

The active life of William (Bill) Mitton Rice VK5BP / VK3ABP

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For those who had close contact with Bill Rice, he was someone not to be forgotten. Personally, I thought he was a genius! Bill became a Silent Key in May 2007 and his long time friend Bill Roper VK3BR wrote an obituary, which was published in the July 2007 edition of *Amateur Radio* and also in the September 2007 edition of *OTN Journal*. Bill Roper wrote about Bill Rice's life based on what information was available at that time. But there was clearly a lot more about the Bill Rice history which might be written and I set out to find out what I could. For example, when sailing on Lake Eyre, he communicated mobile by amateur radio, something nobody had attempted to do before. This was unique because the lake doesn't get water very often and only fills years apart.

I have collected quite a lot of information about Bill's sailing and other items such as on his fox hunting. Much of this has come from Peter Rice, Bill's son, now also VK3ABP, Tim Robinson VK3YBP and Brian Richardson VK3CCR. I will start this article from when I first met Bill Rice just after he had finished his school days in Murray Bridge, South Australia.

By 1946 the war had finished and some of the pre-war radio amateurs in Murray Bridge were re-applying for their old licences. Frank Millar VK5BF and Bob Grundy VK5BG were the first to appear on air in the town. I had already passed the amateur radio exam in 1941 and was granted a licence with VK5BR as my callsign in January of 1946. Also in 1946, ex-Navy Jack Trevor VK5AM popped up in the town. Then 1947 came around and we became aware of Bill Rice building his radio station VK5BP.

Bill Rice in South Australia

Bill Rice was certainly an asset to amateur radio in Murray Bridge. He was born in Pinnaroo and home-schooled on the family farm there. With his parents, he moved to Murray Bridge and attended Murray Bridge High School, where I did, too. But he was three years younger than me and I hadn't known of his existence until the call sign VK5BP appeared on the air waves. Bill had been assembling his radio station in his parents' garage, building his own gear, much as most radio amateurs were doing in those early years.

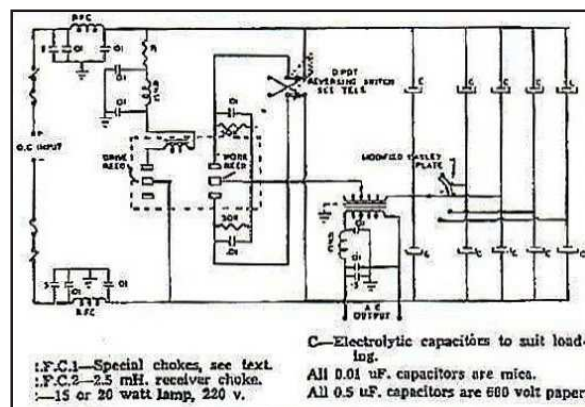
As radio amateurs, we used components where we could find them, such as variable tuning capacitors recovered from the early TRF wireless sets. But Bill was

going one better and he would attempt to construct the individual items themselves. I am sure that if he had found a way to do it, he would have tried assembling evacuated electron tubes.

Bill's skill for making things seems to have been born into him. I remember he made good use of the lathe at the home in Murray Bridge of Bob Grundy VK5BG. He certainly had the skills to construct radio components.

Bill's original VK5BP transmitter operated on the 40 metre band with the transmitter consisting of a Franklin VFO using 6AC7 valves, a 6L6 driver and a push-pull 807 final amplifier. The final amplifier was modulated by a further push-pull pair of 807s. The VFO was later modified to a Clapp oscillator using a 6J5 valve.

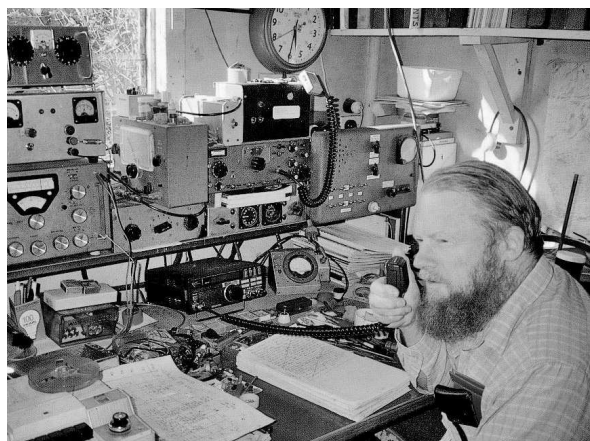
We were all on DC mains in Murray Bridge and Bill built a DC to AC vibrator inverter so that a higher voltage could be generated and rectified, sufficient to operate the 807 valves at their full ratings.



