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JUNE NEWSLETTER 2012

Dear Members,

A couple of months ago I was contacted by two of our members from the south coast of New South Wales to tell me that they were going to the centre of Australia to look and search for meteorites. I thought yippee our very own 'Meteorite Men' like those from America! I was asked if I knew where to source some magnets to use in the search for them and I told them that I had some old stereo speakers in which were some largish magnets which they could have.

I travelled to Nowra with the magnets in tow plus a digital camera to loan them as I wanted to get a story plus some photos of their adventure to share with you.

Just last week I got a phone call saying that the adventurers were back and that I needed to go down to see their great 'bounty'. I was told that the trip was a complete success and that they collected many good quality suiseki – BUT no meteorites! Well you can imagine the excitement that welled up in me especially knowing these guys who have been collecting good stones for many, many years, I just knew that I was in for something special and that they couldn't be wrong.

I arrived and I was amazed at what I saw. Firstly at the amount of stones they collected and secondly at the quality and patina of them. Where on earth did they pack them all into one four-wheel drive plus all of their camping equipment – it certainly was an engineering feat?? The variety was incredible from waxy orange stones to dense black stones very reminiscent of scholars' stones. They were also very resonant when tapped together.

In the collection there were also many picture and pattern stones and stones of every colour imaginable.

The most disturbing fact was how many good suiseki they had to leave behind because of the lack of space. Apparently these stones are just everywhere and easy to find and when you read Roger's story you will be just as envious as I was that I wasn't there too!

Enjoy!

Happy Hunting,
Brenda

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

'Regardless of a stone's origin, all stones have the power to arouse our imaginations, often to our surprise and delight.' - Kemin Hu

Ron and Roger's Suiseki Safari

Day 1 (29th May, 2012)

We departed Cambewarra at 0530, travelled via Goulburn, Bathurst, Orange, Parkes and Nyngan. 734kms - \$80 diesel.

Day 2

Departed Nyngan 0745. Large flocks of Apostle Birds were on the road soon after departure, then onto Burke (\$70 diesel) and then onto Charleville. 650kms - \$83 diesel.

Day 3

Departed Charleville 0800. (See photo below of driftwood found 100kms from Charleville). The 'Highway Hamburger' for the eagles and crows' dining included – 1 goat, 1 emu, 1 cow, 1 bearded dragon, 8 pigs and countless kangaroos. *(See how one is easily entertained over long distances?)*

- The cattle grids have started already and it was nice to pass at least 20 bearded dragons crossing the road at various times.
- The road from Quilby to Windorah has many kilometres of single lane (albeit sealed) road. The sudden end of dual highway to one lane is very dangerous. 470kms - \$80 diesel.
- At a rest area 150kms from Quilby (close to Coopers Creek) was a picnic shelter with a pitched metal roof and stuck to the underside of the roof were many birds' nests made from thousands of mud balls (see photo below) of different coloured mud collected from various creeks and river banks. An amazing construction method.
- So far lots of stones but no suiseki.



Day 4

Departed Windorah at 0730. 10 wild horses 10kms out and then about 60 Chicken Hawks on the road followed by 30 or so more. There were another 30 or so of these birds kilometres further on. We then sighted a flock of 20 Kestrels as we passed "Wade" Creek (my son's name).

- 265kms from Birdsville the gravel road started and we found our first suiseki – a shelter stone. Then we arrived at Birdsville at 1330. 383kms - \$74 diesel.
- Four star accommodation at Birdsville Pub. \$130 per unit with excellent dining.
- The airport is on the opposite corner to the pub with lots of tourists flying in to stay and take flights over Lake Eyre (\$600 per couple). So don't forget to book your accommodation. The Tourist Centre is a very good combo of museum and library.

Day 5

Departed Birdsville for Mungerannie Road House with eyes 'open and down' looking for you-know-what? 2 dingoes, 4 beautiful brolgas and 4 large geese sighted.

- 100kms from Birdsville we started to see billions of small, medium and large red and very dense bell-ringing stones so of course we had to stop to camp overnight. Found many suiseki. We were still 195kms from Mungerannie but we spent the morning still collecting suiseki. Departed at 1200 after 1 ½ days of collecting.
- I was sleeping in the Hilux and Ron was in his tent and at 0400am, I heard Ron exclaim, "Oh God, another one!" I assumed he was dreaming about finding another great suiseki, however, when I asked him in the morning, it turned out he had sighted another meteorite burning up on its way down to earth. We had sighted another one late in the previous afternoon.
- 195kms travelled.

Day 6

Departed for Mungerannie and stopped many times collecting great suiseki of all shapes and sizes – the Great Stoney Desert certainly lives up to its name. We also found a great number of small animal shaped stones in reds and browns.

