

Circumnavigation of Australia 2023

Ever thought of flying right around Australia? Well, fellow RVAA member Steve Nelson had had his eye on this one for a long time, he just needed someone to join the journey to make the reality happen. For those who haven't ventured outback yet, travelling in company makes the trip all that more enjoyable, knowing you have a back up for any unexpected occurrence. There is safety in numbers, and it feels just great.

Steve had spent twelve months planning the trip, identifying the destination stops, fuel stops, accommodation, hire cars and tours. For the inexperienced, never think for a moment that you can just take off and everything will fall into place. Finding Avgas in outback Western Australia can be exhausting if not impossible at times.



Tour leaders Steve & Dominie Nelson

When Steve suggested the trip, Suzanne and I just jumped at the chance. The number of Australians who can boast that they have flown the entire coastline of Australia is very small indeed.

For us the journey started at Redcliffe whereas Steve and Dominie flew up from Adelaide. The first leg was Airlie Beach. If you have never flown into Airlie, then I'd suggest that you put it on the bucket list. Great location and quirky aerodrome with the most enthusiastic and helpful management team you could ever wish to meet. Better still, on the aerodrome boundary is a caravan park with beautiful new cabins all within a few minutes stroll. No need for hire car here, there is a bus stop right outside the caravan park with bus fares (seniors \$2.50 all day).

Our next leg was Cooktown via the Great Barrier Reef. An excellent stop over where the Sovereign resort hotel does free airport pickups and also has a great bar and restaurant. The next morning we continued up the coast towards Horn Island. We only encountered two patches of low cloud the whole trip and today was the first, as we approached Lockhart River we flew along at 1500' below

cloud. I get the feeling that Lockhart River is a magnet for bad weather, especially when you consider the history of aviation accidents at that location. Fifteen minutes later we were back into Cavok and admiring the most unusual sand blows that scattered the entire coastline as we travelled north.

Landing at Horn Island with our reserved parking ensured, (don't go there and expect you will find a parking space on Horn Island) we caught the local bus to the ferry and cruised over to Thursday Island for a two night rest. We toured the island with a delightful local operator. For those of you who haven't been to the very top of Australia, Thursday Island is a great spot to stop. Last time we visited Thursday Island we flew out to the Torres Strait Islands for a day and would thoroughly recommend that you consider doing the same.



Enjoying the
Sunset in the Gulf

Departing Cape York we flew to Karumba for another two night rest at Ash's Cabins. We took the local sunset cruise out into the Gulf and landed on a small sand island to watch the sun set. What a small island that turned out to be, where we met other RVAA members Shane and Sue Finney who were flying around the outback.



Shane & Sue Finney & I on a desert Island

Shane bragged that he had found a roll cloud that morning flying from Burketown to Karumba, he even had the photo bragging rights. I have previously googled roll clouds and knew they were unique to the Gulf Country occurring in September to October, sometimes only half a dozen times

per year. Here we were in late August and Shane and Sue had snagged a rare gem of a roll cloud that morning. It had me looking into the sky the next morning, every morning low SC cloud pushed east to west but no roll cloud, or as the locals call them, morning glories. That's luck it would seem, but the story doesn't end there.

The morning we departed Karumba for Burketown (refuelling) the cloud base was becoming scattered with SC moving off the land and out into the gulf. The base was approximately 3000' and tops about 4000'. As we flew west bound the cloud base started getting lower and lower. By 1000' I had had enough and decided to climb through the holes and get on top. The top was now at about 1500'. We got on top and proceeded west over the cloud until one moment we were on top of a layer of SC and then there was a large gap and in front of us were two perfectly formed roll clouds that surprised the dickens out of us. What absolute beauties they were, for as long as we could see out to the horizon, these perfectly formed roll clouds just extended. As you can see in the photos we had a little play and managed to find the lift immediately in front of the cloud and just surfed along with power reduced. It was a moment that we will never forget and we have the photographs for bragging rights.



Morning Glory Mr Burketown



Roll Cloud



My thoughts and recommendations are, it seems the clouds form because of the two weather patterns, one coming from the land and the other coming from the gulf. You may not see the roll clouds from the land and you'll need to launch airborne and be over the gulf where they really and truly form. Searching from the air between Burketown and Karumba late Aug to October. There was a locally produced video at the Barramundi breeding farm which documents a glider pilot who made an 1100 km journey on a roll cloud. It's worth visiting this region just for the chance to find a roll cloud.

We had planned to stop at Adels Grove, however for some reason this year many great tourist spots owned and operated by the indigenous were closed, an alternate plan saw us landing right in the middle of King Ash Bay's Fishing Club's resort. It's a fisher-a-persons mecca, accommodation was clean but fairly basic and we had the deluxe suite, but great meals and drinks were available from the bar.

The next day had us refuelling at Groote Island, a large mining island. We avoided some indigenous aerodromes as the landing fees were just preposterous. Lesson here, check the prices of landings before you set out or you might be in for a shock. Deep down I suspect the Federal Government paid for the installation of the aerodrome and probably pays for the upkeep and the local mobs just see it as an opportunity to rake in profits or they don't welcome strangers, either way it works for me, I'm going somewhere else. Do your homework and read the public notes in Ozrunways. Here is a couple examples of contributions made this year in respect to an outback community aerodrome, "Do not stop here if it is just for a toilet break, its disgusting. The local council should be ashamed. Reason enough to refuse landing fees if you come here." Others include "Caution. I recently refuelled at the JetA1 bowser and found a fair amount of water whilst doing post fuel drains. It took a few drains to clear it".

