

USELESS LOOP CELEBRATES THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL, SEPTEMBER 2019

Darren Clark, Photographer

| IMAGE NO. | COMMENTS |
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| BA2840/1634 | I arrived back in Denham from Onslow on Sunday afternoon and I had to wait until the following Thursday before I could drive over to Useless Loop. Every day when I walked down to the shops I could see the Shark Bay Salt tockpile glowing white in the distance across the other side of Henri Freycinet Harbour, it was almost as if I was calling me. The tension I was feeling by this stage was intense. |
| BA2840/1635 | For three weeks I had been dreading the drive over to Useless Loop as so many different people had warned me that the road was a living nightmare to travel along. At 8am on Thursday morning I began my three and a half hour journey along this Useless Loop road which in parts turns into a rutted track. Every word that I had heard about this road was true! My car and caravan bounced along over some of the worst road conditions that I have ever experienced. When I arrived in the community three and half hours later I was completely exhausted. Some of the Shark Bay Salt employees told me that they regularly find bits and pieces of caravans, cars, and camping equipment lying beside the road. This track is unforgiving. |
| BA2840/1636 | At the halfway mark there is a lookout where I parked so that I could check how I was travelling. After closing my caravan door that had swung open and reattaching the fridge door, which had fallen off, I tried to take in the view. Truthfully I was too stressed out to be able to fully appreciate this beautiful landscape because I knew that I still had to get to the community |

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| | <p>before 11.30am or else they were going to be sending out someone to look for me, which I didn't want to happen. When you stop and take a closer look at this vast landscape there is an abundance of rare and unique plants and animal life, some of which are found nowhere else on Earth. It's home to over 100 known species of reptiles and amphibians, 240 varieties of birds, 320 types of fish, 80 different corals and 820 species of plants, including 700 flowering species. Protecting many endangered species, Shark Bay's Francois Peron National Park is one of the most important wilderness areas in Australia.</p> |
| BA2840/1637 | <p>After arriving at Useless Loop I was shown where I was to set up camp just out of town. The first thing I did was walk down to the beach where I found these oysters growing on the rocks and I sat down and cracked open half a dozen of them as I recovered from what I had just experienced.</p> |
| BA2840/1638 | <p>The following morning I was up at sunrise and walked bare foot down the beach to try and get my head around the fact that I was finally at Useless Loop. I felt fully refreshed and ready to go as I looked down the beach at Useless Loop. I was so excited that it felt like I was about to explode if I didn't start making images soon.</p> |
| BA2840/1639 | <p>My caravan site was a dream come true, 100 meters away from the beach under a group of gum trees where it got a cool sea breeze in the afternoons. I woke up each morning to the sound of birds singing and the smell of the ocean.</p> |
| BA2840/1640 | <p>The first place that I visited in Useless Loop was the Primary School which is the living heart of the community. When I arrived at 8.30am on Friday morning the whole school was busy preparing for their school's 50th anniversary which was to be held on Saturday the 7th of September, 2019.</p> |
| BA2840/1641 | <p>The Useless Loop Primary School students practicing their dance moves which they would be performing in front of guests that attend the school's 50th anniversary. The students were dancing to five different sound tracks which highlighted the key events of each decade.</p> |
| BA2840/1642 | <p>The view from the Useless Loop Primary School looks across the salt crystallisers towards the huge Shark Bay Salt stockpile in the distance. No matter where you go in the community the Shark Bay Salt working environment surrounds you. The water in the Useless loop bay is 1.5 to 2 times saltier than the open ocean, perfect for salt production. The bay directly to the</p> |

