



Daily Blog from the Autism Victoria Support Crew participating in Walk 2, Walk 4

Day 1: March 16th 2011 – Footscray to Bacchus Marsh

Dear Walk Supporters

I just wanted to let you know that Anika and Ashley have set off – and have successfully completed their first day. What a day! It started with breakfast at the WorleyParsons Office in Footscray, with short send off addresses from Murray Dawson-Smith, CEO Autism Victoria, and Greg McPhee, Director, Southern Region, WorleyParsons, and Ashley responded on behalf of them both, and thanked everyone for coming along to see them off. There were about 50 people there to wave and cheer as the walkers set off just as the sun rose behind the city buildings.

The first stop was at the Western Autistic School in Laverton where Principal Val Gill, teachers and lots of young students welcomed Anika and Ashley with posters and banners that they had made. What a great first stop – to see how funding really helps children and families who are living with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The first day finished under police escort into Bacchus Marsh, with dinner at Young and Main, organized by the Bacchus Marsh Parent Support Group and the first night's accommodation provided by Bacchus Marsh Caravan Park.

Anika and Ashley have completed 58km today – one of the longest days of the walk. It was lovely weather and gentle gradients – tomorrow is going to be a bit more hilly. Let's hope they get a good night's sleep ready to tackle Day 2.

We look forward to meeting you all along the way – thank you for being a part of this great walk and for assisting us with arrangements along the way – without all your help, we could not have done it.

See you soon!

Kind regards

Fran on behalf of the walkers and support team – Anika, Ashley, Luke, James, Erin, Frank



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Day 2: March 17th 2011 – Bacchus Marsh to Ballarat

Hello Walk Supporters

Another day has finished, and Anika and Ashley have now made it to Ballarat. The day started off with a fantastic cooked breakfast put on by the lovely folks at the Bacchus Marsh Autism Support Group – thank you to Snez, Deb, Katrina and Ross for their delicious cooking (not sure how much cooking Ross did!) and for looking after us all so well.

We were just about to set off when we managed to break the casing on the car key – good tip – don't do this! The car had to be towed back to Mitsubishi! So thanks to our wonderful colleagues, James, CEO Murray and Kym, a new car was brought out and we swapped over and got under way. (Hey James thanks for the coffee and liquorish allsorts!)

There was a big hill out of Bacchus Marsh – and the walkers were joined by one of the Kokoda walkers, Paul, who gave some moral support up the hill! Once at the top, it plateaued out and the scenery was lovely – and the weather too.

Ashley is having a few problems with her toe – she fractured it only a few weeks before the walk started, but she didn't want it to stop the walk going ahead, so after a full day on it, she was pushing it a bit too much, so the walkers became riders for a few sections of the day.

The walkers/riders made it through the very pretty Werribee Gorge – and up the other side! Into Ballan, and a local resident and her 2 boys, offered us the use of her home as a pitstop. Refreshed Ashley and Anika made good time into the outskirts of Ballarat where Bill from the Ballarat Special Developmental School joined them for the walk down into Ballarat.

All along the way, people have stopped at the side of the road to say hello and to support the walkers – and give us donations as well.

A great group of supporters met Ashley and Anika outside the town hall and local MP Sharon Knight welcomed the girls with a few words of thanks. Great to see the ladies from the Ballarat Autism Network, parents and children and the Win TV camera crew – what a brilliant welcome. Thank you guys!

It was another really long day for the walkers but now there are a couple of shorter days and the weather is holding up well at the moment. The wind is cold but the sun is warm.

We look forward to catching up with many of you along the way!

Very best wishes from the walkers and support team.

Fran



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Day 3: March 18th 2011 – Ballarat to Beaufort

Anika and Ashley have now arrived at Beaufort. Today's walk was a little shorter – “just” 44km rather than nearly 60 for each of the first two days! With a very cold wind but a hot sun, Ashley and Anika set off from the Town Hall in long pants for the first part of the day.

The supporters in Ballarat have been wonderful – thanks to Stacy, Kris, Andrea, Corel, Samone, Jonty, Jonty's sister whose name I've forgotten (sorry!), MP Sharon Knight and her sister Kerryn, Lynne and Bill from the Ballarat Special Developmental School – Bill's support walking with AandA has really helped lift their spirits and all the others who have helped with the walk.

Leaving Ballarat through the Remembrance Arch, the walkers followed Remembrance Drive for many kilometers with support along the way from truckies and cars giving them a hoot (mostly friendly), and some pulling over to give them a donation and words of encouragement. The good will of the people is wonderful.

Stopping for a break at Cardigan Lodge Motel, we were absolutely delighted when Luke asked if there was any chance they could provide accommodation and they came to the party with 2 family rooms for the night! We would like to say a big thank you to Robyn and Paul for their generosity – and without any warning or notice! Cardigan Lodge Motel is just near to Burrumbeet Lake – a really lovely spot.

No adventure is complete without some incidents! Today's were a flat tyre on the support vehicle and a grazed knee for Anika. Erin gave first aid and Hains Windscreens at Beaufort fixed the puncture – at no charge. Thank you Hains – awesome.

