

3000KM TREK | Governor-General in SA's Outback

Focus on forgotten land

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RURAL EDITOR

THE Outback is supposed to be the traditional heart of Australia but many argue it is being sorely neglected by the nation's leaders.

On his Back to the Bush - Bridging the Divide journey through the centre of South Australia this week, Governor-General Michael Jeffery is seeing some of the nation's most beautiful country in the Flinders Ranges and along the Birdsville Track.

More importantly, in the Year of the Outback 2006 to promote remote Australia, he is recognising what hundreds of politicians and leaders generally fail to acknowledge. Even now, the Outback is a forgotten land, neglected by politicians and vastly underfunded, its inhabitants treated inadequately on many issues, including a serious lack of infrastructure.

In focusing on the Outback's future on his 3000km journey, Mr Jeffery is emphasising the key themes of water, education, youth, regional development and tourism.

He aims to inspire Australians to get more in touch with the Outback, whether through tourism or work, or just to understand problems and complexities of life in the inland.

"I love this country. It's a tough country, it's a hard country, it's a



BACK TO THE BUSH: Governor-General Michael Jeffery meets Bob Dillon, from Angemepeena station, and checks out fossils with students at Leigh Creek.

Pictures: MARK BRAKE

**“I love this country
... it's the best country
in the world**

wonderful country, it's the best country in the world," he said.

"The people in it have made it wonderful and will continue making it so but it's time to get right behind the Year of the Outback and bring urban Australians to understand it and the problems and get back to the bush.

"For those in Australia who haven't been inland, my message is to cross the great divide, come out and see your country."

Mr Jeffery points out much of Australia's wealth comes from the mining and rural industries and increasingly from inland tourism. "We want to let all Australians know that so many of our regional centres are not dead," he said. "They are not dying but are vibrant and very friendly and innovate places."

The Back to the Bush trip, believed by Mr Jeffery's staff to be the first such journey by a Governor-General, is a tribute to the ongoing Year of the Outback concept.

In fact, it would not have happened, nor would it have been poss-

ible, without the Year of the Outback. Mr Jeffery and a party of 43, including personal staff, police, key Outback people, drivers and media, are visiting some of SA's favourite places and characters over five days.

The ongoing success of the Year of the Outback program, began in 2002, is a tribute to Bruce Campbell, 74, the determined and visionary Queenslanders who came up with the idea. Named Senior Australian of the Year in 2003 for his efforts, he has devoted the past eight years to helping the people of the inland gain more recognition through the Year of the Outback.

"Among the many objectives for Year of the Outback, one is to point the minds and faces of Australia towards our heartlands because there has been a tendency to point in other directions for the past number of decades," he said.

"Outback is the most powerful word in our vernacular and it has an extraordinary magnetic influence and effect."

What exactly is the Outback? Mr Campbell said the best explanation he had heard is in *The Outback*, a poem selected as the official verse for Year of the Outback, which concludes: "There's a place called the Outback, we're never far apart, for the Outback's not a place, it's the beating of my heart."

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