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| | <p>west of the town of Useless Loop once acted as a natural inlet system where there is now a sequence of ponds, increasing the salinity and hence density of water. This has now been dammed off with sea walls built from local rock and pumps are used where tidal power was once relied upon, however large parts of the operation are still extremely low tech which is realised through the language used to explain the mining process; 'grow', 'crop', 'harvest'. Driven by gravity, water levels, tidal movements, sun and wind, the mine relies on the pristine water and environment of the Shark Bay area to produce the high quality and large growth crystals Shark Bay Salt is known for.</p> |
| BA2840/1643 | <p>The Useless Loop School playground is well equipped with everything a child needs, best of all the school is in a pristine environment.</p> |
| BA2840/1644 | <p>David Armstrong is one of the teachers at Useless Loop Primary School. Originally from Bassendean, he has been living with his family in the community for the past eight year and loves working at the school. David first came to the town when he was 19 and worked at the school as a cleaner until he left in his mid twenties and went back to school and got a degree in teaching and then returned to teach at the Useless Loop School. David is a committed and extremely passionate teacher who seems to be thriving in this isolated community. He told me that he loves life away from mainstream Australia, " This is a place that I can bring up my children safely" he told me "It's such a healthy environment where children can explore their surrounding in relative safety".</p> |
| BA2840/1645 | <p>Useless Loop Primary School Principal, Marita Henry, enjoying the excitement in the classroom as her students preparing for their schools 50th Anniversary. Marita told me that she enjoyed living in the controlled environment of Useless Loop. She said that the company exercises a great deal of control over all of it's employees and this discipline then filters down to her students who are extremely well behaved at school. "The only time the students seem to get in trouble is when they run under the verandas where they are suppose to be walking, apart from that everything else runs like clockwork."</p> |
| BA2840/1646 | <p>All of the year levels at the Useless Loop Primary School working together peacefully as they prepare for the school's 50th anniversary celebration.</p> |

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| BA2840/1647 | Teachers in isolated areas face similar issues to those in metropolitan locations regarding access to professional learning and classroom resources. Both Sahra and her husband haven't been very well accepted into the Useless Loop community and can't wait to leave. Sahra Pitman has been teaching at the Useless Loop Primary School for the past two years and she enjoys the students, but is struggling with living in such a small isolated community. "No matter where I go in the students are always there, I just can't escape and find my own space, the only way that I can find privacy is to jump into my husband's boat and sail across to Denham for the day. Thank goodness I only have one more year of my teaching to go here, then I can transfer back down to Bunbury. That's the best thing about working in isolated communities, at the end of your contract you're able to transfer wherever you like". |
| BA2840/1648 | Megan Cockerill is a relief teacher at the Useless Loop Primary School. She lived in Useless Loop with her husband and their children for ten years before moving down to Geraldton so that her eldest daughter could go to High School. She said that after living in Useless Loop for so long she is now really struggling to find her place in Geraldton's much bigger cosmopolitan community. Megan told me that the Useless Loop community has changed since she left, "it was a very social town when I was here, but budget cuts made by the company have changed the whole social structure of the town now". |
| BA2840/1649 | Relief teacher Megan Cockerill playing What's The Time Mr Wolf with the pre primary and first year children at the Useless Loop Primary School. |
| BA2840/1650 | Relief teacher Megan Cockerill is loved by all her students and her approach to them is a very personal one. Low student numbers allows for an individualised approach to learning and promoting a whole school philosophy of 'success for all students'. |
| BA2840/1651 | Megan said "There's no getting away from the differences in behaviour that I have observed in this remote school compared to the bigger schools in Geraldton. "It's like night and day". But she can't say for certain that it's wholly due to the smaller class sizes. Megan thinks that it might have something to do with the family backgrounds of the pupils. "All their parents work for the same company and I feel like the children have a sense of belonging to this school which encourages their respectful behaviour". |

