

What the Brothers are doing – Pat Lynch – NEW SOUTH WALES



1 Pat Lynch calls Goodooga home

I first discovered Goodooga three years ago when I was driving the bus for Cassandra Gibbs and Julieanne Manson on one of their *Let's Talk* tours, where they took people to 'walk country' with them and visit Aboriginal peoples in their home country. Goodooga's quite a pleasant small town of about three hundred people, seventy five kilometres northwest of Lightning Ridge, which has the nearest supermarket, hospital and petrol station. About twenty of the people in town are not Aboriginal and these include four or five of the

teachers at Goodooga Central School, the matron at Goodooga Health Clinic (which used to be a hospital), the two police (one a man and the other a woman), the post mistress and her husband, the owner of the local pub and me. It once used to be a bustling town of more than a thousand people and the centre of a thriving sheep industry; many of the people in town were sheep shearers but several factors have made this a thing of the past. Maybe the most significant of these factors was the lack of rainfall – there hasn't been any significant rain for more than three years when the town was cut off by flood waters. The land is so flat in the Western Plains that when there is a lot of rain it takes a long time for the water to run away.

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Photo: Bob Matthews

Goodooga is situated in the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese, whose nearest priest is in Bourke, two hundred and fifty kilometres to the west. Although Walgett is in the Armidale diocese, the priest from there comes to St Denis's church here to celebrate Mass on the first Saturday of each month. Several people from surrounding properties and a Josephite sister from Lightning Ridge come here to join us for that Mass. On the third weekend of every month I go down to Walgett (a hundred and forty miles to the south) to spend the weekend with Mark Cody and Peter Ellis and go to Mass with them on the Sunday morning.

What do I do for the rest of the time? Well, I live here! When I came back from China I began to realise that although we pay lip service to the fact that the Aboriginal people have a different culture from ours, even today we expect them to become assimilated into our transported British culture. I talked with Vince Duggan and he was happy for me to come to live in Goodooga. It seemed an appropriate Australian response to our chapter's call to work towards bringing our presence, compassion and liberation to our most unlistened to people.

Peter Ellis with Pat Lynch at Goodooga, a long way from anywhere

Goodooga Central School has about thirty-five students from kindergarten to year ten and is a centre of community activity in the town. We've had a 'back to the river' day and a day at Culgoa National Park, during NAIDOC week, during my time here – both enjoyable community experiences. Students who wish to complete years eleven and twelve go away to boarding school. There are, for example, several boys from the town boarding at Nudgee College.

There's a community garden in town, which has just started coming back to life again and I spend some time each week working there. We also have a youth/homework centre which has been closed for a while, but is about to open up again from 3.30 to 5.00 pm each weekday. I plan to volunteer there a couple of afternoons per week. Once a month there's a 'Working Party' meeting I've been



2 Peter Ellis with Pat Lynch at Goodooga, a long way from anywhere.

invited to attend, where people gather to discuss what is needed and what is going on in town. As I settle in I'll soon get to see what is needed and the people here will tell me other ways I can help out. Apart from that, I've got plenty of time to read, walk, think and, dare I say, pray. I live in a furnished Health Department apartment at a quite reasonable rent. The Health Department has several empty furnished apartments in town that used to be for the nurses who were on shift in the old hospital. My apartment's quite adequate and comfortable, with a few spare beds if ever you would like to come and visit for a day or two: nobody knows where Goodooga is, so you won't be disturbed and you'll find it quiet and restful. When the *Let's Talk* tours come to Goodooga I have those few beds for participants to bunk down while they're here.

It will take a long time for me to be welcomed into the local community. I hope to listen to the stories about the land and the people and come to discover our Australian spirituality. This will certainly take a long time – but there's plenty of time in Goodooga and things happen slowly here.

Pat Lynch cfc