

Our new series on fly-away destinations continues. Loads of our readers have asked for ideas on where to choose for their fly-aways – whether it be for a long weekend or an annual trek. So we now invite readers to write to us with suggested destinations, providing contacts for the guidance of our travel writers. Great getaway secrets need to be shared so if you've flown into somewhere that worked for you, let us know. Email to shelleystross@yaffa.com.au or post to Australian Flying, GPO Box 606, Sydney 2001.

On the banks of THE DARLING



The Members Stand
at the Louth Races

PHOTOS BY PHIL LACEY

Being partial to a punt on a sure thing at an outback race meeting opens up a whole new world if you've got access to an aeroplane and a couple of days off, particularly if you're heading anywhere near Louth on the Darling River.

According to legend, not to mention a growing number of loyal patrons, the festivities surrounding the annual Louth Races provide all sorts of reasons to drag out the WAC, pack the top-hat, and head on out to red dirt country for a very memorable long weekend. If you make that the weekend following the first Monday in August every year, you'll have plenty of company.

The village of Louth (don't blink, warn the 30 locals) is situated on the banks of the Darling River 100km SW of Bourke and 132km NW of Cobar. A browse through the prestigious Louth Turf Club (LTC) website reveals that horse racing out here dates back as far as 1880 when the local Christmas Races were held on the 27th December of that year. Featuring a two race program, the two mile open handicap boasted prize money

of 60 sovereigns and a maiden plate over one and a quarter miles with prize money of 15 sovereigns.

These days the prize money at the annual Louth Races is a lot higher and you'll be fed and watered in true outback Aussie style throughout the 7-race event which, this year, is on Saturday 11th August. John Flamish is an avid *Australian Flying* reader and a loyal devotee of the whole gig. He's not the first pilot to tell us that others might just find this tiny dusty town a standout destination to weave a few days fly-out around – no matter what time of year, as long as it's winter.

Louth (YLOH) has its own sealed airstrip with plenty of tie-down area, and operator Bourke Shire Council (02 6872 2055) won't charge you a landing fee. It's a walkable one km from town or, on race day, the LTC provides complimentary transfers to the race course. In the unlikely event you've packed the trusty two-man, you'll find camping, hot showers and firewood on site at the race course which is only a stone's throw from the village and Darling River. Otherwise, read on and we'll put a roof over your head.

Festivities begin days before the actual race day with many visitors making a week of it, enjoying the excellent fishing, great company and cold beer served late into the night at Shindy's Inn, which we're told on high authority becomes the throbbing heart of Louth for pretty much the whole week.

During the week leading up to the Races, there's loads of mischief on tap for out-of-towners. You can take your pick of a nine-hole golf challenge, charity auction and BBQ dinner, and the alarmingly competitive Damper Bake-Off. But our tip is to just take advantage of the biggest attraction on offer – the opportunity to mix with the locals. You'll know where Shindy's is by this stage – go and introduce yourselves to new owners Kath and Dave and tell them all about *Australian Flying* over a frosty lager.

"You really do need to arrive at least the day before," says Flamish. "Where I stay, Kallara Station at nearby Tilpa, there'll be a BBQ dinner on the Friday night, then on Saturday morning a cooked breakfast which it'd be rude to miss. Then it's a quick 35 mins flight to the Louth airstrip to go to the Races." Kallara has a range of accommodation from luxurious (you can even enjoy fully hosted dinners by prior arrangement) to powered camping areas. They have an all-weather sealed airstrip with lights for late landings or early morning departures (courtesy vehicle by arrangement with the owners, Justin & Julie McClure, ph: 02 6837 3963). Give them a ring to confirm the condition of the strip beforehand but do it by Cobar as mobile coverage seems to drop out after there."

Kallara's just one of a handful of accommodation options around there. You can browse the web and find out all about surrounding stations such as Trilby, where Gary & Liz Murray run a 130,000 acre working station, and Idalia River Stay. There's also the wonderful *Old Louth Post Office*, now run as a popular B&B by David and Robin White (Ph: 02 6874.7362).

Says another recent visitor, pilot Phil Lacey: "Accommodation for the Races weekend can be tricky for the unprepared. You can book a year in advance if you want to stay in Louth at Shindy's Inn or on one of the surrounding stations. You can have a cold, restless night camping under your aircraft. Or you can be clever and stay in Bourke and fly down the Darling for half an hour on race day – very civilised. And, if you stay at the Bourke Bridge Inn, (and we can't NOT put the address in: 4 Bogan St, Nth Bourke) Glenn, the proprietor, will collect you from the airport."

