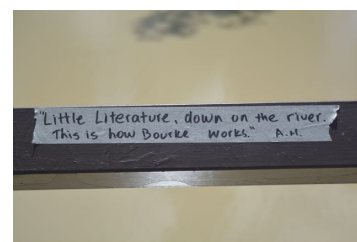


Stories of Bourke: Past, present and future



**Festival of a Thousand Stories
September 2-10, 2016**

You don't know Australia until you know Bourke
Back O' Bourke



MORE THAN JUST TALK



Compiled by Graeme Gibson

Stories of Bourke: Past, present and future

Over two weeks at the end of August and early September 2016 the people of Bourke, and visitors to the town, were invited to contribute to this project.

Meetings and workshops were held with community associations and service providers, schools and support groups. Individuals were invited to contribute through random meetings at the monthly market, in the street and elsewhere.

Life writing workshops were scheduled with participants invited to contribute a story of their experience living in or visiting Bourke. A couple of pop-up writing workshops were held over a couple of hours with people invited to come along for as little or as long as they liked.

Stories collected needed to reflect people's lived personal experiences, their memories, their hopes for the future. Old stories of Aboriginal culture or of early settlers were not sought, these have been told elsewhere. It is the contemporary stories that were the focus.

Like all places Bourke has had, still does have, social issues that affect the community. These stories, where told, are included. The aim was a snapshot into Bourke as it is, warts and all, not just an air-brushed collection of feel good stories.

Some of the stories are on the spot responses, others are deeply reflective. Some were provided verbally, others written. A very few are drawn from previously told stories.

Some of the stories will make you laugh, some may make you feel sad. Many are very insightful, deeply thoughtful and hopeful of the future.

The stories are presented in three parts: Anecdotes and spoken stories, Written word and Poetry. This project was part of the Festival of a Thousand Stories held in September each year. The festival includes the Poet's Trek, which gains a mention.

It's hoped that you enjoy and learn something of this remarkable town and its people – it's past, present and future.

Story telling is eye to eye, mind to mind and heart to heart
Scottish traveller's proverb

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Anecdotes and spoken stories

Anecdotally ...

Far enough away

I have lived and worked in Bourke for 10 years. I was drawn here by my wife's work, family connections, fresh air, the surrounding wide open spaces, and the fact that, as a town, it is about as far as one can be from Sydney and still be in New South Wales.

John Thompson

Wealth

There's a lot of money in Bourke, particularly in the cooler months. You just have to look at the millions of dollars worth of 4WDs, caravans and motor-homes coming through the town every day.

Anon

No escape

Back in the '76 flood they had to blow the railway line up to let the water out and down to Louth. The Aboriginal people had to move from the showground. There were no levee banks then.

Anon

Ever heard anything like this before? Anywhere?

When that bloody Queen came [2000] they had the town looking all spruced up. The streets, the shops, everything was brilliant. It was just a picture to look at. As soon as she left it went back to how it was.

Anon

The only place to be

I've visited many countries, bushwalked in all Australian states and territories. There's only one place to be and that's on the Darling.

Tony Pritchard

We had expected a bigger place

So many people talk about Bourke, you hear so many big stories, we had imagined the town to be bigger. But we aren't disappointed, we like it. Everyone's helpful. And it's green.

Toni and Michael

Wide skies

Where I live it's often so green it hurts your eyes.
But I'm drawn to this place and its wide skies.

Graeme Gibson

Leaving the district

We've been out here many times and always seen mobs of goats. This year, none. I think they have gotten wind of the new meatworks, and left the district.

Visitor from Brisbane

That's a fact

We prefer to base our song writing on folklore, rather than dodgy historical fact.

Jason Roweth

And how do you like living out here?

I love it, I hate it, *said Kylie*, but mostly I love it.

That was last year. Wonder what she's thinking this year?

Graeme Gibson

(Sadly, wet weather kept Kylie out of town this year)

Mind expanding

When you have so much space your mind expands. It's different to those closed in places like where we live in the Blue Mountains.

Toni



It had a story

Jack Bennett came to Bourke in 1950, intending to stay six months. But he never left.

The mighty Darling

Jack recalls his arrival by train:

"I got here about six o'clock at night and got a lift down to the Royal, got a bed on the verandah. Got up the next morning and had a look and there was the mighty Darling, in flood."

Introductions

Jack was not long in Bourke when he had the opportunity to take over an earthmoving business. He needed to introduce himself to a few local businesses. The conversations went something like this ...

- Hullo, I'm Jack Bennett.
- Yes, I know.
- I'm going to need some supplies, but I'll only be able to pay every few months.
- It'll be right boy.

Arrangements were formalised with a handshake. "They adopted me," Jack says.

When you looked at something it had a story

Observe nature, learn from nature and work with nature could be Jack's motto. Jack's cleared a lot of trees in his time.

"It was a bit brutal, to be honest. You'd look at a tree and try and find it's weakness, then off you'd go and 'boom,' over it goes."

After knocking over thousands of trees there was one, out at Gundabooka at the intersection with Kidman Way, that captured his imagination. "I don't want to do it," he recalls thinking, before asking the engineer if he could leave that one. The engineer agreed. All he had to do was put in a slight change to the direction of the road. It's known as Jack's Corner.

Jack Bennett

Tales from Barrington

Mary Crawley, now 92, came to Bourke in 1948. In 1977 she went to Barrington near the Queensland border, where has been licensee of the Tattersalls Hotel ever since. We caught up with Mary during a short stay at the Bourke Hospital. She could fill a book of stories. Here's just a few from our chat:

Always learning

Mary has made many friends of regular truck drivers and other travellers. "Everyone who comes into a pub you can sit with and have a chat and learn something from," she says. In all that time Mary can only recall one person she was glad to see leave.



Mary Crawley

Best friend

Mary's always had an affinity with animals. "No-one," she says, "could have a closer relationship than I have with Gidgee," a dog of uncertain breed and about eight years old. "Gidgee always knows where the best bed is."

The normal thing to do

"A while back the gate was left open and the horse wandered off, heading to Queensland," Mary says. "I didn't want to go after her but I worry about an accident so Gidgee and I went up after her. I took a dish with some feed and she came over after a while. Then I realised I hadn't taken a bridle. I had nothing to lead her back home. So I took off my bra, my pants and cotton top and tied them together to lead her back. It was the normal thing that anyone would do."

Mary Crawley

Addendum

"You've got no shame mum, telling that story."

Mary's daughter Brigitte

Take it as it is

We caught up with Robert and Robert, both born and bred Bourke locals, during father's day at Bourke Pre-School.

–How has Bourke changed over the years?

–A lot of it is to do with the weather. Drought knocks the whole town. Without water it's hard to find permanent work. But this year, with the wet winter, is the best it's been.

–What would you tell someone preparing to visit Bourke for the first time?

–Take it as it is. Don't over-estimate it, don't under-estimate it.

Robert Creighton and Robert Hatch

Back in a heartbeat

"The biggest change I've seen to Bourke is to attract tourists. Any small town without a dominant industry needs this. But Bourke is still Bourke and always will be. The people are friendly."

Born in Cobar, Sally has visited Bourke many times over the years. In Bourke for a two week placement at the hospital during her nursing studies, Sally chose Bourke as her first preference. "And I'd come back again in a heartbeat."

Sally Cullemward

As it was

Aunty Gertie was born in Bourke. She's travelled a lot, lived in a lot of places, but she's not keen on cities. Likes the outback and Bourke's home. She remembers the river where the wharf is now:

“We didn’t know it as a wharf back in our day. Wasn’t like it is now. There was just enough timber for a diving board. We’d to come down and swim, because there was no swimming pool. This was the main watering hole. Sometimes we’d go to North Bourke. Whoever had a bike would double us out and we’d float back down ... the things you do when you’re a kid.”

And there were other cultural delights:

“Back then there was the picture show. We had movies twice, three times a week and on Saturday was the matinee. In summer it was open air, with the canvas chairs. In winter it was indoors.”

Aunty Gertie Edwards-Darrigo



Aunty Gertie

Spirit and soul

Jenny Greentree has managed to make her passion – art – her profession. Travelling to Bourke in 1996 amid the dust and heat she thought she was, “moving to the ends of the earth.” The environment is important to her art, her life. “I need nature to feed my soul,” Jen says, recalling how she wondered back then how to manage in such a barren environment. On the day she arrived it rained non-stop. The red dirt landscape transformed immediately. The contrasting greens and reds of the landscape accompanied by a brilliant blue sky ignited her creative instincts. Spring was a profusion of wildflowers like she had never seen. And she hasn’t looked back. Her artworks express the spirit and soul of the district, which “describes not only the landscape, but the people as well. They portray life and hope, ruggedness and resilience, beauty and strength. This is available to everyone in their everyday world.”