**Ron and I are considering asking Suiseki Australia for a grant so we can both book in for trauma counselling due to the severe depression we suffered due to having to leave behind so many different sized suiseki due to the weight restrictions of the truck!!! [I for one would love to know where they hid the 'secret' stash! – Ed].*

Ron talked the Mungerannie publican into giving him this 40kg stone. Funny story – the publican told him it wasn't for sale but he told Ron if I say it twice you can have it. Ron didn't hesitate and as soon as the publican mentioned it twice, Ron of course picked it up in a flash and loaded it into his truck.

To get the size of it, that is a camera case behind it.



Day 7

Departed Mungerannie 0900 (From New South Wales to Queensland and now into South Australia). We are on the Birdsville Track going to Marree and Lyndhurst shopping for suiseki and being joined by a King Brown snake (see photo below) and finally arriving at Copley. 323kms - \$85diesel.

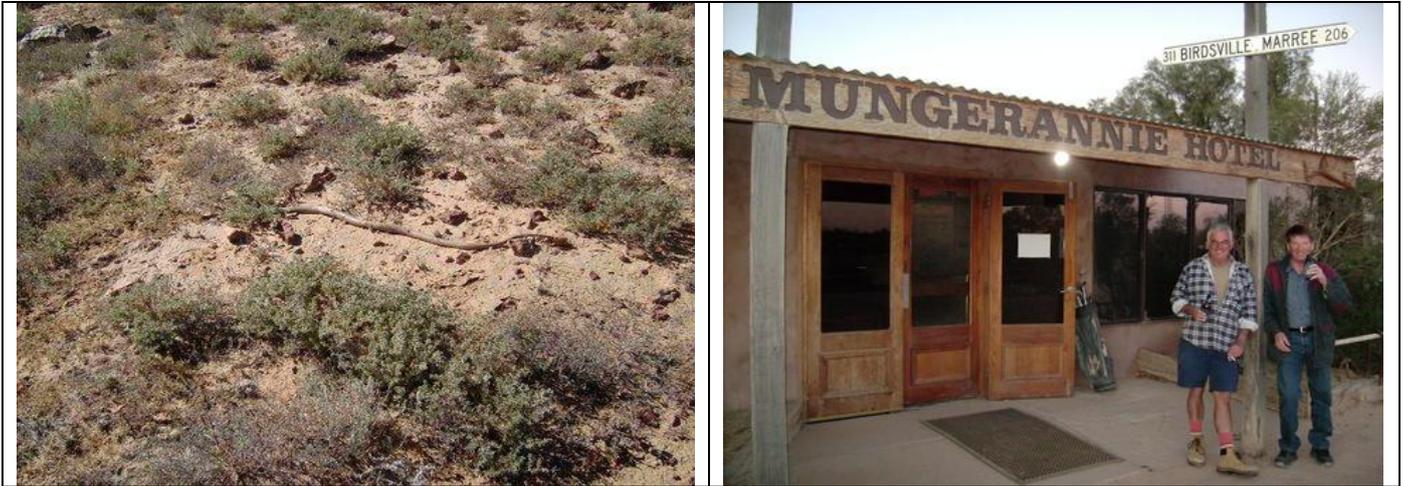
On the way to Copley we saw two more King Browns and took photos of sand hills on Birdsville Track and of Lake Gregory which had beautiful blue water.

*Meals

The best meals so far (1) Birdsville Pub – whole marinated and grilled chicken breast with vegetables, (2) rare rump steak (from Gawler, South Australia the publican told us) chips and salad at the Copley Pub.

***Accommodation**

Until Copley, accommodation was very scarce. In Charleville we were lucky to get the last two cabins in one of the caravan parks. Motels and hotels are booked out continually due to mining, energy and general reps. Good to book ahead is the rule. Caravan park cabins with ensuite on average are \$90 per night and without ensuite \$60-70. Pub accommodation is \$50 - \$70 on average.



Day 8

Rest day today at Copley included a trip to a riverbed, 5 minutes from Copley. We collected a plethora of accent 'water' like stones or novelty stones and some small suiseki. *(We set aside the accent stones for Brenda in our appreciation for all of her hard work.) – [thanks guys, Ed].* Only 26kms today.

See the photos below of very old trees with their roots exposed mainly from the floods and one tree with an 11 metre root exposed above ground. The riverbed reminded us somewhat of Nerriga. Lots of variety of stones.



Day 9

Today we headed to Leigh Creek (5kms from Copley) to do some shopping. Leigh Creek is typical of government built mining towns I have seen in Western Australia for nickel mining but in Leigh Creek it is for the coal mining industry. \$80 diesel.

