



ALL PHOTOS SHELLY ROSS

## Meet you at The CRACOW

It's one of those places that leaves you staring into the distance and shaking your head. It's not for everybody; that'd make it common. The Cracow Pub is anything but that. **Shelley Ross** spends a memorable night in the middle of nowhere.

**It's not size that'll lure you here, nor surrounding attractions or elegant country sophistication. It doesn't even rate a big prawn or a ram on stilts as you drive in. In fact, the bitumen runs out about a mile each side of town and you'd have to be on your way to nowhere to pass it. To be honest, you've arrived, so you're lost.**

The tiny town of Cracow is allocated a dot on the S.E. Queensland map; and as such I think that means it has a population. In fact, a population and a pub – which I'm pretty sure are the criteria for a dot. The population takes care of itself; I met all seven of them and they are classic laid back Australians. As for the Cracow Pub, it's up there amongst the hierarchy of true outback establishments and, for my money, should be nestled in amongst the glossy pages of expensive coffee table books that set out must-see places to visit before we all die. So you could plan the Pyramids, Niagara Falls, Taj Mahal, Cracow Pub. Then you can die. As a matter of fact, the issue of death is why the current publican bought the place to start with.

Seven years ago, Cracow was a complete ghost town and the pub was up for sale. Along came a fellow by the name of Fred Brophy, with his wife Sandi, who'd been travelling the country



**No parking hassles at south-east Queensland's Cracow Pub.**  
**TOP RIGHT:** Publican Fred Brophy's got the roast in the oven and is more than happy to share a yarn with patrons.  
**BELOW RIGHT:** Airstrip owner, Bill Walker (left), and Sandi & Fred Brophy welcome Dick Smith and his Cessna Grand Caravan to Cracow International.

for 25 years with the famous Fred Brophy Boxing Troupe. For those of you who've sipped your way through a weekend at the Birdsville Races, (with or without horses) you'll be familiar with this icon of outback entertainment and the legendary status that befalls the champion who emerges bloodied but triumphant from that tent.

Addressing a surprising notion to "settle down" for their future, Fred suggested to his bride that they should buy a pub. This idea has been known to fall flat on less than accommodating ears, but Sandi saw the potential within the bones of the hundred-year-old Cracow



and so they took it off the hands of the owner for about a dollar fifty. As far as they were concerned, the pub oozed character in its ancient but beautiful floor boards, big old public bar, rambling upstairs accommodation, wrap-around verandah facing the "main street" and a delightful back courtyard shaded by two vintage Queenslanders – a huge Poinciana and Jacaranda.

But according to Fred, it was the resident ghost that clinched the deal; the Cracow is haunted. She's female and resides upstairs (and still does, I'm here to tell you). The Brophy's plan was to make the Cracow into a true Ghost Pub, complete with creaking floorboards, bloody daggers wedged into walls, unearthly wails in the depth of the night and billowing night-dresses disappearing around corners into

the misty haze. "They'll come from miles away," enthused Fred. "We'll make it a real tourist stop-over. This is bound to put Cracow on the map."

### Struck gold

So they set to work on a massive undertaking to bring the pub back to life. It started with agonising months of plumbing and electrical repairs which Sandi remembers as being tough times. "There was so much work going on – up in the ceiling and within the walls – but we knew we couldn't start on any visible improvements until that was all done."

Then one day, a couple of men in suits arrived in town – obviously, they stood out. It turned out they worked for Newcrest Mining and guess what? Within a matter of two months a big working



# Destinations



gold mine opened up two miles out of town. Fred and Sandi couldn't believe their luck. The sleepy little community suddenly became the hub of life for a couple of hundred hard-working, starving and eternally thirsty mine-workers who adopted the Cracow pub as their own.

So the plan for a Ghost Pub for tourists was ditched and the Brophys sunk all their energies into turning the Cracow into a unique and welcoming watering hole for locals and anyone else lucky enough to find it.

## Airstrip at your service

Well, we found it. Actually Dick Smith found it; we just happened to be with him when he did. It was back in June and we were on our way back from the Old Station Fly-In at Raglan in Dick's Caravan and he decided to call in on his old mate, Fred, for the night. We landed on a well maintained 1100m strip on a nearby property *The Brae*, owned by Bill Walker, a friend of the Brophys, who met us on arrival and helped with securing a make-shift electrical fence around the plane to keep the cattle away. Bill has told *Australian Flying* that anyone is welcome to land on his strip, with the usual proviso's that they are doing so at their own risk, are prepared to dodge any cattle and roos, and to make sure they ring Bill (07-4993.7134) for

**ABOVE:** It's a big night at the Cracow. The boys have dressed up.

**BELOW:** The famous Fred Brophy Boxing Troupe drum is centre stage as Fred beats out his bone-chilling summons to challengers, the *Birdsville National Anthem* that has marked the start of the outback ritual for 25 years. (Dick's limbering up.)  
**OPPOSITE LEFT:** Macca gets into the mood for an appreciative audience of gob-smacked locals.  
**OPPOSITE RIGHT:** Despite the night-time antics, Cracow is a peaceful country town – there's a car about every four days.

details on the strip before arriving.

As they did for us, the Brophys are happy to drive out to the strip and pick up anyone who needs a lift into town; a ten minute drive.

Well, the inside of the pub has to be seen to be believed. Fred has slung all sorts of memorabilia from 25 years of the Boxing Troupe all throughout the main bar. There's old boxing gloves with well worn leather dripping with cobwebs; saddle bags and bull horns coated in dust; road signs and dozens of cracked photos of decades of poignant outback memories. Stay for dinner and you'll be offered the biggest feed you've ever seen. Fred is the chief cook and you'll love his three-course country menu and the ambience of the big old dining room.

Upstairs there's a dozen or so twin and double rooms, some of which open up onto the front verandah overlooking, um, nothing – just the town's only street, which is fairly pretty as streets go. Anyway, it's a good place to catch the cooling afternoon breeze as you scrub up for cocktail hour down in the bar. Fred and Sandi top up their permanent staff with backpackers for a fortnight or so at a time, who work the bar and add a continental flavour to this ridgie-didge little outpost. I'm not sure they've told their mothers that they're working here, but they've learnt to pour a decent beer and that's a vital life skill.

On this chilly Sunday night, the dreadlocked Dutchman grabbed his





guitar at one stage and started playing at the bar and then another did the same; it's just that sort of place. We had ABC Radio's Macca with us, so he belted out a few songs on his guitar, which the locals even stopped talking long enough to listen to. The old wood-burning fire in the corner was roaring and everyone was enjoying swapping lies with anyone that sauntered in as the night wore on. By the time we were well into the second chorus of *Land Downunder*, the bar was holding up about 30 very promising Outback Idols.

It doesn't matter what night it is out here; all the miners work rosters, so a Tuesday night could be just as big as a Saturday,

you just never know. In fact, breakfast time is huge; Fred's spreads are famous for satisfying those massive appetites coming off the night shift. Ask him for double mushrooms and you won't look back all day.

Plan a flight out there soon, before they lay the bitumen and spoil it all. ■

*Cracow* is located on the Theodore-Eidsvold road in the Banana Shire Council, 485 kilometres north west of Brisbane. For further info, phone the Cracow Hotel: 07 4993.7118 or Email: [cracowhotel@bigpond.com](mailto:cracowhotel@bigpond.com).

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