

SOUTH AUSTRALIA 2025

What with one thing and another, including some time on the boat and surgery for Norma's right eye, we were not able to get away on the van until late April. The original plan had been to return to Queensland as far north as possible and enjoy autumn in the tropics. That didn't work out because Queensland became the wet victim of tropical cyclone Alfred and devastating rainfall, resulting in widespread road closures throughout the state.

The option we chose was to explore South Australia and visit regions of that state that would be new to us, as well as revisiting some familiar ground.

So, on Thursday 27 March in drizzling rain we got on our way, starting along very familiar roads including the painfully long stretch of roadworks along the Hume Highway and sharing it with hordes of combative drivers. But it all became better as we cleared Goulburn, where over lunch we decided to make our first camping stop at Gundagai, in the Riverina region. We had stayed the night in motels on its fringes several times, but never taken a proper look at the town.



Our main guide to camping places, from posh holiday resorts to free camps in bushland, is the WikiCamps app. Its value lies not only in the description and location of the sites but also the helpful reviews of countless subscribers. It seemed that in Gundagai there was a good free place to stay, just a short walk to the town.

We camped there, in among old trees with a view over farmlands crossed by a historic timber railway bridge. We overlooked a narrow divergent stream of the Murrumbidgee River, and watched



countless birds as they swarmed in countless flocks. (Indeed, the name of the place may be related to some Aboriginal words for birds.)

The next day we walked this very pleasant little town and learnt a lot about its history from the early 1800s. Built on a slope, the most attractive and classic colonial public and private buildings were lined up along the 'upper' side of the main road.

The nearby Prince Alfred bridge was built in the late 1889s as part of a new Gundagai-Tumut railway line. The timber viaducts and its steel truss over the river are regarded as highly significant because of their construction as examples of an early engineering solution for crossing a major flood plain.

Flooding of the plains was a feature of many local stories. The original town gazetted as Gundagai in 1838 was situated on the right-hand bank of the Murrumbidgee River floodplain in the area colloquially known as 'The Crossing Place', where the risk of flooding had been warned by the local Wiradjuri people. An early flood was in 1844, and there was much praise for the heroic actions of Aboriginal people at Gundagai in rescuing settlers. Still a frontier town, it was swept away in 1852, with

the death of at least 80 residents – a terrible disaster of the time. Again, Aboriginal men rescued many people, and a bronze sculpture of two of them, Yarri and Jacky Jacky with a canoe, was unveiled in Gundagai in 2017. The number of people whom they saved is estimated as 68, one third of the town's population.



Following an even higher flood in 1853, north Gundagai was redeveloped at its current site. Even after that, a flood in 1891 left several pastoral workers needing rescue. Major floods also occurred in 1974 and 2012. In recent years the Gundagai wetlands and marshes have disappeared, largely as a result of ground compaction by cattle and by Gundagai Shire Council diverting ground water into underground pipes.

We visited the local museum, one of the larger examples of the genre, packed tightly with a huge collection of 'stuff' and a lot of fun to walk around.



It had been a warm day, but cooling at night with a sprinkle of rain – quite a contrast to the violent storms and rain in Queensland and down into NSW. The forecast for this was exactly why we had so very recently changed our plans for the trip. It was still very wet for a while in the morning, as we set off again for a familiar run continuing down the Hume and taking a right turn to Wagga.



There, we stopped to take a look through the Wagga Wagga Aviation Heritage Centre, right by the roadside. This opened in 1995, to focus on the history of the Royal Australian Air Force's involvement in the Riverina region and to provide access to the memorabilia and history of military aviation and technical training. Apprentices were a large part of the early history of what was then RAAF Base Wagga. Much of that history is well described within the main building.



Outside there stand several aircraft important in the history of military aviation in Australia. Two were of particular significance for me, the Canberra fighter-bomber (below) and the F-111 multipurpose combat

aircraft. I flew several times as a passenger in RAF Canberras while in Cyprus, and later had a peripheral role in improving the safety harness of the American F-111 for the RAF version.



Then it was back on the Sturt Highway and to Narrandera. The few possible bush camps looked a bit too muddy, and so we went on to Hay and the Hay Plains Holiday Park, part of the Big 4 chain. It was pleasantly neat, tidy and quiet.