Jen Greentree

Lifelong Learning

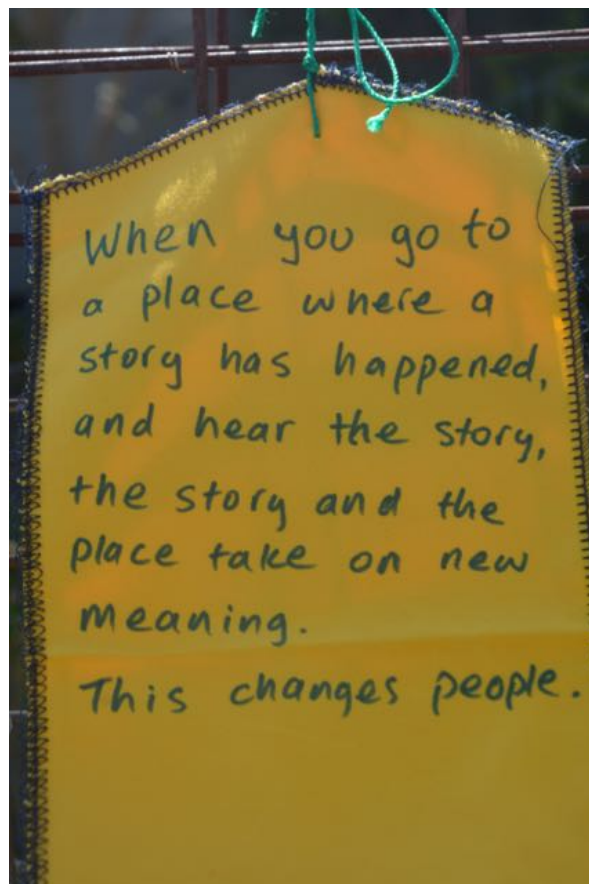
Originally from Gilgandra, Steve Greentree came to Bourke 20 years ago. Steve is a third generation competitive axeman. He started about 40 years ago, around age 16. He hasn't been too active the last 16 years or so, but he's getting back to it. "Is passion something you seek or does passion seek you," he muses.

Getting to know the place

Steve went on the first Poet's Trek in 1996. "This was one of the great experiences of my life," he says. "I'd only been in Bourke nine months so it gave me a good look at the country side, met some great people and heard some good yarns."

–A lot of long term local people think they know the place well, but when – if – they go on the Trek they see things differently, they learn something. What would you say?

–Absolutely. You get to see places you never knew existed. And then to hear the stories from the place where they were told is special. One of the good memories is hearing Henry Lawson's [Lake Eliza](#) on the shores of Lake Eliza. A full Lake Eliza.



Re-imagining Bourke's history

Steve has had a long interest in the history of the area. He's learnt a lot from local historian Paul Roe and more recently augmented his learning.

"There's a contrast between being taught by Paul and over the last six years being open and taught by local Aboriginal people. It's a different style of learning. You just spend time, you don't sit down in a classroom. Just do life with them.

I grew up all my life with Aboriginal people but now have a totally different frame of reference. I had the standard Australian view of Aboriginal people. But now I'm in awe at highly intelligent, well-organised, beautiful people. You can learn so much from them. They love, they give."

Steve Greentree

Room three

"I first came to Bourke in search of stories about Henry Lawson. It was 2001 or 02. I'd read "Stranger on the Darling," and at the time I was going to lots of different towns to write songs. I'd pick towns I hadn't been to on the Country Link map ... anywhere that Country Link went to, I'd try and stay in every town along that route. Bourke was a town I'd always wanted to visit so I booked the bus. It gets in quite late at night. I'd booked a room at the Port of Bourke Hotel.

The bus driver asked how I was getting there. I said I'd walk, I had a map, but he said, "No, it's not safe to walk. I'll drive you there." So once everyone had disembarked, taken their bags, the driver – just him and me – drove me there, in the bus. He gave me a little tour of the town on the way. On the way he asked if I'd heard of the Gidgee Guesthouse. I hadn't so he suggested I check it out. I stayed one night at the hotel and then walked over and that was the day I met Chris and Christie. They had room three available.

I ended up staying an extra week, I'd only planned a few days but I got such a good reception I just wanted to hang around. For the next week they cooked, we had wonderful dinners with great, enlightening conversation, poetry and songs. I found it a really fertile place to write and ended up getting a couple of really good songs out of my visit in room three. Since then I've been coming back as much as I can."

Darren Hanlon

Natural storyteller

Nooka didn't get a great deal of education. Born in 1955 he spent years working on stations. For the last ten years he's worked at Bourke District Children's Services. "Still in pre-school," he says, "but it's the best job I've ever had." And the kids love him. Him and his stories.

Nooka, the sixth of 11 children, tells a good story. He used to share a bed with two brothers and says he was his mother's pet. "When an older brother fell out of bed, mum would bash him. When a younger brother fell out of bed, mum would bash him," Nooka's story goes. "But if I fell out of bed mum would bash the other two for pushing me out."

"Nooka" Barry James Harris

The bush was still in me

Born in Orange in 1945, Bob Howarth was the youngest of 13 children. He moved to Sydney when his father died from snake bite. After school he worked in building in Sydney before coming to Bourke to work with a brother. He was 21 then and he's been in Bourke ever since. "The bush was still in me," he says, "from the years in Orange."

Ringbarking trees and fencing were some of his station jobs; cotton picking as well. Bob worked in maintenance at the meatworks. "It used to kill seventeen hundred sheep a day, three days a week." But Bob never wanted to work on the floor.

Later, Bob had a job building the rock wall at the Fred Hollows Vision Way on the Dubbo Road. He worked with a team of six, building the walls, collecting the rocks of different sizes and shapes from Mt Oxley.

–What is the biggest change you've seen in Bourke?

–The closure of the meatworks. It went downhill straight away. And it hasn't recovered. Bob lives at River Gum Lodge now. His wife and two daughters are still in Bourke.

Bob Howarth



Bob Howarth

It's hot

Sallie Irving grew up in Barraba in the New England region of NSW. After six years in Sydney she has been in Bourke since the beginning of 2016, teaching at the Bourke-Walgett School of Distance Education.

–What would you tell a Sydney friend about Bourke?

–It's hot. And it's really friendly. Most of my friends would have no idea what it's like out here. They think the country starts at Penrith.

Sallie Irving

A sunset every day

After completing year 10 in Bourke, Kristy Kennedy went to boarding school in Sydney for years 11 and 12. A gap year followed before university and a Bachelor of Arts (Law). Kristy says there was a lot of blood, sweat and tears in that but a successful career in the law unfolded. Kristy is a proud Barkindji and Ngarrindjeri woman who acknowledges the strength she has from her nans and her mother. Kristy has a passion to serve vulnerable people and there's always been a calling to come back to Bourke.

"I could live in Sydney or Bourke, but Bourke keeps me grounded. And I get a sunset every day."

Making a difference

Bourke has its share of vulnerable people. This is seen in crime rates, particularly young people, who often get locked into a cycle of offending, imprisonment, release, offending ... It's been this way a long time, and its mostly Aboriginal people.

A new approach, aimed at breaking the cycle is on trial in Bourke. Known as Justice Reinvestment it aims to redirect resources away from detention into prevention through targeted interventions. The trial is being managed by the [Maranguka Community Hub](#), an initiative of Bourke Tribal Council. Maranguka means caring for others. Kristy was working for legal aid in Sydney but took time off to come back to Bourke to attend community meetings about the trial.

"I was blown away by what they were trying to achieve. Reducing incarceration rates and working with local people to make effective change through grass roots people. It's driven by the community. I heard them talking about a coordinators position and I thought, 'I want that job. I want to be part of this.'"

When the position came up Kristy successfully applied.

"I coordinate working groups that focus on early childhood, children eight to 18 years, and men. Each group has goals with targets and six monthly reviews. They're achievable but also aspirational. We want to push ourselves."

While it's early days there are positive signs. The Maranguka Justice Reinvestment trial was reported by [ABC 4 Corners](#) as "Backing Bourke" on 19 September 2016.

Kristy Kennedy

The Bourke Story Chair

A requirement for good story telling is a relaxed setting, and the right state of mind. A comfortable chair can help.



The Bourke Story Chair was produced for the 2016 Festival of One Thousand Stories. Restored and upholstered by Meg Bishop (red pants) the decorative work represents Bourke through the colours and images: shades of brown and green, a red-tailed black cockatoo. On the rear, local artist Anna McCorkle (red shirt) and the *Make Sew Do* group from Carole's of Bourke provided an appliqué camel.

Making a life

I walked into the Indigenous Art Gallery with a cushion, on which Meg had sewn some artwork, to accompany the story chair. The artwork was purchased from the gallery back in March. Siara was the artist, the work of yellow bellies. Craig, who works in the gallery most days, recognised the work, he may have recalled selling it to us. I invited Craig outside for a yarn in the Story Chair.

Craig discovered art in primary school and now paints most days. "There's an average of 10 but up to 30 local artists using the gallery to work in and exhibit. They start to find skills to build on and work with," he says. "They enjoy it. They're proud of it." Browsing in the gallery, watching the artists at work, this is evident.

–What would you like to see for Bourke in the future?

–I'd like to see Bourke as a place to be, for everyone to come, settle and enjoy it. To be able to make a life, a good life, out of the town.

Craig also thinks it's important to acknowledge and respect the early cameleers: "I think we should pay homage for their contribution to Australia's progress."

Craig Knight



I know where my people are

We caught up with Janaya, who was born in Bourke, while she was participating in the Sydney Story Factory program. Janaya's mother is Kamillaroi, her father Barkinji. "Knowing my background, I know where my people are," she says.

Janaya is passionate about school, wants to go to uni and become a PE teacher.

Janaya Knight

The town has a life

"My first impression when I came to Bourke as a 13 year old, nearly 40 years ago, was of the greenery. How many trees there were.

The biggest changes have been people moving out. Drought, the meatworks closing. The airline service stopped. The train's gone. Banks have shut.

But now with all the grey nomads and the backpackers in the cooler months the town's just lovely. It has a life, it's vibrant. Not like summer when you don't see people out and about so much."

Linda

Baked dinner

Betty Manning was born in Bourke, then went to school and lived in Dubbo. Betty came back to Bourke and lived at River Gum Lodge for about 10 years before moving to Residential Aged Care at Bourke Health Service. Betty likes a cake with morning tea. And a nice meal.

- What was your favourite?
- A baked dinner, *without hesitation*.
- Lamb, beef?
- Either, *with a broad smile*.
- Baked vegies as well? Potato, pumpkin?
- And sweet potato.

