

We visit Carnarvon Dish to Inspect the OTC Facility



After all the elation of finding out that we could use the dish at Carnarvon for Seti, we thought that a visit to the site was in order allowing us to inspect the old OTC facility first hand.

Our Western Australian coordinator, Guido Nigro was contacted and our plans to visit the site, which is approximately 1,200 km north of Perth, were drawn up.

Perth is a long way from Brisbane, and not much time was available for us to be at the site so we needed to travel there as fast as possible. Our Director, Noel Welstead, decided to fly commercially to Perth, then hire a light plane and fly the group up to Carnarvon where we could get on with the job of inspecting our newly acquired facility for Seti and personally meet the local group of enthusiasts who would be helping out to restore the old station so it could become a tourist and science museum with a working radio telescope.



After a long flight to Perth and being picked up by Guido we retired for a sleep so as to be as fresh in the morning as possible for our flight to Carnarvon the next day.

Morning came and the weather was not looking good as we pondered our plans for the trip. Should we risk the flight with the weather looking bad or go by car with the contingent from the West Australian Newspaper, Carmelo

Amalfi and photographer Trevor Collens who had so much gear with them that they had to drive up in a station wagon. By Lunch time the weather was looking pretty good so we decided to risk the flight up to Carnarvon in a Piper Warrior (PA-28) I hired from Minovation Pty Ltd from Jandacot Airport (<http://www.cosmic.com.au/minovation/default.htm>) We were given the baby of the fleet to use (VH-PMW) and it is truly a lovely aircraft to fly. The staff of Minovation could not do enough for us and we can highly recommend them.



Our trip up the coast to Geraldton was quite easy, although we were flying into quite a strong head wind and the trip was taking longer than expected. We arrived in Geraldton for refueling and after a short "pit stop" and filling up the tanks, we were off again to Carnarvon. The scenery in this part of Australia is truly awe-inspiring. Follow these links to see what it is like up in the

north west of Australia.

(<http://www.greenough.wa.gov.au/> ~ <http://www.sharkbay.asn.au/>)

Guido had his GPS with him we were able to navigate quite accurately over this quite hostile and desolate terrain. Guido was as great passenger and helped me with whatever I needed during the flight including passing the sandwiches that his wife Daniela had packed for us.

As we left Geraldton and climbed to 5000ft we noticed a large military installation to our east with dishes covered by huge radome's, which we thought must be one of the US bases run jointly by the Australian and US Government. We decided to stay far away from this site as possible!



The second leg was also quite uneventful but we had encountered a strong head wind, which was going to make us late arriving at Carnarvon where there was a civic reception that had been planned for us by the members of the Gascoyne Historical Society. This was to be at the Yacht Club where Noel was to give an address to the public about SETI and after we were to meet the local council identities and then finally have dinner and a few welcome drinks. (<http://www.qta.asn.au/carnarvon/attractions.html>)

We got to Carnarvon just before last light and Mr. Les Bateman picked us up from the airport and we were at last able to meet our good friends from the Historical Society, Cecilly Miller and Carol Bateman as well as the others who came to meet us.

The talk lasted about 1 hour followed by many questions and an interview with Carmelo Amalfi for an upcoming article that was being prepared by the paper. After a very tiring day and long night we both finally got to bed at about midnight excited about visiting the OTC site the next day and installing some of our receiving equipment and recording the signals for later analysis.

Saturday morning was clear and bright and after a hearty breakfast at the motel, we were thankful of getting the loan of a four-wheel drive vehicle for the duration of our stay so we could get around the town without any complications. The OTC site was amazing and its size took us completely by surprise. The pictures attached to this article give an indication but this dish is huge. We hurried to get to the control room and get the antenna pointing straight up so we had an idea where it was pointing.

A crowd had gathered to watch the work we were doing and finally we pushed the switch and the dish started to move into the park position. This caused quite a stir with the local bird population, as there were many old nests in the structure that were starting to fall apart. The local visitors that came to see the event were running all over the place as stones and sticks were starting to fall down on them.

The dish had not been moved for many years and it groaned and shook a little until we got it to the park position ready for our tests. When the complex was decommissioned about 12 years ago, much of the equipment was removed

and we will need to replace quite a few items just to get it operational again. The tracking systems will need to be reinstalled with state of the art controllers and computer tracking software that will allow us to move the antenna to the desired position and track a point in the sky. Also the wave-guides will need to be re-manufactured and our own receivers installed for the Seti project we have in mind.

Control of the facility will eventually be from the Boonah Space Centre that we are building south of Brisbane, but this is a few years away yet, the immediate goal we had was to install a small receiver and record the times and some signal. Guido and I got to work installing the equipment and we soon were getting the hiss of the hydrogen band coming out from the speakers. **SUCCESS.** We could hear many signals coming in from space; in fact we believe that we were able to record the dish's transit across a pulsar with its unmistakable sound buzzing away in the speaker. The signals we got were incredible. The crackle and pops coming in were much more intense than I had ever heard before at this frequency, I wish we could move this instrument to Boonah.

The day finished off with us recording about 1 hour of signal for processing at our lab in Brisbane to see what we could find in the static. What a fantastic day we had at the site. I am eagerly awaiting the chance to return to Carnarvon for a longer time so we can take some additional gear up there and do a full run with our computers attached.

Saturday night we had a victory dinner in town followed by a slightly earlier night to bed.

It was time to leave for Perth again on Sunday morning and after saying goodbye to our dear friends Cecilly, Marianne, Carmelo and Trevor we made our way to the airport for refueling and our trip back to Perth. The trip back to Perth Via Geraldton was quite a bit faster as we had a good tailwind to speed us along. The weather started to close in a bit so we had to dodge many large clouds that were dropping large volumes of rain. We arrived back in Perth just before dark to a few wines and a lovely typically Italian dinner with the Nigro Family. We wish to thank the Carnarvon group who made our visit there such a success and to Guido and his family for their help and hospitality during our stay.