The next morning we were off on the Hay Plains run which, to be honest, now seemed a piece of cake after so many long, straight runs along the Stuart and Nullarbor Highways last year. Just south-west of

Balranald we turned into the Yanga National Park, where WikiCamps informed us we would find the Mananga Campground. This was a large bush camp completely empty when we arrived, with basic facilities such as a drop toilet and good barbeque facilities. In this lovely site, we parked up right on the bank of the Murrumbidgee River and much enjoyed a quiet afternoon in bright sunny weather.



The next morning we went for a long exploration of the adjacent Yanga Woolshed.



This was once a vast and important sheep-shearing and wool centre which, although old and closed, has been maintained in good condition, with excellent explanatory placards. It was probably established by the W C Wentworth conglomerate in the late 1850s, replacing a smaller facility. The situation was to take advantage of paddle steamer transport to take the wool to market. The river location had a good depth of water, while above the normal flood level. Wentworth ran both sheep and cattle here.



We had the company of an emu for a while, and several galahs in the trees.

From there we simply drove the short distance to Balranald, and stayed the night on a capacious and free RV parking place that we shared with two huge water towers.

In Balranald we did some useful shopping at an excellent IGA supermarket before continuing along the Sturt Highway through Euston, familiar to us as a stop on our way to race meetings at Mallala. In the outer approaches to Mildura we turned left at a sign indicating a campground on or near the banks of the Murray River.



We drove down a dirt road through trees to a large public park, the Bottle Bend Conservation Reserve and picnic area. There were many defined camping pitches, and we settled into 'Camp Park 1' on the very banks of the mighty Murray. We were there in time for lunch and a pleasant afternoon in beautiful conditions. There were a fair few water activities to see, including very fast speedboats rushing about, and the inevitable charter houseboats.

After the previous night's solitude, Norma was pleased that here there were several other campers nearby. The following day we just stayed put, with the only problem being too many flies, the widespread Australian national irritant.



From there it was up to Mildura and continuing to aim west, with a stop at the now-abandoned village of Meringur. Of interest there were a few horse-drawn mobile homes, of the kind used widely by a variety of private and government bodies during the early settlement of Victoria. Otherwise, there was not much to see, as most of the buildings were locked up, and machinery and other outside sights were slowly being allowed to rot. We had lunch there, tight shut inside our van to keep out the flies.

Back on the Sturt, we crossed into South Australia, the state that was to be the main target for explorations in this camping trip. There is a food quarantine station at the border, but Norma had been careful on what we could take across and we had no problems with the friendly official.

And so on to Renmark and one of the several National Park camping areas strung along the banks of the Murray. We booked in for a couple of nights. It was a shadier site than we usually favour, but the better ones were booked out.



We took a morning run back into Renmark, a good-looking town.

The main historic feature is 'Olivewood', a homestead used by the locally famous Chaffey family and maintained by the SA National Trust. In the associated museum were many well-presented examples of early irrigation machinery, with which the family was intimately involved.



In the late 1870s many parts of Australia were suffering from drought. The South Australian Premier offered George Chaffey 250,000 acres of land on the Murray, and an agreement to establish the Renmark Irrigation Colony was signed in 1887, the first such undertaking in Australia. The Chaffey family grew and was greatly respected, building originally a log cabin and later the impressive family home, 'Olivewood'.



Throughout the beautifully presented and fully furnished homestead complex we reviewed many good displays of semi-industrial, domestic and other implements associated with 19th century life.



The surrounding gardens were beautiful.

We returned to the campground for a sunny afternoon, still on the banks of the Murray. At this point we had to finalise general plans for the rest of the trip through South Australia. At some stage we would have to go through Port Augusta, at the head of the Spencer Gulf, to reach the Eyre Peninsula. To get there from Renmark we had three choices: south-west to Goolwa and the Coorong, west to Gawler and the Clare Valley, or north through Port Pirie. We took the first of these choices, and the general strategy would now be to explore as much as possible of the three great peninsulas of the



South Australia coast in this order: Fleurieu, Yorke and Eyre.

The night of April 5 was very cold but still dry. We left the Murray at last, and the morning's drive was a pleasant one through attractive open countryside, with lots of unsealed tracks leading sideways from our quiet road and over



farmland to the horizon, the properties being out of sight or hiding in clumps of trees. We had a lunch stop in Karoonda, which featured some of the best silo art we had ever seen, especially in regards to its animals and birds.