Betty's had a full life. "It's all been exciting," she says.

Betty Manning

The town skatepark

"The nae-sayers said it'd be a problem. 'Nothing but trouble they said.' But there's kids using it all the time, there's parties, there's family picnics. It's fantastic, it's bought life."

Mel Milgate

Some things stick in the memory

Mick worked as a cook at Toorale Station for around seven years. He has a lot of memories, some clearer than others, but one thing has stayed clear. That is the workmanship that went into cutting the verandah floorboards of the homestead to fit snug against the corrugated iron walls. Mick is now living at Rivergum Lodge.

Mick



Floorboards at Toorale Homestead

One change

Irene came to a pop-up writing workshop on the wharf, seeking some advice to encourage her teenage daughter Kelsy with her writing. Kelsy didn't know about this, of course. While there I asked Irene, who was born in Bourke, what is the one change she would like to see in Bourke. With little thinking needed, she offered the following: "More for teenagers and teenagers together – not separate black and white."

Irene Morris

Vibrant

Frank Povah first visited Bourke in the 1960s, but he can't remember why. He came again in the 80s after winning an Australian Yarn Telling Competition at Coomealla – at the other end of the Darling.

–And how are you finding Bourke this time?

–Although it's had its difficulties, it's vibrant. I don't know whether that's new people or a re-kindling of pride among locals, but it's noticeable."

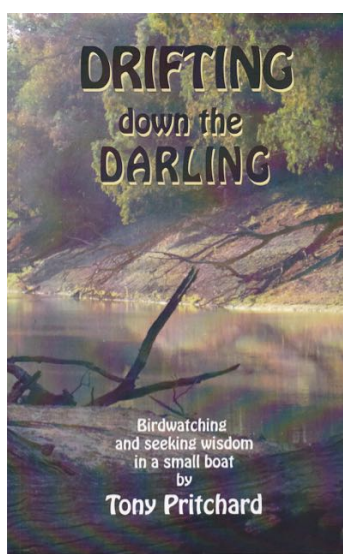
Frank Povah

Sophisticated

Growing up in Dubbo, Tony Pritchard was always on the Macquarie River. You could say the inland rivers are in his blood. He's done 10 long canoe trips on the Darling and written about it. "Every bend is different," Tony says, who also claims to have been on first name terms with all the wood ducks.

Tony's father used to work around Bourke. He'd come home with stories that were larger than life, of generous people. Tony has his own stories of the people: "Do the wrong thing and they'll kick you in the bum, but they are far more sophisticated than most people give them credit for."

Tony Pritchard



Local knowledge

Scott's only been in Bourke a year, working as a meter reader. He's picked up some stories in that time. How it is, how it was.

I was looking for a place in Mitchell Street, the old showroom it was called. I couldn't find it so I thought I'd go into the library and ask.

–This is it, they said.

–No it's the library, I said.

–Oh well, it used to be the old showroom.

–How long's it been the library?

–Since 1999.

If you live in Bourke and you're going to Brewarrina it's the Bre Road, but if you live in Bre and you're coming to Bourke it's the Bourke Road. But it's actually the Mitchell Highway. Or maybe the Kamillaroi Highway.

Meter readers aren't allowed to carry keys or enter premises unaccompanied anymore, but it wasn't always like that. Verbal instructions were often provided.

There's one place where the key was kept under the blue pot on the left hand side. After finding it you had to kick the dog, shoo the cat and jump the fence to get around to the back door. But if there's a fellow there don't go in – he's having an affair with the lady of the house. But if it's after two o'clock it'll be all right, she get's her mum and they go down to the RSL.

Scott

Being accommodating

While many locals see the kangaroo population as vermin, Kristie Smile takes on the job of raising orphan 'roos whose mother has been killed and releasing them back into the wild. Kristie has been a licenced WIRES member for four years. In that time she's released around 40 'roos. "I like the reds best," Kristie says. "The most traumatised are those that have been kept by people – as pets for kids."

Kristie and partner Chris have run the Gidgee Guesthouse since 2000. In that time Kristie says she has raised many backpackers. "They come with few life skills, no mum in the backpack," Kristie says.

Kristie is an admirer and practitioner of the iconic Australian accommodating spirit. "It's a mystery to me," she says, "why we can't extend that to refugees."

Kristie Smiles

Sometimes it takes time

First impressions

We met Jan the day after she arrived, from Melbourne, for her first visit to Bourke. She had been expecting very dry, open, vast plains. But she found instead very green, open,

vast plains. The Darling River made a big impression on Jan who was ... "absolutely delighted to be here on the river, with lots of trees, lots of people."

Her first impressions of the town, though, were not favourable.

And a week later

"Bourke is one of the most interesting towns I have visited. It isn't because of spectacular buildings, but it is the fascinating people who founded this country town on the mighty Darling River; and the interesting, friendly and hospitable people who live here now.

All their stories intertwine to create the town of Bourke, and in my mind they as a whole are like a magnet which will draw tourists like myself (who have given the town time) to reveal its great Aussie spirit."

Jan Spreyer

Role model

After school Margaret worked at the Bourke Hospital. She left for a while to care for a sick auntie. When she came back to Bourke she took a job at the pre-school. "And I loved it. Just totally loved it," she says.

Margaret was asked if she wanted to do Certificate Three in Children's Services. "But I was never confident within myself. I ummed and ahed. Thought I couldn't do it." But she decided to have a go. "And that was the best thing I ever did," Margaret says, sitting in her office where the walls hold her certificates and awards and her Personal Philosophy Towards an Holistic and Inclusive Approach to Caring for Children in Early Childhood.

A Diploma followed, with Margaret once again having to confront her self doubts. She puts it down to having a really good role model, Catherine Marett from Louth. "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her. Being the director, with young girls coming up, the best thing I can do," Margaret says, "is be a role model for them."

What goes around comes around.

Margaret Stewart

Bourke's been good

Linda was born in Cobar, Barry in Bourke. When they married they lived in Cobar for three years before moving to Bourke in 1981. "When we came we had nothing," Linda says. They lived at Maghera Station on the Wanaaring Road, where Barry did station work with Alan Crawford.

In 1984 they moved to town and Barry worked at Rockmelon Joes for seven years. The business was sold and Barry continued with new owners for another couple of years before Darling Farms took over, with citrus and cotton the mainstays.

Linda worked various jobs in hotels, retail, cleaning before starting as a teacher's aid at St Ignatius eight years ago.

Meanwhile Alan Crawford's daughter had bought Maghera Station. In 2014 Barry went back to Maghera completing a 30 year cycle. He comes into Bourke each weekend, some nights during the week.

During their time in Bourke they've raised three sons, bought a house. "Bourke's been good to us," Linda says. Barry always knew it would be.

Linda and Barry Wood



Linda and Barry Wood

You hear a lot of stories

Whether in the cities or the outback, stories of violence are legend. Might be why murder mysteries are so popular. Ron Wood, who worked at Toorale Station, tells a story he heard of some goings on at Toorale.

"Around about 1954 a horse-breaker at Toorale Station asked an overseer who was going into Bourke to bring him back a bottle of rum. When the overseer returned the horse-breaker was drunk, so he refused to give it to him. The horse-breaker didn't take this news well and laid into the overseer with a stick. He died of his injuries a few days later. The villain went to gaol but not for long. Some time not long after his release he repeated this behaviour, somewhere further north."

And there's more ...

"As a kid growing up in Bourke, we heard a story of the North Bourke Hotel publican who had supposedly killed a bloke in the pub with a spanner. This was back in the 1950s, perhaps 40s. When the pub burnt down six or so years ago, they found a spanner under the floor."

So the story goes.

Ron Wood

Bourke ... in the News

For a town of its size Bourke gets a disproportionate level of media coverage. It's been this way for years. It influences how people – locals and others – think about Bourke, the stories they tell about Bourke.

2013: a newspaper headline

Bourke: most dangerous place in the world

Sydney Morning Herald, February 2, 2013

I want my money back.
I came out to Bourke for an adventure holiday.
Newspaper said Bourke was most dangerous place in the world.
I expected gunfire, explosions. Angry raised voices at least.
All I found was this sleepy little town.
All I heard was the Corellas sweeping in for a drink at dusk.
I want my money back.

Local poet Andrew Hull in response

September 2016: what some people have said

People in Bourke are very anti-media. They have had such bad coverage for so long, concentrating on racial problems, crime, poverty. Always bad news.

Lisa McGregor, ABC TV 4 Corners producer

I love this town, I care about this town and I will not talk to any media from out of town. I can not trust them and would strongly discourage any of the people I work with from talking to the media.

Long time resident, community services worker

Bourke has its problems and many of these have a long history. You can't dwell on that but you can't ignore it either.

Local resident

That's it! That's all we want. Acknowledge what's happened in the past, don't bury it. Acknowledge it and move on.

Local resident, in response to statement above

The first time we came to Bourke was more than 20 years ago. Back then you wouldn't stop unless you had to. You certainly wouldn't stay. Now it's entirely different. Welcoming and friendly. We'll be back.

Visitors from Geelong

We had heard the horror stories about Bourke but it hasn't been like that at all.

Visitor from Newcastle

Hurt people hurt people.
Healed people heal people.

Luke Thomas

Written word

Far enough away

I have lived and worked in Bourke for 10 years. I was drawn here by my wife's work, family connections, fresh air, the surrounding wide open spaces, and the fact that, as a town, it is about as far as one can be from Sydney and still be in New South Wales.

John Thompson

Bourke Men's Shed

"Will you help to set up and run the Men's Shed", they said to me back in September 2008. At the time I had no idea what Men's Sheds were really all about, but rolled up my sleeves and got involved.