DC-AC vibrator inverter by Eric Cornelliuss, the basis for the inverter built by Bill Rice VK5BP.

As discussed later, Bill moved to Adelaide which had AC mains. As he didn't need the inverter there, he loaned it to me to run my gear in portable mode when I went home to Murray Bridge on week-ends.

VK5BP at Murray Bridge soon moved on. Bill attended the University of Adelaide to commence an Engineering Degree and the VK5BP amateur station went with him to Adelaide. He also went on to achieve Honours after the initial degree qualification. To achieve Honours, he chose to investigate slotted antennas. By that time I had decided that Bill was a genius. Impressed with Bill's skills, we became close friends.



Bill Rice operating as VK3ABP at Altona, Victoria.

A slot antenna consists of a metal surface, usually a flat plate, with one or more holes or slots cut out. A narrow width slot, with a length similar to a dipole, performs much like a normal dipole. Considering Bill's future work was connected with RAAF aircraft, my guess is that Bill was researching the narrow width slot to fit in the metal fuselage of an aircraft.

Around Murray Bridge and Adelaide, Bill gained a few active amateur radio friends including John Lamprey VK5JL, Jim Milway VK3CX (ex VK5CX), Rob Gurr VK5RG and John Millard VK5FC. A typical activity of this group was a visit in 1948 to the Clare showgrounds, driven there by John Lamprey in his parents' motor car.

The field day was sponsored by the amateur radio 'Northern Net' and the small travelling group enjoyed a stimulating conversation between John and Bill on the new mode of SSB which was beginning to appear on the amateur bands.

At this time, petrol rationing was still in force and the group had to borrow some petrol from one of the members of the Clare Net to get back to Adelaide. As the address of John Millard is listed in Crystal Brook, it is unlikely that he was a passenger in the car from Adelaide as indicated in one of Rob's articles in *Amateur Radio*.



The Adelaide Group at Clare. From left: Jim Milway, Bill Rice, Robb Gurr, John Millard, John Lamprey (ladies and children not identified).

Bill was regularly on the air with his radio station, particularly with John Lamprey who was also attending the University. I too spent quite a bit of time with Bill. At one stage Bill developed an interest in golf and bought several golf clubs. So I bought some too. One day we headed up the hills to the Belair National Park Golf Course. My means of transport was a rather well-used ex-army motor bike and we mounted ourselves, plus two bundles of clubs, on board it. It was never designed for such a burden, but somehow we made the grade to Belair and back without any problem.

Of the golf, I am not sure how Bill managed the course. But a lot of the first drives headed into deep gullies and I always managed to hit the ball into them. Such locations made it difficult to retrieve the ball and hit it out of the gully. I guess I left many balls where they lay!

Bill Rice VK3ABP in Victoria

On graduation from University, Bill joined the Department of Supply, later the Department of Defence. I was also working in the same Defence Department, but at Salisbury, South Australia. With security restrictions, I could well understand Bill's reluctance to release much detail of his activities.

In 1953, the Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU) moved from Edinburgh RAAF base to Laverton RAAF base in Victoria, and so Bill and his newly married wife Margaret moved to Altona, Victoria where they started their family. Bill's amateur radio activities continued at Altona.

Here is a quote from Brian Richardson VK3CCR:

"I met Bill when I was posted to RAAF Laverton in 1970 and he worked there in ARDU. I gained my amateur licence that year and formed a friendship with Bill. There were numerous memorable incidents relating to Bill and I relate some of those memories here to the best of my memory:

"Bill had a hand in many things among which was the design of the Non Directional Beacons (NDB) antenna towers for the RAAF airfields. He calculated that the top guy wires could double as a top hat provided that their length was broken by an insulator before they effectively screened more than the top 40% of the mast; if they were continuous below that height the antenna efficiency was reduced. That stuck with me.

"I was with Bill one day in 1971/2 when he received a phone call relating to the latest amateur satellite which was at least partly built in VK and the receiver was in testing in USA prior being loaded into a launch vehicle. Apparently it failed some test for signal rejection and an urgent fix was needed. Bill produced a bundle of used photocopy paper, on which he did all his designs in pencil, and proceeded to make calculations with his slide rule before pencilling in changes which were phoned to the caller and the satellite. Oscar 6, I think, was successfully launched. Nothing fazed Bill."

ARDU moves again but Bill stays in Altona

In the mid 1980s, ARDU again moved, away from Laverton, and Bill joined the Aeronautical Research Laboratories at Fishermans Bend in Victoria.