Coming into Beaufort we had some surprise visitors who joined Anika and Ashley for the last part – 3 guides and a scout from the Beaufort group – so we jacketed them all up in high vis vests over their uniforms and the group walked into the centre, where we were greeted by Harry from the local Rotary Club, and about a dozen more guides and their parents and leader who had put on afternoon tea under the trees at the rotunda (very spooky – Luke had been craving lettuce and egg sandwiches and one of the mums had tuned into his brainwaves because there they were!). What a great surprise – thanks, Angela, from the Pyrenees Advocate for coming along to cover the walk and also Maria for getting the word out, and to Beaufort Caravan Park for offering us a site.

The Golden Age pub provided fantastic support with a roast dinner and sticky date pudding – if you're in the area, you might want to pop in there! And great timing meant that we were able to see Anika and Ashley on the 6.30 Win News from Ballarat the previous night with interviewer, cute Henry!

Back to the Cardigan Lodge Motel, where James joined us again having picked up the broken car and the caravan and helped us to swap cars again – back to the original support car! James – you are a legend – and Mary – you have a wacky sense of humour! Thanks for keeping us laughing.

Keep your fingers crossed for the weather – it's been great so far but we've been told there's a rain band coming through. Let's hope it's not a big one.

That's all for today! Fran – and the team – Ashley, Anika, Erin, Frank and Luke



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Day 4: March 19th 2011 – Beaufort to Ararat

Hi Walk Supporters

Today Ashley and Anika had another medium length (for them!) walk – about 44km from Beaufort to Ararat and the weather continued to be very kind – the cold wind dropped and it got quite hot in the middle of the day. We were warned that there were quite a few locusts around the Ararat area, so we made sure we had hat nets just in case it got really bad.

Bill Sutcliffe joined Anika and Ashley for the first part of the day, then Anika's sister and Ashley and Anika's workmate Cat walked with them and Anika's parents caught up with them for some of the way, so all the extra company helped keep the energy levels high and they kept up a very good pace, reaching Ararat right on schedule.

The walk was very straightforward, along the highway, and being a weekend, there were not quite so many trucks on the road – there were a fair few hills – which the walkers noticed a lot more than the support crew! The walk was without major incident – which is a good thing.

Ararat had its biggest weekend on the calendar with the Jailhouse Rock Festival taking place in the main street – so Anika and Ashley's arrival was announced over the speaker system and a great crowd welcomed them into Ararat. Local Councillor, Murray Woods made them very welcome, as did the Ararat and Stawell Parent Support Group, who had made banners and signs and had balloons, which the walkers could see as they walked up the street – thank you parents and members for that – what a terrific sight.

A huge thank you to Julene, who runs the Parent Support Group for organising members to come out and welcome the party – what a lovely welcome. Also in the welcome party were Rose, the Special Needs Coordinator at Marion College, and local parent Kylee, and a number of other supporters (please forgive me for not getting all your names – especially the lady holding the banner!).

The walk from the Town Hall to the Shire Hall Hotel for dinner was not difficult – about 15m across the street! Thank you to Toni and Kerry Stockwell for providing dinner for the whole party and to Councillor Woods and his wife Janice for drinks, and to Julene, Kylee and Rose for their company over dinner – it was a lovely evening and Ashley, who had been hanging out for a steak for a few days, finally got one!

Being the biggest weekend on Ararat's calendar, accommodation was very difficult to find: however, Kylee opened her home to the 6 of us – 2 walkers and 4 support crew – and we had a “mini-break” at her lovely and peaceful property at Landsburgh. It really was like having an overnight holiday in the bush – the moonlight was almost like daylight when we arrived and it never went dark. We woke up to kangaroos 20m away and the most lovely sunrise lighting up the mountains in the distance. Kylee put on a wonderful cooked breakfast for us all and Ashley and Anika sat out on the deck to record a visual diary in the most amazing location. Kylee – thank you so much for doing this for us – it was more than we could have imagined.



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Tomorrow is a shorter day – about 30km from Ararat to Stawell and the forecast is good again – the walkers are holding up incredibly well and doing a truly amazing job. They are having the opportunity to meet people all along the way and to hear first hand stories about the people they are doing this for, so it's quite an emotional journey as well.

We can't say thank you enough to all the people we are meeting along the way – the word doesn't say enough, but you know what we mean!

That's all for today – coming to you a little late because the PC has also been feeling a little tired and emotional!

Very best wishes

Fran on behalf of the team – Anika, Ashley, Frank, Erin and Luke



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Day 5: March 20th 2011 – Ararat to Stawell

Hi again Walk Supporters

Anika and Ashley have made it to Stawell, about 240km into the walk, with 530km to go to Adelaide – so about a third of the way there...

