

# The Milparinka Visiting Volunteers Program

*Volunteers from around Australia  
are helping to boost tourism in a small outback  
community.*



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The effects of drought have resulted in a population decline right across our region, the Corner Country of New South Wales. As a result the Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association Inc does not have the capacity to manage its facilities on the Milparinka Heritage Precinct on a daily basis.

Instead, we rely on Visiting Volunteers. These are people from many parts of Australia who come to live in our community for periods of weeks and provide a continuous face to face tourism presence. We call

this our "Visiting Volunteers Program."

We attract volunteers using the internet and by encouraging word of mouth referrals. No special requirements are asked of volunteers; a friendly manner and an open mind are helpful qualities.

Visiting Volunteers also enable the Association to continue to market Milparinka and the region to tourists who call into our town. This is how they help us.

- They provide local and regional tourist information through the Barracks Precinct Visitor Centre as well as referrals to other attractions and local businesses.
- They undertake minor maintenance and cleaning of our facilities and actively provide security to our buildings and assets.
- They collect donations and entry fees, sell souvenirs and assist with catering projects, our only real means of regularly raising tourism funds.
- Importantly, they provide a friendly face to visitors and usually offer hospitality in the form of tea and biscuits.
- They maintain visitor statistics and record sales and donations.

Images used in this document:

Cover: The Milparinka Courthouse, Police Barracks and Cottage  
Page 3: re-enactment of gold escort 2005,  
Page 4: local history interpretive displays in courthouse, family history material  
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**The Visiting Volunteer Program is a major asset to the tourism potential of Milparinka and the Corner Country.**

**We know that Visiting Volunteers actually help increase visitor numbers and that they are instrumental in maintaining the heritage and conservation assets of the community.**

**During their stay in Milparinka Visiting Volunteers become valued members of the community, and remain “friends” well beyond their time in the township. Some volunteers are “returnees”, making the pilgrimage to Milparinka year after year.**

**Accommodation options for Volunteers in Milparinka include self contained accommodation for two in our recently restored cottage, or providing one’s own accommodation such as a camper or caravan.**

**The program attracts such up to 30 individuals each year and has the potential to be expanded to include volunteering at other locations across the Corner Country.**

**Further information is available by contacting Ruth Sandow on:**

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Milparinka is a tiny community located in the Unincorporated Area of far north western New South Wales, about 40 kilometres south of Tibooburra and 300 kilometres north of Broken Hill. It is the oldest proclaimed township in the Corner Country, and is situated on the banks of the Evelyn Creek, named by Charles Sturt during his 1845 Inland Expedition.

During the expedition Sturt and his men were forced to spend six months trapped by drought on the banks of nearby Preservation Creek. The site of this heroic feat is one of our region's, and Australia's, most significant heritage places, as symbolised by a still-intact cairn built on top of Mt Poole.

In the 1870s, as pastoralism spread across the west of the colony, gold was discovered not far from Sturt's Depot Glen. As the newly announced mineral boom brought more and more people to the area (named the Albert Goldfields) the pressure on scarce water resources grew, and a township was established on the Evelyn Creek's waterhole.

At the time of its 1880 proclamation Milparinka boasted all the trappings of a modern day community: hotels, shops, a blacksmith shop, a bank and a post office. Gradually it also acquired the symbols of colonial administration; a police station and cells, a courthouse and a school.

Resources' booms are notoriously followed by a bust, and by the early twentieth century Milparinka and the other townships of the Albert Goldfields were no longer viable communities. As the majority of the three thousand goldfields' residents left the area Milparinka became a virtual ghost town. Tibooburra, once known as The Granites, survived to become the Corner Country's administration centre.

For close to eighty years Milparinka remained in limbo. With the owners gone the many local sandstone buildings became ruins, mostly assimilating with the dry dusty earth from which they had been carved. One hotel, the Albert remained open, trading beers and meals with a few locals and the odd passerby.

Down the rise from the Albert, on the crest of a ridge above the creek stood the Courthouse, a magnificent example of colonial architecture, sturdy, but also succumbing to the elements and vandalism.

Whilst it was the initiative of local people in the 1980s that halted the destruction of the building, it was a new organisation formed in 2000 that actually brought it back to life.

Slowly, over the past six years, this organisation, the Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association, comprising mainly of station people, has gone about attending to its core business of preserving and interpreting our community and region's heritage. It operates on a voluntary basis, drawing funds for projects from competitive grant programs, donations and more recently, from the sales of souvenirs.



The Association was responsible staging a re-enactment of Cobb and Co Gold escort to mark the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary since proclamation, an event which attracted more than 350 people to the community in 2005, and other community celebrations.

For its work the Association has been awarded considerable merit: a Business Enterprise Award in 2004 and finalist in the Community of the Year Award in 2004 and 2005. In 2005 the Association also received a Volunteer Heritage Award.

## WHAT'S AT MILPARINKA?

The core business of the Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association Inc has been built around the Barracks or Police Station Heritage Precinct, and utilises several heritage buildings.

