

Mallee Patrol News

April 2009

It is with mixed feelings that I present this report.

A new addition



Lezanne Schwartz

During the trip made in February Heila remained home to be ready in case our son Willi rang to tell that his wife Bernice needs to be admitted to hospital for the birth of their second child.

On the third day of my patrol, Willi rang and Heila made the trip to Bathurst. A healthy and beautiful little girl, Lezanne, was born. The next week I made the trip to behold the bundle happiness myself.

It was during this time that our youngest, Heidi, and her boyfriend, Phil, announced their engagement to be married in October.

Our cup of happiness was overflowing!

We returned home and I made preparations for my next patrol.

Fractured!

Then, so unexpectedly, our eldest daughter living in Bathurst rang up with the terrible news that her husband had been killed in a work-related accident. The trip back to Bathurst during the night was the longest ever.

Jouke Swiegers was like our own son. We loved him very much and to know that we will never see this healthy, strong and energetic young man of only 32 never again really knocked us off balance. The only comfort we have is the fact that he knew the Lord. He is the first of our little family to sing the praises of his Saviour night and day around the throne of glory – into all eternity!

Heila and I stayed in Bathurst a while after the funeral to help Ansia and her three little children. I eventually returned home alone, only to find the loneliness too much. I went back for another while.

Our little family is fractured. We trust in God for comfort. We daily pray for Ansia and her children.



Jouke Swiegers

February – dust storms aplenty!

It was still very dusty and dry with gusty winds sweeping across the western plains. The strongest wind (properly in preparation for the onslaught of the Black Saturday Fire Storms) whipped across the paddocks.

After visiting a few addresses around Wycheproof I camped in the municipal caravan park. I was the only camper.

The next day saw me heading further west towards Watchem. At first I encountered one empty home after the other. It just seems as if farms are getting bigger and bigger. Smaller operators sell out to the bigger ones and leave the houses just like that!

I was beginning to wonder if I would have any success to find any one home. But, as usual, God has prepared the opportunities. I spoke to the fellow who told of how he was just fortunate to turn all investments in shares into investments at the banks. He would have lost what he had to try to make it through the drought if this was not possible.



Would you touch the toolbox?

"If we have another year like this, we will have no choice but to sell out and walk off the land," was the remark of the next farmer. They have been on that property through generations and always followed good farming practices and economic policies. But, after so many years of crop failures, there is just no other way open.



Lake Buloke

We had a good conversation around the kitchen table, and I could direct the topic to things spiritual. I challenged them to trust God through Jesus Christ, and be faithful in attending the worship services. After a nice strong cup of tea I prayed for them. May God use the handed out literature to his glory.

On my way south towards Donald I paid a visit to Lake Buloke, now nothing but a dry silty plain filled with trunks of dead eucalypt trees. Driving through the scorched grass where once the water would easily cover my vehicle is really sad. Not a bird in sight, just dust.

That night was dreadful: I thought the wind was going to blow the camper trailer into oblivion. I hardly shut an eye as my camping abode got violently tugged about. It was with a sense of relief that I answered my mobile phone at about 2.30am: Lezanne Schwartz had been born. I packed up and made it back to Kerang to assist Heila in getting ready for the trek to New South Wales.

More Storms

I was asked to take a funeral of a local Aboriginal lady whom I had visited in hospital; she died of cancer. The funeral was held in Balranald, some 160km northwest of Kerang.



The road to Balranald

The occasion was sad, but there was something joyful about it. A life was celebrated; but most of all, thanksgiving went to the throne of God for salvation in Christ – the deceased had found peace with God just before she died. The singing was something to remember.

