

## **Appendix H**

Interviews with Tourist Information Centres and Tour Operators

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### Introduction

Analysis of the current tourism and interpretive facilities and programs has included interviews with staff of tourist information centres in the region and accredited tour operators who take visitors to Mungo.

### Tourist Information Centres

#### Broken Hill Tourist Centre

E-mail: [tourist@pcpro.net.au](mailto:tourist@pcpro.net.au)

Dinitee Haskard, Tourism Service Manager advised that there is no breakdown of Mungo visits to and from Broken Hill but there are figures for visitors travelling to Broken Hill from Victoria by road. A recordable percentage of visitors arrive by 4WD vehicle, having come up the river road via Pooncarie. She mentioned the Great Murray Outback Tourist Trail. She referred to the Sturt NP Visitor Study and work on Mutawintji, the first NPWS area handed back to the Aboriginal

#### Balranald Tourist Information Centre

Ben Scott, Tourism and Economic Development Officer

Phone: 03 5020 1599

Rhiannon Anderson advised (19 February 2002) that Mungo is the major tourist drawcard for Balranald. The Shire Council maintains the road west from Balranald to Mungo. People who sign their visitors book usually don't indicate whether or not they're going to Mungo, but it is assumed that many of them do so.

#### Wentworth Tourist Information Centre

Phone: 03 5027 3624

Carmel Chapman advised that in January 2002 they had 990 visitors to the Centre (up 300 on January 2001), of whom 74 were international tourists, from 21 different countries. These overseas visitors all asked about Mungo NP. They get lots of backpackers. Many of their visitors have done the Great Ocean Road, then try the Outback. They ask for information packages and are given the Mungo NP Info Sheet and the Willandra Lakes sheet. The Centre gets great feedback about Harry Nanya Tours which operate out of Wentworth. This company has won a major NSW tourism award and last year shared the gold Award for tourism in Sunraysia with Stefano de Pieri. The route from

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Wentworth to Mungo is good, with 88 km of bitumen and 55 km of gravel. Mungo was closed by rain for two days in January 2002.

**Shear Outback (Australian Shearers Hall of Fame Inc) Hay, Australia**

This new attraction at Hay, to the east of Balranald, is described on their website as “a monument to contemplate, celebrate and honour shearers and shearing. The aims and objectives of this integral exhibition space are:

- to introduce visitors to the overriding theme of SHEAR OUTBACK.
- create a place that records and honours the contribution of shearers to our nation and its history.
- nominate and tell stories of individuals who have made singular contributions to shearing.
- provide shearers and their families with a permanent place to record their personal contribution to an itinerant industry.”

A group of five linked spaces comprises The Shearers’ Hall of Fame, The Exhibition, The outside, the Murray Downs shearing shed (a relocated “artefact”, and The archive, all complemented by the website, which will provide access to the collection through the Museums on Line program, access to the Shear People Database and educational information to school students and downloadable educational kits.

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## **Accredited Tour Operators**

### **Junction Tours – Tom Evans**

Bookings: Phone: 03 5021 4424 (Visitors Centre, Mildura), 03 5027 4309 (Tom Evans)

Mobile: 0408 596 438 Fax: 03 5027 4884

E-mail: tom@ruralnet.net.au

Tom Evans has been taking groups to Mungo since the early 1970s, when it was still a working sheep station. In 2001 he estimates he took 200 visitors to Mungo whereas previously he used to take a 1000 a year. Last year he averaged 1 day per week at Mungo, down from 3 days previously. He is an accredited tour operator and fills out monthly returns for NPWS and forms to let them know which parts of the Park he uses. He still takes small groups of 5 or 6 to the Grand Canyon. NPWS staff leave him pretty much alone. He was critical of some other operators, including one previous operator, who he claimed allowed damage to Park areas. He stated that a considerable amount of material has been broken or damaged. He mentioned the example of the damage to the classing table in the woolshed at Mungo. In his opinion, visitors should not be allowed onto the Walls of China, unless they are on a guided tour.

Tom's regulars include one family in which three successive generations have visited Mungo with him. He has taken a group from the TV lifestyle program Getaway to Mungo, accompanied by two rangers. He considers that there should be a full-time ranger at Mungo, especially for the period April to September. He believes many interstate parks of comparable size and significance have full time rangers. He believes the 70 kilometres long circular drive should not be available for visitors because of the risk of them causing damage to significant sites –“out of sight, out of mind!”

Tom Evans has had good responses to his advertisements. Recently he has advertised in publications aimed at senior citizens in Sydney, Wagga Wagga and Tasmania. He leaves brochures at motels and caravan parks but finds the compendium guides at motels a waste of time. A high percentage of his business comes by word of mouth. He attracts quite a few German and French tourists but the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have caused a big drop in visits, particularly from Germany and Switzerland.

