

Huw Davies Gallery
Beyond Border Town
Ed Whalan
24 April - 11 May 2008



Mine Site #1

Huw Davies Gallery
PhotoAccess
Manuka Arts Centre
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Photoaccess is supported by the ACT and Commonwealth Governments
The *Beyond Border Town* project recieved support from the ACT Arts Fund

photoaccess
at the Manuka Arts Centre

Introduction

Ed Whalan's *Beyond Border Town* exhibition is a sincere and moving tribute to the people and places he has taken to heart in Captains Flat, a town abandoned by mining more than forty years ago.

In February 2004 a travel writer for Melbourne's The Age newspaper recommended a visit to Captains Flat—Fascinating mining town in the hills to the east of Canberra:

Whatever your mental image, Captains Flat is nothing like it. A town nestled into a valley with the hills around scoured of trees by constant mining. It is a rare mixture of interesting historic buildings and rather rundown residential areas.

Located 343 km from Sydney and 60 km from Canberra, Captains Flat is 922 metres above sea level. It was inhabited by the Ngarigu Aborigines prior to European settlement. People passed through the area as early as the 1830s but it was not until the late 1870s, when gold was discovered, that the town really developed.

It is local folklore that the town was named after a bull. Apparently there was a large white bullock, part of a bullock team, who used to slip away from the rest of the team and make for the grassy flatlands near the Molonglo River which are now part of the town's football field. The old bull loved the area so much that drovers passing through the area invariably found him on 'the flat' and, as the bull was nicknamed 'Captain', the area became known as Captains Flat.

'Whatever your mental image, Captains Flat is nothing like it', the claim probably remains true today. But Ed Whalan's *Beyond Border Town* tells us The Flat is more than a historic curiosity. Whalan's memorable images of the landscapes and people of Captains Flat are proof that the '... rich, surprising and complex community life ...' he shares is what challenges our preconceptions of this place *Beyond Border Town*.

Ed Whalan has been involved with PhotoAccess for more than a decade. As a staff and board member, tutor, mentor, adviser, event and exhibition coordinator and curator—and as an artist—he has been an inspiration and friend to countless established and aspiring photomedia artists in Canberra.

PhotoAccess assisted Ed Whalan with the *Beyond Border Town* project, as did the ACT Government through the ACT Arts Fund. It will surprise people who know Ed and his record as a photomedia artist that this is his first solo exhibition. Considering his significant contribution to its development and the creative achievements of others, there could not be a more fitting place to show it than the HUW DAVIES GALLERY.

David Chalker

Beyond Border Town

I moved to the Captains Flat region in 2001 after returning from almost two years in the Northern Territory. During that time the cost of rental housing in Canberra had sky rocketed. I guess in the long run this worked in my favour because it forced me to look for somewhere to live in the surrounding district.

Captains Flat was more accident than planning. I knew nothing of the town or its history, let alone the people who lived there. At the time it had a population of around 400, one pub, one bowling/RSL club, a café and a post office—but no shop or service station. I used to joke that you could always get cigarettes and beer at the Flat, but not much else.

Seven years on the town has continued to redefine itself as more people like me move to the area, seeking relief from rising housing costs or a quieter life in what is still at heart a small country town.

Captains Flat is by no means unique in terms of its relationship with Canberra. Many small towns that pre date the creation of Canberra as the National Capital are within an hour's commute. Over the years Queanbeyan, border town, has gained a reputation as Canberra's less costly cousin, but relationships with Canberra extend well beyond border town.

Driven by my personal relationship with the town itself, the surrounding country and the people who live there, Captains Flat has become the primary focus for my take on what exists—the rich, surprising and complex community life—*Beyond Border Town*.

One drawback of living so far away from Canberra, but still reliant on it for work and services is that it forces you to be 100% dependent on the car. The car changes our relationship with the country. Despite spending anything up to 15 hours a week traversing this landscape our interaction with it is limited by the flatness of the windscreen and the cocoon like environment of the cabin. The road becomes hypnotic and the country itself becomes part of the daily meditation process preparing for or winding down from work.

The selection of images in *Beyond Border Town* highlights small but significant aspects of the lives of some of the people dependent on the National Capital, who choose to live outside its planned environment. Whether it is the roads they travel on, the collections they surround themselves with or simply the land they travel so far each day to call their own. This is just a glimpse of what exists *Beyond Border Town*.

Ed Whalan, April 2008.



Interior #2



Mine Site #2

List of Works

1. Valley #1
2. Mine Site #1
3. Main Street #2
4. Interior #2
5. Backyard #2
6. Interior #1
7. Backyard #3
8. Cross Roads #1
9. Backyard #1
10. Mine Site #2

Limited edition of 9.

Prints 30cm x 228cm, inkjet prints on 100% cotton paper, \$870.

Prints 15cm x 114cm, inkjet prints on 100% cotton paper, \$540.

Acknowledgments

The *Beyond Border Town* project was supported by PhotoAccess and the ACT Arts Fund through artsACT and the ACT Cultural Council.

Special thanks to all those people who participated in *Beyond Border Town*.

Biography

Selected Exhibitions

Huw Davies Gallery

2008 Beyond Border Town (solo exhibition)

Access all areas 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002

2006 Wildside

2005 Alchemy group show

2004 About Us group show

2002 Encapsulate group show

2003 Side Long Glance

Other Venues

2007 Upper Lachlan Shire Drought Appeal, Crookwell Memorial Hall

2004 Tuggeranong Regional Art Prize

2004 Fin Feather Fur, Criterion Gallery Braidwood

2003 Tuggeranong Regional Art Prize

2003 Summer Salon, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.

2002 Encapsulate group show, Criterion Gallery Braidwood

Other Projects

2007 Curator Affluence, Huw Davies Gallery

2007 Australia Day Award, Best Community Event

2006 Honorary Life Member, MultiFocus

2006 Project Manager Captains Flat Heritage Archive

2006 Project Manager, Indigenous digital storytelling project

2004 Curator About Us, Huw Davies Gallery

2004 Curator, Alchemy group exhibition, Tuggeranong Arts Centre, Criterion Gallery, Huw Davies Gallery

Recent Employment

PhotoAccess, Canberra ACT

2002–2007 General Manager

2001–2002 Multimedia Centre Manager

2001 to date digital imaging lecturer/tutor

1998–1999 Digital Photography Lecturer, Canberra TAFE Diploma Arts and Craft



Interior #2



Main Street #2