

# Great Australian Inland Cruise

## Report on Phase 1 – Echuca to Mildura

24 Nov 2014 to 18 Dec 2014

### Intro

After a formal farewell by the Honourable Peter Walsh, MP, and Paul Weller, MP and a blessing of the Fleet by Fr John Tinkler, nine boats departed Echuca on 24 November, bound for Mildura. This included 5 paddle boats and 4 smaller boats of varying types.

All nine boats arrived safely (though not without some major incidents) at Mildura, as a Fleet. This was after 20 days of on-water travel. The Fleet is now almost half way to its final destination of Goolwa where it will be officially received at the South Australian Wooden Boat Festival on 21 February. This will be following a further 50 days of on-water travel.

### The Boats

#### Paddleboats (all ex Echuca)

1. Tooraloora
2. Amelia Jane
3. Ivy May
4. Billy T
5. James Maiden (steamer)

#### Other boats

6. Moonshine (ex Brisbane)
7. Sunshine (ex Mordialloc Creek)
8. Agnes (ex Nagambie)
9. Mars (ex Altona)

A tenth boat, Phantom, a small houseboat from Darwin, preceded the Fleet; we met up eventually in Robinvale and have travelled in company since then.

Additional boats (paddle and other) will be joining the Fleet in Mildura prior to its departure on 3 January 2015. It is anticipated that the Fleet will grow to 20 or more boats before reaching Goolwa.

### Highlights of the Trip to date

1. By far the biggest highlight has been the natural beauty and tranquillity of many parts of this outstanding waterway. The River in its many moods and in varying light conditions has, at times, been breathtakingly beautiful.
2. Transiting the locks at Torumbary and Euston
3. Transiting under the lifting bridges at Barham/Koondrook, Tooleybuc, Swan Hill, Murrabit and Nyah
4. Transiting through areas of high hazard, including extensive snag hazards, large rocky reefs, clay banks, sandbars, shallow water, narrow gaps and channels and fast water. This included some days of very high wind which compounded the problems especially for the larger boats but also made the River harder to 'read' and navigate for all boats.
5. Gearbox replacement for Tooraloora about 4 km upstream from Swan Hill. This was done in double quick time and she caught up with the Fleet in a further 3-4 days.

6. Numerous incidents of running onto a rocky reef, running aground on sandbars (4 occasions) and running over snags by Sunshine
7. Tooraloora running aground on a sandbar and being rescued by Lillian, a local paddleboat, which, in turn, ran aground on the same sandbar and was then 'rescued' by a large local tractor.
8. The most remarkable and most enjoyable highlight was the very generous support of the local communities all along the River who were unstinting in their assistance and hospitality to all the Fleet; this especially came to the fore when repairs and supplies were required. All members of the Fleet have been impressed with this aspect of the trip.
9. At Barham, the town, including schools, closed to watch the bridge lift and to see the Fleet transit; this was very impressive, especially the kids response to the boat whistles. Local traders were very helpful with repairs and support.
10. At Boundary Bend, we met and were supported and entertained by the very welcoming descendants of the legendary Captain Archie Conner, whose statue and story is at that location. They helped with boat repairs, showed us the local area and treated us to a barbecue and drinks; they also took us on a tour and showed us how the Murray River contributes to both local and State prosperity and the extent of the water pumping in the district, in some cases over 20 km inland.
11. All caravan parks at which we stayed looked after us very well and were ambassadors for their local area. In Robinvale, we visited Robinswood, the former home of the Cuttle family and now a Museum with an emphasis on the life of Lt. Robin Cuttle, MC who died in the First World War and after whom the town is named.
12. In Mildura, we were very fortunate to be hosted by Pointon's at their slipway; this generosity has made a big impression on us all. We have had great support from the community in Mildura and are planning a very special launch there of Phase 2 of the project.
13. Support from the paddleboat community everywhere along the River has been outstanding and has contributed much to the enjoyment and success of the trip.
14. Cameraderie amongst the very diverse Fleet has also been very high, with team members supporting one another; we have had many enjoyable and entertaining hours around numerous campfires and, working together, we have solved or resolved many challenging technical and travel issues.

### **Facilities along the River**

There are very few facilities on either side of the River which support transiting boats; in fact, it appears that such support has not been included in planning at either State or Local level.

Problems for boat travellers (which need to be addressed) include:

- Steep banks
- Very limited mooring facilities
- No access to power or water
- Little access to food or fuel
- Many navigational hazards that should be moved or marked in the interests of safety, including navigational snags, reef gaps, channels

This presents an opportunity for the communities involved to compete to attract the boating public, by addressing these issues and promoting their local areas.

### **Departure from Mildura**

The Fleet is due to depart on 3 January after spending Christmas and New Year in Mildura. A departure 'event' is planned for the Mildura foreshore, starting at 10.30 am. See the separate document on this event.

### **Enroute highlights planned for Phase 2**

1. Five days up the Darling River to Avoca Station and return
2. Numerous rest days at towns along the River
3. The trip across Lake Alexandrina
4. Possible trip in the Coorong area
5. The Wooden Boat Festival itself
6. Seeing the River widen out and expand in both size and facilities as it comes under the influence of a greater range of locks

### **Conclusion**

The trip so far has met its objectives and all participants are keen to see the remainder of the River and to enjoy the numerous high-quality River-based facilities provided by South Australia. Phase 2 will be a slower part of the trip with more rest days enroute at selected destinations.

The detailed Plan for Phase 2 is being developed.

Garry Spencer, AM  
Convener  
Great Australian Inland Cruise  
0418 996 856  
[garry@aql.com.au](mailto:garry@aql.com.au)

Bob Mcgrath  
Fleet Commodore  
Great Australian Inland Cruise  
0426 982 529  
[pbbillytea@gmail.com](mailto:pbbillytea@gmail.com)

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