### The Milparinka Courthouse

Built in 1886 (some now say 1896) the courthouse was designed by James Barnet, the same architect who designed the Sydney Post Office and Bathurst Gaol. It has been restored with assistance from the Western Land Commission and NSW Heritage. NSW State and Regional Development provided funds for the publishing of interpretive material, and the NSW Dept of Corrective Services provided labour to complete much of the structural work undertaken in 2002.

Comprising four rooms the main section has been devoted to Local History Interpretation. In keeping with the ambiance of the building, simple interpretive panels have been hung in mostly chronological order around the internal walls. Subjects covered include:

- Local aboriginal history
- Charles Sturt's expedition
- Burke and Wills Expedition
- Settlement of the far west
- The discovery of gold
- Transportation
- Information about the school, hotels, police station, post office



On a desk in the courtroom are several copies of interpretive material that have been locally researched and published. Seating is provided for up to 60 people, making it an ideal venue to provide group information for bus and other touring groups.

The rear room of the courthouse has seen life as a court office, a post office and a rural lands board office. Today it is used as the Family History Room.

Simple displays depicting items from the early life and times of pioneers have been created in the room, whilst the walls have been hung with photographs featuring many of these people.



A central table holds copies of material researched and published by Association members, including:

- Almost 2000 of the estimated 3000 people in the area in the 1880-1920 period.
- Birth, death and marriage records from Milparinka and Tibooburra
- War service records for Milparinka and Tibooburra
- Specific family history records where available

Entry to these facilities is by donation, and a box for collection purposes is located at the rear of the building. A ramp provides wheel chair access.

## The Barracks Visitor Information Centre

Located adjacent to the Courthouse the Barracks or former police station was built in 1883. It ceased to be a manned station in 1920, and in subsequent years was used as a private residence. Acquired by the Association in 2003 the building was restored with funding assistance provided by Regional Partnerships. Again, labour from the Department of Corrective Services was utilised for the reconstruction work.



This is the building most used by the Visitor Volunteer Program. The building has been fitted out to include a tourist information and souvenir shop front, a small gallery room, office, store room and kitchen. This is where visitors will gather for a chat, to buy a souvenir, or to ask for directions to other attractions or accommodation places. Information is kept on site for that purpose, include a Guide to the Corner Country published jointly with the Tiboburra Village Committee, with inclusive maps showing directions to Sturt's Depot Glen and the Mount Browne Goldfields.

The Centre has the capacity to serve tea and coffee, and generally make visitors feel welcome.

Visitor Volunteers collect tourist data and record on the office computer (or manually), record sales and donations collected, and maintain a clean facility. They are also responsible for keeping the Courthouse and Cells clean and tidy.

## The Proto-resources Mining Interpretive Centre

The former cells are located immediately behind the Barracks, and comprise two rooms and a security fenced "exercise yard". The building has its original 1883 solid doors and sliding bolts. The Association uses this building as a Mining History Interpretive Centre.

The central feature of the displays include an original 1884 map of the mine area, and some working models of equipment used in the early days.

The restoration of the building was achieved through savings made on the restoration of the Barracks and a NSW Heritage grant.

## Evelyn Cottage

This former police station kitchen is located adjacent to the cells and has recently been restored using Department of Transport and Regional Services funding to create permanent accommodation for Visiting Volunteers.

Two people can be accommodated in the cottage, with a separate kitchen/living room and bedroom. A bathroom has been constructed beneath the verandah which serves both the in-cottage volunteers and those staying in their own accommodation.

Linking all the buildings are the remains of the original clay drain pipes which fed water collected on the roofs into a central **underground tank**. The Association also hopes to be able to reinstate the drains and tanks, thus removing any reasonable risk of water damage, and enabling the Precinct to become water independent.

### **The Variety Childrens' Park**

Located adjacent to the cottage is a small park area with benches and displays. This area is intended as an educational facility for younger visitors to Milparinka. It houses a working model of a "dry blower" and other mining history memorabilia.

Approximately 60 native trees and shrubs are also growing in this area, as well as a site for an ongoing vegetable patch for use by Visiting Volunteers.

### **The Harry Blore Memorial Park**

Located across the road from the Precinct is a park area that the Association has established and maintains. Featuring native trees and shrubs the park also contains a shelter, panels with local environmental interpretive material and a picnic table. A swing has been built for visiting children. Visitor Volunteers are asked to water the trees which are connected to dripper line. Blockages do occur, and some adjustments to the system need to be implemented.

### **Milparinka Pioneer Memorial Wall and Silhouette**

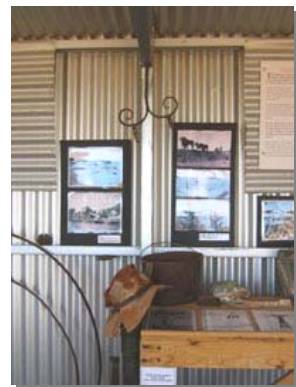
In 2005 local residents constructed a stone memorial wall alongside the park, and invited the descendants of local families to provide plaques commemorating their ancestors. Complemented by a steel silhouette of a pioneer family and a wheel barrow laden with belongings, the site is positioned to be seen first as one approaches the town. It is stark and symbolic of the region's social history.