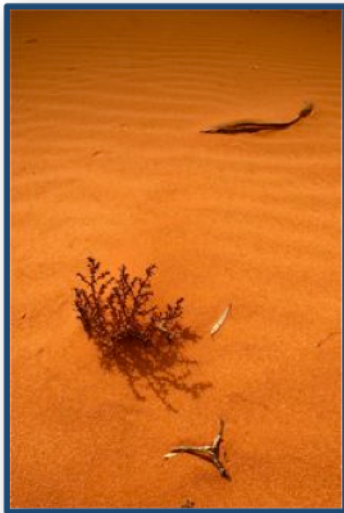
Weatherwise, it was a dreadful day. At stages I could hardly see the road ahead of me for more than just a few hundred meters. Three hours later, upon my return after

the funeral, things had not improved.

And then, the next day: havoc broke loose in Victoria – the bushfires in the south killed 175 people and destroyed hundreds of homes and properties.

To the Northern Corner

There was some sort of restless within me as I prepared for the next patrol. With my old billy cans dug up and a few alterations made to the trailer I left for what may become known as the *North-western Mallee patrol*. This strip of land is just south of Mildura-Renmark road and north of the Murray Sunset National Park.



Red Mallee Sand

The cockies were busy preparing for the planting season, if not already planting in the dry soil. It was therefore not easy finding them all home. But my photo session at the Meringur Pioneer Museum proved to be extremely fruitful.

The weather promised to be just the opposite of the previous patrol: mild autumn days and slightly cold nights.

My reading of the maps made me first cross the border with South Australia to enter the park from the west. It proved to be a mistake; however future patrolling of properties along the South Australian border might be very fruitful!

I must admit that driving on “Carwarp” road made me feel a bit uneasy, especially knowing that the Santa Fe is not really a 4X4 vehicle!

This was the best patrol since I started in the Mallee!

The cockies were busy



Unexpected visitors on my trailer

After doing much of the western part of the area the previous



“Shadows from the Past”, Meringur Pioneer Museum

day and camping by the roadside at Meringur, I called at the open air museum the next morning. What a place! It was meant for me to be there as the Management Committee happened to meet that morning. I was invited to morning tea with them before the meeting and was fortunate to meet many people of the district – some of whom I visited later on!

“I am a Christian,” one elderly person declared to me as I asked her about her relationship with God. *“I know that He loved the world so He sent His Son to die for me.”* We talked, leaning on the garden gate. What an opportunity to encourage and be encouraged.

Camping was unbelievable. Not a breeze, not a mosquito, not a moth – just the cool of the evening, staring at the fire and admiring the beauty of God’s creation. *What a job!!*



Fishing boat on the Murray River

Another bloke asked a lot of questions. He attends church regularly but seemed to grab the opportunity to talk to someone other than his pastor. The conversation went from our attitude towards Muslims to fruit in keeping with Christian faith. For more than an hour we talked. The visit was worth the while.

Upon arrival in Kerang and opening my email I found a response from

someone who apologised for being in a hurry when I called. He wrote: *“After you left someone told us that he had a neighbour’s boy over. He said that the boy’s father had killed himself some years ago and the boy found him. My wife and I have talked several times about the high suicide rate here, especially in the rural and remote areas. So I think that everyone*

around appreciates what you are doing even if you catch them at a busy time. Keep up the good work and maybe next time I see you around we will have time for a cup of coffee.”



Camping on the banks of the Murray



Salmon Gum

I responded immediately and will DV visit these folk on my next trip.

I thank God for the privilege to be a patrol padre of the Presbyterian Inland Mission.

Prayer Points

- *Thank God for the recent rain in the Mallee. Farmers are once again positive about the new season.*
- *Thank the Lord for a good patrol, meeting people with whom a good friendship could be struck.*
- *Pray for the boy who lost his father through suicide.*
- *Thank God for the opportunity to meet many people of the community at one spot.*
- *Pray for blessed rain and a successful crop this year. Many farmers will have to leave their farms if this year is another failure.*
- *Thank God for the good and positive support from the Kerang folk.*
- *Keep praying for Ansia and her children*



Big red eucalyptus flower