

From the Bottom to the Centre of Victoria

Where a journey that started off at what was thought to be the bottom of Victoria turned out to be a centre for John.

Greetings, Grylls Descendents.

Recently I was corresponding with Brother Bill about where the <euphemism>bottom</euphemism> of Victoria lay. He suggested Kurting near Inglewood, but I disagreed, quite liking that Goldfields country. I suggested Tragowel-Macorna-Mincha, and stopped there. On stimulus from him: "I once spent a couple of days with Uncle David in his back paddocks. Godforsaken ****", meaning Dingee, where our grandparents lived, I wrote back, paraphrasing, "And imagine, it is 1919, our Grandfather has just returned from the War and Gallipoli and France. His own brother has removed all the wires from his fences, as he had been meant to die." I then wrote to Bill

"I had been going to continue the sequence "Tragowel-Macorna-Mincha" with "- Pyramid - Mologa - Mitiamo - Prairie - Dingee", but I didn't, thinking it was a bit of an insult to our forbears. I did write, concerning the wonderful nearby swamp "And yet, Grandma and Grandfather loved the Tang and its wildlife. They seemed to have a superb capacity for taking all that life offered. A round-Australia camping trip in a VW Kombi in 1955?"

This caused me to go to Google Earth *and Street View* and I added

"If they liked the Tang so much, would they have enjoyed using Google Earth Street View to bring up the Dingee-Rochester Road and look at it, as I just did now? The children in the photo seem to be enjoying the Tang very much ... Cripes, I've gone all emotional."

I had added this unutterably wonderful photo of the Grylls children at the Tang. The tall girl looks as if she might have mothering possibilities:



Then out of the corner of my eye in Google Earth I saw something very surprising, a marker “Loddon-Campaspe-Greater Bendigo Corner”. WHAT? I then realised that in a very small area, that there are several things of some importance to me, and the area is far from being the *bottom* as suggested above, it might have been the *centre* for me for 50 years. To explain, I have marked some things on the following map from Google, which has a length scale of some 10km.



- The Grylls farmhouse where our mother grew up, described in [Mum's Story](#). The place has indelible memories for me. I recall one of the uncles taking me and showing me a Curlew's nest in the god-forsaken flat paddock just north of the house, a pathetic little clearing on the flat ground with an egg in the centre. I remember the good board games from the 1920s-30s they had there (I always was a sickly indoor sort of boy – remembering with horror another uncle being a mad shooter and making his own cartridges in front of the garage to blast the Bejesus out of anything that moved at Duck Opening – and he a convinced nature lover!).
- And of course The Tang ... shown next to the farmhouse, in slightly difficult Google Earth type, is *Tang Tang Swamp Wildlife Reserve*. How pleased would the Grylls family have been to have seen it declared a reserve, they who loved it so much!
- And now we get something quite strange, on the right of the photo the aforementioned *Loddon-Campaspe-Greater Bendigo Corner*. I couldn't believe it, but a bit of research shows it indeed to be the corner of the Shires of Loddon and Campaspe and the City of Greater Bendigo. Here is an extract from a map from Goulburn Murray Water, and it seems to be quite definite:



- In fact, also labelled on the right of the aerial photo is the mighty Waranga Western Channel, that provided us on the farm in the Mallee with water, via two different channels, one high-level, the other low, very close to their terminii, after a long and tortuous struggle with topography and seepage around western and north-western Victoria.
- Now, another encounter with an old friend. Some 5km from the Grylls house is the take-off of another important irrigation channel, also labelled, the Pyramid No 1 Channel. It contains an unusual feature, a large square storage reservoir (unlabelled but obvious) constructed on it so as to be able to manage the flows better.
- And now the chickens really come home to roost: when I was working for Rubicon at the turn of the century, I developed a simulation program for waves in rivers and canals and applied it to that very channel, some 50 years after the moments of my boyhood on the nearby farm. When I was typing in the data, I hadn't realised how close I was to home. The program is actually quite useful, also for flood prediction *etc.*, and I have used it in several papers. It has undergone several changes in the spirit of my Grandfather's axe, that has had two heads and three handles. It uses a simple and accurate method that everybody else in the world thinks does not work ("The Unstable Method"), and only Little Johnny uses and advocates it very happily. Applying it to the Pyramid No 1 Channel was a little like the Buddha, returning to ferrying people across his river.

Sad update – one day after writing all the above

I had written all the above but to get information about the storage reservoir I wrote to my former colleague at Rubicon, Tony Oakes, who seemed to keep the whole Murray Valley irrigated while I was there, maybe because of his birthplace Nathalia, but maybe also his engineering training and then some years living in Kerang working for the then SR&WSC and where he met his wife. And playing footy for the Rovers, but hey, nobody's perfect, even if he did write most helpfully just now.

The storage reservoir on the Pyramid No 1 Channel is actually called Tandarra Pondage, and Tony guesses that it was constructed in about 1970. It is (and here I am surmising) a Turkey Nest Dam, where soil is excavated from an area and placed in a closed bank around the outside, forming the dam. The water so impounded then sits in an elevated position above the general plain. It seeps into the soil and emerges outside the dam wall, bringing up salt if it is there. It is a problem in the case we are considering, and I knew that 20 years ago. Tony wrote:

Certainly bores were drilled and there was talk of some groundwater pumps. Not sure if that eventuated. ... It looks like from Google that trees were planted on the north side. There was talk in the NVIRP days of reducing the area/volume, to save evaporation. I don't think this happened, but the Google difference on Google Earth is interesting ... the storage is important for overall dynamic response.

Funnily enough, Little Johnny also once published a paper on how to do that calculation, something simple enough you might think, and you would be right.

HOWEVER, rather more importantly Tony suggested I Google it, and I came up with very bad news indeed. Read and weep: [Site 15: Tang Tang Swamp](#). My early enthusiasm above has evaporated – and I must say, using Google Earth Street View as reported above I had thought that the trees didn't look very well. I'm feeling crushed.