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Trilby Station, Louth, NSW



THE FUNNY THING ABOUT 'authentic' accommodation back stories is the louder you have to shout them, the less genuine they probably are. The Murray family, owners of 130,000-hectare Trilby Station (trilbystation.com.au) in north-west NSW, don't have the time nor need to scream their sixth-generation farming credentials from the rooftops. It would be a pointless exercise in any case, given the closest neighbours are 15 kilometres away.

Trilby was a true out-before-dawn, home-after-dusk sheep farm long before it diversified into becoming one of Australia's first station stays. "We only take a day off if it rains, and only because you can't drive anywhere," says Liz Murray. "Even then, you're usually in the workshop or doing something."

Four decades ago, then-newlyweds Liz and Gary moved onto this shimmering, mesmerisingly flat mega-property; its outback credentials unquestionable. Trilby literally passes the Ogilvie 'Back O' Bourke test' – it's 125 unsealed kilometres south-west across the black-soil plains from the town.

The station has only relatively recently been gifted an "actual" address (10,965

Toorale Road), but Liz suggests you don't type it into your GPS. Digital navigation has led a few guests "up the garden path". From the Bourke-side (heading along the 950-kilometre Darling River Run), the weensy village of Louth is the nearest settlement.

Trilby's stilted mailbox is a storytelling landmark in itself; its corrugated-metal roof tilts dashingly, as if tipping its hat hello and directing you up the main-road-like driveway. It's been a receptacle of good and bad news since the 404,685-hectare Dunlop Station was carved up among the Murray family in the 1950s (thus creating Trilby). Peeling paint still reveals the 1976 flood-level – "the highest in white man's history".

Liz takes charge of "anything inside the levy banks" while Gary and two of their four children, Tom and Will, look after "the rest". This includes mustering 14,500 merino sheep – by plane (Gary's 'sky Toyota') and motorbike – around a space a little less than twice the size of Singapore.

Farming a patch of semi-arid outback where "you expect more dry times than good seasons" has made the Murrays paragons of

bush pragmatism. With cyclical drought a reality, they supplement their main income by rounding up trips of drought-resistant wild goats that roam the wide-open spaces. Some seasons they get more for a big billy goat than they do for a prized lamb. "When the kids were little, every time we needed to pay school fees, a power bill, or I wanted a hiking holiday [her big passion], we went and chased goats," says Liz.

While Trilby is certainly not a *City-Slickers*-style hands-on dude ranch, there are plenty of opportunities to witness the action, especially around shearing time (May). The self-drive 'mud-map' tours, however, are the most glorious way to get lost, while not getting lost, in Trilby's immense space.

Ninety kilometres of trails thread through a landscape that is equally bewitching bone-dry or fiesta-ed in wildflowers. The land has been worked since paddle-steamer days so something always beckons you over for a gander; be it a sun-bleached animal skull staring up from the cracked earth or an old Holden carcass confusing your calendar. Out here, Trilby's big sky soon becomes your mood.



In exactly the "middle of nowhere" you'll bump into Gary's parents' 1950s "honeymoon house", petrified in time from when it was abandoned. Eerily quiet except for the sinister banging of screen doors, it has horror-film set written all over it. Nearby, a vintage double-decker bus rusts silently, a sad sight once you learn about its formerly adventuresome existence.

For all Trilby's uninterrupted horizons, most human and wildlife activity contracts to within cooee of the Darling. When the river flows, so do the recreation possibilities, from canoeing and birdwatching to yabbing and fishing.

The farm-stay options are set among river gums and coolabah trees, relatively clustered around the Murrays' homestead and its treasure-filled "rust-gardens". Grey-nomad and family-friendly campsites spread out along the riverbank.

Refurbs of the Overseer's Cottage and Jillaroo's Cottage deliberately shied away from "modernising" the former workers' quarters. These self-contained cottages feel more house than hotel: sprinkled with local curiosities, black-and-white-framed history and a sturdy fridge your grandparents would have given their right arms for. No more or less than you would expect in the Murrays' homestead. The cute new kid on Trilby's accommodation block is corrugated one-bedder Mitch's Hut. The generous north-facing verandah, complete with Weber and fire pit, is a sensational sunset perch.

Liz's home-cooked cuisine is a treat several generations in the making. Think full-cream, no-compromise country classics such as slow-cooked lamb shanks, stockyard chicken

CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Find a range of accommodation at Trilby Station; On the Darling River Run: Local wildlife; Meet the sheep; Camp by the river. OPPOSITE: Head further south-west on the Darling River Run to see the iconic black box trees of the Menindee Lakes.



Hot properties

CORYNNIA STATION The accommodation on this merino and cropping property at Carrathool via Hay is charmingly decked out with vintage furniture and chintz.

ELDEE STATION This eco-credentialled working sheep and cattle farm is 25 kilometres from Broken Hill; book the comfy Grae Suite.

CARINYA STATION The camping on this Lightning Ridge property is no frills, but the insights into the workings on an outback farm are authentic and plentiful.

CALLUBRI STATION Constructed from upcycled shipping containers, the Sky Suites on this 11,300-hectare working sheep property in the NSW Central West add a touch of modern luxury to the station experience, including a mineral plunge pool.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DESTINATION NSW