Our next stop was Gove, a huge mining town and another pleasant stop for the night. Onwards to Darwin for a few days of rest and recreation. Parking at Darwin is challenging and a phone call before arriving is helpful. We ended up finding a couple of empty spots on the graveyard where all the local operators have parked their wrecks from which they salvage parts.



Parking at Darwin next to the wrecks

When in Darwin don't forget to visit the Aviation Museum at Darwin. Steve, who is a Director of the Adelaide Aviation Museum proved to be up to the task of making this a memorable visit, next time I'm in Adelaide I'll be visiting Steve's museum to check that one out.

Next stop Western Australia which I enjoyed immensely. First stopping at Kununurra and doing the triple J boat ride down the Ord River (recommended), and then flying out to the Buccaneer Archipelago. These archipelago's and reefs are simply the best in Australia and the world, wow. Montgomery reef was flowing and there were cruise ships in abundance. Doubling back over the Horizontal falls and stopping at Mount Hart Wilderness Lodge in their glamping tents with ensuites. It was here that the second surprise of the trip was discovered. We booked the evening dining @ \$100 per person, it wasn't necessarily the cheapest, but for outback prices it was quite satisfactory. As you can see in the photograph there were only six of us dining that night. But what a surprise, a three course meal that simply was the best meal I've experienced in a very long time, the food was fantastic and melted in your mouth. It was worth travelling here just for the culinary experience.



Next day had us on a short leg to Cygnet Bay, a pearling farm resort where we rested up in truly brand new exquisite glamping tents with air-conditioning and fans. Without a doubt a five star glamping tent and gardens. Unfortunately, the tides were not with us and a couple of the

adventurous boat tours were not being offered whilst we were there. We took the only option which was an island cruise, it wasn't cheap and wasn't worth the time or money unfortunately. Putting that aside it is a truly delightful place to visit. If you are after pearls, I'd recommend a trip to Willie Creek pearl farm just north of Broome as being the better option.



Cygnets Bay parking

Leaving Cygnets Bay we headed to Broome for fuel. Now this is another example of doing your homework, you are not permitted to land and refuel at Broome unless you have applied for a landing and parking permit beforehand, can you believe that?

Departing Broome the next landing was Port Hedland, what a huge, huge mining town, very nice and interesting, I could have spent another day exploring.

The following day we arrived at Coral Bay and Ningaloo reef. A water oasis in the middle of nowhere, the only shame was the water temperature was not up to my high standards to go swimming, such a shame as the water was just beautiful. We spent half a day whale watching from the water. We had already seen enough whales from the air to fill a lifetime of whale watching desires.

Our next stop was marine watching of a different nature. We landed at Shark Bay for the Monkey Mia experience. We hired a car here with some very funny hiring protocols. Any part of a day is a whole day. If you picked the car up in the afternoon and returned it the next morning, that's two days hire, so it made car hire a bit more expensive here. So off to Monkey Mia we went in the morning and watched the dolphin feeding and then got onboard a local charter catamaran to find Dugongs by the herds. This was another town where I could have spent an extra day as there were some very interesting tourist cruises and tours of nearby Dirk Hartog Island which I may do another time.

Now after nearly a month of beautiful warm weather and clear skies we were heading south back into winter and boy we weren't disappointed. We flew coastal past Perth without speaking to a controller once. Perth looked immaculate, Fremantle looking cloudy and rainy, Serpentine was

covered in showers and the wind was starting to build up, we saw a numbers of dogs flying through the air, having been blown off their chains. Now for the second time in four weeks we had to navigate around and under clouds at 1000'. Luckily this weather was isolated from Freemantle to Bunbury and cleared up for a refuel stop at Busselton. Steve reported that his 7's rudder was at near full deflection for the cross winds at Busselton. The 14's rudder being bigger seems to handle cross winds a bit better compared to the 7.

Coastal onwards to Albany, where we tied down for the next three days. We pushed onwards to Albany one day earlier than planned due to winds of sixty knots and rain predicted the next couple of days. The BOM forecast proved accurate and we were very happy being safely on the ground. I had truly forgotten what cold was having lived in Queensland for the last 15 years but I got quickly reacquainted with the concept.



Albany, note the low clouds.
Its was wet freezing &
windy

When we departed Albany three days later the weather had abated and it made our onward journey so much nicer, to Esperance then coastal to Cocklebidy. What a truly magnificent coast line with reefs and islands everywhere, we then had to venture inland for refuelling and overnight at Forrest. I know many of our members have been to Forrest before, as it's nearly impossible to cross the Nullarbor without refuelling at Forrest. If you have not had to fortune of stopping at Forrest, then it's a journey that every aviator should consider on their bucket list. Forrest in the middle of nowhere with only two people living there to look after aviators refuelling needs. Accommodation is provided

in six houses that were once used by BOM and DCA families working at Forrest. Your hosts will cook your meals and provide cold refreshments with true country hospitality.



Forrest Hangar,
free hangarage
for the night

The following morning we departed to head south back to the coastline and onwards back to Ceduna, where we left Steve and Dominie as we headed back to Queensland. It was a wonderful trip with great company. Suzanne and I are indebted to Steve for his meticulous planning and execution of our plan. For those considering such an adventure I'd suggest you contact Steve or myself and we would only be too pleased to share our plan as a good starting point for a great adventure.

We are back at home and Suzanne has marked our journey on the large wall map of our flying adventures. Australia now has a solid black line around the coastline, something we will look back upon as we grow older, it will assure us that we did achieve a lot in our short flying career.

Alan & Suzanne Carlisle