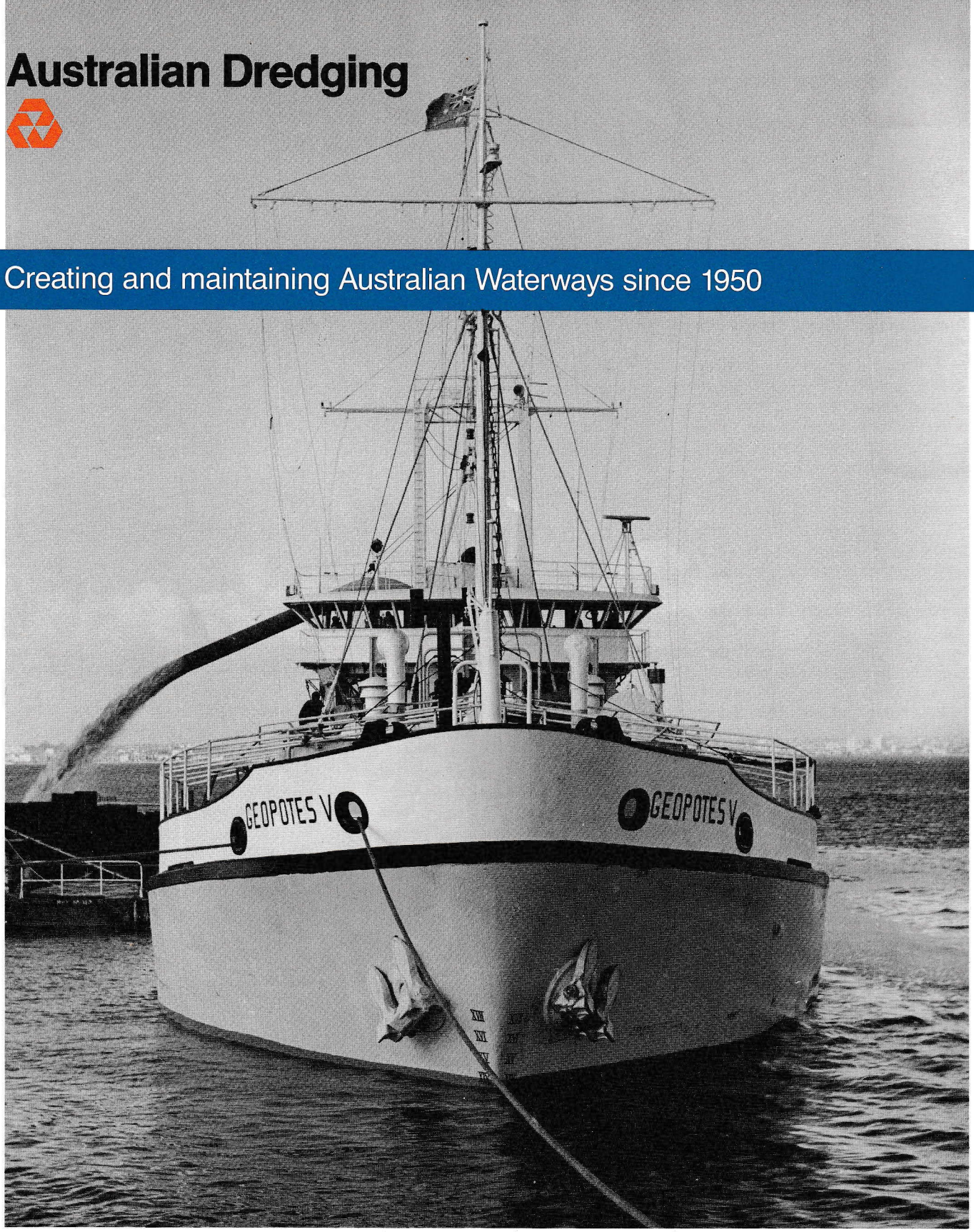
Australian Dredging

Creating and maintaining Australian Waterways since 1950




# Australian Dredging - 40 years

Graceful Geopotes V

**On a mild summer night in February 1990 Australian Dredging celebrated its 40th anniversary. In a nautical environment we welcomed some 50 guests, amongst whom were 5 retired directors and 5 first fleeters with their wives. After appropriate speeches from Hans Ferwerda (ex Managing Director) and Michael Parker (present Chairman), the Company was presented with a beautiful Delft Blue handpainted plate depicting the arrival of our first dredging equipment in Australia. The plate was presented by Rob Brouwer on behalf of Volker Stevin Dredging and has been given a prominent place in our office. It was especially nice to be able to welcome our first fleeters, Hans Ferwerda, Ben Meertens, John Korevaar, Arie Breedveld and Wim Verschuur. These were men who 40 years ago left everything behind them in Holland and made the great step into the unknown. Although these first people were not forced immigrants, a considerable bonus was promised for stayers. Many did settle in Australia, and it was great to meet a few of them again at our celebration and dredge up those old memories.**

The Delft Blue Plate present by Volker Stevin Dredging




**Australian Dredging & General Works Pty Limited** as it is officially known was incorporated in Victoria, Australia, on 17 February 1950. The direct reason for its establishment was a large contract in Melbourne being awarded to a Joint Venture consisting of **Van Hattum & Blankevoort N.V.** and **Koninklijke Maatschappij Tot Het Uitvoeren van Openbare Werken 'Adriaan Volker' N.V.** This going together was not really spontaneous, but prompted by an immigration official who, when studying the various requirements of one party mentioned that a competitor was going to the same place for the same reason and he suggested they should team up for such a big job. This suggestion was followed through and the Melbourne Port Authority was left with only one tenderer. Australian Dredging.

The first contract was for the removal of 3,900,000 cubic yards of silt for the development of the docks of Melbourne. The equipment mobilised for this contract consisted of the steam driven bucket dredger **Beverwijk 16,** steam driven barge **Kamelion** and motor barges **Amsterdam 4** and **5;** this mighty fleet was further augmented by the tugs **Loevestein** and **Thea.**