It's been great getting to know the men, building up a sense of camaraderie, working on projects, but mostly just coming together once a week for a slap-up BBQ lunch. Of course that involves telling stories of long ago. Just this week one of our members brought in an Australian Geographic Magazine dating back to 1947 featuring a story on Bourke. The men took turns trying to identify the location of the river shown in the old photo.

We have lots of plans and big ideas at Bourke Men's shed, but often that's as far as things go.

For many, the Men's Shed is the highlight of their week. One wife tells us she tried for years to get her husband to come, but once he finally did he now looks forward to it all week. A couple of the men have lost their wives in recent years so the men's shed gives them a reason to get out of the house and meet some of their mates. We have a laugh, tell stories but we don't take each other too seriously.

Let's hear something from the men themselves:

Jack: "I can express my opinions and no-one will take offence. Also, I like to support a worthwhile community asset."



John T: "I spend a lot of time on my own on my property, so I enjoy the company at the Men's Shed and I like to meet people."



Ron: “I enjoy the conversation, you can have a good yarn at the Men’s Shed…….and I don’t mind a game of cards.”



Paul: “I enjoy the companionship at the Men’s Shed, and you get a good lunch on Thursdays.”



Bernie: “I like to drop in for a chat and a cup of tea, when I’m not working. Its good company at the Men’s Shed.”



Being new to town ten years ago, the Men’s Shed has helped me to get to know a great bunch of blokes that I probably wouldn’t have met otherwise.”

John Beer

And some random comments thrown around at the weekly barbeque

“When I come to the men’s shed I get so well educated I think I’m in a university lunch room with a bunch of professors.”

“The town’s coming back to life. There’s hope, if the meat works goes ahead and if the river keeps flowing.”

An early campaign against domestic Violence

Helen Coolican now lives in Sydney but grew up in Bourke, where her father was a doctor. There are stories about Doctor Coolican's boxing skills and his approach to the prevention of domestic violence.

"I've heard about my father's skill as a boxer from several people in Bourke and in Sydney and while some of it is possibly true I've no idea whether it happened a lot, or just a few times and became a mythical preventative threat. I did hear of one official boxing match with Owen 'Bun' Tancred down at the Meatworks, where they had assigned 'seconds.' It was just after he arrived in Bourke and apparently Owen lost, needed stitching up, which my father did, and they were on better terms thereafter. I'll be very interested to see how the story evolves!"

Helen Coolican

Helen says that local historian Paul Roe has heard these stories first hand. Paul says:

"In an isolated town like Bourke stories grow in the telling. So you need two or three reliable sources to confirm the truth of the matter. I've heard confirmations of the Bun Tancred vs Dr. Coolican fight - an organised stoush between two pillars of the community like that obviously drew a good crowd and had many witnesses.

Not so public was another story that I have heard from several sources, about Dr Coolican administering preventative medicine for a badly beaten woman who appeared regularly in his surgery. The story was confirmed by her son who told me how the good doctor made a house call, knocked on their door and asked to see his father. Having summarised the patient's injuries and assessed the likely cause, the visitor forcefully applied his fist to the head of the head of the house. Patiently waiting until the man was sufficiently recovered, the physician advised him that more of the same medicine was readily available should his wife return with the same symptoms. Definitely not text book medical procedure, but rumour has it that this firmly applied bush medicine not only cured the problem, but may well have prevented its spread in the town. At very least, it adds a new perspective to the idea of doctor doing his rounds!"

Paul Roe

People of the red sunset

Established in 2002 [Desert Pea Media](#) uses storytelling to engage and empower participants in regional and remote areas of Australia to explore local cultural and social issues and tell their story.

Earlier in 2016 Lahshaye participated in a Desert Pea Media program in Bourke

"First of all we sat in a room and started to brainstorm ideas about what we wanted in our song. We had 4 days to complete the song. It took us two days to write the song and two days to film it.

With the song lyrics we added the places we talked about and filmed. We went down to the reserve to film some parts. We went out to the North Bourke Bridge. And we even went out to Gundabooka to record the Bourke riverboys (Aboriginal dance group). We also went out there to record our chorus and the chorus was about the sunset so we went out to catch the sunset.

On our way to Gundabooka we broke down on the bus so we had to call the other teachers but lucky our other bus came with us so we went up in that. By the time we got on top of the mountain we started to record our last bit. After the filming we had a sausage sizzle at the bbq area. By the time we got into town it would have been 7.30pm.

We have now finished our song and it is going to be on You Tube for everyone to see.”

- And how do you feel about it?
- It was cool.

Lahshaye Dutton

The song, “People of the Red Sunset,” is on You Tube. It can also be viewed [here](#) where the lyrics may be read, contemplated:

Growing up in Bourke

I am a locally born Aboriginal elder in the Bourke community, born in the 1940s.

I am a proud NGEMBA woman and associate my Heritage with Land and Culture.

My great grandmother lived on Gundabooka Mountain. She had two daughters who did not have English names. They had tribal names given to them at birth. One of these daughters was my grandmother. As a child I was told their tribal names but I no longer remember.

When the English set up a colony in NSW and the settlers gradually moved further out west to set up stations around the outback, a lot of the tribes offered some resistance to the invasion of their hunting grounds, but were no match for guns and horses.

By now the NSW Government had decided to eradicate the “full blood” Aborigines. They patrolled the bush with mounted police who were given orders to shoot the younger of the tribe, who were still left, so as to stop the breeding cycle, so they would cease to exist. The elderly ones were not killed as they couldn’t breed and would gradually die out.

The woman who had the two daughters – my great grandmother – decided she must save them from being killed. When she knew the police were getting close to the mountain, she would take them to the top of the mountain and hide them in a big cave, until the police left the area.

When the girls were old enough they went to work for property owners and there they met their partners.

My grandmother, Rosie, was taken by a white man by the name of Wilson, who was a stockman on Yanda Station. He and Rosie had three sons whose names were Harry, Frank and Jack. Jack was my father.

When dad met mum they decided to get married and have children. They had nine in total: five boys and four girls. I was the third eldest.

We lived at Horsefalls Billabong, down near the convent school (St Ignatius). Whenever there was a big flood the water would flood the billabong and we would swim in it (we didn't think about the danger of swimming in flood waters back then.)

When the billabong was dry we would start a game of Rounders – a game with four bases, a tennis ball and a stick for a bat. We would start off with a few kids on each side, but as the game progressed we would end up with about 20 kids on each side; they were the good days. As kids, back in those days, we were allowed to do a lot of things as long as we behaved and were home before the street lights came on. We did have restrictions and rules and pity help us if we broke those rules.

Dad worked for the DMR (Department of Main Roads), he worked out of town a lot. Mum did her best to care for us. She took us to the pictures every change of program. It was on three times a week and we went to the matinees on Saturday.

As a teenager I went to woolshed dances, claypan dances, we sat around campfires telling stories and singing along with the guitars.

I had a fairly good childhood. We had the usual trauma of losses in the family but we learnt to deal with our grief. Grief can stay with you for a very long time.

I left school at the age of 15 and a half years but that's another story.



Aunty Dot

My work experiences

Over the last 50+ years I have worked in education, health and community development.

I left school at the age of 15 and a half years, but the teachers didn't want me to leave (I suppose they saw potential in me), so they contacted the Department of Education, who then created a position for me as a teacher's aide, therefore I was the first teacher's aide in any of the Bourke schools, as well as it being my first job.

I stayed in that job for 12 months, then I decided to try something else.

A position became available in Kara's Café as a waitress, I applied for the job and got it. I wasn't overly excited about the job (doing that kind of work didn't do anything for me).

Then a Home Care position became available, I applied for it and was successful.

I did Home Care for a couple of years, then I decided to spread my wings a bit further and moved to Dubbo for a couple of months. I applied to Home Care again, I won a position with them until something else came up.

Another job became available which was a governess position on a property out near Gilgandra, caring for two young boys. I enjoyed this job until the family decided to sell the property and move on.

I came back to Bourke and did some more Home Care. I was caring for my aunty.

By this time I was old enough to apply for an assistant nursing position, which I was successful in getting.

I loved working in a caring profession and did this for four years, then I had a 16 year break to get married and raise five children.

I returned to nursing to obtain my Enrolled Nursing Certificate at age 40.

I worked in every area of the hospital system including the operating theatre and physiotherapy department.

I left the hospital system to work in the community at the Community Health Centre as a generalist nurse, working closely with doctors and elderly clients.

After eight years as a generalist nurse I decided to change professions again.

I was successful in obtaining employment with Host Family Respite Care, caring for people with a disability. I am currently working in this position.

I also worked for Family Support Service, with a target group of Aboriginal families and children, for eight years.

I worked for Outback Arts for 12 months, I was employed as the Regional Indigenous Community Development Officer.

Bourke has been good to me for employment over the years. I enjoy what I do but my passion is community development and the environment.

The future of Bourke

For the future for Bourke, I would like to see everyone working together, instead of everyone going off and doing their own thing.

I can remember when Bourke was a thriving community and I would like to see it like that again. I think we are getting there, it will take time.

Bourke is my home and I wouldn't live anywhere else. I love Bourke. The people are friendly and supportive. Bourke has a lot to offer. Some people say there is nothing to do in Bourke, but if you get involved with the community you will be kept busy.

Aunty Dot Martin

A strange way to meet

In Bourke I learned that when it comes to storytelling, 1+1 = 3. For example, bringing to life stories of two men long dead, buried side by side in the cemetery could create a larger than life drama. In 1915 Leon Braunstein a Jewish tailor was deported to Australia from Singapore and incarcerated in Bourke as a POW. Just as the German internee arrived, 41 year old Pte Donald Fraser of Bourke enlisted with the 13th Battalion AIF and went to fight the Germans half a world away in France. He was captured and interned in a POW camp near Hanover in April 1917. Leon Braunstein died far from home in the Australian outback in December of the same year. Donald Fraser was repatriated 12 months later, died in 1944 and buried a few feet away from the Jewish man in the Presbyterian section of the Bourke cemetery. Imagine what a story might unfold if someone tracked the intersection of these two men's lives!

