



Clem flying home from school 2024



Our first trip up 'The Strez' in 2016



Our overnight stay at Ballera workers camp, 2024



Our trip up the river to get to minischool, 2019



Our trip up the river to get to minischool, 2019



Strezlecki Storms 2024

# GETTING THE KIDS TO SCHOOL

## The Strez NEVER BEAT US

Jodie Keogh SA Lone Members/ Quilpie Branch

We commenced our School of the Air (SOTA) journey through Port Augusta, South Australia (SA) back in 2016 when my eldest son Jacob (5 years old) started his first year of schooling. We had to travel from Innamincka Station down the infamous Strzelecki Track, at that time nearly 480kms of dirt with myself, my govie Miss Jess and 2 younger boys Lachie, 3 and Clem who was 6 months old. That was only the start of the journey, I then had another 300kms to go to SOTA. I didn't grow up in the outback and quickly realised that instead of being worried about the journey, you just have to be prepared and do it otherwise your kids would miss out and so would I.

During my 2nd school trip I had my first adventure – changing a tyre. I can capably change a tyre but was just a little amused that 2 fit middle-aged men just watched me from camping chairs without offering any assistance while my 2 kids played in the sandhills, and the baby lay on a blanket nearby. I don't expect help but it's definitely not the outback spirit!

My next memory is when the Cooper Creek was in flood and started flowing past the station a few days before a Mini School - of course, our homestead was on the wrong side of the creek to the road down south! When we know the creek may cut us off we put a couple of cars on the other side of the creek to be able to check the other half of the property and cattle and this saved us this time!

To make sure we didn't miss out, Nathan, my husband fired up the tinny, loaded up myself, the 3 kids and Miss Kate and gave us a beautiful scenic boat ride a couple of km's down to the crossing on the other side of the creek to access a car. The creek was still up when we returned a week later and we had to do a few trips that time to get home though as we had all our food stores to boat back as well.

I've travelled all over the far SA to attend face-to-face events for the kids including Woomera, Port Lincoln, the Riverland, Port Hughes and Adelaide to name a few. Now I am in the far southwest of QLD at Durham Downs, I am surrounded by a minimum of 250kms of dirt irrespective of which direction I travel and fortunately, I've had no real trouble, as there is barely any phone reception. One trip I had to double back 300kms out of the way to dodge slippery roads after an unpredicted big storm but we still made it to school on time on Monday!

My 2 most recent trips have been some of my most memorable to say the least! My travel distance is approx. 900kms from home to Port Augusta but that does not deter me or my 3 great travellers (thank goodness for Ipads in recent years and my extension cord charger in my car now!!). We even found a Geocache at Moomba that has 99% of entries in it by the Keogh family.

In February this year for Induction Week, unprecedented rain of at least 140mm fell at Innamincka, Strzelecki Track and

the Warri Gate road on the Wednesday closing both roads for around 3 weeks. We were determined to get home and I didn't want to sit around town as I wanted to get back into routine in our school room so we commenced a 1750km trip through 3 states to get home. We went through Port Augusta, Broken Hill, Cobar, Bourke, Cunnamulla, Thargomindah to get back to Durham Downs. Miss Megan did that trip with me and we weren't in the car that had the extension chargers either! The trick I live by is to get in the car by at least 5am, earlier if possible so I can have a couple of hours of peace to start the journey with my ear pods in!

My last trip was another doozy! We had school experience week in Port Augusta and stayed an extra day to attend the SA ICPA State Conference on Friday. I knew there was some rain predicted on Sunday so got on the road Saturday morning, again up 'The Strez'. All was fine until around 50kms out of Innamincka where storms were surrounding us and started lightly raining. We stopped at the Innamincka Trading Post so that we could let Nathan know we were on our way and get an ice cream to get us through the last 2 hours. Nathan said it was raining at Durham so would meet us at Ballera, the gas plant which is 50kms from home and where our dirt driveway starts.

About 20kms out of Ballera I knew we weren't getting to Durham that day – it was raining so heavily and we only just got

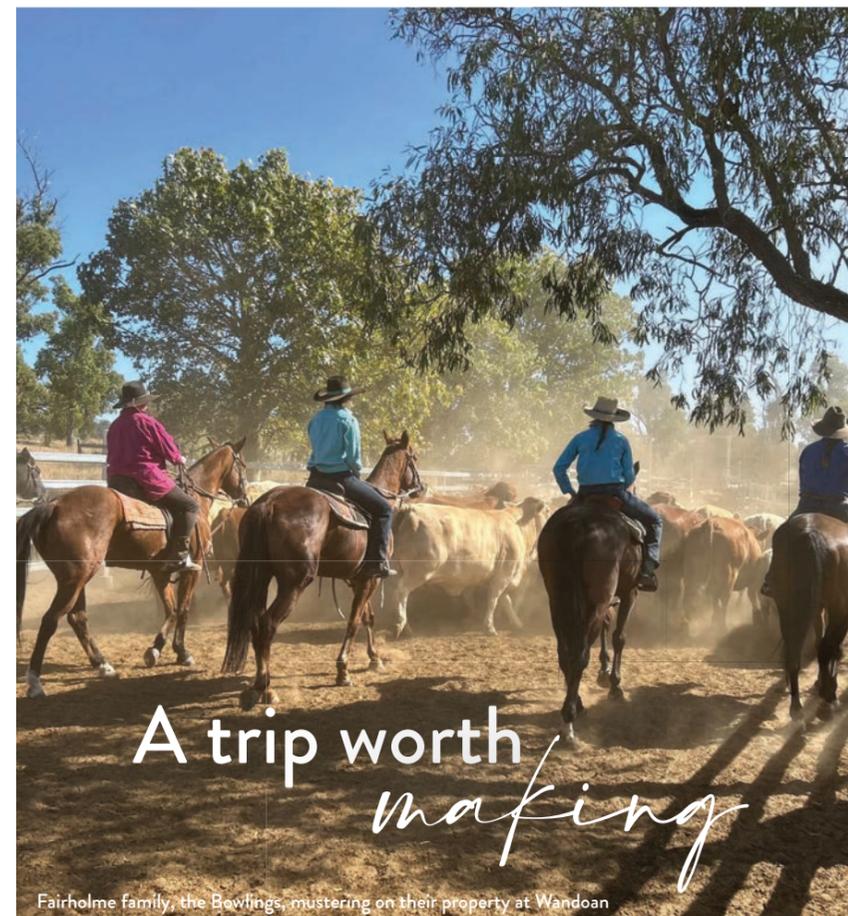
through a couple of creeks on the bitumen. When we arrived at Ballera the first person I saw said that I needed to call Nathan – he couldn't even get out our driveway creek!

We were looked after so well at the worker camp, unlimited ice cream and pizza and even a few wines for me to calm my nerves!

We had a good night sleep there and had to get ferried back to the station by helicopter the next day. Miss Megan felt like a rock star returning from school!

My journey with mostly dirt roads down 'The Strez' for school will finish at the end of this year – in a funny way I'll miss that

road for school and I'm proud of myself that the tyranny of distance never stopped us getting our 3 boys to see their friends at their limited face to face events for school.



Fairholme family, the Bowlings, mustering on their property at Wandoan



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