In these days it was a contractual requirement that the contractor had to bring in all the required personnel from overseas, and accommodating these people was a major headache.
The company soon made a decision to build an entire street of houses in the Melbourne suburb of Williamstown, which was then aptly named 'Holland Court'. Still today some of our own first fleeters are living in Holland Court.

Many millions of cubic metres were shifted in the 1950's in the ports of Melbourne and Geelong, and it can be said that Australian Dredging virtually created these ports and pulled them into the 20th century. Early contracts were also executed in Albany, Botany Bay and in the port of Bluff on the southern most tip of New Zealand.
In the decade following the first ten years the company further spread its

Dinner on the occasion of our 40th Anniversary at Polly Woodside Museum from l. to r. Mrs + Mr Evers, Commander (Chairman) + Mrs Parker, Mr Brouwer, Mrs + Mr Sweetland (ex Chairman).





Farewell dinner in Holland of first fleeters - speaker is Mr Freek van Hattum

wings; a replacement bucket dredger **A.D. Victoria** was commissioned and also a trailer dredger **Geopotes V** and cutter suction dredgers **Platypus** and **Crocodile** were added to the fleet. With this enlarged fleet the company roamed the island continent of Australia and neighbouring New Zealand and the list continues. Whyalla, Westernport (4 times), again Melbourne (3 times) and Geelong. Taranaki in New Zealand, St. Kilda, Gladstone, Newcastle (twice), Esperance, Sydney (twice) and Weipa.

During the 1970's many ports were revisited and many other ports were added to the list and much more work was also obtained in New Zealand during that period and in December 1973 **N Z Dredging & General Works Limited** was formed and the **Geopotes V** was transferred to that new company. In order to still have a sizeable trailer in Australia a new trailer was commissioned by Australian Dredging and the **A.D. Geopotes I** was launched during 1973 at Newcastle, N.S.W.