Paul Roe



Paul Roe

Baggage

I'm sitting at the bus terminal in Bourke. It's the old railway station, but the trains don't come here any more.

I'm dropping a guest off, she's heading back to Sydney. We've said our goodbyes, so we sit quietly in the car watching. The summer holidays are over, all the kids are going back to boarding school.

Kids with pillows and bags, plugged into the Ipods.

Under the nearby trees, sits a group maybe a family. A youngish woman, two men and there are a couple of kids rolling about on the grass. The children are oblivious to the palpable anger that I see among the adults. There are raised murmurs, flashing eyes between the woman and one of the men.

Finally the bus pulls in announcing its arrival with a gravel crunching swirl of dust. This pushes the awaiting passengers back to the brick wall.

My guest and I get out of the car and unload her backpack.

I glance across at the group under the trees. The children stop playing, the woman gets up. She kisses the kids, tells them to be good. She grabs a packet of smokes and sticks them up into the sleeve of her Tshirt. Then she picks up a white shopping bag with a few belongings in it. Maybe a change of undies, a brush and some deodorant.

She is travelling light, with heavy baggage.

The men stay seated, she walks away towards the bus.

One of the men yells out "Are ya comin back?"

She swings her worldly possessions and not looking back says, "If I loved ya baby I'd stay, but I don't, so I'm gone."

With that she climbs aboard the bus, which roars off to the east.

Kristie Smiles

Why Bourke?

I arrived in Bourke mid June 2015 very undecided whether to continue north or east. The plan was to head to a warm climate and find work. The past two years I have lived in my 16 foot caravan, towed by my Subaru Forester, exploring Australia and working. That is more stories. I have spent around 17 years living in Darwin and even though I was born and bred Victorian I hate the cold.

Travelling up from Victoria I had decided to stay in Bourke for a night or two then I had to go either North or East into Queensland. I called into the info centre to find out about things to do in the area and options for my travels. I was asked where I planned to go and I said I wasn't sure as I was looking for work. It turned out that a casual job in the info

centre for three or four months was available and I had experience in this area – within 24 hours I was offered the job. I decided to take the job thinking a job in hand was better than none and having no idea of the impact that Bourke would have in my life over time.

Initially I focused on quickly learning the basic info required to be passed on to the travellers that came through and then I started to realise that Bourke was not an ordinary town on the edge of the outback. It was also bloody cold at night especially, which I really hated and struggled with. I think most Australians have heard of Bourke. "The Back O Bourke " is a bit of a catch phrase. I think also that people have no idea how "special" Bourke has been for so many people and also how so many people have had Bourke touch their lives in such a variety of ways.

Ellen Wharton



Reconnect

Reconnect is a program for young people who, for a variety of reasons, are out of mainstream schooling.

Reconnect boys

On the day where a meeting with a Reconnect boys group had been planned the group's teacher had been injured and was absent. The group don't cope well with sudden change to their routine and they stayed away that day.

Reconnect girls

At first glance many of these stories appear negative, pessimistic even. They do however represent some of the problems that face communities throughout Australia – not just Bourke. The girls were promised their work would be published as they expressed it, apart from errors in grammar or spelling. It was their lived experience, their perceptions that was sought. In discussion at the time all of these girls expressed a view that they wanted things to be different, better. This is evident in much of their work.

Bourke is a beautiful place but unfortunately it's changing in a bad way. People are using drugs and kids are going to jail. I would like to see our community change so it can be a good place to live.

Katie Brookson

Bourke

- need to stop graffiti
- not being racist
- get a better education
- kids not smoking

I would love Bourke to be a better place and also kids going to jail and doing bad things, needs to stop.

Chequita

To me Bourke is a small town. Sometimes it's boring and sometimes it's okay. A lot of the kids have lack of respect and Bourke people need to improve on their drug use. They have lack of care about where they drop their used needles.

Lahshaye Dutton

Bourke is a beautiful town

Our community is helpful

Unique town to live

Read rough people

Kind people

Environment with relationship

Estelle Edwards

Bourke

- drugs
- rubbish
- smokes
- swearing
- fighting
- drinking a lot
- fires
- break and enter
- graffiti
- kids going to jail
- trashing the town
- chucking rocks
- shooting birds with shanghais
- racism

Myah-Rose Edwards-Driscoll

Bourke Story

Bourke is a beautiful place. The community of Bourke at the moment is not a very nice place because we've got young kids drinking, smoking etc. Not just young kids but also elder people in our lives and community doing drugs, stabbing, drinking everyday, smoking every 5 minutes. Bourke is looking disgraceful with the rubbish and amount of syringes laying around on the ground and, also people who are doing drugs aren't worrying about the world around them and others in their lives. Kids are going to jail and graffiti is everywhere. Normally Bourke is a really nice place when everyone is thinking straight but also lots of people are passing away and dying because of the flu and what everyone is taking and doing.

The end.

Nikyra Suckling

St Ignatius Parish Primary School

An hour or so was spent with students in each of years 3-4 and 5-6. "Stories Matter" was the underlying principle to our work. Whether family stories or town stories, they all matter. This is how people remember and learn, share and connect with others. Here's the outcome:

Life in Bourke

What I like about Bourke is that you have your family and friends who care for you and want to play with you. I could have moved six years ago but I have so many good memories about Bourke that I wanted to stay. Some of the great places and things to do in Bourke are the skate park, going camping and catching yellow bellies in the river. I do think about my new school and new friends that I will make, but I'll never forget St Ignatius.

Katanah

My family

My mum and dad were the first people to get married on the Old Bourke Bridge. Abbie's brother was the ring bearer. My parents got married in the year 2000.

Lara

Bourke in the future

I want to tell you a story about Bourke in the future. In the future I would like to see a McDonalds, robot fish, evil zombies and tigers that love you as much as you love them. I know it might not happen but still I would love it if it happened.

I have one more story to tell you. One day at my pops, my sister Sophie was riding a motor bike around the farm. Thomas, my brother and I were jumping on but Thomas didn't hold the handlebar. We went too fast and he did a back-flip off the bike and landed on his feet. We were only four or five at the time.

Lucy

The history of my house

In the old days, my house was a private hospital. My room was a babies room and it can be very scary because I can hear sounds. It was a very small private hospital. The lounge room was the waiting room. My brother told me about the history of my house. I heard

mum tell someone that one of the ladies that left a couple of years ago said that she was born in my house.

Abbie

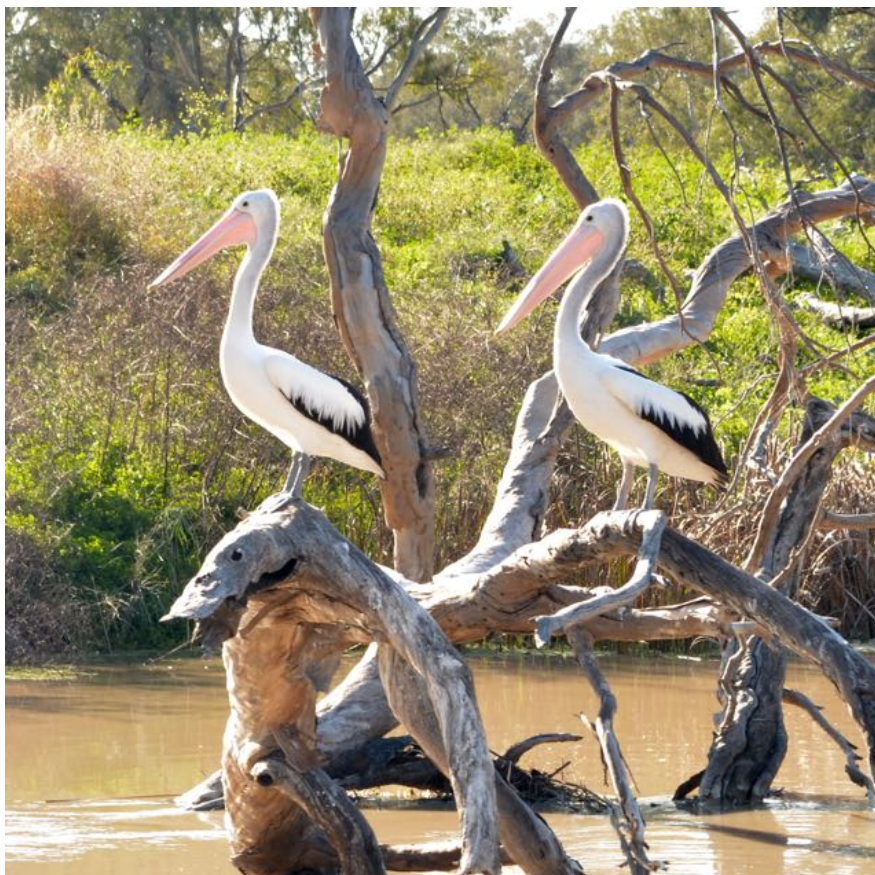
My story about Bourke

The reason I like Bourke is that you can catch yabbies and fish and not have to travel very far. Whereas in the city, you can't fish as easily.

In Bourke, you can go for long, quiet bush walks and not get fined for having a dog off the leash in certain areas. In the city you can't walk without going past at least sixteen shops and if you have a dog off the lead, you can get fined heaps of money!

That's why Bourke is better.