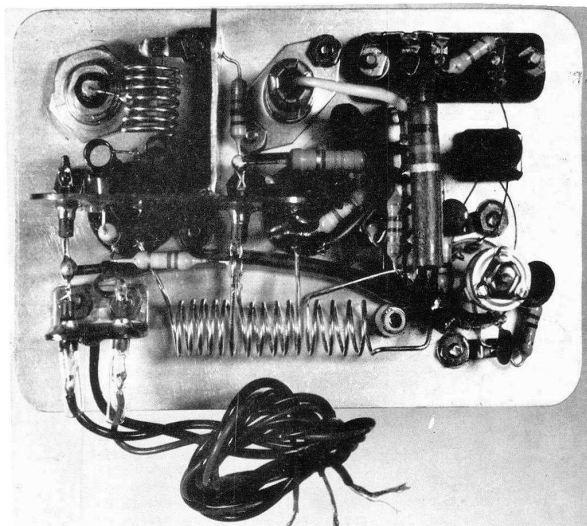
Bill had transferred his amateur radio activities to Victoria as VK3ABP and was based in his home at Altona. With my eldest son Kym working at Werribee, the visits by my wife Margaret and me to Victoria were frequent and we invariably called in to the Altona home of Bill and his wife Margaret. As it happens, the two Margarets knew each other from earlier days (and a common interest in teaching). At the time of each visit Bill was involved in different projects. I remember one visit when he was experimenting with some gear he had put together to monitor the weather patterns generated from the weather satellites.

But Bill talked a lot about the WIA. He became very interested in the running of the WIA organisation and its directing Board. He was editor of *Amateur Radio* for 15 years. He became firm friends for many years with the likes of Bill Roper VK3BR and Ron Fisher VK3OM.

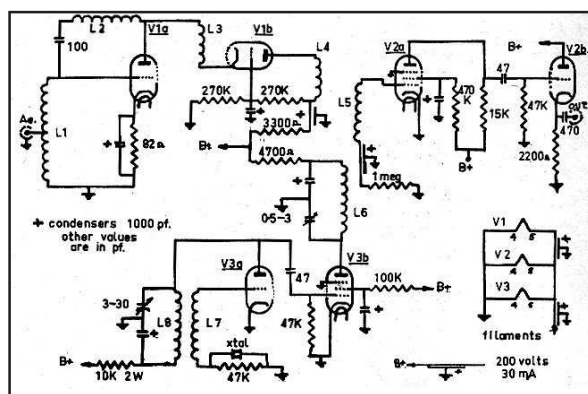
Bill Roper managed the office administration from 1988 to 1993, was involved with the production of *Amateur Radio* and was a member of the Publications Committee (with its related tasks) from 1963 through to 2015 (a total of 51 years). This period also included being editor of *Amateur Radio* from 1972 to 1976. Later, Bill VK3BR also took on the task of *OTN Journal* editor. Ron Fisher did a lot of technical writing for *Amateur Radio* including technical assessment of amateur transceivers. For a few years Ron Fisher and Bill Rice ran a Sunday night net on the 80 metre band. I called into that net a few times from my home in Adelaide.

The frequency converters

Bill Rice was well known for his design of circuitry and hardware which provided conversion from HF to 2 metres. As Bill VK3BR pointed out in Bill VK3ABP's obituary, it was one of the most popular pieces of equipment ever published in *Amateur Radio*. The photo of the converter and its circuit diagram shown on the next page were copied from the November 1962 edition of *Amateur*



The HF to 2 Metre VHF converter by Bill Rice VK3ABP, published in *Amateur Radio*, November 1962.



Circuit Diagram of the Bill Rice VK3ABP HF to 2 metre VHF converter.

Radio. Bill later published a 6 metre version of the unit (*Amateur Radio*, June 1967) and further on, when transistors became available, a transistorised version (*Amateur Radio*, May 1982).

Foxhunting with Bill Rice

Bill Rice had a lot of different activities and was involved with many different projects. One amateur radio activity was 2 m fox hunting and on this subject I include comments from Jock Walsh VK3UB, Bill Roper VK3BR, Tim Robinson VK3YBP and Brian Richardson VK3CCR. First, here is an extract from an article on fox hunting in the 1970s by Jock Walsh VK3UB:

"I started fox hunting in about 1969 with a group of hams that included Bill Rice VK3ABP, Graham Farthing VK3AFR, Kevin Phillips VK3ZYP and Tony Saunders VK3BZT. We used all home-brew gear, most of which would be consigned to the scrap heap today.