But these wide expanses of farmland were so, so dry. Across all of South Australia farmers were desperately trying to source enough feed for their sheep, cattle, horses and other animals. We had learnt from local publications that the state had already endured one of its worst dry seasons on record last year and was still gripped by drought. We came across many double and triple road trains hauling tons of bales of hay, each costing \$2-300, many being shipped from their interstate compatriots although they too, especially in Victoria, were right now grappling with low rainfall. And to think of the reason we were touring SA rather than Queensland: the latter was sodden!

And so to Goolwa, at the northern end of the low-lying Coorong. We crossed the once controversial bridge over to Hindmarsh Island. We chose a simple camp site there, because after several bush camp stays our batteries were getting on the low side and needed mains power to recharge. In any event we were very pleased that we had doubled the lithium 'house' battery capacity and thus extended our off-grid time range.



The next day we took a run round the island. There were scores of new property developments, some as large as small towns. Down on the south-facing beaches there was a very powerful surf, following days of southerly wind from the Southern Ocean and Antarctica just over 3,000 kilometres away.



Back in Goolwa, on this Sunday, in good conditions we wandered round the fortnightly street market. It was absolutely typical of its kind, lots of fascinating wares, all great fun and very friendly.

For the night we sought a camp further down the Fleurieu Peninsula. There was not much of a choice, most of the possible places being in SA parks and all requiring bookings. (We soon learned that this was almost universal in South Australia, and we did get used to the booking system; many parks were lovely.)

This time we settled on a 'farm stay' a fair way down south of the peninsula, near Waitpinga, finally getting through to the owner after three phone calls. This was the Breakaway Farm Stay, where we received a friendly welcome. But we had no close interaction with any animals, wild or farm, which was a disappointment. The best area in the farm, and with power, was taken by a



large group of caravans. But we did find a peaceful location in a big paddock under shady trees, with big black cattle to be watched over the fence. There was no phone or internet access, and we readily accepted that this was a pretty lonely place.



peninsula. Here we came to the docks for the ferry to Kangaroo Island. They were undergoing very substantial reconstruction and expansion works, as the island is becoming an important tourist destination.

We had discussed whether to take the trip over, but in the end we decided it was too expensive and from what we could see over the sea, the landscape was much the same as on the mainland. (A local man with whom we discussed this decision did agree.)

Under unusually cool and drizzly conditions, the next morning we drove down a winding and hilly road to Cape Jervis, at the very end of the



We turned back north and towards Adelaide along the main A1 highway, overlooking the Gulf St Vincent to the west. Given my family history and several previous visits to the city, we were familiar enough with the place to decide to bypass its centre and Port Adelaide and continue the run up the coast. We continued to the small town of Windsor before turning down to the well-reviewed Parham Camping Ground by the sea, lying in a protected sandy location behind the beach. We watched and photographed a lovely westerly sunset over the gulf.



We decided to stay a second night and enjoyed a peaceful day in this rather scruffy but quiet site, mostly reading in the sun.

The next run was an easy one up to the top of St Vincent Gulf at Port Wakefield, then turning south to Ardrossan on the east side of the Yorke Peninsula. The sight to see here is an impressive line of bronze sandy clay cliffs. Many long jetties for loading grain were prominent. We had already seen and commented on

the number of vast paddocks, mostly growing barley that was being stored in many gigantic grain bulk-handling towers. The port, we learnt, also ships dolomite, which is mined just inland.



Carrying on south, we were again heading for the tip of yet another peninsula. We reached Marion Bay and the eponymous campsite in good time and settled into a sunny site just in from the beach. It was all very pleasant, and a night less cold than recent ones was very welcome.



The short run from here was south to the Dhillba Guurunda-Innes National Park, right on the toe of the Yorke Peninsula. It divides the Southern Ocean coast, with Spencer Gulf to the west and St Vincent Gulf to the east.

The Innes Park is brilliant and a tremendous place to visit.



It is rough, dry country, with marvellous scrubby scenery overlooking the sea. The many beautiful sights included lines of coves separated by craggy cliffs.



Our visit was on a lovely day, but this part of the world is often exposed to the worst conditions possible for seafarers. In one of the coves lies the skeleton of a large sailing barque, Ethel. In January 1904 in poor visibility in a south-westerly gale she hit a reef off Cape Spencer and was driven ashore. An ebbing tide left her high and dry on the sand, and the passengers and crews were able to walk ashore. A later attempt to





refloat the ship only resulted in her being set back further into the cove, and she was then left to decay. Her remains are still

visible at low tide, and we could see them at the bottom of the cliffs.