The interpretive media are generally OK. He is concerned that one of the audio tapes in the Visitor Centre gives visitors the false impression that wool was transported directly from Mungo by paddle steamer. He argued that interpretive displays “should be like a woman's skirt – long enough to cover the main points but not so long that they're boring”. Stories in the Visitor Centre should be directly relevant to Mungo. He was critical of the use of didgeridoo music in the Centre.

Tom Evans thought the levy of \$3.30 per tour customer to be acceptable, provided the funds raised goes back to Mungo, not into consolidated revenue. He charges \$70 and \$74 including morning tea

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and lunch. A typical tour will start with morning tea at the Mungo lookout, followed by a visit to the Walls of China (Grand Canyon if group small enough), then the woolshed, lunch at the picnic area, then the Visitor Centre. He complements the interpretive displays with his own commentary. He describes vegetation both on the way to Mungo and at the Park.

He has found sunset tours to be too unpredictable – it is often cloudy and the moon only comes up at the right time and place about twice a year!

**Mallee Outback Experiences – Shaun and Lee Rayner**

Bookings: Phone: 03 5021 4424 (Visitors Centre, Mildura), 03 5024 6007 (Shaun Rayner)

Mobile: 0418 521 003 (best times Mon & Fri) Fax: 03 5024 6007

The Rayners operate their business from home and they have recently moved house, with a new phone number. The number shown in the NPWS Mungo NP Information Sheet is their old number. Fortunately, the current occupant of their old premises passes on their new number to callers, however NPWS has not put the new number on their info sheets, in spite of requests to do so.

Mallee Outback Experiences receive a lot of their customers through Lonely Planet. They place pamphlets in caravan parks and motels and have recently advertised in Retirement News, covering five newspapers in NSW. An ad in *The Apexian* attracted many Apex members, as individuals, rather than in groups. Most of their customers arrive by car and come as individuals or family groups.

Shaun Rayner takes small groups to Mungo by minibus. Numbers average 80-100 per month, with an estimated 10-15% being international. They keep records but had not analysed them at the time of our enquiry. Some figures available are as follows:

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of visitors</b>
April 2001	140 (includes Easter Saturday and Monday)
September 2001	Visits cancelled because access to Park affected by rain
October 2001	Approx. 70
November 2001	60
December 2001	128
January 2002	17
February 2002	20 (all on 21 February) up to 22 February. Usually quiet this month because it is hot and school holidays have finished

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The Rayners take daytime tours all year, and additional sunset tours in summer. Daytime tours depart at 8.30 am and return at 5.30 pm. Sunset tours depart at 2.00 pm and return at 11.30 pm. A normal tour starts at the Lake lookout, then proceeds to the Visitor Centre, the Woolshed and finally, the Walls of China, but the order may vary depending on the weather. Shaun Rayner sometimes takes small groups to the Grand Canyon. He is concerned that if he finds archaeological material and leaves it in situ for later interpretation, it will often be stolen and unavailable on his next visit. Lee Rayner also cited an instance of a visitor taking a bag of sand from the Walls.

Mallee Outback Experiences was already accredited with NPWS when the Rayners took over the business, but they have since been interviewed by a Service officer, possibly from Head Office and have had to complete an ecotourism questionnaire, answering questions about how their tours are conducted, how they interpret sites, etc. They have been required to pay a \$110 fee to continue accreditation.

Lee Rayner advised that NPWS officers have not complained about their operation and regularly check on their visitor numbers. They check with Warren for weather updates. They consider that the \$3.30 per head levied by NPWS on tour patrons is excessive, particularly when compared with the equivalent \$1.10 charged by Parks Victoria. They have not increased their rates since taking over the business but are now considering that they will have to. Visitors are asked to sign a visitors book during afternoon tea, at the end of their trip. Feedback to date has been overwhelmingly positive.

### **Harry Nanya Tours (pronounced 'Nunya')**

Bookings: Phone: 03 5021 4424, 03 5027 2076 (Harry Nanya Tours) Fax: 03 5027 2179

Kerry Ziernicki advised that Harry Nanya Tours took 5,070 visitors to Mungo during 2001. This figure does not include their provision of guides for coach tours, which are each counted as 1 for statistical purposes. Before September 11, 2001, at least 78% of their visitors were international tourists. This dropped to 1% after September 11 and has slowly climbed back, to 40% at present (21 February 2001). Domestic tourists made up much of the shortfall. Each visitor is asked to complete a survey sheet and the data from these is used to direct the company's marketing.

Bookings are mainly made through the Mildura Visitors Centre, but they get many recommendations from motels and via the Internet. They conduct lots of "famils" for industry reps, place ads in local tourism magazines and with Tourism NSW and run ad campaigns on local TV, aimed at motellers and tourists. They leave their brochures in all relevant sites including caravan parks but have found that advertising in motel compendia is not cost-effective. Most of their tourists arrive by car and most will have decided to visit Mungo before their arrival, although they leave the actual booking until they are in Mildura.

Harry Nanya Tours run daytime and sunset tours, the latter mainly in hotter weather during daylight saving. All tours go via their retail outlet where visitors can purchase Aboriginal craft and souvenirs.