Amirah



Bourke Matters

A story of how keeping Bourke's feeling matters.

Some people want a Big W and McDonalds but I don't agree. It's important to keep Bourke's feeling. Like Henry Lawson said, *"If you know Bourke you know Australia."*

So if we change Bourke's feeling from a nice, quiet, lovely place to a big, loud, so much happening place then people will think that Australia is a big loud place.

Isaac

Bourke's history

Let me tell you a story about a famous bakery in Bourke. This old bakery is called Morrall's. They are famous for their beautiful, yummy pies. Sometimes they're so yummy that there are none left. It opened in 1905 and still runs today. It has had a few different owners over the time.

I have a really funny story just for you because I live on a farm and we have a ute. One day my dad was driving and I was on the back. Suddenly dad slammed on the brakes and I went head first in the ground. I had dirt up my nose and in my mouth.

Charlotte

North Bourke Bridge

In Bourke's past the old North Bourke bridge was used for all sorts of vehicles. It was a great sensation and was used regularly by locals and travellers. The bridge used to open upwards so large boats could pass underneath. Large wooden planks were used to hold it up. It's been replaced by a more modern bridge. Although it is old it's still a major tourist attraction.

Unnamed

Back in the day Bourke had paddle steamers carting tonnes of freight up and down the Darling River from Queensland to New South Wales. The Bourke bridge was built so people could cross the river and the bridge could lift up so the big wool boats could go under. The Bourke weir was built to maintain a reasonable level of water in the river near town. The lock was nearly 60 metres long and 11 metres wide and was the only one built on the Darling.

Clancy Nott

Back in the day Bourke had paddle steamers carting tonnes of wool up and down the river from Queensland to New South Wales. The old Bourke bridge was built to lift up and down so paddle steamers could go underneath. It was manually cranked up and down by man. The Bourke weir was designed with locks. They would fill the lock with water so paddle steamers could go in and then they would let the water out and then the paddle steamer would go out and continue its journey.

Henry

What I would like in the future in Bourke is Flip-Out, Subway and ten pin bowling because they're all a lot of fun.

Tyron

Bourke is a great place to be so come along to our real outback.
Bourke is a beautiful place, a very friendly community.
The gateway to the real outback.
If you know Bourke you know Australia.
I think it should stay exactly like this

Molly Taylor

When I come back to Bourke I want to see more buildings and people because there will be a bigger community. Inside the buildings I want a lolly shop. When I walk down the street I hope that I am welcomed still as I am today. I hope to see more rain and greener lands for farmers. I hope the Jandra is still driving on the river.

Will Poole

Acrostics

Beautiful town
Outback
Unique and lovely
Rough country
Kind people
Everyone's happy

Harriet Mitchell

Beautiful and nice
Outback
Unique and courage
Rural outback
Kindness
Energetic community

Daley

Beautiful
Outback
Unique
Red dirt
Kind
Excellent

Unnamed

Bourke-Walgett School of Distance Education

The school, which covers the area from Cobar out to Wanaaring, up to Hungerford and through to Brewarrina, has 11 students and two teachers. Separate to their normal studies, students were invited to make a contribution to "Stories of Bourke." Five of them responded.

Bushman's hats and flannel shirts.
Outback roads heading to station country.
Unaware kangaroos left in ute's dust.
Rowdy galah's sit in branches of Gidgee.
Keen cattle heading for water.
Enduring blazing summer sunshine.

Brayden



The man with the hat

1897

Bang! "Did you really have to do that Jacky!?" said Bad Dan. "Yes I did Dan!" I awoke from the gun that fired and I heard sheep run, I rushed outside and saw some bad guys stealing all of my sheep in a trailer on a wagon. I ran at them and shouted "Stop right there you fools!" Then I heard the gun shoot again, pain erupted in my leg as I fell on to the dirt, they shot my leg! So I lay helplessly bleeding out and seeing my sheep go. I will remember those names, Jacky and Dan.

Soon enough I was in hospital getting my leg fixed. Now I was a poor man with little amount sheep. Over the passing weeks there were reports of many other farmers being stolen from, the police suspected the same duo were doing all the thieving. A year later my leg had healed fully. My life was bad and those bandits were still around, they sure are annoying.

A few days later I was in the Bourke Pub and a nice fellow was walking to me and said, "Well you look pretty poor." So I said yes, and told him about what happened to me in my past. Soon after he said "Well I'd better help you out!" So then he took his hat off and said to everyone "Care to put some money into the hat to give to this poor man here?" Some did and some didn't, but anyway, the hat ended up with a fair bit of money, which was given to me to reshape my life. When I had everything back to normal I knew I owed a lot to the man with the hat.

A few months later

I was just getting to bed, it was a late night for me, then I heard voices, "Nobody will be awake this late, Dan..." "Keep an eye out anyway Jacky, alright." It's them! I got onto my horse and chased them, they ran, but were too slow, so I bowled them over with my horse and tied them up with rope. Shortly after, I left for the police to get them arrested properly.

THE END

Mulloka O'New-dawn



Keira Jackson

The Long Dusty Roads

The long dusty roads
Halt trucks heavy with goats
Exhausted drivers changing tyres.

Lonely cattlemen on their bikes
Occasionally out checking fences
Nudge nuisance flies
Glare at the tail of a ute racing by.

Dusty cattle dogs panting
Upon ute trays and tool boxes
Strain against their collars
Tails wagging
Yawning a whimpered cry.

R
O
A
D
S
Random travellers
Out sight seeing
Australia's iconic
Dusty roads, winding
Scenery on the outskirts of Bourke.

Sophie



The Falling Miracle

An expressionless empty blue sky stretches to the horizon. I search for clouds but it taunts me with nothingness, as our battered ute hurtles its way along a dry dusty track. Its back is filled with precious white gold; tiny seeds of protein for hungry cattle. I gaze through smeared glass at lifeless lignum and ruthless cracks in dark soil.

A cloud of grey dust hovers above trotting cattle as they scramble to reach the food truck like little children greeting Mr Whippy. Our ute slows and inches its way through the crowd. Gradually, we come to a halt and mum climbs through the window into the back to avoid the pushing and shoving of the voracious cattle. She quickly shovels the seed, smothered in cotton into the drums beside the ute. Almost immediately, the strong and cunning of the mob push the weak ones aside. They indulge in the whiteness, while stragglers are left waiting patiently.

I step from the ute and keep the hungry animals from the empty drums with the flick of a whip so that mum can fill them. My little sister complains of boredom as the flies have a party on her face. She is exasperated and so is my mum as my sister's whining worsens. I

think of my lonely schoolroom and the schoolwork awaiting my return. I wonder what children in civilisation are doing in their lunch break? I imagine playground jungle ropes, amateur soccer games on a carpet of green and children sharing their lunches.

Now two more waters and our ute seems to find its own way home. The coolness of our house welcomes us and my little sister demands a soothing icy pole. I make my way down to the end of the breezeway and on the right lies a motionless room with a pile of schoolwork and reality. Mum continues with her other jobs, hanging washing out and vacuuming. Nothing is put on hold for a drought; it is just added to the chores. She has finished washing the dishes from lunch and I can faintly make out the boil of a kettle. It's time for her afternoon tea. She collapses with tiredness in the chair opposite me, sipping away. I watch her as she speedily types 'Bourke' into the weather report on the computer. Usually, the weather map comes up that our district will receive no rain and sunny days are ahead, but other times we are lucky and tiny bits of colour dot the weather map filling us with anticipation.

In the late afternoon we walk down a ribbon of red towards the first white gate. We watch ants grapple with minuscule clumps of red soil from deep beneath the earth to build their nest higher. They must think wet weather is ahead. My little sister screeches at what lies in front of her; a small yet deadly centipede slithers across the crimson track, another hopeful sign that rain may soon soak the perished land that surrounds us. I know for sure rain is imminent when I hear the constant croak of little brown frogs that hide themselves in the water drains. These slimy, brown creatures are the true weather reporters and as they continue croaking, an optimistic smile grows on my face.

It starts with a trivial and pathetic sprinkle that only dampens the grainy sand outside. As I listen to the small shower in the complete darkness of my room, I know there probably won't be enough to measure by morning. Then suddenly the drops become strong and heavy on the tin roof slowly turning into an inundation of water that pours from flooding gutters. Like zombies, we emerge from dark bedrooms and make our way towards the tiled veranda. The drenched windows slide open and a cheerful wave of the distinct rain smell fills our house. We stand in silence and listen to the falling miracle. I look at my dad. He does not say anything but he smiles. A smile that is full of happiness and hope.

Millie Fisher

Bourke Public School

Demands of time and curriculum prevented any direct contact with students but *Stories of Bourke: Past, present and future*, fitted with other work students were engaged with at that time. Students contributed the following.

Why I love Australia

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because you can go out motorbike riding with your brother and dad.

I love Australia because you can go skiing on the Darling River with your family.

I love Australia because there are good schools that have fun teachers and we have a lot of fun on the equipment.

Riley Parnaby

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because it is a good country because you can go motorbike riding in the bush.

I love Australia because you can play football at the Davidson Oval with your friends.

I love Australia because it is fun to ride your bike around the streets on the weekend.

Kaleb Cummins

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because it is my home and I love living here.

I love Australia because there are lots of fun things to do like going skiing in summer, pigging when the pigging comp is on and having lots of fun.

I love Australia because all my family lives here.

Damon Brookman

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because there are good things like kangaroos, emus and wombats.

I love Australia because there are stuff that other places don't have. Such as cool animals and special drinks.

Clancy Lawrence

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because it is clean and has lots of lovely grass everywhere.

I love Australia because you go do lots of things like going from the country to the city.

I love Australia because I like going to the beach and swimming on the big waves.