- Leigh Creek – One day a desert the next day a town with all the amenities including a hospital, school, day care centre, clubs, golf course etc. Wives and children don't like the heat, so tend to depart quickly and the husbands work on a fly-in fly-out system, so there are not too many houses in use.
Now departing Copley for Oodnadatta at 0930.
- Constant roadwork due to the floods.

- The publican at Copley told us they had 10 inches of rain in 24 hours. Scary! We stopped at Marree for fuel (\$40) and bought onions we forgot to buy for the barbecue rump steak purchased at Leigh Creek.
- Along the way there are constant sightings of The Old Ghan Rail Line with the rails removed but metal bridges still in place in many areas.
- See photos of Lake Eyre south and photos of Twin Plateaus with water frontage approximately 50kms from William Creek. Then onwards to our campsite 60kms further and photos of the sunset at the campsite. 369kms travelled today.
- The campsite is adjacent to a very good suiseki collecting area, and many very good suiseki were left behind due to the weight restrictions.



Day 10

Departed campsite at 0830 and headed to Oodnadatta. Some blackish stones found about 140kms from Oodna'. Arrived at Oodna' at 1200 with several stops along the way 171kms - \$65 diesel.

*Our intention was to push on from Oodnadatta to Coober Pedy and The Moon Plains, however having collected such good quality suiseki along the Birdsville Track we decided to backtrack to Marree and cut across to 'The Track' and camp for some days, so we stayed overnight in Oodnadatta, which proudly claims to be the hottest and driest place in Australia. The only place where you can't drink the tap water – tank or bottled water only.

Day 11

Departed Oodna' at 0615, diesel at \$2.29 per litre and cost us \$105 to fill up. We also topped up back at Mungernannie for \$50 more and travelled 735kms back to our campsite.

Barbecue snags (sausages) for dinner – Ron cooked, I made suggestions!! Still perfect weather.

Day 12

Intend to stay for some days which we did and found many (heaps, heaps) of suiseki. We held adjudication sessions around a few (?) beers and dinner and discarding many good quality suiseki. (See photos).



Someone find that tree!!
Follow that man! - Ed.

These discarded suiseki caused 'adjudication blues sessions' (cry, cry) hence the need for trauma counselling sessions!

Subsequently we are now restricted to collecting only small and some medium stones due to the weight and luckily our campsite area provides many small animal, bird, fish, turtle, mouse etc. stones. Ron found a great hippopotamus stone and is presently searching for his 'headless woman' stone which is somehow lost. Ron also found a great 'Pro Hart' stone and I found an FA18 fighter plane stone.

For this safari, Ron invested in a 45Lt "Companion" fridge/freezer from BBQ's Galore. Waco or Inglis fridges are also available from BCF Stores. The fridge got airborne many times due to the cattle grids but never stopped working. Having had use of this fridge (connected to the truck battery) with a spare battery in tow, we enjoyed supplies of frozen foods, chilled food and very cold beer in camp – MAGIC!! Suggest that any camping period over 4 days, that campers forget the ice and eskies and buy a fridge/freezer.

Wonderful wildlife on "The Track" (Birdsville, that is), saw flocks of budgerigars and some of the smallest birds (??) I have ever seen. Also recalling a flock of over 300 Chicken Hawks flying over Mungerannie Roadhouse.

We came across our best and most unusual suiseki on the Birdsville Track which we named "Scroll Stones", for the want of a better name. They are definitely the best we have ever found. They are dense red stones in varying shapes and sizes with unusual scroll-like raised lines around and partly over the stones.

There were beautiful sunsets where we were camped and it was near the Clifton Downs Cattle Station area which was only 2kms from our campsite, and they were breathtaking. The station covers an area of 7,500 square kilometres and run 12,000 head of cattle at any one time. A mail plane drops in on their private air strip once a week. The cattle musters are conducted with the help of four wheel drives, motorbikes, horses and single seat mini helicopters with the pilot exposed to the elements.

Day 13

Off at 0700 from camp and travelled 10kms to a great suiseki area we spotted previously. Another good day of small animal stones collected.

We are running low on water, so will de-camp tomorrow and head back to Copley. Total distance travelled today and yesterday 116kms for 'eyes down and looking' and including for King Browns!!

Day 14

Final departure from Birdsville Track at 0725.

Campsite discussion the previous night concluded with us agreeing that quality suiseki in Australia are hard to find, e.g. from Carnarvon and south to Albany in Western Australia, I only found about 2. From Carnarvon north there are good stones. The first 3 days of our trip produced little, as did the last 3 from Menindee to Cambewarra.