Fully refreshed by the overnight at Kylee's, we were back in Ararat to start off by about 8.30am and were offered coffee at the Ararat Bakery – thank you for that! Joining the walkers today were a number of members of Ashley's family – her mum Sharon, step dad Tony, friend Sandy, and boyfriends of Ashley, Anika and Erin – Jan, Tristan and Gareth, and their friend Ian, as well as our overnight host Kylee and Councillor Woods. Tony and Sharon drove the support van allowing Frank and Erin to walk as well, so it was a big group of walkers striding out through the lovely wine region around Great Western with the Grampians on our left.

Lunch break was just before Great Western, but with today's walk being only around 30km, the walkers had no problem keeping to time. The boys were able to keep up with Anika & Ashley for the day – but looking at the state of their feet by the end of the day, there's no way they'd be wanting to do 60km tomorrow!

We got into Stawell at around 5.15pm finishing up at Cato Lake where Councillor Andrea Cooper greeted Anika & Ashley on behalf of the Stawell Rural Shire Council. She told us about the regular flooding the area has suffered since last September and how she and her husband are living in a bus, with a lounge outdoors as their living room. The whole area is incredibly green and lush for the end of summer, with waist high crops in the paddocks and happy animals with full dams.

The guys rested their feet in the lake in Cato Park before the group headed off to overnight accommodation provided by the Grampians Edge Caravan Park at Dadswell Bridge. The weather was fantastic again all day – but quite humid by the time we reached Stawell, and with storms forecast overnight and looking quite iffy for the next few days. So keep your fingers crossed for us – don't want Anika and Ashley to have to squelch all the way to Horsham.



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Day 6: March 21st 2011 – Stawell to Horsham

Dear Walk Supporters

Day 6 took the walkers from Stawell to Horsham – a really big day. Overnight the storms that had been forecast didn't eventuate and the rain that came through during the day split at Horsham and went either side of us so we had just a couple of brief showers – much better than expected.

Ashley and Anika were offered a horse ride just near the town which was a lovely change from their usual mode of transport and put us a bit behind schedule. We started off from outside Stawell's wonderful town hall and clock tower, complete with hourly chimes and moving figures of miners. Emma D, one of our colleagues from Autism Victoria dropped by as we left Stawell.

Murphy's law meant that one of those brief showers happened just as we had got another flat tyre and were changing it outside the Big (rather sad looking) Koala. Again it was on the left hand side of the car, and this time it was a screw stuck in it, and being at the back, we had to change the front tyre and put it on the back and put the little tiny emergency spare tyre (which is more like a bike tyre) on the front. We are getting pretty fast at changing tyres – Frank is an absolute whizz.

Today was also changeover day for support staff – Luke was heading back to the office and James was taking over which was lucky as this meant that Luke was able to go and get the tyre fixed whilst we continued to Wimmera Lake for a pitstop. Whilst we were there the photographer for the Mail Times saw us and stopped to take some photos by the lake – which has water in it for the first time in about 15 years.

Ashley and Anika made very good time, with a bit of time on the bikes to rest Ashley's broken toe, and we arrived at the Wimmera Lakes Caravan & Tourist Park on the Stawell side of Horsham in good time. We are incredibly grateful to Chris and Kirsten for providing us with a cabin and powered site for the night. It's a wonderful caravan park and just a shame that the weather wasn't warm enough to go in the pool but Ashley and Anika were able to cool their feet in it.

We had a wonderful treat in the evening thanks to Kylie Cleever, coordinator of the Wimmera Parents Autism Support Group, who rallied the members of the group to put on a wonderful barbeque dinner, complete with pavlova and chocolate cake for dessert! It was a great evening – lots of parents and children as well as teachers from the Horsham Special School and Principal Matt Copping, as well as plenty of uninvited guests – mosquitoes – and Ash's cat!

Ashley and Anika have really enjoyed meeting the parents and children and hearing their stories, which helps make the walk mean that much more. They are continuing to do a fantastic job – their steely determination, despite being dog-tired every night, is really impressive.

Tomorrow's walk will take us from Horsham to Dimboola – a much shorter day and pretty flat, so fingers crossed for the weather again and a relatively "easy" day – and yes, that's easy for me to say, sitting here in the car!

Very best wishes to you all from

Fran on behalf of the team – Ashley, Anika, Frank, Erin, Luke & James (and Tristan who joined us for the last part of the day)



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Day 7: March 22nd 2011 – Horsham to Dimboola

Hi Walk Supporters,

What an exciting day today! Ashley and Anika were in the Horsham ABC Radio Studio by 7.15am and live on air a few minutes later being interviewed by Rebecca McLaren – quite a nerve wracking experience which they handled with the confidence of pros. Thanks ABC Radio National for helping us publicise the walk – just wonderful.

Whilst we were busy with media engagements, Frank was packing up the van and James was packing up the pop-top. And talking of the pop-top, Coral, thank you for lending this to us – it is absolutely awesome. Once we had made complete duffuses of ourselves winding it up and down a few times (watched by all the grey nomads who probably knew how to do it a lot better than us), we were able to sit in luxury on a couch for the first time since leaving Melbourne. The beds were comfortable, we were able to make a nice cup of tea and relax – but unfortunately the Horsham mozzies decided to spend the night with us.