It was a hot and windy evening back in the camp site. Before leaving the National Park we explored a now almost abandoned outback hamlet, the Innes Historic Village.



While today Innes is mostly bushland, back in the 1880s gypsum was found here and the town of Innes sprung up to support the mines. Over the years the town got to as many as 500 residents, but by the 1970s, mining had ceased and the town had become deserted.

Now the buildings in the township are being preserved, but most are a long way gone. One or two are open as visitor stays, but they looked pretty uncomfortable.



Then it was another turn to the north up the peninsula, taking us to Minlaton, known as the barley heart of the peninsula. The Spencer Gulf was a few kilometres down to our left. On both sides of the road lay vast paddocks ready for barley seeding. The problem here, and in South Australia generally, was that the state very dry and in a desperate situation for rain.



The Bureau of Meteorology's 12-monthly rainfall deficiency map for the period June 2024 to April 2025 was showing the extent of the drought currently in south-east Australia (see BOM map, left).

Indeed, the regions that were suffering the worst rainfall conditions on record (in red) were precisely where we were touring: the Yorke and Eyre peninsulas.

We drove down the west coast of the Yorke and to historic Port Victoria, one of the last of the windjammer ports. We visited the good little Maritime Museum there, with its masses of information on the days of the great sailing ships. The compact museum building was originally used as a general cargo shed for the early settlers of the town, and was brought out from England in kit form in 1877.



The focus of the museum is the story of the windjammers and the men who sailed them to Europe via Cape Horn loaded with bagged grain, told mainly through

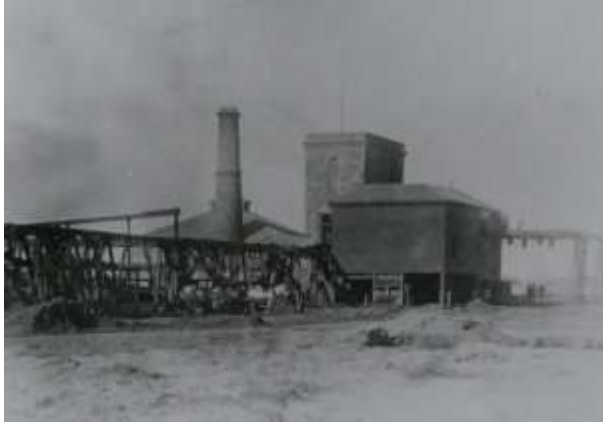
descriptive panels and old photographs. The trade ended in 1949 when the Pamir and the Passat made their final voyages.

The well offshore Wardang Island offered an anchorage for the tall ships but was something of a graveyard because it offered only poor protection from sou-westerly gales.



A little further north we came to Moonta and the Moonta Mines State Heritage Area, with its good mining museum. The building is in what was the Moonta Mines School, built in 1871 to educate the children of the miners, who were mostly from Cornwall.

By this time we were now in what is known as the Copper Coast. The displays tell of Moonta's connection to Cornwall and the lives of the miners and families who sailed here. Most of the mine



“Everything in Moonta appears to be done on a gigantic scale”

In the mine's heyday, the technology of copper mining totally dominated the landscape. Once the land of impenetrable scrub, all the trees had been chopped down resulting in terrible dust storms. The noise never ceased, with the pump houses and concentrating plant working around the clock. The mining process killed off all the plant life over great areas still bare today. At the mines everything, including the people, had to make way for efficient copper mining.

workers had been from the copper mines of Cornwall, sailing out for free and with hopes of a better life – albeit a harsh and dangerous one.

There are several rooms displaying the principal features of the Cornish mining era, tough as they were, and displays of machinery, simple cottages and minerals.



Cornish miners were sought to work the new Moonta mines for several reasons. They were world-famous hard rock miners with a heritage steeped in mining. Large numbers of Cornishmen were prepared to migrate because of the desperate conditions in Cornwall. By the time copper was discovered in Moonta, many Cornishmen were already working in Australia, and had demonstrated their capacity to endure hardship.

The Moonta mines were successful right from the start, producing high grade ore. In the first year of operation the Moonta Mining Company raised 9,000 tons of ore, at an enormous profit – but at incredible risk to miners and their families. The mining methods were back-breaking, and the work hundreds of metres down.

