

GEOGRAPHY'S

Big Week Out 2011

Give up a week of school holidays to do Geography fieldwork? Yes please, say these students ... and can you make it longer next time!



The 2011 Geography's Big Week Out was held from 2 to 7 October on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria. The 16 participating students had won their places through outstanding performances in the National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition. On offer was selection into the team which will represent Australia at the International Geography Olympiad in Cologne, Germany, 21-27 August 2012.

The students arrived in Melbourne on Sunday 2 October:

First up we went to Eureka Tower, the highest tower in the Southern Hemisphere let alone Melbourne. After ascending over 80 floors, we were able to take a full circle view over Melbourne. In small groups, we walked around the tower taking observations of Melbourne, what had changed and what was currently happening. This was great for providing us with background information about Melbourne and it gave us a glimpse of what else was to follow during the week. Anthony

After our Melbourne Orientation experience in the Eureka Tower's "Skydeck" we made our way to Federation Square which over its short lifespan has evolved to be a significant social focal point. We then boarded the City Circle Tram, a free tourist service (which therefore is always overcrowded). Enroute it gave us a narrated tour of Melbourne and some of the background history which was quite fascinating. With a short stop in the Docklands to have a look at an example of urban renewal we continued around to the Carlton Gardens and after drawing a sketch map we were on our way down to the Peninsula. Daniel

After travelling to Blairgowrie we settled into a comfortable

group accommodation lodge, and continued work after dinner with a briefing on the next day's activity.

On our first morning on the Peninsula, we drove to Arthur's Seat to draw a field sketch. This vantage point provided breath-taking views of Port Phillip Bay and the adjacent suburbs of Rosebud, Tootgarook, Rye, Blairgowrie, Sorrento and Portsea. Aside from the beautiful view, this activity was a really great way to commence our time on the Mornington Peninsula as it provided us with an opportunity to get our bearings and to establish a special understanding of the area in which we would be working. Lucinda

Next, we were lucky enough to visit the Mornington Shire Council office, where we were given talks by guest speakers, Council CEO Dr Michael Kennedy and Strategic Planning Manager Allan Cowley. These speakers gave us an insight into how the Mornington Peninsula was run, and the problems the Shire faced when planning for the future of the region.

Below: Students at the Eureka Tower's "Skydeck"





Participating students of the 2011 Geography's Big Week Out

They really showed us the importance of town planning and the possible career directions geography could take us in the future. A few councilors – Antonella Celi, David Gibb and Bill Goodrem – were kind enough to sacrifice their time to discuss the area with us over a great lunch supplied by the Shire. It was an interesting visit, and a great starting point for us to base the remainder of our fieldwork on. Aleks

In the afternoon the students began their river studies at the source of Main Creek – struggling through the undergrowth to take measurements.

The Main Creek Study was a chance to really get into the activity. If you weren't feeling the chill of the Peninsula's weather yet, this was the perfect opportunity to get your feet wet and freezing. Whether it was using dog biscuits and oranges to find out the speed of the creek's flow, or measuring the wetted perimeter and dimensions of the creek's shape, most were brave enough to get into the water for a bit of fun. Everyone also had a chance to do some sampling and tests on the creek's water condition at different points of the creek with Lisa Kordus, a Waterwatch coordinator with Melbourne Water. Observing the surrounding vegetation was interesting as well as seeing the changes at different spots down the creek. Everyone learned something new here and it was also a good time to bond through team work. Carmen

Tuesday morning started with an early visit to the Peninsula Hot Springs.

The Peninsula Hot Springs was a great activity that we were lucky enough to enjoy, and I speak for many in saying it was one of the highlights of the trip. These man-made pools of water are filled every morning with 38-42EC water that is naturally warmed by a geothermal zone in the earth's crust. As there is no natural surface spring, the water is extracted from an artesian bore on the premises. It is later pumped back

into the ground so the use is sustainable. Relaxing in these hot pools of water was a welcome escape from the intense field work and long debriefs that we had been experiencing, and gave us a chance to enjoy one of the Mornington Peninsula's most renowned tourist attractions. Apart from enjoying the water temperature we were also able to gain an insight into the functions and difficulties of running a developing tourism venture by talking with the business manager. Nicholas F

Most of the day was then taken up with comparing the sand dune systems on Rosebud Beach and St Andrews Beach. This included measuring dune transects using very sophisticated GPS units – lent by Ultimate Positioning, along with Jamie Portman and Naomi Witham to teach us how to use them.