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| BA2840/1652 | <p>Teacher Sahra Pitman told me that working with a small group of students is really challenging. She said, “It's relatively simple to run a collaborative learning activity with a room of 30 pupils, regardless of their age, ability or attitude. Split them into groups, assign roles, set a time limit, distribute the resources, deliver the instructions and let them loose. It can become zany and hectic but you can be pretty sure that learning is occurring. There are so many of them with such a range of voices and opinions bursting to be acknowledged. You need to guide and motivate them in the right direction, but they'll be doing the work and teaching one another. It creates a buzz in the room, a busy atmosphere that is self-generating. When there are only seven children in the room it's much more difficult to create this kind of mood. Sometimes there simply aren't enough pupils to make group work effective. They seem to worry that their voices will be heard saying something wrong. They don't want to be the one to stick their head above the parapet and speak out. I've set group discussion topics and been met with a freeze of shoulder shrugging. I've asked questions and been deafened by the silence”.</p> |
| BA2840/1653 | <p>At Useless Loop Primary School there are two classrooms, one with pre prep and grade ones and twos, and the other classroom with grades three to six. Composite classes have been shown to provide benefits to both the older and younger students in the class. Older students often take on a mentoring role, and benefit from helping younger students in co-operative learning situations, while younger students have the opportunity of enhanced learning experiences when they are ready for it. The older students provide a model of appropriate behaviour for the younger students – this also means less behaviour problems in the classroom because younger students integrate quickly into established class routines as modelled by the older students.</p> |
| BA2840/1654 | <p>Useless Loop Primary School has a strong relationship with the student's families and the community. There are a large number of adults in Useless Loop who were once students themselves at the primary school and now have their children being educated there. I found it really interesting how the residents of Useless Loop seem to keep returning to this isolated little community so that their children could experience the lifestyle which they themselves experience growing up in. The children at Useless Loop Primary School generally described their lives in their community as safe, friendly and peaceful. They spoke about positive social relationships and enjoying the feeling of 'knowing everyone'. They also appreciated other</p> |

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| | benefits of the lifestyle, such as ease of getting around, quietness, space and the natural environment. Overall, they expressed a strong sense of community. |
| BA2840/1655 | <p>Katherine Trigg has lived in Useless Loop for the past two and a half years. She is the school officer and her job is to organise the day-to-day running of the school. Katherine has found refuge out in Useless Loop after doing it really hard up north. In 2015 Katherine's husband was made redundant from his job at the salt mine in Carnarvon, they tried to find work but there was nothing available, so for the next two year their family of five children Katherine and her husband had to survive on \$250 a week. At the beginning of 2017 her husband found work at Shark Bay Salt and the family moved down to Useless Loop. Katherine found employment at the Useless Loop Primary School as the school librarian and later as the school officer. " Living and working in this community has changed my whole outlook on life, I feel as if my family belongs here and we are finally getting back on our feet again financially. Living in a smaller community like Useless Loop does have the benefit of being an actual community and getting to know the people that you're living amongst. Also, the cost of living is a lot less, all you have to pay for is your food everything else is covered by the company. At the end of the day, if somebody else is paying your rent, by the time we leave here, we'll be in a much better position than we could ever possibly achieved if we stayed in Carnarvon".</p> |
| BA2840/1656 | <p>The more time I spent around the Useless Loop Primary School, the deeper I began to look into the heart of the Useless Loop community. I found one couple's story really interesting on so many different levels. Rebecca Armstrong and her partner Cameron Holmes are highly regarded members of the Useless Loop community. Rebecca first came to Useless loop with her family when she was eight years old, she and her elder sister Jess went to the primary school and then left to go to high school in Karratha. Rebecca returned to the community briefly before moving down to Perth to study Aquaculture at TAFE for two years and during that time she met her partner Cameron Holmes. They decided to travel around Australia together and work their way through all of the states with their first stop at Useless Loop where Rebecca's family where still living. Cameron found work at Shark Bay Salt as soon as they arrived in the community and within two months Rebecca had fallen pregnant. They decided to stay until the baby was born and Cameron was offered a twelve-month contract with Shark Bay Salt, which</p> |

