

Great Days at Deafblind Camp November 2009 - by Richard Howell



Left: Richard Howell at an Able Australia Deafblind Recreation event.

In the two weeks prior to November 20, Melbourne recorded the hottest weather in almost a century. As many excited deafblind people prepared to go Phillip Island we experienced 37c in the city of Melbourne, but we were determined to be ready despite the hot weather. Upon arrival I was pleased to discover the camp was very neat.

Deafblind people and volunteers came from as far as Sydney, Adelaide and even Perth to participate in the camp!

Everyone was very excited to meet new people and catch up with old friends. We were partnered with marvellous volunteers who helped us with everything from getting around, to communicating and knowing what was going on.

On the first evening the weather changed unexpectedly and a cool change came through. We changed into warmer clothes before dinner time and then ate a lovely meal.

After dinner it was time for a chat, to find out what rooms we were in and to look at the various activities and tours that were in store for us over the coming days.

We did an activity where we met new people and learnt things about them before settling down with a cuppa before bed.

On Saturday morning the weather was still cloudy and a bit cool and the rain had finally come to end the dry spell! It had to be the day of all our outside activities!

After breakfast the schedule of activities changed slightly because of the weather, but all of the guests understood. Most of the activities went ahead and people participated in archery, canoeing, yoga, a beach walk and various tours around the island.

That morning I went with some deafblind people and volunteers to Nobbies beach. We looked at some beautiful rock formations overlooking one of the most treacherous water in the world, Bass Strait. We spent some time in a Souvenir shop where we watched as hundreds of seagulls flew around and braved the strong winds.

In the afternoon some of us went to Churchill Island. A tiny island of 57 hectares, Churchill Island has an historic working farm like one the European settlers would have had in the 1850's. There were fragrant cottage gardens and lawns, farm buildings and various farm animals that were very relaxed in

our company. Some of us watched the cow being milked and watched a demonstration from a blacksmith.

I felt at home on Churchill Island as I grew up on a sheep farm. I missed my old place which had cattle, poultry and farming crops and where I spent many hours fishing, hunting, walking and enjoying the scenery.

Back at the camp site, I received a massage from a deafblind masseuse, Susan. Susan spent many hours massaging different guests.

A volunteer named Elise guided me to the Koala Park despite the weather. We managed to see some koalas before heading back to camp. I love the smell after it has been raining.

At night we ate a delicious dinner of traditional roast beef and vegetables. Later I went to the Phillip Island RSL. I suppose you all know what is RSL is? It is called the Returned Services League and has 1,500 sub – branches in Australia with 24,000 members at present. The RSL honours those who fought and still fight for our country Australia for peace.

On Sunday morning the rain poured down which was disappointing. I was pleased, however, that this meant that there would be more water for farms and dams and would also dampen the bushfires.

After Breakfast, some went to the Chocolate Factory, others to the Vietnam Museum or Penguin Museum. I went with my

beloved lady Nina (my wife) and others to the Penguin Museum. On arrival I was shocked by a bad odour. I learnt this was because we were closed to a series of long burrows where penguins nest and lay their eggs.

Back at camp we enjoyed a late lunch and then got the entire camp group together for a photo! There were about 20 people wanting photos so it took a while.

At about 2:00pm we said our farewells to people and big thankyous to the tired volunteers.

The camp experience was so fulfilling and it was great to meet new people and communicate with people from all over Australia. Some of us exchanged email addresses, SMS numbers and postal addresses to keep each in touch.

It was great to share stories about our individual experiences and realise that other people are also experiencing difficulty and isolation. I believe that it is to support each other through our hardships.

I'd like to say a huge thankyou to Susan the masseuse who did so well to make the deafblind comfortable, free from stress and strain etc.

Also, I would like to express BIG THANKS to:

- ABLE staffs who arranged the camp**
- The volunteers who were wonderful and caring**
- Camp staff. The facilities and food were excellent**

Congratulations to all of them!

And a special BIG THANKS to the two sponsors that fund the camp: HV McKay charitable trusts and Perpetual Trusts.

Without all of them we would be isolated, without regular contact with our friends, and without fun activities.

Written by Richard Howell (Usher's of Geelong, Vic) December 2009.