Thank you Chris and Kirsten for the night at your lovely caravan park – what a great place for getting together with the local support group.

Ashley & Anika set off into Horsham where Kylie and her son Tom gave us a shout and a wave from the side of the road, then we caused a traffic jam in the middle of the town. They are forgiving folks these country people! Next stop was to visit the Horsham Special School, where the whole Senior School was out on the footpath to greet the walkers. What a fantastic sight! Ten of the seniors were very excited to join Ashley and Anika for a short distance along with their Principal Matt Copping.

Horsham Special School Juniors were waiting a little further down the road with signs that they had made – “Hi Anika”, “Hi Ashley”, “Super Stars”, “Good Luck”, “Great Walking” and “All the best” – thanks guys, what an awesome effort. The visit to Horsham has been really great – thanks to Kylie and Matt and to everyone else for making Ashley and Anika so welcome.

Leaving Horsham, the weather continued to be fine, although dull and rather windy. Areas off to both sides of the road were still flooded and the whole area is green – very unusual for the end of summer. We stopped just off the highway at a little pond (don't know if is normally there or just a flooded paddock!) and Samone and Jonty, and Jonty's grandma found us. (And a quick hello to Jonty's sister – Jenae – who we met in Ballarat, now we know your name!)

The railway track followed the road much of the way from Horsham to Dimboola, and we spotted the overlander (just 8 carriages) and a couple of impressive trains – the first one with 3 locomotives and 61 freight carriages and the second with 2 locomotives and 71 carriages – couldn't help myself counting them☺ (Make of that what you will!)

We had an unknown beeping sound as we travelled on – it turned out to be the fuel gauge so we thought Anika and Ashley might have to push us into Dimboola. Samone joined Anika & Ashley on the road for the last part of the way into town, including a quick visit to a train locomotive in Apex



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Park, purchased in 1975 by the people of Dimboola to commemorate the importance of trains to the region. (For any train buffs out there, it is a J Class Type 2-8-0 No. 539, oil burning engine built in Lancashire in 1954.) Erin entertained us with some interesting moves in the park – she fell over her thongs and grazed both knees. Sadly we missed the photo opportunity.

What an amazing crowd we had to welcome us outside the Dimboola Library! In a town of only 1700 people, it was a fabulous turnout. Thanks to Debbie at the library, Karen, Lou and their 3 children Anna, Bill and Tom, Samone and Jonty, the local guides, Audrey and Max from the Dimboola Lions, Brendan from the Dimboola Banner, and all the other parents and children who came out to greet Ashley and Anika – a fantastic welcome in one of the smallest towns!

We were treated to a delicious home-cooked roast dinner at the home of Max and Pam Budde – Max is the president of the local Lions Club and he is a very lucky man because Pam is a wonderful cook! She and the “maid” (Pam’s friend Bev) had produced a truly lovely meal – roast turkey and lamb, roast potatoes and pumpkin, cauliflower cheese, tomato and onion bake, peas, carrots and gravy, followed by apple crumble with cream, ice cream and strawberries. Those of us who had not spent the day walking didn’t really have an excuse for eating such a hearty meal but it was completely irresistible.

After dinner we went to the overnight accommodation at the haunted Victoria Hotel – a huge thank you to Samone and her husband for arranging this for us – we had a great night’s sleep in a completely mozzie-free environment.

Tomorrow the journey continues from Dimboola to Nhill and the forecast is not so good, so fingers crossed once again.

That’s all for today from all of us on the walk
Fran on behalf of Ashley, Anika, Erin and James



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Day 8: March 23rd 2011 – Dimboola to Nhill

Dear Walk Supporters

Ashley and Anika are half way there! It's actually more than half way if you go along the highway, but with the route they are taking, over to Meningie and Tailem Bend, it is a little longer and that makes Nhill the half way point. They are continuing to do a truly amazing job and showing us what they are made of.

The day began with the Lions Club making breakfast for us at their headquarters in Dimboola – Audrey, Ron and Max provided a great cooked breakfast which went down very well. I believe we have Pam to thank for more lovely cooking. The Lions also gave a very generous donation and even took our rubbish off us ready to recycle it!

For those readers who remember the film "Dimboola", the folks of Dimboola would like it noted that they really are not at all like the people in the movie. Not having seen it, I can't tell you if that's true or not but if you want to come and check them out, you will find them very friendly and quite normal☺

Anika and Ashley set off in the drizzle, with Brendan from the Dimboola Banner joining them for the day. They soon passed the scene of a truck fire which happened early yesterday morning. There were no fatalities, but there was virtually nothing left of the truck – just some twisted pieces of metal, still being cleared onto trucks to take away.

We stopped for lunch at Gerang Gerung (or was it Gerung Gerang?) where we made use of the Memorial Hall toilet block, and then heated soup for the walkers on the stove in the pop-top. The wind had picked up by this stage and it was a very cold cross wind making walking quite unpleasant. A row of trees along the side of the road gave very little shelter. Looking more closely at the trees, we noticed huge spiders' webs containing some very large spiders with great round bodies. (Anyone know what these are?) You wouldn't want to stop there in the dark for a "natural break"...

