



MEDIA RELEASE

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He's been everywhere man

In the words of that well-loved Australian folk song, Mike Wheatley has been everywhere from Arkaroola to Yulara with the Outback Car Trek (OBT) while fundraising for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). During the past 27 years the OBT has visited around more than 900 towns and villages, clocked up over 100,000 kms and raised over \$25 million. Last year's contribution was over \$1.3 million.

Mike is one of just two people who have been on every Trek.

"I went on another event in 1989, but felt it was too big. I then tried the OBT when it started up the following year and have stuck with it ever since," explained Mike.

"I have two great team mates in Rob and Digby. Rob has been based in Singapore and Hong Kong almost since we started, but he makes it over each year, now with a support vehicle, and our car generally raises \$30-\$40,000 each year.

"It's become a ritual for us, feeling the freedom of the open road, catching up with mates, enjoying the wonderful scenery and all in the name of a good cause. Why wouldn't you come back and do it year after year?"

Although best known for its Outback emergency retrievals, delivering vital primary healthcare clinics now accounts for some 70 per cent of the South Eastern Section's (RFDS SE) operations. These include; mental and dental health, breast care, women and children's health, drug/alcohol counselling and chronic disease screening, as well as GP and other specialist services, depending on population and need.

This year the Trek will visit remote communities such as White Cliffs, Tibooburra, Hungerford and Lightning Ridge, which are all serviced by the RFDS SE. The Section is aiming to reduce the well-documented gap in health and wellbeing between those living in remote, rural and regional areas and those in cities.

Money raised by the OBT will help the RFDS SE to do this by supporting its recently expanded dental service. They have launched a new dental van that will service communities in the West and Far West of NSW not currently on the clinic flight routes.

OBT organiser Bill Patrick is also rightly proud of the support the Trekkers give the communities they pass through.

"The Trek supports the small communities we visit. We estimate that our 300 hungry, thirsty Trekkers leave some \$760,000 in the places we visit during our week away. That will help many local businesses to keep going," said Bill.

“We also get behind lots of local causes. If we hear that the local footy team needs new kit, the school needs a shade cloth for the playground, or a kid needs to raise funds for medical treatment – we send the bucket round and help them out.” Many thousands of dollars are donated each year by Trekkers happy to help the locals.

“Although many of have been coming for years we are keen to recruit the next generation of Trekkers. Anyone keen to join us can find entry details on the Outback Car Trek website.”

Although still a couple of weeks off the start date of Sunday, 4 June, Mike and Digby are preparing their trusty 1969 Holden HT station wagon for over 3,000 kms of hard travelling between Griffith and Port Macquarie.

“As all cars are pre-1978 and specially reinforced to stand-up to Trek conditions - there’s always a lot of work to be done in advance. Believe me, I know, we kept a 1964 Ford Falcon on the road for 22 Treks,” said Mike.

“I would recommend the OBT to anyone. I’m looking forwards to my 28th Trek as much as the first one.”

For more information or photographs, contact:

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ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section facilitated almost 4,500 clinics, took over 5,500 telehealth calls, had over 49,100 patient contacts and transported almost 8,200 patients.

