



Media Release

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Outback Trek keeps rolling on after 25 years

Having already clocked up almost 100,000 kilometres and raised over \$22m for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) since its inception in 1990, the Outback Car Trek (OBT) will tomorrow reach the final leg of its 26th successive Trek.

Last year it raised \$1.3 million, an amount it hopes to top when the Trek crosses the finish line at Main Beach in Byron Bay tomorrow after a week winding their way through the backblocks of Victoria, NSW, South Australia and Queensland.

The OBT 2015 route is 3,242 kilometres in total, an average of 465 kilometres per day. Much of it is off-road or on routes much less travelled, making it a real test of endurance for the participants and their much-loved pre-1978 vehicles. The cars are specially engineered to withstand the rigours of Outback travel and, according to event organiser, Bill Patrick, must be, "...gluttons for punishment."

"While we all love the challenge and the camaraderie of the Trek, we also know that rural and remote communities struggle to get access to the healthcare services we take for granted in the cities and that the Flying Doctor is an essential lifeline for them," said Bill.

"Four of the Outback communities we visited (Yunta, Packsaddle, White Cliffs and Stanthorpe) during the 2015 OBT are serviced by RFDS clinic flights, which underlines just how far-reaching the Service is."

"The OBT also raised funds for local health and community services in the places we visited and the 116 cars and 261 hungry and thirsty Trekkers provided an important economic boost for local businesses."

One of the world's largest and most comprehensive aeromedical organisations, the RFDS helped over 280,000 people in the past year – that's one every two minutes.

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

For example, the Far Western NSW community of Packsaddle gets a clinic flight every 12 weeks, whereas White Cliffs receives one a week. Typically, both get a doctor with a dentist, mental health or women and children's nurse on rotation. On occasion, both also receive visiting specialists such as an ophthalmologist or a dermatologist.

A portion of the money raised by the OBT will go towards supporting The Outback Oral Health and Treatment (TOOTH) dental program. Launched in 2012, this unique public/private \$2.5m partnership between the Investec Foundation, the Gonski Foundation and

RFDS SE, is aimed at improving the oral health of some of NSW's most vulnerable and remote communities.

When TOOTH began, significant levels of untreated dental decay, some five times higher than the national average, were discovered in both adults and children in Central Western NSW. During the past three years the program has held 695 clinics and treated almost 5,000 patients in the communities of: Bourke, Collarenebri, Goodooga and Lightning Ridge, where access to dental care was either non-existent or extremely challenging.

Latest data shows a decrease in untreated dental decay in both adult and child patients and a substantial overall improvement in dental health in all four locations. In just three years TOOTH program has halved the decay in children attending TOOTH clinics and established a consistently declining pattern of decay in adults.

"The Outback Trek has established itself as the major fundraiser for the Flying Doctor, and we are looking forward to their continued support," said Brendon Smyth, General Manager, Fundraising, Marketing and Communications, at RFDS SE.

"Fundraisers such as the OBT help the RFDS raise additional money, on top of the Commonwealth and state government allocations we receive. This enables us to deliver vital clinic and emergency services and grow to meet increasing and diverse healthcare needs," Mr Smyth added.

"We like to say we're *"...more than a service, part of the community"* a feeling I'm sure the Trekkers will find in the places they visit, particularly those serviced by the Flying Doctor."

To keep up to date with the Trek visit outbackcartrek.com.au, or to make a donation go to everydayhero.com.au and enter "Outback Car Trek" in the search engine.

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For more information or photographs, contact Nick Bleszynski, Media Consultant, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0403 931 291 or nbleszynski@rfdsse.org.au

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 flew the equivalent of 6.25 round trips to the moon as it conducted over 5,000 clinics, took over 6,000 telehealth calls, had over 53,000 patient contacts and transported almost 8,400 patients.