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The commonest cause of death was the lack of clean drinking water. There was (and still is) no surface water in Moonta, and water from the mines is heavily mineralized. In times of drought, water had to be transported from a spring over 17 kilometres away. Cesspits drained into the water tanks.



We went on up the peninsula, again through more barley paddocks reaching the horizons. They were understandably accompanied by gigantic grain silos.

We came to Wallaroo, the economic epicentre of the district. It meets the sea, and millions of tons of copper ore and grain have been from the times of its development sent along a long

jetty and on by sea out to the waiting world.



It's still a major international grain port, and its most prominent feature is indeed a huge and lengthy shipping wharf that connects a group of silos to the waiting ships. We settled into the Wallaroo Holiday Park on the foreshores of the bay.

It was getting exceptionally sunny by this time, and we were already well aware that the state was combatting a serious drought. We use a brilliant world-wide weather situation and forecasting website, 'Windy', which indicated that at this time of day here in the South Australian autumn, at 35-40 degrees C, it was among the hottest places in the world!



The next morning we explored the very pleasant town, neat and tidy, with a small but good museum. This featured its local heritage and maritime history. Extensive displays feature the copper smelting era (1861-1923) and emerging telecommunication technologies. For us, its emphasis on the days of sail was particularly interesting, although most of the displays were pictures on the walls or notable bric-a-brac from the ships.



Real maritime charts on the wall showed how extraordinarily dangerous was the final approach to both the Spencer and St Vincent gulfs for sailing ships of the era. They had been sailing mostly downwind for weeks, generally from west to east along lines of longitude, depending solely on celestial navigation and dead reckoning. Especially in bad conditions, errors would grow over time. Before seeing even the peninsulas between the gulfs, the seamen had to avoid the multitude of low, small islands and underwater reefs

scattered miles offshore. These ships could not at all easily change course rapidly, let alone turn around. All this is of course why hundreds of them over time ended up as wrecks, with high losses among the crews.

While the grain ships are best known, in this region there was also much reliance on coal ships. Once local wood supplies were exhausted, the copper smelters needed coal. Smaller ships brought hundreds of tons of coal for the smelters, and returned to Britain with tons of copper.



Back in Marion Bay we had seen in the sand some surviving ribs of the sailing vessel Ethel. There was a lot more about this ship in the museum, with good pictures of her grounding in a storm in 1904 and subsequent decay.



There was an intriguing display of a giant squid that was hauled up from the seabed by a trawler or in the stomach of a whale (choose the story!). It looked a bit desiccated, but it is the largest ever seen, originally about 10 metres long.



Then it was yet another run up grain land and past ginormous silos. It all presents a powerful picture of the extent to which the country depends on such fundamental products such as grain and minerals.



Another short run up the peninsula brought us to yet another port, Port Broughton. This is rather an intriguing little seafront town, readying for a population boom, with an exceptionally long wharf in a region of long wharves. The port was established in the 1870s and was trading for 70 years. It was originally confined to ketches that could manage the shallow but protected waters. As wheat production bloomed, ocean-going windjammers had to anchor out about 12 kilometres in the gulf, and the ketches shipped the grain loads out to them. It took about three weeks to completely load a ship this way, with a constant service of loaded ketches.



The only acceptable camp ground was a little way out of town. It was essentially a private paddock set up for RVs, with a peaceful little seating area under trees, complete with a camp kitchen and the usual dead fridge used for a swap book collection. This one was placed in a pleasant little recreational and chat area set up by the owner. The main camping area was scattered with young palm trees, which one day would be providing more shade than we could relax under. The only fee was a voluntary donation (\$10 suggested) in a tin box.

It was indeed very hot, windy and dusty when we arrived in the early afternoon, and we soon settled down reading under the awning while fighting off flies. It was still 33°C at 3:00pm, lower than earlier. The nights were cold, though, sometimes very cold by my standards!

We stayed put the next day, Sunday 13 April. The heatwave continued, but we were happy to be sitting fairly peacefully – except for the worst flies yet, as bad as at Uluru. For the first time since then, we put on the stupid – but effective – head nets we had bought there. It was pleasant again after sunset, and the flies disappeared except for a few in the van.



There was a big full moon and a brilliant star display. We wished we could still identify the brightest as we used to at sea, but this time turned to the internet for a guide.

