

BENDIGO FLY-IN Friday March 19th to Sunday March 21st 2004

Tony and Jan Vanderspeck along with John and Jenny Moore must have spent many hours organizing this Fly-in to their home city of Bendigo, which from our arrival on Friday to our departures on Sunday was filled with many informative and diversified things to do.

It all started on Friday afternoon as twenty Comanche aircraft landed at Bendigo Airfield to be greeted by our hosts with a cuppa and afternoon tea before being transported to the accommodation of our choice at either Julie-Annas or Greystanes Manor .

At approx 5.45pm amongst great noise of greetings of fellow fliers we are driven by coach and returned to the airport for a tour of HEMS Helicopter Ambulance Base. Standing in a large hanger void of the helicopter, which had chosen to perform a service right at that time, we were however given by Phil Hogan a paramedic an insight into the extensive background and future this invaluable air service achieves. On to the Bendigo Flying Club for pre-dinner drinks and nibbles followed by a delightful dinner that was described as a "Reef and Beef Southern Style" and later driven back to our accommodation for the night.

Saturday started with an early breakfast after which our Swan Hill pilots Jim and John joined us bearing gifts one of which I believe not sits on a well known Nanango's medical practitioner desk both amusing and abusing his patients.

We are all taken by coach to firstly the City Hall for a grand tour including the restored hall by two wonderful historians then a short walk to the Law courts in the Old Post Office precinct. Our tour guide David McCann gave us so much insight into how the legal system performed within these court rooms that quite a few of our fellow travelers found themselves acting out the services from Judges to Jury and even the criminals. It was interesting to see who chose what role! Another short walk this time through the Conservatory Gardens with its beautifully perfumed roses etc to the Golden Dragon Museum. The building was erected where once was Bendigo's China Town with its history of the Chinese people of Bendigo from the gold rush of the 1850s to the present. "Sun Loong" the worlds longest Imperial Dragon and "Loong" the worlds oldest Imperial Dragon adorn the interior along with many artifacts and costumes from Chinese heritage within the region. We pull ourselves away from this museum for morning tea after which our party breaks up some choosing to visit the Austrlain Defence Industry and others following their artistic natures to visit the Bendigo Gallery in which works of 19th Century European artists along with many other equally impressive works are displayed. The building alone is state of the art and yet still blends in with the wonderful heritage building of which there are many in the area.

At approx 1.pm we re group and are coached out to the Sandhurst Ridge Winery and Vineyard for a tasting of both Sandhurst Ridge and Balgownie local wines. As Peter Brown is with us we ask the same old question "Is this good!" Maybe our own taste buds need to be questioned. A sumptuous lunch is served at the winery followed by being returned to our accommodation for a well earned rest.

Off we go again at 6pm and walking this time but only a very short distance to the tram stop. Trams were a working means of transport similar to Melbourne untill 1972 with their heritage dateing back to 1890. This tram journey was a lot different with pre-dinner champs and very tempting and tasty hordurves served along our way to the underground Central Deborah Mine for dinner. The mine is a present working mine and we must don hard hats to descend the 20 storeys in a cage lift to the restaurant below. I managed to be sitting at a table with friends all of whom did not receive an entrée as the caterers had run out.

What a blow to receive a free bottle of local wine as compensation. Oh well, you can't help bad luck!. During dinner we are entertained by a local Jazz duo and Fred Morgan received a rubber crocodile to promote our next fly-in to Moorachadore .I think Fred is going to show Steve Erwin how its done.

We must return and take the guided tour of the mine some other time as it is said to be the best tour of its type in Australia. After dinner we are once again taken back up the mine shaft, on to the tram and back to our accomodation for the night.

Sunday brought us another sunny day to which we were taken by coach back to the Flying club for breakfast followed by a Tribe Meeting and an update on the International Convention to Hamilton Island in 2006.

Thanks again Tony, Jan, John and Jenny for a wonderful insight into your great City of Bendigo. I for one will be back to explore this rich old gold rush town that has become one of Victoria's most elegant Cities..

Slowly but surely we part and fly back to our niches in life till we once again meet up in mass for the next fly-in to Moorachadore Qld.

Irene Lawson.