

This is the stuff of legends.

E.G. (Tom) Kruse MBE, the *Mailman of the Birdsville Track* became a household name in Australia and around the world after he played himself in an award winning docudrama ***The Back of Beyond*** in 1954. He was a movie star before his ***Top Gun*** Hollywood namesake Tom Cruise was born.

The Back of Beyond introduced Tom Kruse and his 1936 Leyland Badger mail truck to a generation of Australians. Most never forgot the extraordinary images of the man and his battered trucks doing battle each fortnight with the sand and isolation along the Birdsville Track - outback Australia's toughest mail run.

Tom drove his first mail run on January 1st 1936 for pioneering outback transport operator Harry Ding. Tom took over the mail contract from Harry in 1948 and held it until 1963. He would load the Badger at home base in Marree and take on the Track, carrying the Royal Mail and supplies to Birdsville 519km away. Three days up, a day in Birdsville and then three days back to Marree.

He had to deal with vicious dust storms, soaring temperatures, massive sand dunes and at times the Cooper Creek in flood. Tom endured the worst conditions imaginable to 'get the mail through'.

As a lad growing up in Waterloo in the mid-north of South Australia with his blacksmith father Henry, mother Ida and eleven siblings, he wasn't much for the education caper. Tom always said '*I'd rather cut a ton of wood with a blunt axe than write a letter.*'

What adds to Tom's legendary status, besides his gentle nature, his bush mechanic skills (they reckon he could 'get a bucket of bolts going') was his physical strength. He could toss 200kg 44-gallon steel fuel drums onto and off the back of the truck - and think nothing of it.

The Cooper Creek in flood was his greatest challenge. In ***The Back of Beyond*** Tom says '*...then suddenly down from the north it comes in flood - and the cattle that survived the drought it drowns and hangs them up in the trees...you never know what the old Cooper's going to do - she could be anything from six miles wide to nothing.*'

As the outback opens up and more and more people venture into remote Australia, we are all able to better relate to this extraordinary man.

Now you can visit the Tom Kruse Gallery at the Marree Hotel.

Very few can claim the title of *Outback Legend*. E.G. Kruse MBE (1914 – 2011) is one who reluctantly has had the title bestowed upon him. The photographs, artifacts and found objects in the Tom Kruse Gallery are an important tribute to the life of a remarkable Australian.

The collection houses some very personal accounts and the story of ***The Back of Beyond***. There are 180 photographs as well as framed letters, certificates, awards, a signed mailbag and a floorboard and the original grill from the 1936 Leyland Badger.

A celebratory 12-minute audiovisual presentation produced by Keith Webb and Ian Doyle from Image Control includes sequences from ***The Back of Beyond*** and ***Last Mail from Birdsville*** and interviews with former Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffery, members of the Crawford family and outback identities Keith Rasheed, John Parnell, Dave Burge and Ted Egan.

Marree Hotel publicans Phil and Maz Turner would like to thank the Kruse family, Ian Doyle, Keith Webb, Mark Metzger and private and corporate supporters for putting the collection together.

Tom was a charitable man and we continue this approach by making sure that everyone has access to the gallery - at no charge. Tom's principal charity however was the Royal Flying Doctor Service and visitors are asked to consider making a gold coin donation to this essential outback service, in Tom's name.

The Tom Kruse Gallery is open every day from early morning till late at night (hotel hours).