After lunch the weather deteriorated further with the rain really setting in and the temperature dropping. The trucks were putting up a huge amount of spray and we decided that it was important to get the walkers to the finish as quickly as possible. They arrived in Nhill looking like drowned rats (sorry guys!) and headed straight for hot showers.

The West Wimmera Hospital had provided the accommodation for the night at the Zero Inn Motor Home, thanks to Martha Karagiannis and the hospital CEO – terrific accommodation. Martha also managed to arrange a physio session for Ashley and Anika to make sure they were holding up ok so thank you very much to Martha and the physios for that – at very short notice!

Darcy, Brody and Diane from the Nhill College dropped in to say hi to Anika and Ashley and present them with a donation of \$187 that they raised today with a coin line across the tennis court – what a fantastic result!

And next it was on to the Nhill Lutheran Primary School where Autism Victoria member, Belinda



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Avery had set in motion the evening's event. Belinda arranged with the P&F Committee to put on a meal and info session about autism for parents from the school, including providing activities for the kids so parents could attend. Ashley and Anika were greeted at the front door by Principal Grant Fiedler and head girl and boy, Antonette and Seth, and escorted through to the hall where they were met by a lovely group of parents, teachers, local service providers and students.

James is one of our Information Officers at Autism Victoria, and he gave a short overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders and how this can affect children in a school setting. Anika talked about her connection to autism through her nephew Kaya and what a difficult journey this is for him and his family and then Ashley talked about the journey they were on and the meaning it had for them and what they were experiencing along the way.

Thank you to Sonya Colbert, P&F Secretary and Chris Deckert, P&F President for this great initiative. We were so sorry not to meet Belinda whose children were not well – but thank you Belinda for putting the wheels in motion for this. Thank you also to Fleta Pohlner, a speech therapist in Nhill, for coming along and for helping us with media interest, and to YingYing He, another speech therapist in the area who is currently working with two families with autistic children. It is great to be able to connect with you and let you know about how Autism Victoria can provide assistance not only to families but also to professionals through the InfoLines for parents and for professionals.

At risk of making all other primary schools envious, I cannot finish without telling you that the Principal, Grant, caught dinner! There was a very nice sized snapper (it filled a large tray) which he pulled out of the sea a few days ago. The salad was fully home grown, and I believe Belinda was responsible for the wonderful pavlova.

Tomorrow is the last full day in Victoria – Ashley and Anika head for Kaniva and we look forward to meeting the locals there. Please feel free to pass this on to anyone who might be interested – or drop me a line with their email address and I'll add them to the list.

Time for bed!

Fran, on behalf of Anika, Ashley, Erin and James



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Day 9: March 24th 2011 – Nhill to Kaniva

Hello Walk Supporters

Today was a special day – Erin’s birthday! And it was special for another reason too – at lunchtime, Ashley and Anika were exactly half way through the walk, timewise – 8 ½ days done and 8 ½ days to go.

Unfortunately it was another poor day for weather with a very strong headwind the whole day, showers on and off throughout the day and temperatures fluctuating between 15 and 17 degrees! The terrain was quite tough too – some long slow hills up and down.

Breakfast was provided for us by Ann at the Zero Inn Motel – very nice too, thanks Ann! We dropped into Oliver’s Diner in Nhill for a coffee before getting underway for the day – Oliver’s was recommended to us and employs people with disabilities.

The main highway between Dimboola and Kaniva is currently undergoing some major works to provide overtaking lanes from time to time as it’s only a single lane highway. Due to the torrential rain in these parts, the ground is very soft, and one of the grading machines had got bogged (It didn’t make the grade, according to James – ha ha!) Can’t imagine what sort of machinery you’d need to get that out – they were all standing around looking at it when we passed.

A big thanks to the truckies today who have been very considerate, moving right over or slowing down and giving us plenty of room. It makes a lot of difference.

We haven’t seen much wildlife along the way, but today we saw the most amazing spider – about 8cm from toe to toe with a blue body and a red front half – we think it was some sort of mouse eating spider but it looked like a plastic toy one. Talking of spiders, we still haven’t worked out what yesterday’s was but will try to get it’s photo onto the website sometime soon.

Ashley and Anika made hard progress against the headwind, getting rained on from time to time, but pushing on at a very good speed. We reached Kaniva at around 5.30pm and were greeted at the Colonial Gardens Motel by Paula and Paul and who very kindly provided us with overnight accommodation, as well as breakfast, and then offered to take us to the local pub for dinner, and to crown it all, they ran around and organized a birthday cake for Erin – and thank you to Julie for baking it. When we asked, we were thinking that the pub would be able to arrange it, but they don’t have ovens suitable for baking, so especial thanks for going to all this trouble – it was a great surprise for Erin. Also thank you to John & Jackie at the Club Hotel for shouting drinks for the evening – it was the first alcohol for Ashley & Anika for many weeks and probably the last until next Friday! Paula, and their lovely girls, Tiannah and Emmasyn introduced us to schnitzel night at the pub – the best pork schnitzel I have ever had. Tiannah drew a picture of the 5 of us for the birthday girl, and Emmasyn brought us each a purple flower. A lovely evening – thank you very much.