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Daytime tours leave at 9.00 am, go to the shop at 9.45 am, then on to Mungo, returning at 4.30 pm. Sunset tours depart at 3.00 pm and return at 10.30 pm. They charge \$60 per person with \$52 concession and \$132 for a family with up to 5 children under 12. During holidays, particularly at Christmas and Easter, there is an approx. 50:50 split between adults and children.

Some teenagers find the Mungo experience boring, preferring to stay behind at their motel to use the swimming pool or view in-house movies. Harry Nanya Tours have tried to provide lots of activities for kids on their tours but some are used to more entertainment.

NPWS monitors Harry Nanya Tours operations at the Mungo Visitors Centre and complains if tour guides enter the shearers' quarters or kitchen block. Harry Nanya Tours were asked to provide camping equipment and guides for the presenters of the Nine Network's Today program to do a feature on Mungo. Harry Nanya Tours referred the request to NPWS but claim that the response was too slow, with the result that Today went on a houseboat cruise on the Murray out of Renmark instead. Co-host Tracy Grimshaw however did make a private visit to Mungo with Harry Nanya Tours, staying at Mungo Lodge and doing both a sunrise and sunset tour of the park. Harry Nanya Tours would like to purchase Graeme Grant's vehicle, which they understand he intends selling. They would like to establish closer links with Mungo Lodge.

Harry Nanya Tours have recently entered into a contract with AAT Kings Tours to provide guides for 3 coaches per week. AAT want to do all sunset tours. They have also negotiated a deal with Travel Australia for 12 coaches a month. When they started operations they had barely 1% of the market. They now estimate they have 98% of the market. They have a good relationship with the Aboriginal staff of NPWS but cited complaints from the Service about their operations and a level of resentment by tribal elders.

Harry Nanya's Aboriginal guides can supplement the interpretive material available at the Park while the non-indigenous guides concentrate more on European heritage eg at the Woolshed. Visitors particularly ask questions about how people lived and worked in the woolshed. Another common question is "How did the sand get here?".

They have contacted NPWS about accreditation and carry out regular self-evaluation exercises. George Townsend, a former NPWS Manager, drives for them part-time and is part of their training team. He is engaged to check on their tours, particularly those guided by students in the Certificate Course years 1-4 in Tourism who are new guides. Archaeologist Harvey Johnson also helps with their interpretive programs. Two Aboriginal elders check the accuracy of dreamtime stories presented to tour groups.

On the matter of the use of the didgeridoo in their performances, Kerry Ziernicki agreed that this had been contentious and that the use of the instrument had been discontinued for a while. Not all their Aboriginal guides are able to play the didge – Graham, Alan, Johnno and Roger do play it but Ian and George do not. They consider its use to be justified as long as it's not overdone. Guide George

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makes spears on the way to Mungo. Some guides know more than others about indigenous use of plants and talk about bush tucker etc. They collect material from elsewhere for use on these tours, not from the National Park.

Harry Nanya Tours are starting a venture in Broken Hill, with tours to Menindee and Kinchega. They did want to include Mutawintji but factional problems and the excessive fees charged by the local guides counted against this.

### **Ponde Tours Pty Ltd – Brian Hunt**

PO Box 1124  
MILDURA VIC 3502

Aboriginal Guided Tours & Eco-Cultural Experiences

Bookings: Phone: 03 5023 2488 Mobile: 0412 243 219 Fax: 03 5021 0622

Brian Hunt, an Elder of the local Barkindji Tribe, provides tour guide services to coach groups of 40 plus seniors on days tours between April and November, the peak times for visitation to Mungo. Many of the visitors are from groups such as Probus and The Third Age. He promotes his business through Expanding Horizons and has had a good relationship with two local moteliers since 1996. He provides an indigenous welcome at the Mungo lookout, then a guided walk on the Walls of China and an explanation of the sites there (he does not ask his group members to take off their shoes on the Walls), followed by a guided tour of the historic woolshed with an informative commentary plus a tour of the visitors Centre, with explanation of artefacts, etc. He does not take groups to the Grand Canyon and at The Walls he advises all members of the group to keep together and to follow him. Brian provides musical entertainment of original songs and poetry written about Mungo, its relics and artefacts.

Brian Hunt is a member of the Victorian Tourism Operators Association and a licensed Coach Driver. He has not been through any formal accreditation process but has been advised by NPWS rangers that the Service will be calling all operators together shortly. He has a good relationship with Warren and Col at Mungo.

He considers that visitors should only be permitted on the Walls if they are with an organised group. He feels uncontrolled public access there is causing too much damage. He has even seen youths playing football on the Walls. Improvements needed include better interpretation of artefacts at the Visitor Centre, at least one more toilet at the Mungo Lookout (there is only one unisex pit toilet), improved interpretive signage at the Walls boardwalk, and shelter screen around the picnic tables at the Visitor Centre. He explains dating methods and if asked, explains the night sky painted on the roof of the Woolshed.



