



## Marree gallery celebrates the life of an outback legend

The life of Birdsville Track mailman E.G. (Tom) Kruse MBE and his 1936 Leyland Badger are now permanently celebrated in the Marree Hotel. A major art installation in the dining room includes 180 photographs representing various periods in his life and artifacts from the Kruse family and other private collections. The artifacts include a signed mailbag, an axe and chromed shovel presented to Tom and Valma Kruse and a floorboard and the original grill from the Leyland Badger.

“I was delighted when the new Marree Hotel publicans Phil and Maz Turner provided a significant space for the collection. The dining room has had a major facelift and anyone interested in the story of Tom Kruse, the Leyland Badger and *The Back of Beyond* will enjoy the experience,” Executive Producer of *The Back of Beyond Collection* Ian Doyle said.

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

Outback mailman Tom Kruse was a film star before his *Top Gun* Hollywood namesake Tom Cruise was born. The 1954 Australian film classic *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. Produced by the Shell Company Film Unit, directed by John Heyer and shot in black and white, *The Back of Beyond* remains one of the most critically acclaimed and awarded films ever produced in Australia.

A 50-year tribute double DVD *The Back of Beyond Collection* that includes *The Back of Beyond* (Film Australia 1954), *The Outback Mailmen* (ABC Countrywide 1986), *The Postman* (ABC TV Australian Story 1996) and *Last Mail From Birdsville – the Story of Tom Kruse* (Corrugated Air Productions 1999) was released in 2004 at the Marree Hotel.

“Tom Kruse is a dogged, tough giant of a man who was awarded an MBE by Queen Elizabeth in 1955 for services to the people of the outback. We recognise far too few of our heroes. The anniversary DVD and the Marree Hotel Tom Kruse Gallery recognises the significant contribution made by Tom and the other Birdsville Track mailmen to Marree and the tracks beyond,” Ian Doyle said.

Support for the Gallery was provided by retired cabinet maker Roger La-Grone, All Frames and Mirrors Andrew and Ralph Platten, Don McLeod and Alan Logue from Hutt Street Photos, Dynasty Video Productions, the Leyland Badger Restoration Group and photographers Keith Webb, Irene Zada, Nigel (Digger) Campbell, Mark Brake, Neil Weidenbach, Harry Ding, Leon Mead, Ian Doyle and the Kruse and Heyer families.

Tom died on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2011 aged 96. Entry to the exhibition is via a gold coin donation to the RFDS.

**More Information:**

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