In the morning we took the straight road up to Port Pirie, which is a very pleasant town, another busy wool and grain port. The attractive town hall is typical of the era.



We had lunch on the boating waterfront, overlooked by yet another set of huge silos. On this hot and sunny day. Seagulls were sitting in lines in the shadows of palm trees.



There was a tiny nautical museum there, but it was shut. We could see its only vessel through the glass door, and the walls were packed with a complete set of



pictures of sailing vessels which had been lost in the Spencer Gulf.

Further up the Princes Highway we skipped a stop in Port Augusta, at the head of the gulf. We were familiar with the town. It's pretty much essential to pass through it if you're touring the area, because the Princes, Lincoln, Eyre, Stuart and Barrier Highways all point to its location.

Through the town we rounded the head of Spencer Gulf and turned south. We were then starting on our way down the Lincoln Highway, along the western side of the gulf. It's usually quite windy here, but the scores of wind

generators were peacefully stationary. We also didn't make a stop in Whyalla, where its good maritime museum, its amazing mining and industrial history, and other points of interest, we had visited last year.

But we did decide to take a rest stop in an 'overflow' pitch in the Whyalla Camping and Caravan Park. It was by then school holidays in SA, and many popular sites were already full. We were offered what turned out to be a quiet pitch in a peaceful corner out of the way, with power but no water, hard to get into but with plenty of space once in, fine for us.

After a peaceful night we headed on south along the rather boring straight roads of the Lincoln Highway, until we reached the small town of Cowell, about half way down the Eyre Peninsula. Just before reaching the town we deviated down a small road to the Lucky Bay settlement on the sea, to check out the wharf and the ferry that crosses Spencer Gulf from there to Wallaroo. We watched a





ferry come in and load with cars and RVs. There was a busy minerals wharf there, too. We thought that crossing the gulf on a ferry might be a convenient and interesting seagoing route when returning east, and would



avoid transiting Port Augusta for the umpteenth time.

After returning to Cowell we took a run down an unsealed road along a very quiet seafront, with a few dwellings along it, to the remains of Port Gibbon.

This was a wild stretch of scenery, with red cliffs backing a narrow beach covered in black seaweed. There were lots of small campgrounds on the way, but they looked very exposed.



In the early days of shipping, grain was carted by wagons to the beach. The bags were rowed out to the waiting ketch. As the wheat trade grew, jetties were built along the beaches and at Cowell. The bags were slipped down loading chutes from the cliff tops to the jetties, some parts of which can still be seen.



Back in Cowell, we set up in a local council RV bush camp near the village, and enjoyed chats with the neighbours over the afternoon and evening.

It got hot for a while in the early night, then cooled off, and then got hot again as the sun rose. After a long spell of excellent weather the

forecast models were indicating changes to come over Easter, which was soon to be on us. We appreciated a peaceful day on our site, but shared it with flies, as ever.



After an otherwise excellent stop we pressed on south down the coastal stretch of Lincoln Highway, dropping into a few pleasant villages on the way. On our afternoon approach to Port Lincoln we saw signboards for the Axel Stenross Maritime Museum, which we had anticipated visiting during our planned stay anyway, and pulled in.

Stenross and his family were famous boatbuilders in their time. As ship's carpenter, Axel sailed the world on the windjammer Olivebank, and in 1927 he and his mate Frank Laakso decided to live in Port Lincoln and establish a boatbuilding business.

The museum was packed with woodworking tools and machinery, a blacksmiths shop, and some living quarters. There were many types of boat fittings on display, including shackles, blocks and buoys.

There was an intriguing show of wall-hung outboard motors, including several examples that we had owned in our own earlier voyaging days. There were photographs and descriptions of all facets of the fishing industry, from tuna to prawns.

There was an extensive display of photographs and stories of the many windjammers that visited Port Lincoln, with a section dedicated to Matthew Flinders, who was credited with discovering and naming the port.



Within the museum buildings there were also several examples of small craft built by Stenross and his group.



On stands outside was a most interesting vessel, the only fully restored example of the countless ketches that transferred goods to and from the ocean-going square riggers. As we had seen described earlier in the tour, at most ports the tall ships drew too much water to enter the shoaling bays so typical of the ports in the South Australian gulfs. They could thus rarely approach the shores closely enough to transfer goods.