The famous outback town of Bourke is a destination in itself and many will attest to its reputation as the quintessential Australian experience. There's loads of accommodation and activities to fill your trip itinerary should you decide to base yourself there. Just head to www.visitbourke.com. Don't miss the 2-hour cruise on the Paddleboat *JANDRA* which recaptures the romance of the old river-steamers as it makes its way along the Darling River. The *JANDRA* leaves from the Kidman's Camp Caravan Park during the season: Easter to October Long weekend. For bookings see the website, or contact the Bourke Visitor Information Centre on 02 6872 1222.

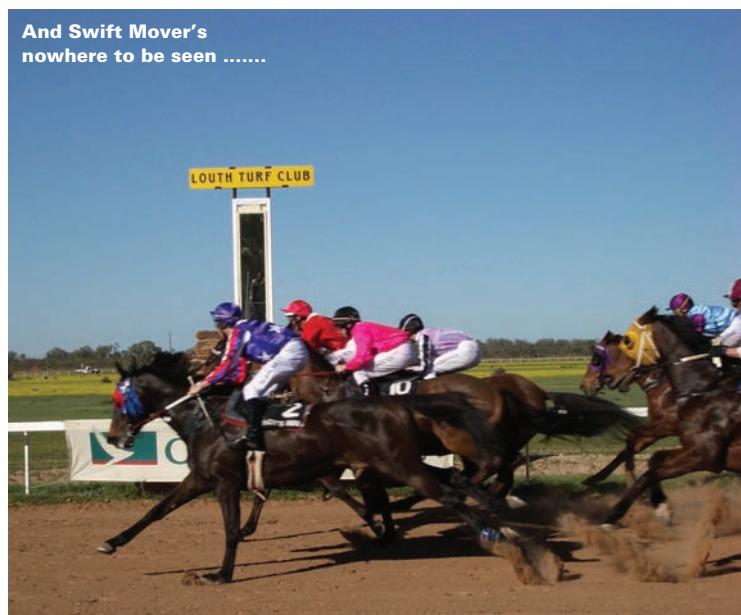
Wherever you choose to stay, you'll find the owners will go out of their way to make life easier for visiting pilots. Just be sure to plan well ahead and make any accommodation



The church gets eerily quiet in Louth on Race Day



Louth runway



And Swift Mover's nowhere to be seen

LongWeekender



Shindy's Inn where
winnings are spent
and sorrows drowned.



The paddlewheeler,
Jandra at Bourke.

and transfer arrangements with the owners. At the time of writing, Jane Murray at Louth's Idalia Outback River Stay tells us the only accommodation they have left for this year's race weekend is a few powered camp/van sites. "Not much chop for a small plane."

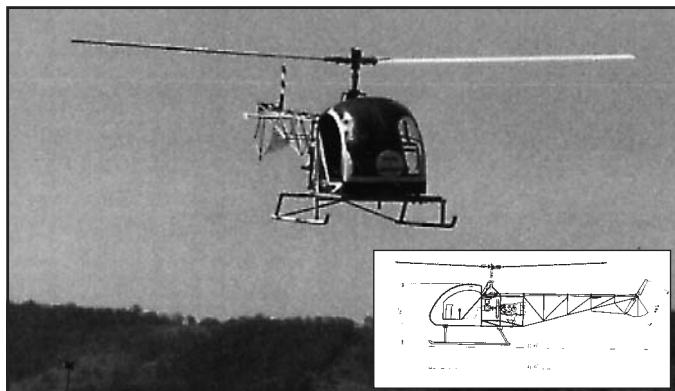
Of course, you can head out here any time you like and take your pick of where to stay: Race week isn't the only time they open the hospitality doors around this unforgettable home of the Red River Gums. I guess if you had any brains you'd go anytime BUT, but then you'd never get to see first-hand why this place has the reputation it's got for staging a great party, and why the race crowd keeps coming back year after year.

If the wonderfully engaging personality of the LTC President, Tess LeLievre, is anything to go by, you'll be assured of an incredible Outback welcome and a long weekend you won't forget in a hurry. ■

by Shelley Ross

More information

Louth Races www.louthraces.com Trilby www.trilbystation.com.au
Kallara www.kallarastation.com.au Idalia www.idaliariverstay.com.au



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