

Tamworth Holiday 2020 - Diana Pine

Tamworth and the surrounding areas were chosen early 2019 as our destination for this year's annual holiday as a result of the devastating drought this region is facing. Whilst still in drought the region was further devastated by fires that raged early this year. Once the fires were out and the area received some good rainfall we learnt that the locals call it "green rain." That is the grass in Tamworth and each town we visited is green, but the rain didn't fall in the catchment and the dam, which we visited, is at 14% capacity so restrictions remain at level 5 and the farmers and local businesses continue to do it tough.

Our 33 U3A members, of which 16 were new to our tours, headed out of Parramatta looking forward to enjoying the many experiences on offer over the week and supporting all local businesses and farmers as much as possible.

As we headed towards Tamworth we stopped at Muswellbrook for lunch at the Hunter Belle Cheese Factory. Before being served lunch the owner gave us a talk about how their business operates, explaining the processes in producing their amazing variety of cheeses and their milk. We were given a tasting sample of 2 of their cheeses and as a result many of us were able to purchase cheeses to our liking. After a scrumptious light lunch, we headed for our accommodation in Tamworth.

We stayed at the Redhill Motor Inn and found our rooms clean, comfortable and well serviced. The new managers, Karen and Paul were very warm, friendly, approachable and eager to ensure our stay was exceptional, which it was. They went above the norm to support everyone on the tour especially those that needed extras to make sure their stay was safe. The meals were of a very high standard with the chef providing a variety of choices over the week that were well-cooked and presented. The service staff were very friendly and carried out their duties professionally but always with a smile and willingness to please.

Tamworth has a lot to offer and our guided tour to start the first day gave us a great insight into the history of the town for example - Tamworth was the first town in NSW to get street lighting. Our guide could have talked all day but only had 3 hours. He continually provided us with amazing

tales and showed great pride for the progress made by the Council's injection of funds to help provide the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre (AELEC) at the edge of town. The area around this amazing construction has had many major sporting facilities developed with more being under construction. Once the tour finished we were given time to visit the Big Golden Guitar and the local information centre to which apart from gifts houses the Country Music Roll of Honour and memorabilia of the Golden Guitar winners since 1973. We then were treated to lunch at the Long Paddock Restaurant adjacent to the Big Golden Guitar which stands 12 metres high and was unveiled by Slim Dusty in 1988. We then headed to town where we could alight from the coach to explore the town including museums, art precincts and the incredible projects developed along the river levy area.

We travelled to Uralla on day 3 visiting the small family operated Sunyhill dairy goat farm where everyone without exception were enthralled with Richard's talk. We learnt so much about the animals themselves, the difficulties faced during the drought and the production of cheeses, milk and skin care products. One notable point made that was unknown to many of us was how personable goats are, it was amazing to see how each goat responded to Richard during his talk. After an opportunity to feed the goats we were able to sample the cheeses and milk the farm produces. Richard's partner, Corinne was also a wealth of knowledge as both owners made us feel very welcome. After purchasing some great products, we headed back to Uralla township for lunch at McCrossin's Mill.

Built in 1870 the Mill is a restored 3 storey flour mill which now houses a multi award winning museum and gallery. The talk provided whilst we ate a lovely light lunch not only provided us with the history of the area and the Mill but also the story of the "gentleman" bushranger, Captain Thunderbolt's death at the hands of Constable Alexander Walker. The mill is home to 9 paintings by artist Phillip Pomeroy depicting the chase and subsequent death of Thunderbolt. The museum is renowned for its empathetic, humorous and often bizarre exhibitions.

Day 4 proved to be very full with us visiting the First and Second Fleet memorial gardens in Wallabadah. The man behind this memorial, Ray Collins, was astounded that there was no memorial inscribed with the

names of all those who voyaged on the First Fleet. It became a passion of his to build such a memorial. On his travels through the country areas of NSW he approached 10 local councils over a twenty year period who declined to give him permission to build the memorial in case he died before it would be completed. Wallabadah council accepted his offer and provided the parcel of land just out of town beside the highway. Every ship of the first fleet has its own section with all names of the convicts, marines and seamen listed. The shade protection over the picnic tables has been done in a way to depict the sails of a ship. Another fascinating place to visit.