### **Pastoral Industry Interpretive Centre (The Shed)**

On the north side of the Heritage Precinct the Association has establish a shed and display area that helps to interpret the pastoral industry of the region, and includes information about :

- The wool industry, and especially shearing
- Providing water, with a complete boring plant and pump jack on display
- Building fences
- Animal husbandry
- Grazing pressure management
- Weed, pest and kangaroo management

Very much an outdoors setting, the priority here for Visitor Volunteers is to limit the dust and to remove rubbish.



### **Milparinka Public Toilets**

The Association was instrumental in negotiating with the NSW RTA to locate public toilets in Milparinka. They were erected by the Dept of Corrective Services. It is part of our responsibility to ensure that they are maintained and cleaned.

### **The Milparinka Heritage Trail**

The Association recognises that there are a number of heritage sites in Milparinka that require historic interpretation. To facilitate this markers have been placed adjacent to the sites, and an information sheet published. This is made available to visitors from the Courthouse or Barracks, and includes the former school, hotel, post office and bank sites.

## Milparinka Cemetery

Located just west of the township, the Milparinka cemetery is the final resting place of some three hundred or so people, although just a handful have headstones. The cemetery fence and gates has been replaced by our Association.

Map directions to the cemetery and the former Chinese Garden and Afghan cameleer campsite adjacent to the Evelyn Creek and located on the Walking Trail Guide.

## The Evelyn Creek and Milparinka Waterhole

The Evelyn Creek and Milparinka Waterhole lie to the east of the Heritage Precinct. Although it remains the collection point of more than one hundred years of "junk", it is also a valuable natural feature of the area. Native animals living along the creek include kangaroos and birds, as well as, as one Volunteer discover, echidnas.

## The town in general.

The best is to just go exploring: there are old hotel bottle dumps, a sandstone quarry and a host of other "ruins" of intrigue and curiosity value. The airstrip has proved invaluable to a model airplane enthusiast Volunteer.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. **Is fuel available at Milparinka?**

A. Yes, diesel and petrol are available from the Hotel.

Q. **Is water available at Milparinka?**

A. Yes, there is water near the Barracks, and drinking water in tanks on the Courthouse.

Q. **Is there power?**

A. Yes

Q. **Are there toilets and showers?**

A. Yes. Volunteers may use the showers and toilets attached to the cottage.

Q. **Is there a store in Milparinka?**

A. No. It is probably best to bring your supplies with you. There is a refrigerator with freezer box in the Barracks for meat and other perishables. There is a twice weekly mail service and fresh items can be brought up then.

Q. **Are meals available at the Hotel?**

A. Yes. The Albert Hotel offers a range of home style meals and soft or alcoholic drinks.

Q. **Is there a doctor in the area?**

A. There is a health clinic in Tibooburra which is accessible 24 hours a day. An RFDS doctor visits on Tuesdays, and can be accessed by telephone 24 hours a day in emergencies. Flight time from Broken Hill is about one hour if a condition warrants a consultation with a doctor, or medical evacuation to Broken Hill.



**Q. Is information available to give out to visitors?**

A. Yes. We have a range of local tourist information and other material available to either give to (other) visitors, or for people to read and learn about the area. We also carry travel information about other regions.

**Q. During what hours do Visitor Volunteers operate the precinct?**

A. The time spent "on duty" is entirely up to the Volunteers, although it's useful to be open to catch the south bound traffic from Tibooburra early in the morning, and the northbound, after lunch.

**Q. What are the main functions of the Program?**

A. Maintaining a face to face presence is essential for encouraging other visitors to stay longer in the area. People like to chat, and to find out more about the area, so just being there is a primary function. In addition, keeping facilities clean and tidy is important.

We keep a small range of souvenirs which will be replenished for 2007. Simple records of sales are useful for future planning purposes. Records of money from sales and donations are maintained separately. Arrangements can be made about banking.

A Visitor Book is located in the Courthouse, but it is also useful to record specific data about visitors, such as home post code, whether heading north or south, and how they heard about Milparinka. This information can be used for future marketing initiatives and collected from those who access the Visitor Information Centre.

**Q. What other "jobs" can Visitor Volunteers do?**

- A. Visitor Volunteers come from all walks of life, and have a range of skills. We always the need for people who can:
- type up manuscripts
  - repair window panes and window sashes
  - repair woodwork
  - paint wood work
  - undertake minor plastering repairs
  - plant trees
  - rectify irrigation blockages
  - undertake other minor plumbing jobs
  - engage in crafts that can be made and sold for souvenirs

**Q. Can Visitor Volunteers take time off to visit other locations in the area?**

A. Absolutely. Touring the region is encouraged. There are many other great sites to visit, such as Depot Glen, Sturt's Cairn, Mt Browne, Tibooburra, Sturt National Park, Cameron Corner and station properties.

**Q. Who do we contact if we need help?**

A. Association members will endeavour to meet and greet all newcomers. They are also available at most times by telephone. Some live in Milparinka and can be approached for help with most matters. Contact numbers are located in the Barracks.