Tomorrow sees another landmark – crossing the border from Victoria to South Australia. It’s around 41km to Bordertown and the weather forecast is a bit better. We’ve had the most remarkable experience meeting people in all the towns across west Victoria and experiencing their generosity



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and welcome. Even those of us not walking have been on the receiving end of their kindness and it has been very special. Anika and Ashley have had 2 very tough days with unpleasant weather conditions, but are obviously made of tough stuff and are coping incredibly well both physically and mentally.

Thank you, supporters, for your messages of support and encouragement – it's great to be in touch with you along the way.
Fran, on behalf of Ashley, Anika, Erin & James



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Day 10: March 25th 2011 – Kaniva to Bordertown

Hi Walk Supporters

The sunrise was lovely this morning – a few fluffy clouds and a blue sky – much better than the previous two mornings. The local police sergeant dropped by to say hello and to let us know he would keep an eye on us during the day if he wasn't too busy catching mass murderers. He went on his way with a piece of birthday cake.

Ashley & Anika set off through the main street of Kaniva, but it was not long until our first stop, because we came across the Rotary & Lions Fauna & Wetlands park with at least 3 of the rare red-tailed black cockatoos, one of which was very chatty, as well as wallabies, kangaroos, emus, peacocks and various other birds and animals.

Much to our disappointment, the train line which had followed the route of the highway for the last few days, veered away at this point and we followed the very straight road west towards the South Australian border. It was evidently animal day today, because a brown and white horse saw us approaching, whinnied and trotted over to us. Knowing that we had to eat all our remaining fruit before the border or throw it away, the horse was lucky enough to have a nectarine and an apple. He followed us along the fence line as we drove on, whinnied, then galloped across his paddock to the horses in the next one where he appeared to be telling them what had happened and bragging about his good luck!

At Lillimur, we took a few minutes out to check out a haunted-looking building – it looked like something out of a film set. Anika, Ashley and Erin went to have a look – it was pretty creepy, and they discovered a piece of newspaper from 1936. We found out that it was the original post office and courthouse from 1896 when this was part of the main gold route.

We finally reached the SA border in the early afternoon and had a late lunch stop – there was a very good rest area complete with toilets, picnic tables, information boards and a marker showing the border. It was a bit confusing because of the dispute over where the border should be and where it is (apparently this section was not very accurately surveyed in 1850 and Victoria claimed a slice of SA when it was resurveyed in 1868, and SA has been trying to get it back ever since).

Anika & Ashley were almost into Bordertown when we were distracted once again by animals – this time, white kangaroos – Bordertown's speciality, to look at that is, not to put on the barbeque.

Tonight we are being put up by the Woolshed Inn Motel in the centre of town, a really old building originally built as a shearing shed in the mid 1850's – thank you to Troy Searle for doing this for us. And thank you to the friendly truckies (including Grandad Greg) and painters who helped us manoeuvre the poptop.

It's still a long way to go to Adelaide but the days are going by quickly. Tomorrow takes us to Keith, so James is getting quite excited! (Surname is Keith.)

More exciting news to come tomorrow!

Fran, on behalf of the team – Anika, Ashley, Erin & James



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Day 11: March 26th 2011 – Bordertown to Keith

Hello Walk Supporters

Today dawned rather dull and overcast, but as the day went on, the cloud broke up and the sun came out, with the temperature getting into the low 20's – perfect for walking.

Ashley and Anika set off from the Woolshed Inn, which dates back to 1846, along the highway towards Keith. We have been listening in to the truckers on the walkie talkies – they only have a 2km radius but it's enough for us to be able to hear what the truckers are saying about us. Unfortunately I can't repeat any of it here – save to say that they don't see a reason for walking when there are perfectly good means of transport around. One of the friendly truckers from the previous night had warned the Boral crew doing roadworks just outside Bordertown that we were coming through, and so we tuned into their channel and listened to them organising the traffic around us and giving each other digs about putting money in the collection pots.

Today's wildlife excitement was seeing a fox streaking across the road in front of us in broad daylight, and on the trainspotting front, seeing the Overlander again as well as a train with 2 locomotives and 45 freight carriages – just a short one.

We stopped for a lunch stop in a very nice, brand new rest stop – only problem with it, they haven't yet built the toilet block. We put up the poptop and according to James, I made the best scrambled eggs on toast in the world, followed by the most delightful cup of Earl Grey tea. This camping lark is such a chore 😊

Now that we have crossed the border, we are no longer allowed to accompany Ashley and Anika as we did all through Victoria. Instead, we have to have one vehicle at the front and one about a kilometer behind it. Once the walkers have walked from one vehicle to the other (on the right hand side of the road), the two vehicles then move up the road a kilometer. This leapfrogging is easier for the drivers as they drive and then have a rest, and so on, rather than having to drive very slowly and concentrate all the time. It also enables us to check out the flora and fauna along the side of the road.