Good policy to stop and pull over when the double and treble bogie cattle trains are oncoming – smashed headlights (we received two), our windscreen is okay, but the danger is also from the blinding dust from the road trains lasting, depending on the wind speed and direction. \$50 to fill up at Mungerannie and arrived back at Copley at 1600 – 439kms today.

Booked cabins for two nights to shower and shave – how good that was!!

Day 15

Another rest day. Filled up at Leigh Creek for \$107 and spent a few hours back at the river bed taking it easy and looking around the area – 85kms today.

Day 16

Departed Copley for Cameron's Corner – lots of emus today and of course lots of cattle grids as usual. About 5% are good, 45% are average, 35% poor and 15% want to get you airborne!!

Weather still perfect. The road from Lyndhurst to where we turned off to head towards Innamincka on the Strzelecki (pronounced Strezlekki) Track was the first really bad gravel road we experienced. Most gravel roads have been good to average, considering the flood damage. It is understood that the damage of the floods is estimated to be in excess of \$1 billion dollars.

Arrived at Cameron's Corner at 1700. This place is named due to it being on the 'corner' of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia (see photos). Today 485kms - \$120 diesel.



Day 17

Heading for Broken Hill and arrived at 1500. 472kms - \$95 diesel.

Rear tyres somewhat shredded.

Stayed at Broken Hill's oldest hotel (see photos). The ceiling height was at least 6 ½ metres (20 feet) and you would definitely need to be an aerialist to change the smoke detector batteries!



Day 18

Visited "Mad Max" territory (see photos) i.e. Silverton.

Only 1 suiseki on return to Broken Hill as all the other stones were very sharp edged.

Photos of Miner's Memorial Building built on an old mining site. 60kms today.

Today we came across some strange place names e.g. Umberumberka.



Day 19

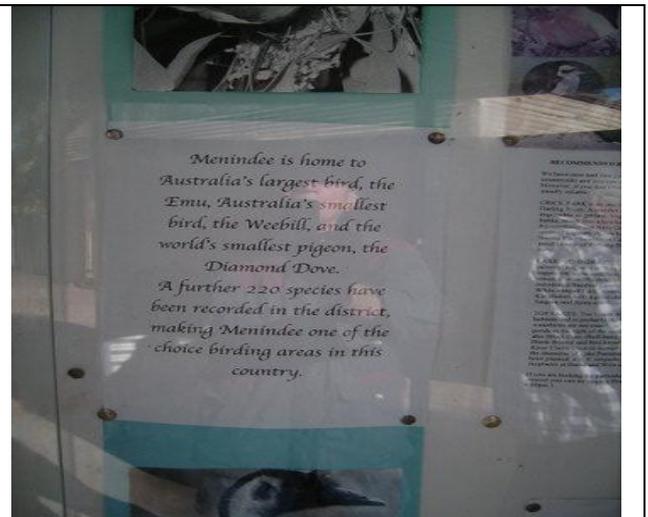
Departed Broken Hill at 0730 for Menindee (98kms) and stopped for breakfast.

Fortunately on the way to Mildura, Ron was speaking to a local after breakfast and he suggested we check for flooded road closures. It turned out he saved us 200 plus kilometres as the way we were heading was flooded. So we diverted via Sawyer's Creek and Pooncarie. The Darling River next to Pooncarie was chock-a-block full. So now onwards to Wentworth.

See photos of wonderful Birdseye Mallee tree stumps between Pooncarie and Sawyer's Creek. This timber is so beautiful and ideal for suiseki display stands/daizas. Also great for pedestal stands for burl-slab tables.

Arrived at Mildura (one of my favourite towns) at 1430. 485kms - \$83 diesel.

(Wonderful steak at Mildura RSL Club as usual).



Day 20

Depart Mildura 0800.

All rivers i.e. Murray, Murrumbidgee and Darling are full-full-full. Very good news!

Between Balranald and Hay there are massive cotton crops on both sides of the road. They also continue from Hay to Neranderah. 637kms today - \$50 diesel.

Even though only hours from home we have decided to stay overnight in Gundagai. Broken headlights – no night driving. No suiseki today.

Day 21

Shock to the system!! Ice on the windscreen of the Hilux. Depart 0715.

We highly recommend the Gundagai Motel and Gundagai Services Club for accommodation and meals.

The Services Club Restaurant produced the best Asian meal I have ever eaten in Australia.

Final fuel stop at Exeter - \$60.

The final 299kms and arriving back home at Cambewarra at 1100.

