

## *POSTCARD FROM THE MINES*

To get to the mines, you will need a plane, a car, a love of kidney-crushing corrugations (thirteen hours of corrugations), plenty of water, and fear, a lot of fear—fear of the colossal, fear of cacophony, fear of vastness, and fear of yourself. The enigmatic Australian outback has a way of diminishing you, daring you to gaze into your soul. So be ready for your insignificance. Be prepared for the abyss.

Mine one, known as Bundanyabba, or Bundy for short, is a small village about six hours from Oodnadatta, or fifteen hours and five or six minutes from the nearest McDonalds, depending on traffic, wash-outs, kangaroos and corrugations. Paris, the other mine, is further out, four hours to the right. In the time it takes to get to the mines, you could be in Paris, France, almost.

Calling Bundy a ‘village’ according to Reg Taylor, chief engineer, and notional self-appointed Mayor of Bundy (aka ‘Bluey’ so known for his blazing red hair), might be to do an injustice to an actual village. It’s a fifty-metre stretch of bitumen that runs between two rows of dongas (single room demountable tin huts affectionately known as suicide cells), five on each side. Four of them on the northern side are rammed together to make a canteen at the end of the street (or boulevard as the locals prefer), lovingly called the ‘Chops Elysees’—chops being their favourite meat, and Elysees a direct send-up of their sister mine, Paris.

Back in Oodnadatta (pop. 204 at last count), which by comparison to the ‘villages’ of the mines is a thriving metropolis, a hundred or so demountable houses line its two hundred and seventy-two-metre bitumen main street. The residents, being very proud of every

centimetre of bitumen, claim you'd have to go to Alice Springs to find the next bit of bitumen. But then you'd be in Alice Springs and not Oodnadatta. In Oodnadatta, known by the locals as the 'riviera of the outback', there's a way of telling locals (born and bred) from blow-ins (lived their life in the town but born elsewhere). The locals have a sofa on their front porch facing the main street in case anything happens (not that anything does, but they thrive on the anticipation), and the blow-ins have a sofa on the back porch facing the vast endless views of scrub stretching to the mountain range on the distant horizon. The locals have seen the view out the back. The view out the back never changes. They're interested in who comes to town, and who disappears.

You stop at the Pink Roadhouse in Oodnadatta before heading on to the mines, not just because it's your last known human contact, but you're coming to the company's mines to reconcile their accounts and are expected to pick up 'emergency stores' for both mines as you pass through. The pre-ordered stores, consisting of tinned food, meat, and beer (a lot of beer) are loaded into your rental car while you sip on a half decent latte. You can get a latte out here, out in the middle of nowhere, served by an English backpacker whose soft full-mouthed accent seems so out of place. But then everything is out of place. Only the red dust, mulga trees, deadly snakes, tarantulas, and flies belong. You are just tolerated—by the huge, by the din, by the vast, by the red. If you weren't so insignificant, the outback would crush you with indifference, and the scream of cicadas would mask your pathetic cries. Red dust penetrates every surface and infiltrates every orifice. The English backpacker smiles at you, or for you, you aren't sure which, but by the end of the trip, you suspect you will know. She acts as though she doesn't expect to see you again, even though you are back every month.

Competition between the two mines is intense, but by and large, good-natured. So far, the eight-burner barbecue has been stolen seventeen times. It mysteriously emerged in Bundy, then just as mysteriously disappeared only to reappear, again mysteriously, back in Paris. No one expects it to stay in Paris long, especially the 'Parisians'. A barbecue is considered a

civilising item at both mines. Why they wouldn't buy a second one and have one each, misses the point.

The second most contested resource at the mines is water. Mayor Reg, with tongue firmly planted in cheek, says everyone up there in Paris is particularly proud of their so-called 'spring', which is yet to flow. In response, the citizens of Paris reckon Bundy's 'spring' is a trickle of brackish water out next to the village dump—not even the 'roos drink it, and it only holds water once every eighty years or so after there's enough rain for the sewage to back up. Still, when it's all you have, you make the most of it. Reg says, 'at least we've got a spring, Paris has got seven-eighths of four-fifths of sweet f\*ck all, if you don't count the mine or the eight-burner barbecue—when they've got it.' ...Continue reading in [The Writer's Lair](#).

[Subscribe FREE HERE.](#)