Marikki Smith

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because there are lots of cool places to visit, like Darling River, Diggers on the Darling and North Bourke.

I love Australia.

Kh'Tia McKellar

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia for all the places you can visit with your Nan and Pop.

I love Australia because there are lots of parks to play tips with your friends.

I love Australia because we have many pools for kids to swim in when it is hot.

Jamilla Smith

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

I love Australia because I can go fishing with my family at the river during the day time.

I love Australia when I can go shopping in Dubbo with my sister.

I love going hunting with my Pop and some Uncles, and I love having fun with my brother at the PCYC.

Shayle McKellar

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.
I love Australia because there are great stuff to do like going to the shops, swimming and fishing in the river and going hunting in the country.
I love Australia because I can ride my motorbike over across the paddock any day.
I love Australia because I have some good friends here.

Josh Mintern

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.
I love Australia because there are a lot of fun things to do like going to a skate park or down to the wharf.
I love Australia for the hot sun that comes out in the summer time.

Eric Dixon

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.
I love Australia because it is a big place.
I love Australia because there are lots of country people.

Shontaya Mackay

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.

Malakai Johnson

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here. I love Australia because ...

Kade Cattermole

The best thing about Australia is living in the country. We live in Bourke and there are many wonderful country people who live here.
I love Australia because it is nice because on a sunny day you can go for a walk or a swim in the river.
I love Australia because you can come to school and learn.
I love Australia because on a sunny day you can go to the pool with your brothers and sisters.

Shekia Edwards

The old and the ancient

The North Bourke bridge is old, it stands over the river like a soldier guarding its army. It is made out of breakable wood. It is too old to travel on the bridge now.



We have an ancient, big, amazing, beautiful rock called Mount Oxley. Trees and rocks cover the land like a blanket.



Hunter Flick

The crowded Club is cold, you can feel the coldness it is as cold as
Breeze moving through the vents and its moving through the hot
Rooms like when you cool off in a river on a hot summer day.
The club is the heart of Bourke.

The Art Gallery are filled with big memories from the dream time it also
Makes you remember the Aborigines from the Dream time. The Art Gallery has
A lot of paintings were you could even Buy.

Mount Oxley is a wonderful place its wonderful than a rainbow above your head.
Mount Oxley is also windy, it's windier than a ginormous storm of wind when its
Wild, Mount Oxley is eventually old.



The art
gallery
is a
place
in
Bourke

The club
is
where
you can
relax.

Mount
Oxley is
a
visiting
place.

Natarlia Smith

Special Places in Bourke

Old ancient caves with rock paintings that tell dreamtime stories. Path ways lead you around Mount Gundabooka through thick beautiful bush land. Winds blowing like a hurricane ruffling the leaves.



The weir is a relaxing place, water tumbling down one drop after another, water bucketing down like hell. Rushing, gushing down the river like a water slide.



By Jack Reid, Bourke Public School

Jack Reid

Poetry

The poet's town

Bourke has poetry etched in the streets
Where passionate people scribed to keep
Bourke's legacy living of literary fame
Stories of old, signed with their name.
Henry Lawson is one who came before
His love of poetry opened the door
So many could follow and commune in rhyme
And this continues to this present time.
Poems are reminders there on the street
Of how history and present politely meet
It's an honour to walk where these poets have been
And see a glimpse of Bourke just as they might have seen.

Abigail Baker



Abigail Baker

My Bourke

Bourke is a place where dreams come alive
And the memories of yesterday can be revived.
Where fruit and cotton flourish and grapes grow on vines.
Where friendships are forged that last for all time.
There is something so special about connections made
The bonds that encompass us are forever displayed
And even if distance is placed between friends,
The bond between Bourke-ites never ends.
The sense of belonging captures my heart.
Connections formed here are what sets it apart
From the cities and towns so much bigger than here.
That's why to Bourke my heart will adhere.

Abigail Baker

Best made plans

Wendy and Greg Butt were visiting Bourke for a week. They had planned spoke tours, radiating out from Bourke each day, returning for the evenings. The wet weather put paid to that, but they managed to make the most of it, discovering there was more to Bourke than they had expected. Including the Festival of One Thousand Stories.

Local rates

There is reportedly a prank played on certain visitors whereby friendly locals, on meeting a new arrival, will suggest that when they order something in a café they tell the staff they have been given Honorary Local status. This comes with a discounted price. Here's Wendy's response to Honorary Local status.

There's a fellow 'round here called Hully
Whose name I would not wish to sully
He's a naughty young boy who created a ploy
To pull the leg of a well meaning lady

Well, my husband he tried to warn me,
But it came a little too late!
I said, oh no, not Hully!
He's my brand new mate

Ah yes, I am silly, even too dilly,
But I am on my holiday—wishing
And it's the great Aussie way to lead others astray
It's commonly known as good fishing!

Wendy Butt

Just passing through

I've been in Bourke ten years now, and during that time,
I've seen people come and go.
Some stay three months, six months, a year or two,
But in the end they were just passing through.

I could tell of Micha and Ross, Warren and Jamie,
Peni, Alex, Sarah and Irene, people who became friends.
As a result of circumstances, all left to make a fresh start in pastures new,
Thought they were here to stay but turns out they were just passing through.

Teachers and police like to come to Bourke, it gives them lots of points.
So later on down the track they can exercise the choice,
To live in their dream home with beach-side view.
No, they never intended to stay in Bourke, they were just passing through.

Tourism is a growing trade, the caravan parks are full,
Of grey nomads on route from here to there, stopping in Bourke.
To see outback man, Exhibition centre and Jandra paddle boat with crew,
But never making Bourke their home, they're all just passing through.

I wonder where I'll be ten years from now,
Will I still be in Bourke or some country far away.
They say life's a journey, that I'm sure is true,
Will my journey end in Bourke, or am I just passing through?

John Beer



John Beer

Sydney Story Factory

The Sydney Story Factory, established in 2012, presents creative writing and storytelling workshops for young people aged 7 to 17, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. They were in Bourke during the Festival of a Thousand Stories. SSF is doing writing workshops at high schools around the State which will be published in 2017. SSF hopes to coincide this with the 2017 festival.

I AM is a starting game that gives the students a sense of the things they have in common and the things about us that are possibly a bit unique. It's a set of responses to questions about the world around us and things we notice that happen in our community.

I HAVE is modelled on a poem from the English poet Simon Armitage which students looked at. It generated a piece of writing about who we are and how we see the world and the unique connection we have with the world around us.

Helen Coolican, who grew up in Bourke and now lives in Sydney where she works with SSF, says working with the students triggered some memories! Helen has attempted the same format.

I HAVE

I have not been to all the places listed on the tea-towel from Carole's shop-Barrington, Enngonia, Wanaaring, Louth, Tilpa, Fords Bridge, Hungerford...

I have coo-ied from the top of Mount Oxley, over the mulga sea and ancient meadows of wild sage.

I have not ridden a horse through tin laneways lined with corrugated iron, flown a kite streaming with ribbons at Polygonum Swamp or skidded down the crusty, dry Billabong on a bike at the end of a school day.

I have seen the Aboriginal cave drawings at Gundabooka.

I have not caught and cooked a yabby on the banks of the river, swum across it from side to side or brought home a fish after a day in a tinnie.

I have drifted in a fast current from the ramp to the bridge waiting for a speed-boat to come around so I could ski the grey-green water-road of the Darling.

Helen Coolican

I AM...

I am baking on hot cement at the pool in my wet costume

I am the brackish air as water finally bubbles

and rolls over the weir

I am my new yellow Bourke Swimming Club cap

I am the smell of gidgee just before rain

I am my mother's Christmas cake made with one emu egg

I am the putter of my father's Vee-Dub coming home

morning, noon and again and again at night.

I am the rage when the Darling runs low

and Canberra doesn't have a clue

I am the violet valley of Hope Street as the sun pulls away

I am shadows smudged by the red bloom of a dust storm

I am all the stories told to me by family, friends and community

- Helen Coolican

STATE OF MIND
Sydney Story FACTORY

Things you need to know about Les

Les came for the 2016 Poet's Trek, this year being the centenary of his mother's birth. And Les, now aged 59, is the same age as his father was when his mother died.

Les has a thing with numbers – birth dates, historical dates. He works in motor vehicle spare parts – all of which have numbers. Most of which he remembers.

Les has five relations in the Bourke cemetery – two grandparents and three aunties. Les really should do something with their birth and death dates, ages and the like.

Les also has a thing with poetry. He's been writing for years, finds it easy to write about family, about what he knows.

Francis Brown, a renowned bush poet, planted the seed that stirred an interest in poetry within a young Les. Brown is buried in the Bourke cemetery.

While in Bourke, out at the cemetery, at his grandparents' grave site, Les wrote a poem.

Their resting place

As the sun sank slowly westward
I sat by my grandparents grave
Baby Mary and Rose rest also
A shame neither could be saved

I placed a hand upon the headstone
That's been there for so many years
What tales grandmother could've told
Instead left only heartache and tears

Below in the cold, cold ground
In that remote outback place
Many decades have now passed
Since the sun kissed Emma's face

All of those sad, sad graves
Many were just young children
Taken by illness or accidents
Not much could be done back then

Black cockatoos flew silently over
Galahs squawked in the trees
Other inscriptions caught my eye
Dad often told stories of these

Francis Brown the bush poet
He's at peace not far away
I was captured by his verse
So still reading them today

Ordinary citizens built Bourke town
The cemetery is in poor condition
While other sections more recently
Seem to attract much more attention

Les Godfrey



Grave of Les Godfrey's grandparents and auntie at Bourke cemetery

Sunday on Jandra on Darling

The chain is released to the sound of happy feet, making their way down the gangplank.
Smiles are broad as they clamber aboard, spirits filled with anticipation.
Caramel waters swirl about, see their beauty and wonder after the drought.
Reeds quiver gently, and bow their heads before the breeze.
Swallows are twisting and twirling and diving with an endless ease.
The rhythmic pulsing of the Jandra doth our cares allay, whilst the dulcet tones of the
blues transfigure our minds away.
They take us to new and evolving friendships and places we've yet to be.....
All things must come to an end they say and sadly also now this day.
So it's up the gangplank with waves and sighs, spirits and feet leaving on a high.
Holding memories dear into the years of a Sunday on Jandra on Darling.

