

## COORONG EXPEDITION REPORT - FEBRUARY 27 – 28<sup>TH</sup> 2016

### What were the ideas behind the expedition?

The intention of the Expedition was to learn something about the Coorong lagoons and the Lower Lakes as a system, and to enjoy good food, wine and company.

The Expedition theme was 'life in a saline environment', and while observing terrestrial and wading migratory birds was a focus, the expedition was also planned to study the geology of the region, life on a salt lake, Aboriginal culture of the region and the Tauwichee Barrage.

Based on Dr David Paton's advice, the expedition was scheduled to take advantage of the migratory wading birds annual visit to the area.

### What were the main elements of the program?

On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> the Expeditioners arrived at Pelican Point at 9.00am where we were met by SA Water officer Bryce Buchanan (and a tree full of Nankeen Night Herons). We drove a short distance to Tauwichee Barrage where the fish ramp was attracting flotillas of pelicans, petrels and other birds as well as New Zealand Fur seals. The seals became the subject of some controversy during the weekend. Bryce gave a short talk about the barrage system and answered questions. Expeditioners were able to walk across the barrage and enjoy the birds. David Paton was also on hand to answer questions.



We left the Pelican Point area at 11.30 and drove to Meningie in time for 12.30 lunch at the Cheese Factory. We then drove the 10km to Camp Coorong, home of the Ngarrindjeri Museum. There Ngarrindjeri Elder Ellen Trevorrow, artist, weaver and educator, led us on a tour of the museum.

Our Saturday accommodation, Wilderness School's Crawford campsite is a 40 minute drive south of Camp Coorong. After a break to allow people to settle into their cabins Dr Peter Hudson led us on a short drive to a salt lake on the land between the highway and the Coorong. We knew that Peter would be looking for beetles and other small forms of life on the lake, but we were not expecting this rarified interest to be the hit that it was with the expeditioners. Peter's passion and enthusiasm for his subject dismissed any inhibitions about looking for beetles and spiders, and before long all 24 expeditioners had joined the search.

Another highlight of the first day was the evening meal. The Crawford dining room allowed all the expeditioners to sit at one long table and enjoy a drink and what proved to be a restaurant quality meal, so good that it drew a standing ovation from the diners.

On Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> the day began with David Paton's bird banding session. The birds had been netted in mist nets close to the cabins, and there were over 100 birds caught and recorded and expeditioners were able to handle the birds. Later David recorded another 100 or more birds. It was a very successful and enjoyable experience.

Following breakfast Peter Hudson, David Paton and Trevor Ireland gave short presentations on the salt lake beetles, the environmental challenges facing the Coorong, and the geomorphology of the region.

Trevor Ireland, assisted by Carol Ireland, then led the final activity for the morning, a walk up Salt Creek to point out some of the geological features that Trevor had described in his post-breakfast talk. This part of the expedition, allied with Trevor's presentation, put the Coorong experience into its wider geomorphological context.

We then convoyed north to a lookout about halfway between Salt Creek and Meningie for our final view of the Coorong with Trevor interpreting.

We'd heard through social media about the entrepreneurial family running Coorong Wild Seafoods, and as Coorong Mullet is the Coorong's best known piscatorial delicacy, we arranged for Tracy Hill from Coorong Wild Seafoods to provide lunch followed by a tour of their small processing plant. The lunch was excellent. From Tracy we learned about the impact of the New Zealand Fur seal on the Coorong fishery. In her view the seals are having a near fatal impact on the viability of the fishery by eating the fish out of the nets and destroying the nets themselves. As most of the expeditioners were well disposed towards wildlife in general and seals in particular, the issue generated plenty of discussion. The visit and the expedition concluded with a filleting demonstration by Glen Hill, before we headed home at 3.30pm.

#### **Expedition Leaders**

Alastair Dow

Rose Dow

Mark Mackintosh

Shylie Mackintosh