambling that the South Road would be open by the evening. Perhaps our luck was about to change, it reopened that night. We bush camped down around Hawk's Nest Well.

<u>Day 16:</u> The strain of what had happened compounded by a lack of sleep was staring to tell. This morning as we were loading the coach, Eric badly jammed his thumb whilst loading a gas bottle between two metal fire grates in a coach sidebin. He managed to drive as far as Kingoonya late that afternoon before the pain became unbearable. I drove from there through to Pimba where we stayed that night in Spud Murphy's decrepit old dongas next to the roadhouse. Spud piled Eric into his Ute and took him across to the Woomera hospital, where they lanced the thumbnail to relieve the pressure behind the nail. Eric returned a much relieved person.

<u>Day 17:</u> Woke up this morning to be faced with changing another flat inside real dual tyre. This was the first time I really had a go at changing a coach tyre by myself, as Eric's hand was still too painful for him to be doing the job. I don't know how the passengers managed to do it, but tonight they presented Eric, Dot and myself with T---shirts emblazoned with the logo "Ram---Ewe" across the front. Plus they also presented Eric with a brand new toy coach, to make up for all the crap encountered with the real one.

<u>Day 18:</u> Morgan to Narranderra. Completely uneventful. I think I remembered saying that on Day one.

<u>Day 19</u>: Farwell to our Sydney bound passengers as they took a transfer coach back to Sydney. We Melbourne three days late but on time at 5pm.

### THE AFTERMATH

Centralian always had a post tour debrief routine for all tours. The passenger surveys indicated that everyone thought they had a highly enjoyable but unconventional outback tour experience.

The tri deck went in for major surgery requiring a complete engine rebuild, plus some serious bodywork repairs where the spare wheel rim carved its path of destruction beneath the coach. Overall cost to the coach operator was never made public, but Eric reckoned \$20K would not have been a bad ballpark figure to start with. Back in 1978 that was a hell of a lot of money.

My three trainees, Phil Bourke, Frank Maloney and Steve Noakes went on to have very successful careers as couriers with Centralian Staff.

Tim Collins the apprentice diesel fitter completed his apprenticeship, and later became a respected coach captain with APT for a number of years. And I want to thank Tim for most of the photos included in this article.

Dot Hamilton who did an absolutely brilliant job keeping the Under 30's Army marching on full stomachs no matter what for the tour duration. Dot later left the company and moved to West Australia where we unfortunately lost contact with her.

Eric Ashenden is now retired, leads a peaceful life up Bundaberg way, but I maintain contact with him and his wife Bernadette.

I also stay in touch with Gordon Thomas who was in charge of Birdsville Police station back in the 1970's. Gordon is now retired in Townsville, and regularly visits south western Qld.

As for me I'm involved with sustainable school vegetable gardens and being thankful I got to see Australia before the 4WD and Winnebago tribes took over.

Cheers, George Wieczorek.

P.S. To all the drivers, mechanics etc. I aplogise for providing sketchy details about the damage done to the coach. I'm no expert on things mechanical, all I can relate is what I remember of an event that occurred 35 years ago. But what I do remember actually did happen!



The official tour group photo at a Camel Farm

More Photographs from this Tour can be viewed on our website.