

Murray River towns to offer authentic Australian experience

By BEN PISCIONERI

THE Murray River has the potential to provide the only all-encompassing Australian tourism experience according to an Adelaide man with a passion for the iconic river system.

Shane Strudwick was first introduced to Mildura Weekly readers in February this year after he started an online petition to raise awareness about the plight of the Murray River, attracting thousands of responses.

He has also created the Discover Murray Trail, which links towns and cities from three States along the length of the Murray.

Shane said his motivation was to help more people experience the beauty of the Murray River, and appreciate its value.

He said that despite its age and significance, the Murray River was still largely an untapped resource for tourism.

"Up until now there has really been a disjointed approach to tourism along the Murray River," Shane said.

"Each State concentrates on its own section of the Murray, independent of the other States."

Instead, Shane said the Murray had the potential to far surpass existing tourism attractions such as the Great Ocean Road in the eyes of national and international tourists.

"Towns up and down the river are helping each other and traditional borders are removed," he said.

"When you compare what the Murray has to offer compared to the Great Ocean Road for example, the Great Ocean Road appears one dimensional.

"For example the different towns and cities along the Discover Murray Trail feature everything from pioneering towns, cosmopolitan centres such as Mildura with fantastic food and wine, locations which offer unique flora and fauna, opportunities for canoe tours along the Murray and its backwaters, camping, houseboat holidays, it's all there on one trail."



• MAN ON A MISSION: Shane Strudwick is distributing thousands of Discover Murray leaflets in towns and cities along the length of the Murray River.

The Discover Murray Trail takes in 2530 kilometres of the Murray River, which it separates into five 'landscapes' – Murray Plains and Mouth, Golden Limestone Cliffs, Mallee and Steep Banks and Rivergums – representative of the regions it passes through.

"Each town along the Murray River can offer an entirely different experience, which is what tourists are after," Shane said.

"They're after an all-encompassing tourism experience." Shane said the initiative would encourage visitors to see more towns

along the Murray.

"Often tourists will visit a particular town that's on the Murray and then take off to other parts of the State," he said.

"If they can see that just 100 kilometres or so up the highway or the river they can experience a totally new attraction along the river, and they're made aware of it, we will see more people visiting towns along the Murray."

He said there was also the potential to link in with other established tourism destinations, such as the Great Ocean Road.

"Why not link the Murray River with the Great Ocean Road in one big tourist loop," Shane said.

"People can do the Discover Murray Trail and then continue on to do the Great Ocean Road experience."

Despite only being in its infancy, the initiative has triggered a positive response from tourism operators and the general tourism industry – recently being awarded a bronze medal at the South Australian Tourism Awards.

Shane is currently making his way through towns and cities along

the length of the Murray River, setting up Discover Murray displays at tourism centres along the way, including the Mildura Visitor Information Centre.

He also has plans for a Discover Murray passport, which would be stamped at each location along the trail.

"Each town or city would have its own unique stamp, and people could get their passport stamped at each location and it would be something for them to keep and remember from their journey, further adding to the experience," Shane said.

DEAKIN LUCKY LOT

This weeks winners are:
 • LOIS PATTERSON • JANICE TYNAN
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 Drawn By: DOREEN ADAMSON

204 Deakin Ave, Mildura
 Ph: 5021 2008
 Sunday - Friday 9am - 8pm
 Saturday 9am - 7.30pm

Wentworth Shire Council

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

An application has been received for approval of this Council to the following developments:-

"D.A. 08/045" PROPOSED STEEL SALES. LOTS 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590 DP 756961 (15-19) SILVER CITY HIGHWAY, BURONGA. FORMER SITE OF SUNRAYSIA BUS LINES.

The application and plans relating to this development may be inspected at the Shire Offices Wentworth between the hours of 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday and until 28 April 2008.

Any person, who feels that their land will be affected or who would like to make a submission regarding the above development, may lodge a written submission with the Wentworth Shire Council before the above date.

PETER KOZLOWSKI
 General Manager

A photo worth a thousand words...

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"I couldn't stand to hear the Last Post played," he said. "It upset me. It still makes me very sad. All those poor blokes we buried."

When he did join the marches, he never bothered to have his five medals mounted. He just pinned them individually on his suit jacket each time, in a manner befitting a humble private in the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion. They were simple campaign medals, but I recall proudly wearing them to primary school on AN-ZAC Day, as though each carried a hero's citation.

Not long ago I tracked down a copy of my father's battalion history, and was surprised to find a picture of him in it, taken in Syria. It was captioned, 'Damour - Privates O'Neill and Girdlestone, of D Company, carry kitchen gear forward.' They are carrying an assortment of utensils on a hospital stretcher. Both have cigarettes hanging out of their mouths. I asked if Private Girdlestone had survived the war.

"Yes. But he died a few years ago, I think."

The battalion history filled in many gaps in the knowledge I had of my father's experience. After fighting in Syria, the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion was returning to Australia when, with other units, they were off-loaded in Java to try to cut off the Japanese advance. Without support they had little hope, and within a very short time these weary veterans of the Syria campaign – where the battalion had suffered many casualties – were prisoners of war.

Six months later most of them were working on the Thai-Burma railway line under appalling conditions. Of the 865 members of his battalion who became prisoners of war, 258 died in captivity – 177 in the railway camps.

The battalion history finally gave me some insight into the conditions my father had endured, and led me to ask some factual questions: which camps had he been in, what parts of the line had he worked on? But even then I learnt little of his personal experience.

Shortly before my mother died she told me that my father, then in his 80s, had started having terrible nightmares about the camps. Since then I have been reluctant to ask more, reluctant to risk stirring up memories.

I also have another photo that I took three years ago. It shows my father talking to the Governor General, Major General Mike Jeffery, at the dedication of the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial in Ballarat.

I had taken the photo,

and then gone to get my father a cup of tea. Later I asked what he and Jeffery had talked about.

"He asked me what it had been like to be a POW," he said, "and I told him."

So, after all these years, he had been officially released from his silence. And I wasn't there to hear.

*** Danny O'Neill, Col. (Rtd), lives in Melbourne. His new book, Ancestral Streams, notes from the Murray Valley, includes aspects of soldier-settler history.**

Field days are on their way

ENTRIES are already flooding in for this year's Mildura Horticulture Field Days, which will be held at the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE campus on May 27/28.

Now in its 57th year, the event will showcase the latest in horticulture equipment, technology and practices, with more than 90 exhibitors expected to take part.

Organisers said water management was expected to be one of the hot topics at this year's event given the ongoing drought and low water allocations.

Entries for exhibitors close on Monday April 14, though some late entries will be taken.