On Tuesday, the group undertook studies of the sand dunes at Rosebud and St Andrews Beach. The field work involved vegetation transects and the collection of abiotic data such as wind speed and height above sea level. We took away from this study a greater appreciation of how the human population can impact native ecosystems. The dune system

Below: Dune study at Rosebud Beach



at Rosebud was significantly degraded due to the extensive human activity in the area. In contrast, the dune system at St Andrews Beach was more natural and relatively untouched. It was great to be able to apply the theory I had learned in the classroom in such a beautiful place. Rhys

On the way back to the accommodation, the students shopped for the international cooking competition, a favourite tradition of Big Week Out. The Mexican and Thai groups cooked the first night while the other half of the students prepared a presentation on the dunes. The next night the Italian and Indian cooks provided the feast, while the other students prepared their residential and retail presentations.



Laura shopping for the international cooking challenge

Four teams, four different cuisines, a shopping trip to Woolworths, a budget of \$180, held over two nights, let the battle commence. The international cooking challenge was definitely a highlight for me as everyone's culinary skills were put to the test and our creativity was tested. In my group (Thai) the two girls took charge and the boys diligently followed our instructions, with some help, in how to julienne carrots, grill chicken and cut an onion. Overall it was good fun and there were no kitchen disasters with all teams producing some very fine tasting (and looking) food. While each team were certain they were going to win, Team Italy were announced the winners. Sarah N

On Wednesday each student surveyed five houses, in both Rosebud West and Sorrento, as well as examining the retail areas. We also did overall neighbourhood assessments, and compared the data accumulated in the field with our expectations of the two areas. We developed these expectations from examining a variety of statistics, graphs and maps prior to entering the field. It was surprising for the group to realise that our preconceived notions of Rosebud and Sorrento were, in fact, incorrect in many areas. We spoke with Kathy Heffernan from Mornington Peninsula Shire's Rosebud West Community Renewal Program, who discussed many plans in place for Rosebud. It was an engaging and interesting activity, which challenged many of the group's misconceptions, and made us think about how we judge areas sight unseen, and are often incorrect. Kate



Main Creek Study

Later than afternoon we boarded **Storm Bay** for a great trip on Port Phillip Bay. Its captain, Tim Phillips from the Wooden Boat Shop in Sorrento, was a mine of local information.

The sailing was a real highlight of the trip, as it was both incredibly interesting and enjoyable to experience. We boarded a 1920s fishing smack in Sorrento to experience Portsea, Point Nepean, and the Rip from a different perspective, all with a running commentary from our captain Tim. We saw a variety of wildlife, ranging from some dolphins swimming alongside the boat to a seal jumping out of the water as it struggled with a large fish, as well as some of the most expensive houses in Australia, and the old quarantine station and leper colony, not to mention the staggering coastline of Point Nepean National Park. It was also a great time to get to know some of the other students; the sailing being more laid back than the intensive fieldwork activities we had completed over the previous few days. Overall, it was a very entertaining experience. Oliver



Cycling in Point Nepean National Park

Thursday morning we conducted more river studies, this time on Balcombe Creek. This flows through more developed areas than Main Creek and so provided a useful comparison.

On Thursday afternoon we cycled through the beautiful Point Nepean National Park. The cycling itself was very tough, with lots of hills and steep sections, but it was worth it as the views over Port Phillip Bay and Bass Strait were spectacular! We stopped along the way at some historical sites, such as Fort Nepean, Pearce Barracks and the site of

the disappearance of former Prime Minister Harold Holt. The scenery was breathtaking and although most of us felt very sore afterwards, it was a lot of fun and definitely one of the highlights of the week. Sarah G

For dinner on the final night we went to a local restaurant.



During the week we drew out the name of another student and while we were doing the retail studies, purchased clothes from an op-shop for that student to wear at our final dinner on Thursday night. We all tried to keep the name of our student secret as we searched the op-shop for the oldest, brightest and daggiest clothes for them to wear. On

Thursday night we revealed who our lucky recipients were and clad in our new clothes we enjoyed a beautiful dinner in a restaurant at Blairgowrie overlooking the bay. With such a strange array of clothing on display, we received lots of funny looks from fellow diners! Special mention must be made of Carmen for her bright pink outfit, Aleks for her incredibly daggy jumper and skirt, Nick B for looking like he had come from the 80s, and Shirley for her new handbag. It was a great night and lots of fun! Sarah G

I believe that I can speak on behalf of everyone when I say that we were pleasantly surprised with the variety and quality of the food that we enjoyed during the week. On Monday night after a day of trekking through creeks we were treated with pizza which was followed by pavlova. Over the following two nights we enjoyed the food prepared by the four International Cook Off groups: Thai, Italian, Mexican and Indian. I think that of all the people, Aleks enjoyed the Mexican the most due to her love of jalapeños and all foods spicy! As Thursday night was our last night together as a group we went out to a local Italian restaurant all decked out in our Op Shop clothes. I think we were all overwhelmed by the size of the dishes we were presented with. Eating out at a restaurant was a great way to spend our last night together. Brodie

Back from dinner, the students were presented with letters from the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, and their official certificates. This was followed by a fun quiz.



