

# Back of Bourke

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## Preface

CPL student Bard Tyldum had recently passed his GFPT & with a couple of short navs under his belt was keen to get on with his navigation training. When he heard his instructor talking about outback flying he wanted to know more. What a great way to do his navigation training, see some fantastic places & he could bring along his girlfriend Ramone to show her what he had been spending all his money on. After a trip to the pilot shop to get some more maps, Bard & his Instructor Larry began to plan their outback adventure.

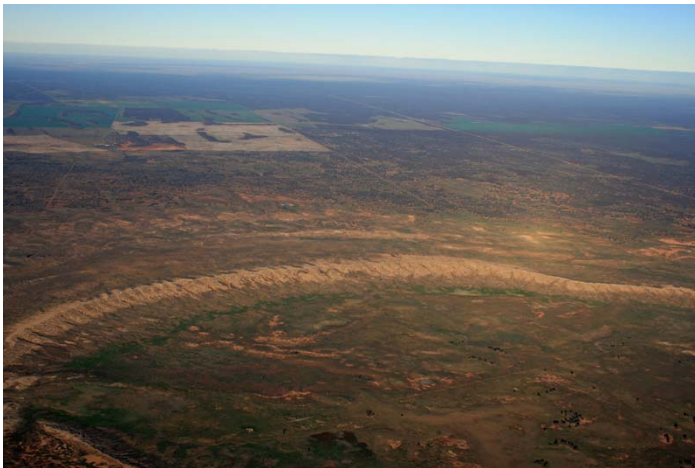
Here is their story as told by Larry.

## Day 1

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### Looking for Adventure!

We departed Essendon somewhat later than planned due to weather. Kilmore gap still had cloud on the ground, so we headed out towards Bacchus marsh with the cloud lifting over the ranges we were soon heading north for Swan Hill. After topping up the tanks at Swan Hill we tracked along the Mighty Murray River into New South Wales. After a short time the river veers off to Mildura as we continue our northerly track for Lake Mungo.



The Mungo National Park is a 27 thousand hectare site of world importance. Mungo man has been dated back 60,000 years.

The views of the “walls of China” from the air were fantastic. From up here would have to be the best way to appreciate this amazing place.

We had planned to land at Mungo but with the late departure and the question in my mind “would the runway lights at our next stop in the middle of the outback actually work?” we continued on.

### [Mungo National Park](#)

Heading north our track takes us past the Menindee Lakes & the Coturaundee ranges to our next stop White Cliffs. We arrived just in time to enjoy a beautiful Sunset. (By the way the runway lights did work)



The Opal Mining town of white cliffs is famous for its [Underground Motel](#)

Opals were first discovered in 1884 by a couple of Roo shooters. By 1890 a small settlement had developed and around this time it got the name White Cliffs from the white shale the miners had to dig through to find the Opals. Building materials were scarce & expensive so miners started converting their old mineshafts into homes. The area continued to attract large numbers of miners until the First World War, when declining opal deposits & the call for war reduced the town to the small settlement it is today.

After a meal & a couple of beers in the underground motel we retired to our “caves” for the night.

## Day 2

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### Meet the Flintstones!

When I woke up in my “dugout bedroom” I turned on the light to look at my watch as there are no windows you have no idea if it is morning or night. I got up & went up the stairs that lead to the top of the hill in which the motel is dug.

Outside at sunrise it was quiet cold, but the sunrise was more amazing than the sunset. Looking around through 360 degrees I could see nothing but flat open terrain that seemed to go on forever. I took photos but they don’t portray the feeling of isolation & the sheer expanse of the territory around you.

After bacon & eggs we went to meet “Mad Jock” I did feel a little apprehensive walking up to the door in the side of a hill. Before we got as far as the door it swung open & Jock stood there waving his arms shouting “come in, come in” there was no turning back now so in we went with the door closing behind us. I wondered how many tourists never came back out. Looking around there were caves (or dug outs as the locals call them) leading off from the main entrance an old bed in one of them was obviously where he slept it was unmade & the blankets looked as old as the rusty bed stead. Jock hadn’t stopped talking from the moment he had opened the door & was quite open about the fact that he was mad & that most people that had been here as long as he





had were also mad which didn't really surprise me. He did seem to be a gold mine of information. (Or is that Opal mine.) He informed us that he would give us a tour & there would be a charge of five dollars each, we all agreed that this seemed a reasonable price to see daylight again. He led us through the underground passages to different rooms; it really was an Aladdin's Cave with artifacts & memorabilia in every room. We say good bye to jock & head off to the pub to organize the aircraft fuel. The Pub sells beer & Avgas. The barman meets us at the airfield, we refuel & are soon on our way again.

The journey of discovery continues northwest into Queensland over the inhospitable wilderness of the Strzeleki Desert towards the dig tree at camp 65 where Burke & Wills perished.

***August 1860 Burke led the expedition from Melbourne with Wills as surveyor to explore the route north to the Gulf of Carpentaria for a telegraph line. Wright & Gray joined the crew at the Darling River & led them to Coopers Creek where they set up base camp.***

***With a two thousand pound reward on offer & other expeditions planned by Sturt & Stuart from Adelaide, Burke decided not to wait for additional supplies to arrive & headed off with Wills King & Gray. They reached the Gulf in February 1861 but the conditions of intense summer delayed their return to the base camp. The crew waiting at the camp had left the previous day leaving supplies buried near a tree beside the creek with "Dig" carved onto the tree, they never found the supplies.***

***Gray died from dysentery on the return from the Gulf Burke & Wills survived for two months at the site, King wandered off & was helped by Aboriginals he was found by a search party & returned to Melbourne.***



We pick out the occasional dirt track to confirm our heading & ground speed and sure enough we arrived smack bang over the strip within one min of the ETA. We land on the sand strip & meet "Bomber" the ranger he has a shelter that is full of photos & info about Burke & Wills. It is only about 50 meters to the dig tree on the banks of Cooper Creek. There is quiet a big flat area in front of the trees & it is not hard to imagine the base camp set up here all those years ago.



Back in the aircraft we are soon climbing out from the airstrip leaving the creek behind us I look out over the desert the views are simply amazing. If only Burke & Wills had one of these flying machines. We head for Tibooburra to refuel & then onto Broken Hill. Landing just before sunset we are soon in a cab heading into town to spend the night in Broken Hill.

## Day 3

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### Homeward bound!

From Broken Hill we fly to Mildura and refuel. It seems too close to home & our adventure is almost over so we decide to take the scenic route home & head south over the Grampians & down to Warrnambool. From there we fly low level along the Great ocean road around Cape Otway, Apollo bay, Lorne, Anglesea Ocean grove & back to Essendon via West Gate Bridge.



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