

# Function Report - Avoca Educational Wine Tour

**10th November 2002**

Sunday, 10th November, headed off from Narre Warren at 6.30 am, after loading the barbecue onto the coach. Picked up from the normal places, Murrumbena and Doncaster, and final pickup was from Keilor. We had our first stop at Melton, where we all enjoyed fresh rolls, paté, salami, coffee and brandy. On the coach we had also had a nicely chilled fruit juice. A BandAid came in handy for one of the helpers, who found that the knife provided by the President (to cut the rolls) was able to cut flesh as well as bread rolls and meat. One of our alleged gastronomes said that he thought it was black sausage, but it was too bright to be anything else venous bleeding.

Your correspondent has a copy of the Australian Complete Book of Australian Wine, edited by Len Evans and published in 1976. The Pyrenees are not mentioned, but there is a paragraph or two about Nathan and Wyeth at Avoca, about which is written "They have developed more than 80 hectares of vines, about three-quarters of which are white hermitage and the remainder Doradillo, and dry red varieties such as shiraz, cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir and other experimental vines. ..." James Halliday's Wine Companion lists 12 wineries in the Pyrenees region, most of which rate between 3 and 5 stars.

To help avoid the boredom of sitting for a number of hours in the coach, Barbara Cecchi passed around a number of three dimensional prints, which if you squint, stare and poke your tongue out at, supposedly have some hidden picture contained within it. Some members and guests were able to decipher the pictures, but your correspondent was unable to interpret 3D pictures with a stereoscope (in his military days) and so affected a superior air while secretly wishing he could see what was so interesting in the prints. Barbara also passed around some pieces of plastic string, with the challenge to find out who could make the string stretch further than anyone else. It was at this stage that your correspondent remembered the words of the ABC Classic FM breakfast host, Clive Robertson, who recently mused on the Australian penchant for competition. But he refused to compete because, for every winner, someone must lose. Like Robertson, I refuse to inflict on other people the indignity of being a loser.

We travelled to Summerfield Wines, where Ian and Mark Summerfield and marketing manager, Patricia, welcomed us. Ian Summerfield established his family vineyard in 1970, and produced his first commercial vintage in 1979. Facilities include a barbecue and picnic area, accommodation and an airstrip.

Halliday writes that Summerfield Wines are "A specialist red wine producer, the particular forte of which is Shiraz. The wines since 1988 have been consistently excellent, luscious and full bodied and fruit-driven but with a slice of vanillin oak." The full range of wines available from Summerfield Wines includes Shiraz, Cabernet Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Trebbiano and Chardonnay. Mark is now the winemaker, and Ian concentrates on viticulture. Further information is available at [www.summerfieldwines.com](http://www.summerfieldwines.com)

We depart Summerfield Wines and travelled to Taltarni Vineyards where Amanda Clohosey (centre of attention) and Anne Chandler made us most welcome. It is most interesting to go back to Len Evans' book and read what he wrote about sparkling wines from the area. "When it seemed clear that the demand for champagne was soaring it was decided to divert up to half the Avoca production into fine champagne." Taltarni Vineyards now consists of a 700 ha property plus 66 ha at Clover Hill in northeast Tasmania. Taltarni has also recently acquired a 15-acre property at Lalla Gully, 15 km from Clover Hill.

We were all most impressed by the gardens and surrounds of the cellar at Taltarni. You enter the property via a beautifully tree lined driveway, and arrive at a great garden that has marvellous roses set amongst the native gum trees. A feature is the bronze horseman and working dogs pictured above.

While Barbara Cecchi and some committee members prepared the barbecue lunch, Amanda took us on a tour of the winery, and gave us a most informative talk about how the product is moved from fruit

to table.

Amanda told us that two years ago the vineyard produced 1001 tonnes, however last year, because of poor weather (dry plus hail) only 500 tonnes were produced. Having been shown the crush and fermentation process, Amanda gave us another informative talk on the sparkling wine process, and then described the bottling process (see pic).

The bottling machine had been imported from Germany.

After the tour was completed, we tasted the Taltarni range and then had a delightful barbecue lunch, prepared by Barbara and her band of willing helpers. To write that we had a barbecue lunch does not do justice to the meal provided for us. We had three courses, a delightful entrée, followed by barbecued meats and salads, and we finished our meal with a choice of delightful sweets. Taltarni wines from the Fiddleback range complemented the meal. The Fiddleback White 2001 and Fiddleback Red 2000, at \$10 each are both “sippable” (Taltarni notes) and very good value to accompany a barbecue. Dining on the verandah at Taltarni added to the sense of occasion.

We were only 35 minutes late departing from Taltarni, but this was a reflection of the enjoyment we had rather than tardiness. Our arrival at Warrenmang Vineyard Resort was marred by some immature (inebriated?) young people who directed the bus into an area that was certainly large enough for a car to complete a three point turn (remember when that was part of the driving licence test?), but was quite tight for a large coach. Eventually we got to where we were supposed to be, and while some of the group sat and rested in the cellar, Andrew, who is the cellar door manager at Warrenmang Estate, welcomed the rest of us. It was interesting to learn that Warrenmang Estate averages about 1.5 tonnes of fruit per acre, whereas at Taltarni, the average yield was about 3 tonnes. The different soil type and rainfall cause the difference in yield.

Warrenmang is set on red topsoil, then some clay and a mixture of limestone and sandstone underneath. This allows the vine roots to go down to about five or so metres underground. This allows the roots to really seek out water after a good soaking.

All processing is completed by hand. The grapes are picked by hand, and the fruit is then placed in open fermentation tanks. The fruit is hand pressed: very much the old style of wine making. Warrenmang produce a number of Italian style wines, plus, of course, their Shiraz and Sauvignon Blanc.

After the coffee stop at Melton, members brought out their string to be measured. Don Rayment lead the comp for a short time, and was then passed by a couple of other members and guests, however Frank Sansone finished by winning by the length of the bus. Obviously 12 months practice at extracting money from customers in his wine store was good practice for extracting the maximum length from a piece of string. By the way, congratulations to Frank, who will clock up the first anniversary of his venture into the wine, retail business.

And so another educational wine trip concluded. All who attended were much appreciative of the work in presenting the tour by President Bob and his family, and the fine food and entertainment hospitality provided by Barbara Cecchi. We must also thank our hosts and hostesses at Summerfield Wines, Taltarni and Warrenmang Estate for their generous hospitality. Without their generous support, and informative discussion, we would not have had the wonderful day that we did. The next function is the Guild Breakfast on the Yarra on the first Sunday in February 2003. Also, a reminder to start saving the pennies for the trip to Coonawarra in March – a trip to look forward to.