On the last night the students were divided into four teams, with the teachers in a single team. The quiz was seven rounds long, each round consisting of 10 questions that challenged students' knowledge of Australia and the rest of the world and one clue to the baffler. In the end, the competition was extremely close. Kath announced that the "Pink Ladies" (made up of three girls and one boy) had drawn with the "Jalapenos" with a score of 63, followed extremely closely by another team and embarrassingly the teachers on 62, and "Team" on 61. However it turned out that apparently Kath had made a mistake in the adding up (she blamed tiredness) and maybe the Jalapenos had won after all. Nick B

The final morning the students sat a test.

The test was a measurement of the skills we learnt during the week. It lasted for 2 hours and was part of the selection process for the team of 4 that's going to Cologne, Germany for the Geography Olympiad. The test was pretty interesting. It wasn't too hard, but it required you to think a lot. I certainly believe it was a good test for the selection of the team. It really drew upon the skills that would be required in Germany. Rob



Port Phillip Bay

After the test was over we departed for the airport and home, travelling via the Sorrento-Queenscliff ferry and thus completing our circumnavigation of Port Phillip Bay.

What makes a camp amazing, and not just good, isn't so much the things you do and the places you go, but the people you share those experiences with; and I can safely say that the people at the Big Week Out made the week exceptional. Even though we were all from different parts of Australia and had different interests, we all managed to fit in together through our common love of Geography. It wasn't just the students who made the week special, but the organisers who made it possible, the fantastic teachers who challenged us and pushed our knowledge of Geography, and the people who gave up their time to teach us about their jobs and the area. Aleks

The students who enjoyed it all so much were:

Nick Booth, Pembroke School, Adelaide
 Laura Butler, Penrith High School, Sydney
 Anthony Chen, Radford College, Canberra

Natalie Cvitanovich, Glenunga International High School, Adelaide
 Lucinda Everson, St Margaret's Anglican Girls' School, Brisbane
 Nicholas Forrester, Hale School, Perth
 Sarah Godman, Cootamundra High School, NSW
 Daniel King, Distance Education Centre Victoria
 Sarah Naco, Canberra Girls' Grammar School
 Kate Parrott, Hobart College
 Brodie Petrolo, Woonona High School, Wollongong
 Carmen Schoenjahn, St Mary's Anglican Girls' School, Perth
 Rhys Sharry, Smithfield State High School, Cairns
 Oliver Vasak, Sydney Grammar School
 Aleksandra Vasic, John Monash Science School, Melbourne
 Rob Wilson, Wynyard High School, Tas

And those fantastic, knowledgeable leaders were:

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| Pat Beeson | Kath Berg |
| Samantha Davis | Tanya Grace |
| Libby Hillman | Robin Irvine |
| Claire Jones | Shirley Lahtinen |
| Margaret McIvor | Terry McMeekin |
| Judy McPherson | Adam Nash |
| Emma O'Dowd | John Ramsdale |
| Gerry Smith | Lyn Terrett |
| Karoline Walter | |

We'll leave it to Oliver to sum up the experience:

I found GBWO to be a fantastic opportunity to both learn a lot more about Geography as a whole, and to meet other like-minded people. The program itself was very well put together, and balanced intensive Geography fieldwork with recreation appropriately, excellently showcasing the Mornington Peninsula. The program allowed for a lot of freedom of thought, rather than dictating our opinions as school Geography courses have a tendency to do. The fieldwork and talks by various officials and groups allowed everyone to formulate their own views, and to share their own ideas with each other, encouraging some very high levels of analysis from all. The BWO was thus immensely enjoyable, both through the activities we undertook, and through how it allowed for a degree of individuality and creativity within our work, presenting a very new, yet professional way of studying the Mornington Peninsula. This combination, along with some very smooth management, as well as the intelligent and likable other students, helped make the week a very enjoyable and memorable one.

To give your students the opportunity to benefit from the 2012 Geography's Big Week Out, enter your Year 10/11 students (16 years or over on 31 August 2012) in the National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition.

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