Our activities also carried us into South East Asia during the 1970's with projects in Indonesia (Tjilatjap twice, Mahaham River) and participation in the Kuantan Project in Malaysia.

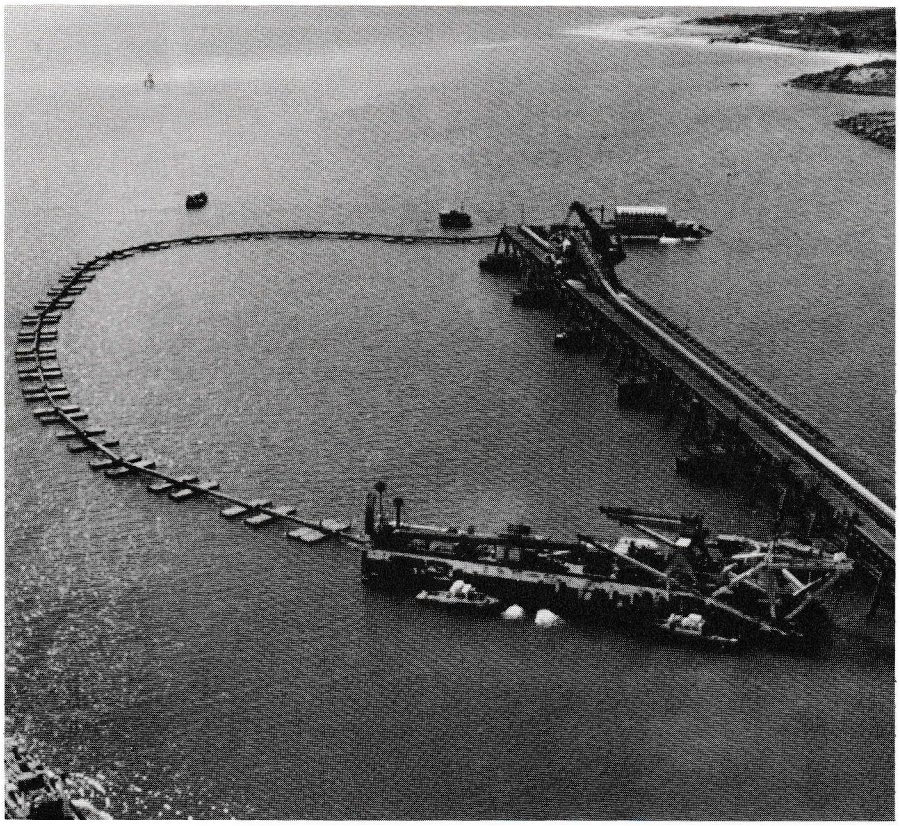
Because of a downturn in the market in New Zealand, and because of its age, the **Geopotes V** was scrapped in 1979. After a lot of hard work the **A.D. Victoria** was sold in 1981, followed a few years later by the **Crocodile.**

**The 1980's**

A new era for Australian Dredging started when it was decided to import a large cuttersuction dredger to Australia. In the late 70's the Australian economy was booming especially as a result of high worldwide demand for coal and iron ore. Harbours for exporting these commodities had to be constructed and existing harbours had to be deepened to accommodate today's large bulk carriers. Oil and gas were discovered in ever larger quantities and whole new infrastructures had to be created. The **Sliedrecht 32** arrived in Australia in 1980, and was proudly re-baptised **A.D. Australia.** Although the job in Brisbane which was the trigger for the import decision was awarded to another

Boarding of 2nd group at Schiphol (22 July 1950) 'Nou Tabe dan'





A.D. Australia

contractor, employment was soon found elsewhere. During most of 1981 and 1982 the **A.D. Australia** was employed on a large port deepening contract in Gladstone-Queensland. On completion of that contract in late 1982 the dredger and ancillaries were taken to the other side of Australia – a seatrip of about 5,000 kms!