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| | <p>he accepted. That was eight years ago now and Rebecca and Cameron now have three young children who are all at the Useless Loop Primary School. They are both extremely happy with the way that their lives have turned out so far and are keen for their children to be brought up in a safe and healthy environment away from the mainstream culture of modern Australia.</p> |
| BA2840/1657 | <p>Rebecca Armstrong with her older sister Jess Armstrong at the Useless Loop Primary School's fiftieth Anniversary on September 7th 2019. Both of these women were educated at the Useless Loop Primary School and have returned to the community so that their children can receive the same education and experience the same lifestyle that they experienced as children. They are not alone when it came to making this lifestyle choice. There are a number of other families in the community that are doing the same thing. Living in Useless Loop Isolated from mainstream Australia has effected the Shark Bay Salt workers deeply. Nearly everyone I spoke to loves living out there because there is no crime, no drugs and they know their children are safe playing around the community. The Useless Loop Community is like a little time capsule where the community is still living the Australian lifestyle from the 1980's.</p> |
| BA2840/1658 | <p>Jess Armstrong is a very shy woman and it took me a great deal of effort just to get her to sit down and talk to me for fifteen minutes. Jess has lived in the Useless Loop community for most of her life. Like all of the children in the community once she finished primary school she left to go to high school in Geraldton. At the age of twenty Jess returned and started working for Shark Bay Salt. It wasn't long before she met her partner Sandy who also worked for Shark Bay Salt and was a FIFO from Perth. Jess moved down to Perth and together they lived the FIFO lifestyle for a few years before Jess fell pregnant. Both Jess and Sandy decided that Useless Loop was the place to bring up their child so they moved back to the town where they now have two young boys, Jake and Mason who are both students at the Useless Loop Primary School. I asked Jess what she loved most about living in such an Isolation place like Useless Loop - "I love the fact that we know and trust everyone in the community, it's like one big family and the kids respond really well to that. There are a few negative sides to the community such as gossip which is a big part of town, if they don't know it they will make it up. I find the best way around this is to be open and honest and don't spread it yourself, people respect you for it and generally gossip about their fellow gossipers. I also find it difficult to relate to the FIFO workers</p> |

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| | who come and go all the time, they don't really contribute much to community life, in-fact the word FIFO means something else in this community, to us it means Fit In or Fuck Off." |
| BA2840/1659 | The Useless Loop Primary School in full swing celebrating its fiftieth anniversary on the 7 th of September 2019. |
| BA2840/1660 | Invited guests: the CEO of Mitsui & Co who own the Shark Bay and Onslow Salt mines; the head indigenous elders of Shark Bay, and ex- schoolteachers and students attended the fiftieth anniversary at the Useless Loop Primary School. |
| BA2840/1661 | Mitsui & Co Ltd, CEO Mr Hidetaka Honda. |
| BA2840/1662 | Useless Loop Primary School Principal Marita Henry addressing the guests at the school's fiftieth anniversary. The indigenous flag was flying at half-mast to commemorate the passing of one of the Shark Bay elders who died the day before this event. |
| BA2840/1663 | The students from Useless Loop Primary School performing dances from the past five decades at the school's fiftieth anniversary on the 7 th of September 2019. |
| BA2840/1664 | Not everyone was interested in what was happening out the front of the school, in-fact these three children found the schools sand pit much more interesting. |
| BA2840/1665 | Betty Frost was the inaugural teacher in Useless Loop. She recalled her early memories of living and working in the community during the early 1970's. Betty first set up the school in the work canteen before the company built her a school. Betty mentioned that right up to the 1980's all of the residents at Useless Loop lived in caravans and when a cyclone was approaching the community the Shark Bay Salt works would park all of the heavy machinery in a circle around the vans to try and stop them from blowing away. "It's definitely not for everyone out here", she said. "It's a tough lifestyle, it really is. Even though we were all living together out here, everyone still worked 12 to 14-hour days and it was a frontier lifestyle". |
| BA2840/1666 | Useless Loop's first teacher Betty Frost was given the honour of cutting the school's fiftieth anniversary birthday cake. |
| BA2840/1667 | Everyone wanted a piece of this cake baked by Jess Armstrong known throughout the community for her amazing culinary skills. |

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| BA2840/1668 | <p>John Oxenham is a Mulgane Elder who has been in charge of the work crew who sealed the first crystallising ponds for the Shark Bay Salt Co back in the early 1960's. He also worked the first twelve-hour shift and loaded the first truck full of salt to be shipped out for the company. John has such fond memories of living and working at Useless Loop from the beginning. John said, "There's something about taking a step back and looking at the world's natural wonders that is truly humbling, and Australia really does have some phenomenal landscapes. Taking a step into Australia's rural and remote locations isn't only a chance to 'become one with nature', it's also an opportunity to grow culturally and get to know the nation's roots". Shark Bay is the traditional country of three indigenous language groups: Malgana, Nhanda and Yingkarta. The Malgana name for Shark Bay is Gutharraguda, which means two bays or two waters.</p> |
| BA2840/1669 | <p>The Useless Loop Primary School students with their teachers and principal. 7th September 2019.</p> |