The area is still very green and today we saw a large number of sheep including at least two lots of merinos.

We were treated to a few bends in the road during the afternoon, after a morning of dead straight roads. Anyone would think the Romans had visited here. Anika and Ashley pushed on at a steady rate covering around 6km per hour. As we approached Keith, James's level of excitement grew – and by the time we reached the Keith sign, excitement peaked as he had his photo taken in the light of the setting sun.

Keith is a picturesque little place, known for its landrover on a pole, commemorating their use in setting up the region for agriculture during the 1950's. We were being provided with accommodation at the Keith Hotel Motel which was buzzing when we arrived – Saturday night in



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Keith rocks!

Tomorrow takes us further along the highway towards Adelaide, stopping at Culburra or Tintinara, which is where we are staying overnight at O'Dea's Bed & Breakfast.

That's about it for today – looking forward to a good night's sleep.

Fran on behalf of the team – Ashley, Anika, Erin & James Keith!



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Day 12: March 27th 2011 – Keith to Culburra

Hi Walk Supporters

Leaving the land rover on a pole and the Keith Hotel Motel behind us, we set off towards Culburra, on the main highway to Adelaide. The weather was cool and overcast to start with and Ashley and Anika set off dressed warmly, but it wasn't long before they needed to change into T-shirts, as the clouds started to part and a hot sun broke through.

A little way along the road, the tradies we met at Bordertown stopped to say hello on their way back home to Adelaide. Still following the railway line, we were treated to various trains including The Ghan, with 2 locomotives plus 69 freight carriages.

The landscape is not quite as green as we continue to get closer to Adelaide, although by the looks of the regular piles of hay bales, it has been a very good growing season around here. The roads were a bit quieter than previous days until later in the afternoon, when weekenders were racing back to Adelaide in a bit of a hurry.

We stopped for lunch just off the road, and whilst Ashley & Anika sat in the air conditioning to cool down, James and I sat and enjoyed the sun for a few minutes – mid 20's and lovely.

The narrow strip of trees alongside the road continued, and we could see more spiders in them. James managed (after several amusing attempts) to stun a locust so we could try feeding it to one of the spiders and photograph the response. I had the camera ready whilst James got ready to throw the locust onto the web. The web was not as sticky as we had imagined and the locust bounced straight back off it like a trampoline, towards us. You'd be surprised how quickly James and I can move when there's a stunned locust and an angry spider coming for us.

Ashley and Anika got through a huge amount of water today – although they much prefer the heat to the cold and wet. They made very good time on good roads with only gradual gradients and a good surface.

Thank you to Prin for the overnight accommodation at the delightful O'Dea's Bed & Breakfast just outside Tintinara – located on a farm, this lovely old cottage has been beautifully kitted out with original furniture and artifacts such as an egg incubator, piano music rolls, a meat safe and an early nineteenth century radio, as well as having a beautiful new bathroom and all the other things we expect to find in a modern house.

Tomorrow takes us from Culburra to Meningie and is a very long way – hopefully we will be able to get under way nice and early.

Only a few days to go now!

Fran – on behalf of Ashley, Anika, Erin & James



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Day 13: March 28th 2011 – Culburra to Meningie

Hello Walk Supporters

It was a lovely dawn at O'Deas Bed and Breakfast and James was out there in 8 degrees taking pictures of the sunrise across the still landscape. What a lovely way to start the day.

Unfortunately we didn't manage to get away until somewhat later than intended after visiting the supermarket for supplies and doing a few other bits and pieces.

At Coonalpyn we visited the bakery (on recommendation) and enjoyed a convoy of 1950's and 60's cars with caravans from the same era, some matching cars and caravans and in wonderful condition. It is remarkable how tiny caravans were back then.

We turned off the main highway at Coonalpyn and headed out along McIntosh Way, over a low range of hills straight towards Meningie. It was not a busy road. We were on it for about 47km and in that time, we passed about 25 cars, 2 buses and 3 trucks. (In light of the fact that we had moved away from the railway line, we had to resort to counting cars instead.) James was a bit concerned about the tailgating – some were less than 2km apart...

The weather was absolutely perfect for walking – not a cloud in the sky and temperatures in the low 20's. You couldn't ask for better, and it appears that it will continue like this until Friday.

We arrived at Meningie at around 6.30pm and we would like to thank Lake Albert Caravan Park for their hospitality in providing tonight's accommodation.

By the time we got to our accommodation, the sun was just sinking into a very calm Lake Albert.

Tomorrow we head for Taillem Bend with just 160km left to go. It's been a long and wearing journey for all, and the end is now in sight!

Fran, on behalf of the team



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Day 14: March 29th 2011 – Meningie to Tailem Bend

Dear Walk Supporters

I don't know if anyone is still out there – it's a marathon of reading for you guys – but for any who are, here is today's update!

