

Flight over Marree and Coopers Spring'

Driving into Marree at 8 o'clock at night is no preparation for the flaming sunrise over an endless horizon, rippling with the unspoken promise of burning heat. The dark had obliterated any opportunity to see the surroundings and the primary indications of being in the desert were the myriads of stars cast across the sky, constellation after constellation, galaxy after galaxy.(A NASA view of the world!)

Morning brought the golden sunrise but did not bring the heat.... It was brisk!
Invigorating! Even a bit cold?

The Teachers' Air force was going to fly across the area, over where the ground crew would investigate ground water at Coopers Spring. Luther Richardson, Keith Treschman and Liz Ryan would gather visual data on the area. We would also be able to provide an environmental context for the hypolithiccynobacterial colonies growing under translucent quartz and the above ground and underground water flow across the area. This was also going to be accompanied by heaps of enjoyment!

Armed with video camera, infra red camera and huge photographic lens bearing cameras, we hit the airfield. Wind violated the sand, tossing it wildly into the air, buffeting the planes on the field.

There was no helicopter!

A man sat smoking silently by the Marree Domestic Airport room..... Steve- our pilot. Together we gazed at the sky, waiting for the helicopter- the only conversation was regarding where we wanted to fly.

The regular beat of the rotor blades was the first indication of the arriving beast. It landed, regurgitated four people and waited to be fed from the hose bearing truck.

We walked to our helicopter - me, Keith, Luther and Steve.

Strapped in, head gear on, mikes on and brains alert- we had lift off!!!!

The immediate sense of endless land was strong - red, grey, more red.... Yellow dust clouds to the right and singular clumps of desert vegetation littered the scene.

When on the ground, it is simple to dismiss the land as being a flat singular environment. When airborne, reality bites hard! A whole scene patterned around flowing, draining water, gathering water and wind direction evolved, construing a dynamic moving environment with swirls of vibrant ochres colouring the view.

Dry smooth rivers bounded by stunted vegetation, dendritic streams fingering stony plains - all headed towards a larger water storage area of a lake or large waterhole.

Kangaroos gazed upwards then bounded off across the land, sheep and goats scattered.....

No camels.

It became obvious that the water flow and storage dictated much of the land structure.... The land took on the forms the water gave. It became clothed in the vegetation dedicated to an arid environment and thrived as best it could.

The environment took on a whole new meaning when viewed from the air. The small helicopter allowed for free vision and the pilot, Steve, was very cooperative in moving the plane to areas we wished to view.

In the distance, we could see a slightly hilly area and this appeared to be the story of the land surrounding Marree. The Birdsville Track headed off into the distance but we did not have the time to follow it far.

Time was almost over....

Flying back towards the airfield, we slowed over the area of the hypolithiccynobacterial growths and once more took visuals.

We landed! Easily and smoothly..... Final photo number was 500 combined effort from Keith and Luther plus infra red and I had demonstrated my filming technique by whatever means I could! The viewing of these masterpieces will be amazing!

It was a wonderful experience and we actually would have liked to ask for more money from our sponsors or just a little freebie!

Liz Ryan (Teacher's Airforce)