We then headed to Quirindi to visit one of the most incredible collections I have ever seen. A retired motor mechanic, Bob has spent over 30 years collecting memorabilia from the 40's and 50's and has set his displays up as they would have been seen in their time – the local store, pub, post office and railway station to name but a few areas in his immaculate large shed. This is one man's passion to preserve our history and so much Peter Brock memorabilia. A collector's heaven. So many memories so very much to see whilst chatting and listening to the fascinating information provided by Bob, his wife and sister. There is not a speck of dust to be seen anywhere and no, before you wonder, Bob looks after the shed and contents himself. His family including his son assist with the tour and cooking of an amazing BBQ lunch, enjoyed by all. A very hard place to leave and I'm sure if any of our group on tour are in the area again, they will visit the shed again.

We reluctantly left Bob and his family to travel onto the heritage listed Werris Creek Railway Station. Werris Creek is the first and last railway town in NSW and is located on a major railway junction. The Werris Creek railway station is the third largest in NSW. It houses the Werris Creek Rail Journeys Museum, which brings this town's railway past back to life.

The stunning displays are a credit to the tireless volunteers who made this museum happen. Constant upgrades and new displays take place regularly so return visits still provide additional information. The latest addition is a model railway showing Werris Creek in its railway heydays. The entry donations go towards upgrading and maintaining the museum.

The Australian Railway Monument commemorates railway men and women who have lost their lives in railway accidents since 1850. The

landscaped monument area features six three metre stainless steel sculptures of railway workers created by Australian Artist Dominique Sutton, an amphitheatre for public concerts and over 2,400 names on walls of remembrance.

Our final day in the Tamworth area saw us heading for Historic Nundle. We visited the Woollen Mill. The owner, Eric, gave us an impressive and informative talk about the history and running of the mill. Nundle Woollen Mill and its machines are very unique from a couple of different perspectives. Firstly, they are the last wool spinning mill of its kind still operating in Australia. Secondly, they don't know of another spinning mill in the world that is working in a commercial way with machines aged up to or exceeding 100 years old. Their oldest machine is a beautiful old carding line, manufactured around 1914, a spritely 106 years old. All their machines work just as well today as they did when they came off their production lines.

Prior to arriving at Nundle Woollen Mill, the fleece is shorn, sorted and classed in the shearing shed, and conveyed by truck to the major wool buying centres in Sydney and Melbourne. Following sale by auction (wool is still sold by the open cry auction system and under auctioneer's hammer), the wool is scoured or washed in Geelong to remove dirt and grease and transported by truck to Nundle. The Nundle process begins: There are 8 stages using different machines for each stage to turn the wool into a 50gm balls ready for sale to hand knitters. To learn more about each stage please visit the woollen mill's website to read the information about each stage and the machine used. We all enjoyed shopping for the varied products on sale. Also, on the website people can purchase their wool and other products.

We then had lunch at the Mount Misery Gold Mine Café before being able to stroll through the adjoining section of the old Mine. The Museum features a 150 metre underground mine tunnel packed with mining and gold rush memorabilia. The museum provided us with an authentic taste of the life and trials of the pioneers. A stroll around the town also allowed us the opportunity to see the charm of the main street and visit the stores to purchase local products, hence supporting the small community.

On Saturday we said goodbye to our hosts and Tamworth. Our journey home saw us venture into the Hunter Valley for lunch at Potters Brewery before rejoining the highway to head back to Parramatta.

Our Coach Driver, Peter, was very informative throughout the whole trip ensuring we were not only safely looked after but aware of the areas we were passing through. Peter also provided a new experience by having quizzes provided for us to complete during the day if we wanted.

Please see the photos to help your understanding of this report.

We will be heading to Wangaratta in 2021. The reason for choosing this tour is to support the local area of Wangaratta that was fire affected earlier this year. Please see the advertisement for the trip in 2020's Second Semester Talks Courses & Events Book. There is also the itinerary for the trip on this website to give members an idea of what we will be doing during our Wangaratta stay.

Stay safe and well during this trying time our country and the world is facing.

Diana Pine