Wendy Butt



Blues on Jandra

One man's creek is another man's Barwon

You see a lot of rivers as you wander here and there —
I reckon in my travels I've seen a decent share —
But one feller's "mighty river", is another codger's creek;
Try to tell him different, and he'll argue for a week.

The south-west's Avon River would be sneered at in the east;
And the Torrens? Strike me purple, it's a weird sort of beast.
More mud than flamin' water, like a claypan upside down;
And there's another one just like it, runs through Melbourne town.

I lived in Old Kentucky, of Stephen Foster fame —
Though the beggar never went there, he just liked to use its name —
And when I said "the river" when I spoke of Cedar Creek;
It kept the boys in Stamping Ground laughin' for a week.

To get to little Stamping Ground, you have to go across,
The South Branch of the Elkhorn Creek, where the buff'lo used to cross;
More water than the Murray — though nowhere near as long —
And wider, too, in places, with a flow that's awful strong.

A 46-inch annual rainfall, keeps her flowing well,
And it'll up and drown you, easy, when the summer storms give hell;
For what them durned hillbillies call a "summer shower",
Is the edge of a tornado, and a foot of rain an hour.

But still, it's just "a crik" to them, though it seemed much more to me,
The blow-in from the Old Brown Land, a place they'll never see.
But like us old-time Aussies, those hill-folk love a yarn;
They love to hear what life is like on someone else's farm.

And so we'd pass the evenin's, swopping tales—all mostly true,
Though sometimes lightly seasoned with a little lie or two;
They loved to hear my stories, of a country that, to them,
Seemed strange—well weird really— and far beyond their ken.

One night as I recall it, a memory slipped out,
Of the Darling down at Wentworth, in the middle of a drought.
I told 'em how that mighty stream, was down to three foot wide;
And how the carp was wriggling up the banks, to pull grass from off the side.

I tried to tell them how, the mighty river gums,
Seemed to hunch their shoulders, as drought the country numbs;
And push their roots down further into the drying mud,
To wait the Darling's blessing, as she brings another flood.

"And," I began — here I paused as all good poets should,
To ratchet up the tension, make the telling of it good—
Here I ask indulgence, I should have taken time,
To do a little extra and fix that bloody awful rhyme...

"And," I said, and drew a breath, adding drama to my tale,
"When the mighty Darling River floods, she'd drown a bloody whale!"
"Thar h'aint be whales in rivers," the local cynic scoffed;
"He's a-paintin' pitchers, cuz you cain't read. Hush your mouth, Clem Goff."

Rescued for the moment, I went on to tell them how,
The rains would always come at last – "Like it's doing here now".
And then those sluggish rivers that they might call a creek,
Spreads out to cover acres by the million in a week.

Down she comes majestic like, a relentless, sliding flow,
Ignoring bends and channels, spreading as she goes.
The TV news might tell us that the "country is in strife";
In strife Aunt Fanny's bed socks! The country's come to life!

The livestock will get fat again, the wildflowers bloom;
There's money for improvements and for an extra room.
The outback wife will smile again, her old man not so gruff;
For when that river's banking, things never seem so tough.

It was Dorothea Mackellar said they "could not understand",
Our love for what outsiders see as barren, sunburned land;
Perhaps because they never wait, they never stick it out,
To see that Aussie miracle, the breaking of a drought.

They never know the joy that's felt along the Darling side,
When Hughie smiles upon us and sends the swift brown tide.
When life's transformed and the world's turned bright, all in a single week,
As the mighty Darling River proves, she isn't just a creek.

Frank Povah



Frank Povah

Three untitled poems

1

I watch the two boys
shimmy up the give way sign,
hang off the guttering,
then up onto the roof,
to fetch the football.

Down below a little fella
is trying to monkey up the pole.
He gets half way up,
slides down.
Half way up, slides down.
There's shame in that.
He yells out "Coppers."

His mates fly over the edge,
hit the street running.
The football sits in the gutter.

2

The wheels of the bike
No rubber, the deflated tyre has been
Ripped from its rim
The spokes still hold, he'll make it home
He'll just leave a track
Through the soft tar
Of this over heated town

3

He bangs a rhythm with a stick
On the street bin
The other boys are jostling
Pushing the young one
I don't know what he did
Or didn't
They push him from one taunting embrace
To another
He's still a brother
No toys, just noise
And sticks to drum a message with

The bottles they hurtle them
Watch them spinning
Through the night
Catching the light
Smashing, smashing

The stolen car no time for rebirthing
Screeches in circles
Beneath the eye of the law
Someone else's toy in the hands of a back lane boy
Come get me enemy
Their own worst enemy

Mothers, sisters, aunts gather
Around the court rooms
Waiting for the man.
Smoking, pushing prams
Kissing their babies
Kissing their babies goodbye

Kristie Smiles

A glass of hope

Mt Gundabooka reclined in the distance, like a woman bathing in the last pink hues of the setting sun.

She sat sipping her wine, staring at the mountain, wishing she was it. The long hot days of dryness were dwindling her spirit.

It was her birthday today, so she allowed herself this moment of contemplation, ignoring the rush of life that hankered after her response.

I'm hungry Mum, where's dinner?
I am hungry daughter, where's peace?

Did you feed the horses Mum?
Did you feed my soul, son?

The cows are out on the road Mum.
My sanity has escaped me, son.

The pump's not working Mum.
My well has run dry, my boy.

There's no wood to put in the stove, Mum.
There's no fire to rally my spirit.

Mum the pup's chewed up my boot.
Daughter the drought has chewed up my hope.

She glanced at the mountain, sitting in all its glory, accepting its fate, staring at her, asking her if she will give up, walk away or offer her strength to the unknown, that absolute.

She took her last sip of wine,
and shook her head.

Okay, dinner's on, put that pup in the yard where it should be and open the gate for the cows.

She looked again to the mountain, as the last light disappeared.
She the mountain would not give up today.

Kristie Smiles



Kristie Smiles

2016 Poet's Trek

The 18 participants in the 2016 Poet's Trek convened at the Bourke Wharf for a briefing before visiting the Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre. On leaving Bourke, heading east, the first call was Mount Oxley, described by Charles Sturt, the first non-Aboriginal to visit in 1828 as "... an isolated mountain, whose sides seemed almost perpendicular, broke the otherwise even line of the horizon." With the western plains as backdrop, one of the trekkers sings "Across the western plains."

After lunch, atop Mount Oxley, the trek moved on towards Brewarrina, stopping at the junction of the Bogan and Darling Rivers. Bourke has a yearly average rainfall of 300-350 millimetres (or 10-12) inches however since May there's been almost 400 mm. Few remember it ever being this green. Visitors are astonished. And here, at the junction of these two swelling rivers, a passage is read from a Lawson story of the Darling.

In Brewarrina the trek visits the Aboriginal Cultural Centre located just above the Darling River with the 40,000 year old fish traps in sight. A guide from the centre explains the making and use of the traps. Inside the centre, stories of Aboriginal land stewardship and the arrival of Europeans. The trek stays overnight at Beds on the Barwon, just out of Bre for dinner and a night around the campfire.

Next morning the trek visits Byrock Rockholes Aboriginal Place. This is one of a number of landscape features that identify and define Ngemba land. After this a return to Bourke and lunch at the Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre.

Along the way and throughout the trek, stories, poetry and music.

Some Responses to the Trek

I've had the most wonderful time. I've made good friends and met so many wonderful people. But I've learnt so much more about the history of Bourke. My memories of Bourke were always happy ones and always the people. And truly, on this last visit it's the people again. It's absolutely the people, the stories and the songs and they've made them live even more vividly for me.

Joy McKean

The Poet's Trek has inspired me to start writing poetry again.

Wendy Butt

As musos Chloe and I are performing gigs all the time. We have three criteria. Do we feel like we are in the right place? Do we feel we can contribute? Are we learning something? Yes, yes and yes.

Jason Roweth

Wonderful! A great experience that I will always treasure. Meeting such interesting people from all walks of life & sharing the passion of verse. The friendly smiling faces of people in the bush has restored my faith in human nature & the reason I am continually drawn back.

Les Godfrey

Trekker Joy McKean is sometimes known as Slim Dusty's wife. Joy came on the trek without announcement, just the same curiosity as all others. Musician Frank Povah performed regularly throughout the trek. Over lunch at Mt Oxley, Joy and Frank got to chatting over music.

Frank has an excellent knowledge of Australian music and folk lore but, somehow or other, didn't manage to work out who he was talking to. After a while, and to his deep embarrassment he asked, innocently, "And what was your husband's name?"

Overnight Frank composed a piece of music, which he played on his autoharp the next day over lunch before the trek disbanded. He called the piece, "And what was your husband's name?"

The poetry was brilliant, the music extraordinary, the history ... but what I found was each person had their own connection to others on the trek and through the poetry to the Aboriginal people and early explorers. We had a link to the future as well as the past.

Tony Pritchard

I've been on every Trek except one. They're all different, all memorable.

Stuart Johnson

You can't teach me anything but this was enjoyably educational in excellent company.

Frank Povah