(To our minds the vessel on display was a schooner, not a ketch, but the museum shut before we could discuss the matter.)

We pressed on then into Port Lincoln and our planned camp, an up-market site in the G'Day chain, down by the sea on Proper Bay, on which sits the main shipping port a little way round

from us. Only an unpowered pitch was available, because the school holidays were in full swing as Easter approached. But we scored a pleasant space down by the beach, rough and sloping but adaptable for our compact van.

Indeed, the next day was Good Friday, and we stayed put, mostly sitting in the sun. We had a lovely overview of shallow Proper Bay, linked to the wide and deep Boston Bay.



We tried but failed to extend our stay, as the site was all full up, so off we went to the nearby settlement of Coffin Bay. This is a pleasant little town, a tourist favourite, across from us to the western tip of the Eyre Peninsula. It overlooks the waters and complex estuary ecosystem of the Thorney Passage Marine Park, a nursery site for vulnerable birds and



guide-walked through the multiple shallow oyster racks.



marine animals. Indeed, emus were wandering with us as we drove along the scenic waterfront. There were plenty of birds wandering around, and we saw a bunch of tourists in waterproof suits being

Coffin Bay was discovered by Matthew Flinders in 1802. He named it after Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin, who had been responsible for the fitting out of Flinders' ship, the Investigator.

From this pleasant place we then started on our northward run up the western coast of the wide Eyre Peninsula. To start with the road was quiet, running past a few more silos and vast acres (hopefully) soon to be seeded.



About 100km up we took a very rocky deviation for a view of the vicious-looking coast at Cummings Lookout. The weather was becoming ugly, coming in from the Great Australian Bight and Indian Ocean, as forecast, with cyclonic gusts of westerly wind and rain reminiscent of heavy squalls at sea.



Our next steps were under debate, and the few camp sites in this quiet area were full. At Elliston, another 100km or so north, a WikiCamps search suggested a presentable stop at a golf club, of all places.



This was right at the top of a hill, with a good lookout over rough and scrubby ground – including the golf course! But the night was foul, the worst of the trip. We experienced some tremendously gusty wind and rain storms overnight, but easing in the morning. Wet it had been for a short while, but nothing like the steady rain so desperately need by the wideacre farmers.

By this time we had decided to turn east and start the run home. As earlier discussed, we decided to return to Lucky Bay, where we had viewed the ferry that crosses the gulf to Wallaroo and the Yorke Peninsula. We made the appropriate bookings, but the choice of an available passage was limited to the evening.



The straightforward and easy run to Lucky Bay would take us due east from Elliston. But before leaving, we took a quick look around this remote seafront village, which faces straight west into the teeth of the roaring forties.

A very heavy swell was rolling on to the beaches and across the channel

into the bay on which the place sits. In another little bay a group of youngsters were paddling into the surf to pick up, by hand, seafood being washed ashore.



The underlying drought was confirmed by the way birds were drinking the night's fresh rainwater in a drain across the road.

Leaving Elliston, we crossed east over the middle of the Eyre and through yet more expansive grain country. There was little traffic and the secondary roads were good, but there was not much to be stopped at and viewed. We refueled half way across, in the quiet little town of Lock. The only bowsers were a pair outside a small café, which looked shut, and the bowsers were padlocked. We had just enough fuel to get to back to Cowell, but not as much as I would have liked. I went into the café to see if we could fill up. Yes indeed, a pleasant Indian gave me the key for the diesel bowser and left me to it!

In the early afternoon we returned to Cowell, where we had booked a night at the excellent little bush camp we had enjoyed before.



On what was now Easter Monday we stayed on the site for the morning and lunch before leaving for the ferry port in Lucky Bay. It was still cool and fairly windy. Loading the ferry was smooth and



professional, and it was packed with vehicles. The sea was choppy and it was too cool to watch outside after leaving the dock. There was also nothing much to see through the small windows after we had

settled in, and we regretted not bringing some reading matter inside for the passage. As usual, access to the vehicles was not allowed, customary ferry practice these days.

It was very dark by the time of our return to Wallaroo. No camp sites were available there, but we had already decided to go to a free RV stop on the edge of the town. The trouble was, even with the satnav it was very hard to navigate through the pitch-dark suburbs. Once we had found an open expanse of concrete that we assumed to be the RV parking place, it was still hard to define where to stop, so we just parked near another campervan that we could see in the headlights. We couldn't see anything else in the dark.