"Bill Rice drove an old Valiant AP5. The fox transmitter was also home-brew, courtesy of Bill Rice I think, and was packed into an old ammunition box to allow for the rough treatment it received when being placed in some of the hiding places. Bill came up with some weird and wonderful pieces of tracking equipment, one of which included a CRO installed in the dashboard of the old Valiant.

"One of the most difficult locations, where most of the hounds were within a hundred yards of the fox and still unable to pinpoint its location, was when Graham Farthing floated the fox transmitter out on a motor car

tube raft into the middle of a lake in the Moonee Ponds Gardens. No one was prepared to go into the water and it was not until someone tripped over the fishing line to which it was attached that it was reeled in."

Here is a quote from Bill Roper on fox hunting in 1960:

"I was a keen 2 m fox hunter in the early 1960s. I recall that Bill Rice VK3ABP developed a continually polar plot rotating beam which was mounted on the roof of his Valiant and read the direction of the 'fox' from a small CRO. I seem to recall that on at least one occasion Bill was stopped by the police who were intrigued by the rotating antenna on the roof of the Valiant. Bill managed to talk his way out of any possible charges. I only have mostly fading memories now, but I certainly remember the fun of fox hunting. I enjoyed those monthly fox hunts for several years. We used to start out from College Crescent, Parkville, close to Melbourne University and covered a lot of territory around the suburbs trying to find the hidden transmitter."

A quote on fox hunting by Tim Robinson:

"I used to ride as 'Melway (street directory) reader' in a fox hunt team which consisted of myself in the back seat, Gil Sones VK3AUI on beam bearings, and Kevin Phillips VK3ZYP, now VK3AUQ, as driver. Kevin had an Austin A40 in which he had cut a hole in the roof so that the pole of a three element Yagi could be dropped through. Most others had to mount on ski bars and put a hand out of window to turn the beam. Not good these days (protruding limbs from moving cars)! We were the only car that did not have to drive with the passenger seat window open.

"Things started to get serious once the fox left to go to his first location. We would get bearings and try to follow a path by checking the street directory. We also timed the fox to get a rough idea of how far he might have travelled. Whilst we missed a few fox locations, I was surprised how close we often came to the actual location of the fox before being called in.

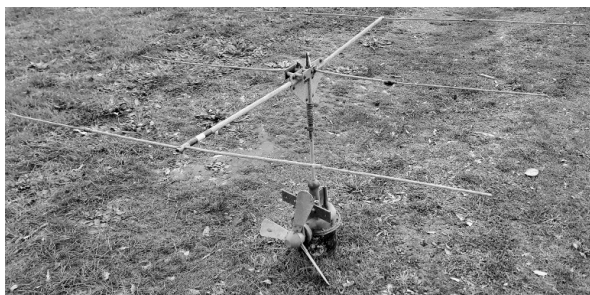
"Bill Rice VK3ABP won the prize for the most sophisticated direction finding setup in his Valiant AP5 car. Being an engineer and designer in the electronics industry, he had a vast knowledge in this area. He is known for the design of the VK3ABP 2 metre converter, a 2 m two stage valve amplifier unit. It did not have the best signal to noise ratio obtainable, but it worked well when the incoming signal was passed through a 20 dB FET preamp. Two Selsyn motors were employed. One drove the antenna sweep at about 50 RPM and the other provided the 'positioning' information to a cathode ray tube (CRT) with a long persistence phosphor. The antenna sweep output was amplified and sent to a second input of the CRT.

"Bill had designed this setup with a rotating antenna connected to the CRT. It plotted the signal strength as the trace turned radar style and plotted a 360 degree readout showing all the antenna lobes. It was quite impressive. One just had to observe the strongest lobe and the direction it was pointing in relation to the front of the car. It was fascinating to watch as you could instantly see the full 360 degree radiation pattern of the antenna.

"The output from the fox transmitter was a modulated tone usually warbled in frequency. The fox operators sometimes made the warbled tone quite annoying. Also, sometimes we were given very strange looks from people when we pulled up in a local laneway or a public area."

And finally a quote on fox hunting by Brian Richardson VK3CCR:

“We used to join the Melbourne fox hunt group on a Friday night and, travelling in Bill’s old Valiant, would tear around town at high speed chasing the fox. The interesting point was the radio setup. Bill mounted a three element 2 m Yagi on a pole on ski-bars on the roof. The antenna rotated, driven by a windscreen wiper motor, and its position was relayed via a synchro to the 5 inch (12.7 cm) CRT in the cab. It was my job to read the CRT and call directions to Bill. However, the windscreen wiper motor lacked the power to drive the antenna when Bill was travelling at his preferred speed so he fabricated a forward facing fan which, when driven by the wind, added to the motor torque and it all rotated at any speed.