Today took us from Meningie to Tailem Bend. We woke up to the most beautiful still morning with Lake Albert as flat as a mill pond and barely a difference in colour between the water and the sky. There were a number of pelicans following a lone fishing boat and hoping for some free breakfast and as the day progressed, we noticed numbers of ducks, black swans, pelicans and other birds, as well as some large fish fossicking close to the edge of the lake, with their dorsal fins above the water.

Anika and Ashley walked alongside the lake for the first few kilometers before the road moved inland and the scenery changed slowly from wetlands to scrub and grass. Apart from the odd farm, this part of SA is almost uninhabited and feels very remote and quite different to the last few days.

We managed to find a lovely spot for lunch just on a side track in the shade of some pine trees – turned out to be the driveway for some locals who stopped by to say hello and good luck. James tried to feed the ant population our rapidly decomposing grapes, but not even they were interested.

After lunch, we continued along the long and winding road towards Tailem Bend with a number of ups and downs along the way, but flattening out as we approached the finish. We missed a fabulous photo opportunity – a gecko was sunning itself on the top of a fence post, but it didn't want its photo taken – must be on the run from the law. Talking of the law, the local constabulary showed considerable interest in the Walk, doing at least 4 drive-bys – just the one policeman on his motorbike.

The whole day was warm and sunny, getting up to about 30 degrees, with the sun just setting as Ashley & Anika arrived in town. We would like to say a big thank you to Rivers Edge Caravan park who provided the girls with a 3 bedroom villa overnight, just by the water's edge. It was another long day on the road for the girls – but only a few more to go now, and just 105kms to go to the end!

Tomorrow starts with a ferry crossing before heading by the back road to Murray Bridge – quite a short day so hopefully it'll be an early finish and will give them a bit of time to relax.

Thanks for still reading! Only a few to go now...
Fran on behalf of the team!



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Day 15: March 30th 2011 – Tailem Bend to Murray Bridge

Hi Walk Supporters

Once again, the day dawned sunny and clear, with a bit of a nip in the air to start with but with a promise of warming up. Today began with a very short ferry ride across the Murray from Tailem Bend towards Jerois. It was lucky we had been talking with Marie at Tailem Bend Primary School, as she let us know that there was to be maintenance work on the ferry between 9.30am and 2.30pm so we needed to get down there straight away.

We crossed the very still river at around 9.20am and the girls started walking. It was not long at all before we were met by a group of students from the Jerois Primary School, which included the prep class and two representatives from the student council and two teachers. What a lovely sight they were in their red and black school uniforms – and they were an absolute delight with all their questions.

Soon Ashley and Anika came into view along the road and the students gave them a very excited welcome. The student council gave a donation of \$80 to the girls for the Walk – thank you to Principal Jenny for organising this and to the student council for the very generous donation.

As Ashley and Anika continued along the road towards Murray Bridge, the wind came up and the sky clouded over: it looked like it was going to rain, but there were only a few drops and the girls reached Murray Bridge without getting wet. This back route to Murray Bridge passed by the Willow Point winery, where James and I purchased some “souvenirs”. They also kindly gave us coffees so thank you for that contribution (and we would also like to compliment you on the lovely loos! We have seen a few over the last few weeks...).

The wildlife was a bit thin on the ground today but we did see some birds of prey hovering over the fields and some rather lovely cows, bulls and cactuses (James says cacti – we have plenty of time to debate these things...). As we got closer to the Adelaide hills, the landscape became a lot more tree covered and undulating – harder but pleasanter walking.

At Murray Bridge, the girls decided to take a bit of time out to do some shopping so James and I took the opportunity to explore the town on foot and by car, fortified by afternoon tea at the bakery. Murray Bridge dates back to 1830 and this was evident from the architecture: the local house design using golden sandstone with red brick quorning and tin roofs is very attractive and warm looking. Many of the houses are beautifully maintained, including the lovely Round House, an octagonal building, just near to the bridge which was the first stone building in the area and was built for the construction manager of the bridge after which Murray Bridge is named.

We learnt that the Murray is the third longest navigable river in the world and was used as a means of communication and food supply by the local Ngarrindjeri people and what is now known as Murray Bridge was called Mobilong. Sturt arrived in 1830 and decided the Murray Valley was a good place for settlement but was disappointed that the mouth of the river was no use for ships due to the sandbanks. After a local farmer called George Edwards settled and stock crossed the river near his farm, Murray Bridge became known as Edward’s Crossing. The first road bridge was built in 1873-



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9 and was changed to a shared road/rail bridge in 1886 before the separate rail bridge was built in 1925. Murray Bridge got its name from the original bridge but the name did not change officially until 1924.

Trains still pass through here on the main route between Adelaide and Melbourne for which we had gentle reminders at regular intervals through the night.

Tomorrow Anika & Ashley are walking from White Hill to Mount Barker, a distance of 42km over an undulating landscape. Then just one more day to get to Adelaide! Nearly there girls!

Fran on behalf of the team