IN CONCLUSION

*We travelled a total of 7,263kms and we each pooled \$2000 for expenses. This amount proved accurate \$1200-1300 spent on fuel and \$2700 on accommodation and meals.

*We feel that on this trip we have collected the most unique stones we have ever seen or found (including 40 years of searching various parts of Australia and closer to home at Nerriga).

*We are already saving for our next Birdsville Track safari.

Eyes down and looking!

Ron and Roger

P.S. Many extra thanks to my best mate Ron who planned and navigated our safari – Roger.

[Editor's final word – I was lucky to have received from Roger nearly 400 beautiful photos of stones and they will be shown to you over the next few newsletters. Very exciting!!]

This year the Wood and Working with Wood Show is at a new venue on the 27th – 29th July, 2012 at The Dome, Corner Showground Road and Murray Rose Avenue, Sydney Olympic Park, Homebush. If you love working with wood and want to see what is new in the tool department – this is a must. Also there will be fine arts to see and buy made from beautiful timbers that will astound you.

George and Johns 'Timely Timber & Tool Tips'

June, 2012

Hello 'Rock Hounds'

Well, here we are almost at the middle of the year and what have you got to show for it?

The weather hasn't been all that good for stone collecting field trips, but maybe things will improve in the latter part of 2012.

Since our last newsletter, we've visited Melbourne for the annual AABC convention, some very nice bonsai on display and a great presentation from 'Bonsai Boon' Manakitivipart, BUT WHERE WERE THE SUISEKI?? I know that they have some great suiseki in the southern region but unfortunately none were on display this time, may have been a space problem? Hopefully, better things to come.

We also attended another great weekend at 'Bonsai by the Harbour'. This annual event is great to not only see a wide range of bonsai related demos, but also catch up with likeminded people about happenings in the local Suiseki scene.

This month, a couple of tips for all the carvers out there. The first is from Mick Balzary, member of Canberra Bonsai Society.

This is a simple way to make a manual sander for smoothing flat areas. Mick was a boat builder (among many other pursuits) and his '1/3rd Sheet Sander' is easy to make and works very efficiently.

You can use any timber offcut as long as it is 'true' i.e. not warped; a piece of pine, MDF or particle board would do the job.

You need 1 piece about 180mm long x 90mm wide x 12 – 20 mm thick for the base and another piece of the same thickness, 180 mm long x 25 mm wide, also 4 drawing or upholstery pins.

Cut 2 pieces about 30mm long from the narrow piece of timber and use these as spacers for the remaining short piece, this forms the handle. Attach the handle to the centre of the base with glue and a wood screw and you have a 1/3rd sheet sander. Cut a standard sheet of sandpaper into 3 equal sections

across the width and secure 1 piece to the bottom of the sander by using the drawing pins on either end.



This size works well for smoothing larger surfaces such as a timber slice or table top. It could be adapted for daiza work simply by reducing the measurements.

Second tip is for a way of speeding up the varnish drying times in this cold damp weather. If you are using enamel type finishes, whether spraying or brushing, you'll know that it takes forever for the 'paint to dry'. This can be annoying when you have a few coats to apply and a limited amount of time. Most finishes rely on evaporation of the solvents to dry. When the atmosphere is moist and cold, the drying process slows down. A simple way to overcome this is to apply some form of heat to the wet paint. By using a suspended light over the work, you can speed up the drying process.

You need to use a light globe that generates heat, so the new energy saving fluoro and halogen globes are not good. I use a portable floodlight that takes a 150w tungsten globe. These are available from most hardware and variety shops and come with or without cords and plugs (you'll need one with a cord and plug unless you have access to a licensed electrician who isn't going to plunder your retirement fund to pay for the job).

My light is screwed to a piece of timber about 10cm wide and 60cm long. I suspend this over the work by using a couple of sawhorses, but you can use anything as long as it's stable. Turn the light on and place your hand just above the work, it should feel warm but not hot. If the heat on your hand is uncomfortable, it's too close and you need to raise the light. Try it at 30 – 40cms away and adjust it from there, the height of the light will depend on the power of the globe. This method works well and you can make up a special drying cabinet if you wish. Don't be tempted into using a hair dryer or fan heater, these are usually too hot and stir up dust which can settle on the work and undo all your efforts.

That's it for now, so long till next time,
G&J

NEXT MEETING

This months' meeting will be on the 20th June starting at 7.30pm at the Don Moore Community Centre, North Rocks Road, North Rocks.

Our theme this month will be the fabulous stones to show you that I was given from Ron and Roger. Hope you will be there for this very exciting 'find' from our intrepid explorers? If you have any friends who collect stones bring them along as a visitor to help promote the love of stones.

See you all then.