



Daily Matters

with Jason Shields

The magic of Mungo

A FEW weeks ago I confessed in this column that I had never heard of Mungo Man or the Mungo National Park before I moved up here.

It wasn't as if I had my head buried in the sand, it's just I hadn't been taught about Mungo Man in school, and hadn't heard that the park itself was a tourist attraction worth visiting.

But I was determined to learn more, particularly as this newspaper will be covering a significant historical event later this year when the remains of Mungo Man are returned from Canberra's National Museum.

After reading the column, a local tour operator contacted me and invited *Sunraysia Daily* along for a first-hand look at what too many of us have been missing out on.

This is where I give Larry Cowley from Hangar 51 Air Tours a free plug for the free ride, mainly because he never asked for one.

Larry's sole purpose was to help raise awareness of what there is to do and see at Mungo.

As he explained, a lot of people, including locals, know that Mungo is the place where the bones of a 42,000-year-old Aboriginal man were discovered, but little else.

So, without trying to sound too much like an episode of *Getaway*, let me fill you in on why this trip into the middle of nowhere is worth taking.

Personally, I enjoy being in a place that transports you back in time.

And Mungo does exactly that. It's Sovereign Hill in the desert, although none of it is manufactured and there aren't crowds of people lining up for boiled lollies. In terms of Australian history lessons, this is the real deal.

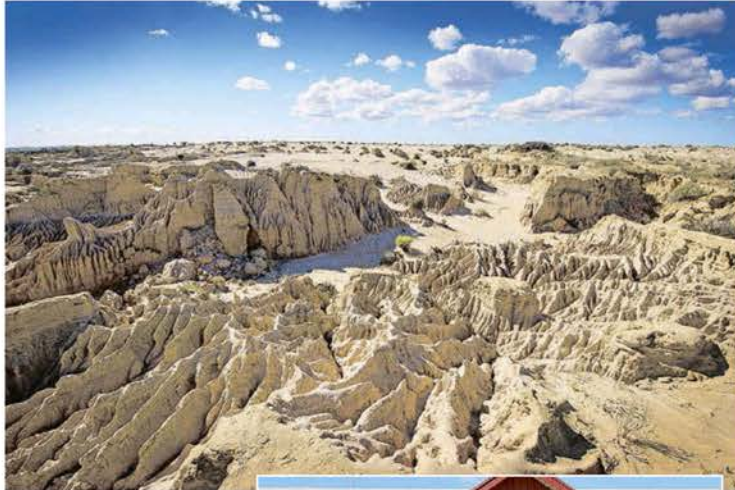
We flew in on a typically crisp, clear Sunraysia morning and landed at Mungo Lodge, which has accommodation, a restaurant and bar with a large open fire and views of the unique surrounds (sorry that does sound like *Getaway*!).

The highlight of the national park is undoubtedly the stunning lunette sand dunes that would provide any amateur or professional photographer with endless inspiration.

It was on these vast dunes that Mungo Man and the cremated remains of Mungo Lady were discovered about 50 metres apart.

This year Mungo Man will be returned home, with details of the celebration and his final resting place still to be determined.

There is a push to have him buried in secret near where he was first discovered, something I hadn't previously considered given his



tourism marketability. However, when the reasons were explained to us by a lady who understands the land and spirituality of her people, it made perfect sense.

As we had a tour guide with us, we were able to walk on the lunette, which is made up of layers of sand and clay that have been blown up from the adjacent lakebed. For those without a guide, walking on the lunette is out of bounds, but there are lookouts and viewing platforms to enjoy the incredible landscape.

It's important to respect those rules as the lunette is a living museum, preserving countless snapshots of indigenous life dating back about 50,000 years. It needs to be respected and protected.

But the fascinating history within the park isn't confined to the lunette and what went on tens of thousands of years ago.

There are also a couple of old sheep shearing stations set up in the 1920s that are well worth a look.

How and why any family would want to set up their operation in this unforgiving country is anyone's guess, but they did, and they made it work.

One station was shearing up to 50,000 sheep a year in its prime and continued operating until the late 1970s. The amazing hand-crafted buildings using age-old techniques still stand like works of art.

Unfortunately, we only had a morning up there, because the idea



Pictures: Carmel Zaccone

TOP: The stunning lunette sand dunes, formed over thousands of years. ABOVE: Mungo Lodge offers accommodation, food and a refreshing drink.

of exploring more and then kicking back with a few relaxing drinks in the afternoon at the Mungo Lodge did appeal.

Tourism isn't all about beaches and swim-up bars. It's why people the world over flock to ancient ruins or medieval cathedrals and castles.

History, in all its forms, fascinates people, certainly me, and opens up our imagination.

I found myself standing on those extraordinary dunes and

looking over the vast lakebed, which dried up 17,000-odd years ago.

I pictured Mungo Man sitting by his campfire with his family and his mates, soaking in those magnificent lakeside views. The big guy, who stood 196cm tall, was relaxing after a day hunting bush tucker on lands abundant with life. He was happy.

Yep, I reckon Mungo Man will be very much looking forward to coming home.

How we saw the week



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