

INTERNATIONAL COMANCHE SOCIETY AUST. TRIBE
BALLINA FLY-IN 25TH – 27TH Sept 2009

Deanna Knutson JGW

Friday 25th September 2009

An early start was the plan for most Victorians heading north for the weekend Fly-In to Ballina. A major winter storm was on its way to take our place.



VH-JGW left Wangaratta Vic at 8:30am with the vents closed tight and black clouds closing in. Those flying in from Qld and NSW had to cope with an orange hue and at times limited visibility due to a huge dust storm which had engulfed their areas a couple of days previous. The weather on route for us to Dubbo was clear and fine. The 30 knots on the nose added a little extra flying time to the trip. After refuelling at Dubbo with the Paratz family, we had an early lunch. We noticed at Dubbo airfield all of the orange dust covering the vehicles in the parking lots due to that recent storm from Broken Hill. The 2 hour flight from Dubbo to Ballina was clear and enjoyable. Four planes

were parked already upon our arrival at Ballina and over the next couple of hours we had a total of 14 planes carrying 33 pilots and passengers from all down the eastern states of OZ. Another 8 people arrived in 7 cars. We were all shuttled into town to our motels. Most members stayed at the Ballina Heritage Inn or next door at the Richmond while others stayed further down the road to the Country Comfort. The Heritage Inn was conveniently located directly across the street from the Ballina RSL. Ballina on the east coast of northern NSW is a town that faces the South Pacific Ocean at the mouth of the Richmond River. It is just over an hour's drive south of Brisbane, and even closer to the Gold Coast.



Ballina thrives on its tourism industry and offers some of the best beaches in Australia.



Upon arrival at my room I could not change out of my "Victorian" winter woollies and into my "east coast" summer wear fast enough. The warmer weather was inviting. Most people took a walk around the streets before visiting the local hotel for refreshments and a catch up with friends all prior to a 6pm taxi pickup returned us back to the airport.

A grand BBQ dinner was prepared by the Ballina Aero Club and served in the hangar of Sir Graham McCamley amongst a few of his very nice aircraft including his two Comanches. We all caught up with Jeff

Hutchinson who was arranging the weekend and the BBQ proved to be a fitting start and get together for a wonderful weekend. A special welcome was made to Barry and Sandra Payne, Comanche members who had travelled all the way from Waimate New Zealand. Our reputation of our fun times must be getting around and it was great to have both Barry and Sandra join us.

A presentation was made from Roy to Manfred in acknowledgement of Manfred and Rolfe's successful flight around the world in Rolfe's Comanche earlier this year. With sumptuous food, refreshments and endless stories, the evening passed by quickly in the company of pilots with a passion for Comanches.

Saturday 26th September 2009

Saturday morning breakfasts scattered us all over town where we were able to choose whatever to start the day. At 9am the bus picked us all up for our day long excursion. With 34 adults and 3 children on board, our first stop was the Crystal Castle near Mullumbimby. While some members took in the 'enchanted experience' with a wander through the magical gardens of mystic statues some marvelled at the jewellery, crystals and treasures for sale, while other members chose to 'enrich their spirit' with a cup of coffee and enjoy the panoramic views from the deck of the cafe. After a couple of hours and we were back on the bus for a quick driving tour of the main street of Bangalow.



We continued on route to the Cape Byron Lighthouse which is only 3 km from Byron Bay. This is the most eastern point of the Australian mainland. The lighthouse was constructed of prefabricated concrete blocks and completed in 1901. In 1956, the light became its most powerful when it converted to mains electricity. There are absolutely stunning views overlooking the cliffs to the ocean. The headland is 94 metres above sea level and the lighthouse is a further 22 metres high.

The wind was blowing up a gale and as our photos showed later we were all experiencing a "Bad Hair Day" While we were enjoying the views and looking for dolphins and whales, we were treated to a spectacular overhead performance from a glider. Back on the bus, we were driven in to Byron Bay township to roam freely for a couple of hours. The AFL Grand Final had brought the local hordes to town to view the event in the big screens. Food, shopping and people watching quickly passed the time.



The bus took us back to Ballina and after a freshen up it was only a short walk from our motels to our dinner spot "WICKED" on Saturday evening. The name threw me as I expected something either a little risqué or indulgent however neither, but our group of forty including four guests did enjoy a pre-set three course menu chatting away the evening.

Sunday 27th September 2009

Sunday morning breakfasts again were at a few different locations prior to our 9 am taxi delivery to the Ballina Airport hangar for the 9:30 a.m. AGM. After the AGM and the election of new officers bearers Jim Barry the previous tribe chief passed on the customary head dress to our newly elected tribe chief Ian Thomson to the delight and amusement of all present.



As the winds howled and the motorbikes roared combined with the muffled acoustics within the hanger, the pilots split their attention between the meeting and the decision to stay or go home.

The weather report was severe turbulence below 8000 feet or 50 knots on the nose above 8000 feet. Several members stayed on for an extra day for an enjoyable extended weekend, while some chose the rough/slow ride home. One report heading south down to 60 knot ground speed, YUK!

It was another good weekend away with folks with a common interest. Thanks go to the Ballina Aero

Club and Jeff Hutchinson for arranging another great fly-in this time into Ballina NSW. Thanks also for all who were able to attend making it fun and a well attended weekend.



AIRCRAFT (11 Comanche and 3 other aircraft for a total of 14 aircraft carrying 33 people)

MMN - Ian Thomson and Irene Lawson

JGW - Jeff Wittig and Deanna Knutson

OIB - Ojars Balodis and Erin (daughter)

CDB - Jim Barry

KZH - Ken and Vicki Lapham

FLG - Fred and Marcia Morgan, Veronica Howlett, and David Campbell

MCO - Roger and Lynda Lenne

MEG - Tony and Angela Read

MCW - Mike and Kay Smith

TSJ - Tony and Jan VanDerSpek, John and Jan Macknight

FFE - Reg and Pat Darwell

ORT - Lawrence, Kerrie, Leon and Rebecca Paratz

DUG - Spider Webb and Yvonne Robinson

CSV - Ken and Gayle Munn

DRIVERS (7 cars/8 people) Manfred Melloh, Ken Holdsworth, Roy Sneesby, John Ward, Jeff Hutchinson, Barry and Sandra Payne, David Wright.