The recently found VK3ABP foxhunting 2 m Yagi, windscreen wiper rotator and forward facing fan.

“It was not uncommon to see looks of total shock on the faces of pedestrians as this old Valiant, with fan and antenna spinning around on the roof and driven by this intense bearded man, went speeding by. Most days this setup provided such an advantage that Bill could have won the hunt but, as that would require him to host supper for the next hunt, he only ever came second.”

Bill Rice, a sailor on Lake Eyre

Another Bill Rice activity was sailing. It was Bill’s adventurous spirit that saw him inspire his first successful attempt at sailing on Lake Eyre in South Australia in May 1975.

The lake was named in honour of Edward John Eyre, the first European to see it in 1840. Lake Eyre is no puddle to sail in. It and some other lakes in the centre of Australia only fill when there are heavy rains delivered via the Cooper Creek, which flows from Queensland. Normally the lake beds are dry.

Cooper Creek is one of three major Queensland river systems that flow into the Lake Eyre basin. But the rains are only spasmodic and the lake does not fill often.



Donald Campbell.

Until 1985, Lake Eyre only filled with water four times during the 1900s, 1916-1917, 1950-1955, 1974-1977 and 1984. The deepest water level ever recorded in the lake was 6 metres, in 1974. When the water has evaporated, a large floor of salt is left without undulation and it is an ideal location for land speed



The record-breaking Bluebird CN7 on display.

tests. In 1964, Donald Campbell broke the land speed record on the Lake Eyre salt floor at 403.1 miles-per-hour (648.7 km/h) in his Bluebird-Proteus CN7 gas turbine-powered vehicle.

After settling as a dry salt-filled lake, in 1975 the river system flowed again and, led by Bill Rice, a group of amateur radio members and their families, headed from Melbourne to Lake Eyre within South Australia. They settled camp at Level Post Bay on the shore of Lake Eyre. Bill had contacted skipper Roger Bullock by this time, who had been marketing the Red Baron yachts. Roger Bullock and his partner joined Bill’s entourage, and Roger’s yacht (#5) was the first Red Baron which sailed on Lake Eyre, its hull painted red and labelled in large lettering with the Red Baron designation.



A typical Red Baron catamaran yacht similar to Bill’s Kathleen M.

In May 1975, Bill Rice and skipper Roger Bullock launched the Red Baron yacht. The family group had quite a task controlling the yacht’s progression down the steep sand slope into the water. Handheld radios designed by Bill were used by the group to co-ordinate the launching. Once afloat, they rigged the mast and sails, and the crew ultimately got the boat under way. On 14th May 1975 an expedition to Brookes Island was undertaken.

The crew was made up of Roger as skipper and navigator, Tim Robinson VK3YBP as the camera man using a 16 mm camera and Bill Rice as radio communicator who, with his gear on board, carried out amateur radio sessions. They sailed from Level Post Bay to Brookes Island, staying long after the sun went down and onto 3.00 am the next morning. They headed

back to Level Post Bay and Roger made use of the stars for navigation. During the dark period, Jack Taylor VK3ZKF manned a shore station, keeping scheduled 'skeds' and acting as a relay in case of emergencies. The return in the early morning to Level Post Bay was assisted by a flashing light beacon on the shore at Level Post Bay. The light might have been mounted on the top of the Bill Rice Wind Generator tower (discussed in following paragraphs).

Sailing into the centre of Madigan Gulf, they could see little of land in the distance around them and it was here that Bill carried out a lot of QSOs with other distant radio amateur stations. Early in the session, he was able to make contact with a radio amateur in the USA. But his first DX contact was the one he was pleased with. It was loud and clear, with 'Snow' Campbell VK3MR in Melbourne and Bill returned S9.

He was obviously excited as he figured he had achieved a first operation, the first radio contact whilst maritime mobile on Lake Eyre. The whole operation was recorded on quarter inch reel-to-reel audio tape; that tape is now a prized archive possession of Peter Rice.

A film was made from Tim's 16 mm filming of the terrain around Lake Eyre and the communications activity on board the Red Baron yacht. 'On Eyre' was released for publication to a number of television and media channels, notably the ABC, Channel 9, and National Geographic, but unfortunately it failed to gain traction. Later, the film was digitised and distributed on DVD by Tim Robinson (Art-Media Services). The film and DVD was the work of the following: direction and camera by Tim Robinson, script by Bill Rice, narration by Ron Fisher, and location sound by Roly Roper.