It was a bit spooky overnight, with no understanding of our surroundings. But we woke to find we were simply in a vast open area that we guessed to be the remains of a big building or factory. There were several other RVs scattered around us and a line of ordinary suburban houses across the street, none of which we had been able to see when we arrived.

For our homeward run from here, we had decided to go back along the Sturt Highway and through the Hay plains, rather than returning via the Barrier Highway and Broken Hill. We started by taking a wandering route on secondary roads through the famous SA vineyards, and thereby crossed the lovely Clare Valley.

That route took us to Burra, which was new to us and an unexpectedly interesting stop. This was to see the vast remains of copper mines and associated structures, all now kept as a museum. Everything was very well displayed and explained.



Copper was first discovered in June 1845 near Burra Burra Creek, and the town began its life as a mining township in 1846.

By 1851 it had become one of a collection of towns known as The Burra, with a population of about 5,000. It was then Australia's seventh largest town and largest inland centre before the discovery of gold in eastern Australia. Burra became the largest metal mine in Australia, and the Burra copper mines, also jointly known as the "Monster Mine," played a crucial role in the colony's development. Indeed, the mine's output helped South Australia become the largest copper producer in the world at one point. The mine's rich ore deposits helped the colony flourish and become a major copper producer. It attracted a large influx of Cornish miners and their families, who brought their expertise and cultural traditions with them.

Underground mining ceased in 1867, and the mine was worked as an open-cut from 1870 until its closure in 1877. While an open-cut mine was re-established in 1971, it ultimately closed in 1981. The Burra mines and associated buildings are now recognized as a State Heritage Area and were included in the National Heritage List in 2017.



From a prominent lookout point we could see the nearby main mine to our south and the smelting works to our north. The vast mining precinct was almost completely circled by the small settlements and villages of The Burra.

We walked down to the smelting works, with great respect for the immaculate presentation of the remaining buildings. The dressing (crushing) tower and the engine house were prominent.



It was then a long and unspectacular run south-east to Berri – and back on the Murray again, for a night at a beautiful free camp at Martin’s Bend. This was very reminiscent of the river stops a few weeks previously. We relaxed in the sun for a while the next morning. We crossed the border to Victoria and took the straight road to Mildura and on through to Balranald. We chose a caravan park there, with the good facilities that we needed by this time. The hordes of corellas swooping through the trees were highly entertaining.

It was a much warmer night than we had been experiencing recently, before we pressed on for a medium-length leg. We had decided not to embark on a series of very long legs, only to get home a day or two earlier, because we had no time constraints of any kind. Our one deviation was to



Carrathool, in countryside east of Hay, to see an old raising bridge over the Murrumbidgee.

In Narranderra, where we were randomly breath-tested, we looked for a place for the night. We checked out but rejected a scruffy bush stop – it looked like a trail bike playground. We therefore returned to the town and the free Brewery Flat RV

campground. This was simply a wide grassy paddock, and perfectly satisfactory.

By this time the van's digital instrument panel was playing up. For the whole trip it had been alerting me for impossible problems, and now the whole dashboard had switched to Italian. There was nowhere nearer than Sydney to get any help in sorting this out, but the reported issues did not seem severe (as confirmed later) or even unlikely. So we pressed on home.

It was a nice blue morning for Anzac Day, and we had no new dashboard warnings on the run east to Goulburn. There was a lot of traffic, this being another holiday. In Goulburn we made use of a free council RV "park" – actually just a narrow lane – between the town's information centre and a boundary fence. The problem there was that only a few metres the other side of the fence was the main railway line, both for freight (very long trains!) and passengers. There was no realistic alternative to stay, as we wanted to stock up at a nearby Coles before our final run home. What would the night be like?

In brief, terrible! A very noisy train passed seemingly very close to us every hour or so, making it impossible to stay asleep, despite earplugs. But in the morning we did do a useful shop, so we left well provisioned.

The run back home from Goulburn was very familiar, and the traffic this Saturday 26 April not too bad.

We reached home at 11:55 am.

Our total trip mileage was 5,155 kilometres.

A well forecast change in the weather, with torrential rain, arrived the next day and was predicted to continue for a week.

The trip had been a very enjoyable and informative tour of more lovely and dramatic sites and sights in Australia, and we were soon discussing where to go next.