

## CLARE VALLEY FLY-IN 28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH to 30<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014

The ICS Autumn fly-in was held at the beautiful Clare Valley in South Australia. This is a wonderful area of rolling hills and old stone buildings and charming small towns. The town of Clare itself is on high ground and still retains lots of gum trees. It is a renowned wine making area and makes particularly good Riesling wines although they also have some very fine reds. As has been the case for most of our fly-ins we had a good turn up with 15 aircraft and 36 people attending. Those who arrived early had a good flight but later in the day we had a build up of cumulo-nimbus which made things interesting. Unfortunately one aircraft could not escape from Ballina due to the weather.

On the Friday we were hosted by the Clare Valley Flying Group. The group were extremely hospitable and very friendly and supplied us with a marvelous BBQ that night.



The Clare Valley Group are very proud of their aerodrome and clubrooms and rightly so. They have a high standard gravel strip aligned North-South 1200m by 18m built to RFDS standards for aircraft

up to 5700 Kg and a 600m grass cross strip. The clubrooms were only completed 6 months ago and are truly great with a 180 deg. view of all the aviation activities. The impressive part is that so much was done with volunteer labour and donated materials. They are now planning to seal the apron area which does need it as there were some reasonable size stones present. It was great to see the pride they have in their airport unlike some local Councils elsewhere.

The aircraft were parked expertly by John MacKnight and most had grass areas for start up to protect their props.

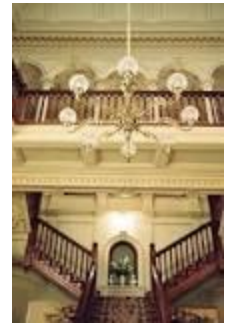
Attendees came from all the eastern states but particular mention should be made of Barry and Sandra Payne from New Zealand who flew their beautifully restored PA-24 250 across the ditch and also John van Bladerin with his companion Cathy who flew all the way from the USA to be with us. Following the BBQ we were transported to our accommodation at the Clare Valley Motel or the Comfort Inn Clare Central both of which were very comfortable.

Next morning we were all collected for the day's activities. Because of the numbers attending we needed a normal bus and a mini bus. Our bus drivers were a laugh a minute and made the day even more enjoyable.

Our first stop was at Pikes Polish Hill Winery which is on high ground and has a superb view out over the valleys to the east. It could actually be seen where the rainfall decreases and the countryside becomes much more pastoral. It felt strange to be wine tasting at 9am but this was the Clare Valley after all and the wines were excellent. In particular their Rieslings were great and I noticed that a few purchases were made. Coffee and tea was available for those who could not quite face alcohol at such a tender time of the day.



Our next stop was about a 40 minute drive away through very picturesque valleys and the charming town of Mintaro to Martindale Hall. It is a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Georgian mansion built in 1879 for a sheep farmer who made it a retreat for the wealthy from Adelaide. The property once had its own cricket oval and polo field as well as a lake for rowing. It is in near original condition with some magnificent furnishings and fittings. The Trophy Room was particularly interesting as were the very deep baths in the en-suite bathrooms. Martindale Hall became quite famous when it was featured in the successful Australian film “Picnic at Hanging Rock”, directed by Peter Weir.



Our lunch was to be at O’Leary Walker Winery but apparently they could not handle such a large group so we went to the Eldredge Estate Winery and had a delightful lunch overlooking their lake. The day had turned a little cool by this stage but the wines managed to warm us up.



The final stop for the day was to Seven Hills Winery. It is a celebrated old stone winery in close proximity to St. Aloysius' Church. The group was divided into two with one group visiting the winery and the other the church. Strangely both groups managed to eventually end up at the Cellar door. This was the first winery in the Clare Valley and was established by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1851 to produce sacramental wine. It was lovely to just stroll through the spacious gardens. The group was then bused back to the motels to freshen up for dinner.

Dinner was at the Artisans' Table where we were provided with a sumptuous feast and accompanying wines.

After breakfast the next morning it was back to the airfield and time to daily our aircraft prior to the General meeting held in the clubrooms. Then unfortunately it was time to mount our steeds and head home. One lucky group however were continuing on a safari with Tony and Angela Read to the great outback of Western Australia with some time in the Pilbara. As one who has done this before I knew that they were going to have a special time.

Particular thanks must go to Tony and Angela Read who organised the whole function in their usual immaculate style and we all look forward to our next fly-in at Murwillumbah to be organised by Ken Holdsworth.

Tony van der Spek