The photo below of young Peter Rice, splashing around with his two sisters Janet and Kathy at the side of Roger Bullock's yacht, was taken near the beach at Level Post Bay.



Young Peter Rice splashing around with his sisters Janet and Kathy beside the Red Baron yacht.

The party camp site at Level Post Bay is shown in the photograph at the top of the next column. It is close to the shore of Level Post Bay and about a mile from the mouth of Goyders Channel. (Level Post was named by Warren Bonython in 1949 when he used a 'level' at or near the point the water reached the greatest depth.)

The vehicle at the front of the photograph with the roof rack was used by Roly Roper and Tim as transport to get from Melbourne to Lake Eyre. In the distance, and around the centre of the photo, the Holden HK wagon of Ron Fisher VK3OM is closely parked to the

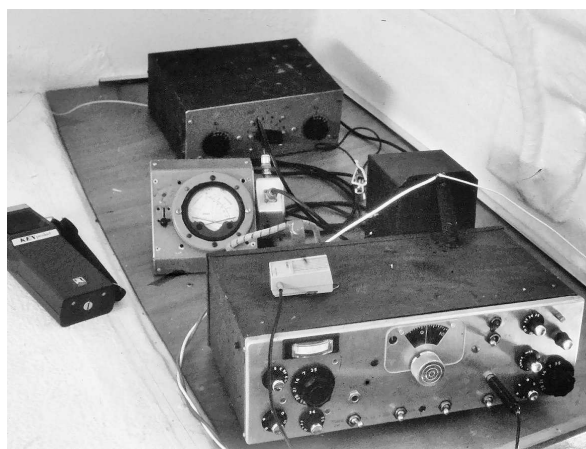


Lake Eyre camp site on the shore of Level Post Bay.

right of Roger Bullock's Ford. The roof and roof rack (with spare wheel), and the right hand rear pillar of Bill's Valiant AP5 car, are barely evident behind the Fisher's car. At the rear there are the Bill Rice and Ron Fisher tents. The wind generator on the tower seen behind the camp was hand-made by Bill to charge the radio gear battery. The wind vane was made from steel salvaged from a Morris Minor front fender.

Light winds meant the wind generator could not deliver sufficient power and instead, a petrol-driven generator belonging to Ron Fisher, was used.

The following photograph is the transceiver gear made by Bill and used when maritime mobile. It was used in Roger Bullock's yacht, which was sailed to Brookes Island, and later in Bill's Red Baron yacht.



The VK3ABP Maritime Mobile gear.

The photo clearly shows the transceiver unit in the foreground. The box at the back is the transmatch antenna matching and tuning unit.

Peter Rice described to me how the antenna was set up. The output line was coupled to the base of the metal mast of the yacht and the mast was the main radiating element. A counterpoise was formed by a conducting plate dropped into the highly saline water of the lake. It was thought that, with the high salinity of the lake, the coupling loss resistance to the water earth plane might have been reasonably low. Bill seem to mainly work on 40 metres and at that wavelength, the 20 ft (6.1 m) mast was about 0.3 of a wavelength long and would have worked very well as a top loaded quarter wave antenna. It certainly put a good signal into Melbourne in the contact with 'Snow' Campbell.

Bill Rice's yacht

Bill acquired a 20 ft (6.1 m) fibreglass yacht, a Red Baron catamaran, made in Australia in the 1970s by Hill and Cameron Yachts. This one was painted white. I remember seeing Bill's yacht when I visited his Altona home and it dominated the front garden of the house. He also called in one day at my Panorama home with the boat on a trailer and offered to take me sailing on Lake Eyre. I was a member of the local Brighton and Seacliff Yacht Club and familiar with sailing yachts, but at that time I was probably otherwise engaged. Bill also sailed that yacht several times in the Marlay Point races on the Gippsland Lakes in the 1990s. The yacht was unquestionably a cruiser rather than a racer, and Bill received the wooden spoon in the Marlay Point Race three times.

In the mid 1970s, Lake Eyre received a record amount of water on two occasions. It was navigable and Bill introduced his Red Baron catamaran to Lake Eyre, complete with his communications gear. Keeping that gear working with power was a problem, so Bill built a wind driven battery charger using recycled materials and put his propellor-making skills to work in fabricating a 2 ft (61 cm) diameter propellor. The coupled generator was salvaged from a motor car and its windings were resonated with capacitors to raise the efficiency. To form the blades, Bill cut the tops and bottoms off aluminium cans and unrolled the remaining aluminium flat, linking the metal sheets by folding the edges and then gluing them together with Kwik Grip. The charger worked with an output of up 25 watts but was not quite adequate to keep the batteries charged.

