

Long trek around the Bight



Looking east along the Great Australian Bight

DETEKTIVE Constable Luke Cornelius has gone where no federal police officer has gone before by completing a 3500km trek along the South Australian coast with three Customs officers to conduct a risk assessment of this remote stretch of coastline.

The 10-day journey began on 9 March 1993 with the group travelling by four-wheel-drive vehicle and staying as close to the coastline as possible.

The aim of the patrol was to meet and encourage local communities to notify authorities of any suspicious activity.

Detective Constable Cornelius said: "It was a case of letting the locals know that there was a means of reporting suspicious activity.

"We picked up quite a few stories along the way of possible illicit activity but much of it seemed to be rumour and difficult to substantiate," he said.

The Australian Customs Service conducts these risk assessment patrols every 18 months and, apart from collecting information on suspicious activities, take the opportunity to create dossiers of landing sites and possible entry points so that if an incident occurs Customs officers know what they are headed into.

The patrol took the team to Cactus Beach, reputedly one of Australia's best surfing beaches and a magnet for members of the surfing culture. Lying in thick coastal scrub it has primitive camping facilities and a deep water jetty.

The waters off the South Australian coast provide some of the world's best commercial fishing and attract fleets from around the globe. Often local boats are contracted to resupply these fleets and this contact is of concern to Customs.

Detective Constable Cornelius said: "It has been rumoured that contraband is exchanged and the potential for unauthorised landing of foreign crews cannot be dismissed.

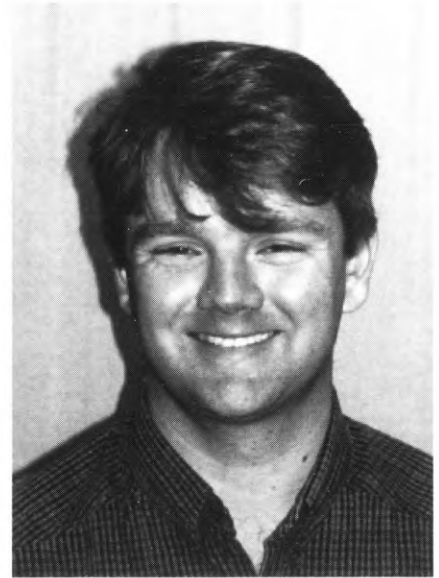
"Domestic shipping also includes grain, coal and other mining products. There is not as much international shipping as there used to be, with the main concern being local boats rendezvousing with foreign fishing vessels."



Isolated landing sites indicate possible points for landing contraband.



The Southern Ocean attracts fishing fleets from all over the globe.



Detective Constable Luke Cornelius

The patrol covered all of the coastline from Port Lincoln to a point 135km east of the Western Australian border. Detective Constable Cornelius said most of the time the group was kept busy completing risk assessments and photographing the area. The opportunity was taken at Ceduna and Streaky Bay to speak to the local service clubs.

Detective Superintendent Brian Brinkler said the trip was an outcome of a concerted effort by the AFP and Customs to form a closer working relationship.

"Theoretically the AFP is responsible for illicit importations and we have to have some coverage in these remote areas," Detective Superintendent Brinkler said.

Detective Constable Cornelius said it was the first time anyone that he spoke to could remember meeting someone from the federal police, let alone knowing of the organisation's existence.

"It was generally appreciated that someone had come up from Adelaide and shown an interest in what was going on.

"The trip was valuable because it was a chance to let people know how they could help with Customs and AFP activities.

"We rely on the local people to recognise a problem and tell us about it. Unless we promote a presence up there then we're not going to get that local co-operation," De-

tective Constable Cornelius said.

He found the trip an interesting experience. Although currently studying law, before joining the AFP in 1989 he trained in geology, so had seen much of the interior of Australia, but not any of its remote coastline. He said that this section of coastline has some of the most spectacular scenery that he has ever seen.

He described the coastline as being a series of large open bays and low and relatively flat landscape with some undulating sand dunes. There are no major population

centres outside of Ceduna and Port Lincoln with small townships scattered along the coastline.

"The communities are based around fishing and wheat farming. The area is experiencing severe drought at the moment and the fishing is going through the doldrums.

"We identified four areas of high potential for undetected landings and eight with a medium rating, although there was no evidence that barrier penetration is happening at the moment," Detective Constable Cornelius said.



A number of bush airstrips were located during the trip along the Bight.