

On Patrol – July 2008



Pastor Rudi Schwartz

It was an experience once again to prepare for patrol. All the drills I had gone through during my involvement in the Darling Patrol 8 years ago, again came back to me, but this time it was so much different. I got rid of much of my camping gear used then, my vehicle is now smaller, the terrain is not the same and the amount of days out on patrol will not be the same.

Planning for our first patrol was not altogether easy. After the excellent winter climate of north Queensland Victoria seems so cold! It took a lot of planning to eventually get the vehicle packed and to get ready for our first outing.

After the stormy wind of Monday night, and with a sore and dry throat and also a runny nose (during the night I wondered if we should attempt a patrol!) we packed our suitcases, grabbed the road maps and headed out west.

The purpose of this first patrol was not to visit properties as usual; our plan was to familiarise ourselves with distances, geography, possible stopovers, mobile phone coverage, road conditions, available fuel stops and helpful contact information. With this as an objective we certainly succeeded.

We went as far south as Donald, then west to Jeparit and Rainbow. We stopped the first night in Hopetoun (the only patrons in the only motel - it was bitterly cold!) and rose the next morning to drive to Patchewollock. The



Beautiful green early wheat fields? Will there be rain to see it through?

population of this little town has dwindled to only 40. We then drove up to

Mildura to meet up with Michael and also to pick up an HF Radio for our vehicle. We then camped on the banks of the Murray in Robinvale.

After about 970km of both black top and dirt roads, and all the local papers with the name of contact people in most of the communities in the patrol area in my bag, we arrived home safely.

The effect of the drought is devastating. We saw smaller towns with a good 50% of all businesses closed. Lots of houses are for sale at prices lower than its market value.

Some paddocks look quite good as the wheat sprang up after a few brief showers in the last month. The question is: will it rain when they are beginning to ripen? We have also seen large tracts of land with absolutely nothing on it! The farmers are probably very weary of waiting upon the rains



Slow down in Speed!



and cannot afford another crop failure. The rivers and creeks are dry, and the irrigators started a season with zero allocation. What is going to happen to established fruit orchards and vineyards along the Murray river, no one knows.

All of this has an effect on the entire infrastructure of all communities concerned: schools suffer, services to hospitals are affected, and local business people face difficult times. On top of the drought, high fuel prices have a devastating and limited effect

on the way farmers do business.

The River Murray at Robinvale

We know we don't deserve rain; it is and remains a gift from God.

We can only pray for mercy and restoration of our land. To help in the spiritual recovery of the land, PIM have a very important part to play.

May God give us the grace to remain faithful!