In February 1976, the lake was less than four metres deep. In May 1976, Bill Rice towed the *Kathleen M* from Altona in Victoria to Lake Eyre, and circumnavigated Madigan Gulf in five days, visiting Eric and Ibis Islands. Bill was the skipper and the members of the crew were Ron Fisher VK3OM, Peter Fisher, Sid Clark VK3ASC and Janet Rice. Ron Fisher also sailed his Mirror yacht on the lake.



Bill and wife Margaret aboard the *Kathleen M*.

Both Bill Rice and Ron Fisher had major boat trailer mishaps on the trip up in 1976. One evening, not long after they had left Marree and only a few kilometres up the road to Muloorina, one of the bearings on Ron's boat trailer collapsed. They limped back into Marree and inquiries were made about night accommodation, and also where the trailer could be repaired.

They were directed to abandoned railway 'navvy' huts in the centre of the railway reversing loop on the north-western outskirts of Marree, and stayed there for a few days while they repaired the Fisher's boat trailer axle.

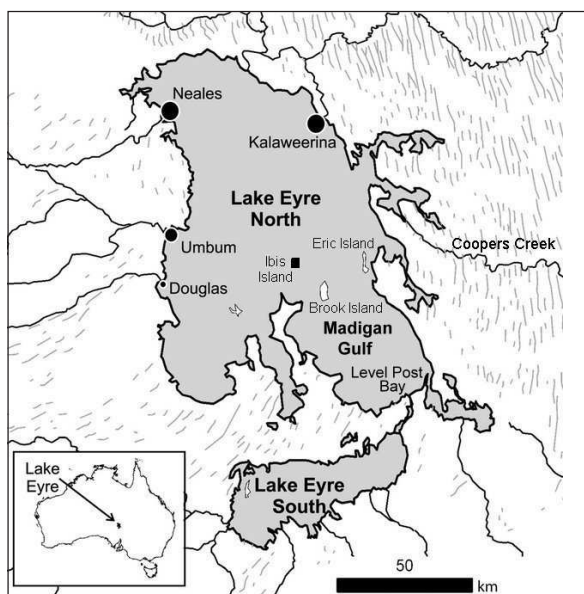
After a few days the group started out for Lake Eyre once more. About halfway between Muloorina Station and Level Post Bay, there was a great thump and grinding from behind Bill's Valiant, and a considerable drag was felt on the car. Once stopped, they learnt that the left hand suspension unit of the boat trailer had completely failed, having dislodged and been torn away from the trailer itself. Corrugations on the track had caused total destruction of the trailer suspension unit, requiring complete replacement.

Their amateur radio units were the means to get rescue help back at Marree. But they were stuck on the side of the Muloorina track for the better part of a week while a new trailer suspension unit was shipped up to Marree. Welding work had to be done at Marree before they resumed their trip to Lake Eyre.

Margaret Rice was a kindergarten teacher and had to return to Melbourne at the end of the school break. So Margaret, with several of her children plus one of her children's friends travelling with them, caught the standard gauge railway at Marree and travelled to Port Augusta, where they connected with a bus service to Adelaide.

In the school holiday break of August/September 1977, Bill Rice and Ron Fisher, each with several of their family members and with their two cars towing their yacht trailers, set out from Melbourne for their Lake Eyre base.

By this time much of the water in the lake had evaporated leaving a depth of only three to four feet. The water was extremely salty and Peter recalls it was



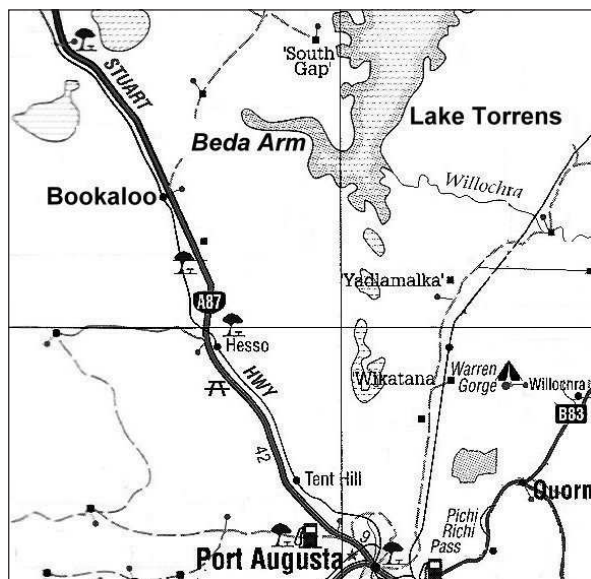
The Lake Eyre locations including those visited by Bill Rice with his Red Baron yacht.

