
RGSSA VISIT -GREAT LAKE EYRE FILL-2026

Special Tour- October 15-19

The Royal Geographical Society of South Australia has had a long and ongoing connection to Lake Eyre, Australia's largest salt lake and the terminus of one of the world's great inland Desert River systems.

To commemorate the two past great fill events in the last 75 years the Society is planning a special five-day trip to Lake Eyre and the Outback featuring Andamooka and Coober Pedy, two of Australia's pre-eminent Opal mining centres as well as the history of early space exploration at the Woomera Rocket Range Heritage Centre.

Kati Thanda Lake Eyre, Australia's lowest point at 15 meters below sea level, is the drainage point for the desert rivers flowing inland in the 1 million square mile Lake Eyre Basin. Following record inland rains in the past two years, flows in the main tributaries, the Cooper and Georgina/Diamantina rivers and exceptional rainfall over Central Australia are nearing a mega fill of Lake Eyre, as in 1974 and 1949-50. The RGSA through its long-term president and later patron C. Warren Bonython organized two scientific expeditions to observe these great fills. Monographs were published on both events, and Warren became one of the world's authorities on this great salt lake. Other adventurers such as Rex Ellis conducted the first boating expeditions down the Warburton Creek in 1974 and all subsequent years that the river ran, Bob Mossel, photographer and remote bush pilot flew extensively over the lake and landed on untold claypans. In 1974 accompanied by his later wife, Denise, became stranded attempting to cross the lake. Both wrote about their experiences and much of their material is held in the RGSSA library.

To experience this rare fill of Kati Thanda Lake Eyre and continue the RGSSA tradition of involvement with this iconic part of our Outback, we are conducting a special five-day tour to Kati Thanda Lake Eyre. This will incorporate visiting the shores of the southern lake and following the Oodnadatta Track to William Creek the epicenter of Kati Thanda scenic flights. There will be the opportunity for a variety of scenic flights with Wrights Air. Much of our journey will take us through some of the quintessential South Australian Outback in full on Boom mode. Special behind the scenes inputs from local residents and expert interpretive guiding will be a core part of this tour with expert driver Outback Tour operator Peter Crettenden driving the coach teaming up with Tour Director/ Guide Joc Schmiechen to again fill in the details on our journey. One of the highlights will be an afternoon with Coober Pedy Aboriginal elder George Cooley, now a highly recognized and awarded artist and one of the driving forces behind the Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal Way Map. We will also highlight excerpts from the past fills C. Warren Bonython, Rex Ellis and Bob Mossel's associations with the great fills of Kati Thanda.

The Journey at a Glance – Thursday October 15 – Monday October 19

Day 1: Adelaide - Roxby Downs

Road trip on Highway 1 to Port Augusta head of St Vincent Gulf. Lunch Wadlata Outback Centre. Then the Stuart Highway to Pimba and then the Andamooka Track now Roxby Downs Road. Overnight Roxby Downs Tavern. Nearby Olympic Dam is the head complex of BHP Billiton's Uranium, Gold and Copper mine. Possible after dinner talk and excursion to the Arid Recovery Centre featuring some of the earliest effort to preserve some of our most threatened wildlife in their natural habitats.

Day 2: Roxby Downs – Andamooka – Borefield Road – Lake Eyre South-Mound Springs – William Creek

In the morning we will visit nearby Andamooka for a local insight into Opal Mining and its history. After morning smoko we follow the Borefield Track created to service the Olympic Dam mine to the Oodnadatta Track. This was the essence of a major Aboriginal trade routes to the north following the mound spring, fed by the underlying great Artesian Basin. This was where in 18?? John McDouall Stuart managed to thread his way through explorer Edward John Eyres seemingly impenetrable salt lake horseshoe barrier to successfully

Day 3: William Creek – Coober Pedy

transect the continent This paved the way for Charels Todd's epic Overland Telegraph soon after, the early Afghan Camel trains, followed by the Great Northern Railway (The Gahn). To this day it is one of Australia's iconic outback travelling routes. We visit several of the mound springs and the early railway history at Coward Springs to finish in William Creek and spend the night with dinner in the William Creek Pub.

Early morning scenic flights with a variety of options over Kati Thanda Lake Eyre. The Anna Creek Station Painted Hills is also an option for those seeking something different and exclusive to Wrights Air. These highly mineralized and eroded breakaway landforms. Once part of an ancient seabed is considered the most spectacular examples of their kind. We will then make a short journey through Anna Creek Station considered Australia's largest cattle property equivalent to Belgium???. After lunch in Coober Pedy, we will meet up with Aboriginal Artist and local elder, George Cooley, to view some of his art and hear some of the Aboriginal story of this other major Opal center. Later we will visit

the Old Timers Mine for a direct insight into the mining techniques, history and lifestyle of the early mining pioneers. Overnight in Coober Pedy.

Day 4: Coober Pedy – Woomera – Port Augusta.

Today we head south along the Stuart Highway to Woomera the Centre of Australia's pioneering involvement in Outer Space and still a key factor in our modern defense industry. We will have lunch here and visit the Woomera Heritage Centre. That afternoon we will arrive in Port Augusta for our overnight stop.

Day 5: Port Augusta – Arid Lands Botanic Garden- South Flinders Ranges – Adelaide.

On our final day we will have morning tea and an early visit to the Arid Lands Botanic Garden then head south along the Eastern side of the Flinders Ranges via Wilmington, Melrose. ----- the mid north through the Clare Valley wine region back to Adelaide.