Original drawing modified by Bill Roper VK3BR.

impossible to go swimming without coming out with a thin layer of salt covering one's skin.

The Rice family headed off again to Lake Eyre South in September 1989. Bill, Margaret and son Peter launched *Kathleen M* on Lake Eyre, but strong winds prevented them from sailing. Undaunted, Bill and son Peter relaunched at Beda Arm on Lake Torrens, investigated the southern end of that lake, and possibly became the first (and only ones) to sail on that lake.

Lake Torrens, some 200 km south of Lake Eyre, is about 250 km in length and about 30 km in width. Bookaloo Railway Station is 85 km west from Port Augusta, along the Trans-Australian Railway. Beda Arm is a bay at the south-western part of Lake Torrens, 26 km from Bookaloo Railway Station.

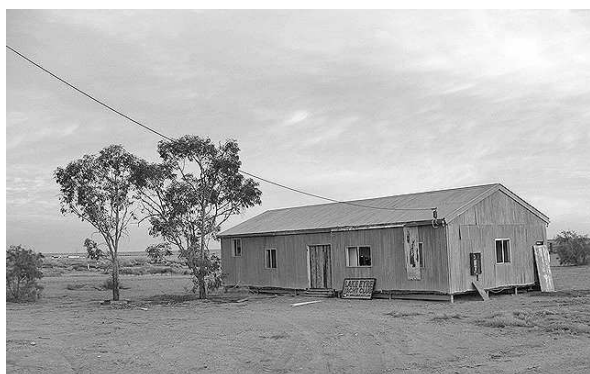


The Lake Torrens and Beda Arm locations visited by Bill Rice with his Red Baron yacht in 1989.

Original drawing modified by Bill Roper VK3BR.

The Lake Eyre Yacht Club

The Lake Eyre Yacht Club was formed on 1st April 2000. The club was formally opened on 9th July 2000 and Bill Rice was granted Life Membership in 2001. The club had the aims of collecting and disseminating accurate information about the Lake. The types of boats used have varied, but one- or two-person catamarans have been popular because of their ability to navigate shallow waters.



The original building on the outskirts of Marree which later became the Lake Eyre Clubhouse.

The clubhouse is on the outskirts of Marree and around 95 km southeast from Lake Eyre. It was constructed by the United Aboriginal Ministry in 1950s and originally used as a church. It was abandoned in the 1980s and in 2006 was purchased by the Yacht Club. The building was in a derelict state and the club had to clean it up. In 2008 the building was cut in half and each half lifted 3 m. The original building is now the second level.



A front view of the completed Lake Eyre Yacht Club clubhouse.

The Lake Eyre Yacht Club has accumulated a membership of about 200 people from all over Australia and some from the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany. The Commodore is Bob Backway.

The club first hosted a regatta in 2010 but had not held another event until 2016 because of a lack of water in Lake Eyre coming down from the eastern states. But that is the periodicity of filling Lake Eyre.

There have been a few other happenings to stop sailing on Lake Eyre. A spanner had been thrown into the works by National Parks refusal to allow sailing on the lake until they had obtained the approval of native title claimants. It appears that around 2011, sailing on the lake was prevented and the Club presented arguments against the decree. However, judging by its active web site, the club is still an active organisation.

Lake Eyre was established as a National Park on 31st October 1985. The lake's official name was altered in December 2012 to combine the name 'Lake Eyre' with the Aboriginal name, 'Kati Thanda'. The National Park was renamed as Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre National Park on 14th November 2013. It was considered as Australia's biggest lake (in May 2019, it was quoted as being 144 km long and 77 km wide).

The native title over the lake and surrounding region is held by the Arabana people. It is not clear whether sailors of the future will be allowed to sail on the lake.

Sadly, Bill didn't live quite long enough to enjoy these events. Bill joined the ranks of Silent Keys on 29th May 2007 after suffering a health problem for a number of years.

That ends the information gained from the research. To finish off the article, I am going to quote a couple of sentences from Bill Roper's obituary of Bill Rice: "He was a quietly spoken, deliberate but personal man, with a brilliant always inquiring mind. He was one of the most knowledgeable and practical people I have ever met." Bill Roper was a friend of Bill Rice for over 45 years.

Note

I acknowledge the research and contributions of Peter Rice VK3ABP, Tim Robinson VK3YBP and Brian Richardson VK3CCR in writing this article.

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