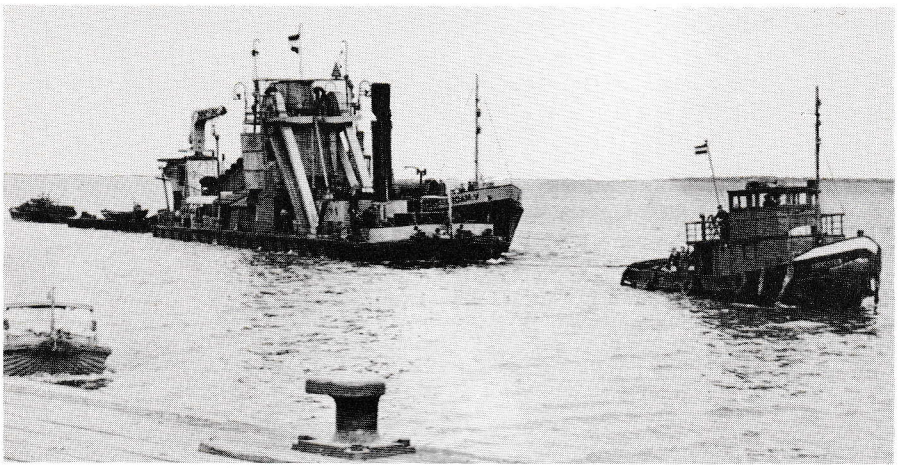
In Western Australia our cutter has shown its teeth in many places. Dredging was undertaken at Dampier for Hammersley Iron, in Karratha for Woodside, at Cape Lambert for Cliff's Robe River Mining, at Lowendal Island for Bond Corporation, at Jervoise Bay for ASI, and most recently at Fremantle for the Fremantle Port Authority. The Westcoast of Australia is rightly considered by Australian Dredging as its home territory.

At the other end of the scale is the trailer dredger **Pelican.** A requirement for such a vessel was created some two years ago when three New Zealand Ports laid up their own dredging equipment after they were forced into private ownership by the New Zealand Government. Since arriving in New Zealand not only have many old acquaintances from **Geopotes V** days been rekindled, but a large number of new friendships have been made.

**Policy**

Up to the middle '80's it was a government requirement that dredging works in Australia could only be undertaken by either equipment imported when new or Australian built equipment.

The decision to built the **A.D. Victoria** and the **A.D. Geopotes I** in Australia was a direct result of this government requirement. A loop hole had been found for the **A.D. Australia,** but this loop hole was plugged once the **A.D. Australia** was inside. To our distress the government relaxed and subsequently abandoned this regulation altogether and this opened the doors of Australia for all sorts of newcomers. It was bitter for us to see major works go to 'overseas' contractors because they were totally unfamiliar with Australian conditions, and even though some of them lost more money than their contract sum in the first place, this did not improve our own position.



Arrival of dredge equipment in Australia in 1950



Pelican




Our Melbourne Office: 4th floor,
1001 Nepean Highway, Moorabbin

**Local company**
When considering a Local company one usually thinks of a company 'on the spot'. This is of course also valid for Australian Dredging, although the 'spot' is a bit larger than usual. The working area of Australian Dredging extends from Samoa (on the international date line) in the East, to Dirk Hartog Island in Western Australia; a distance of some 7,000 kms. Most of the work however presents itself between Timaru in New Zealand and Fremantle in Western Australia; still a distance of 5,500 kms and a time difference of 5 hours thrown in for good measure. A local in-house-site-visit almost always involves 3 to 4 days away from our Melbourne office and a substantial contribution to the local airline industry.

Another notable aspect of working 'Down Under' is that on the vessels only crew with a valid union ticket are permitted to work and membership of a union is only open for Nationals. In New Zealand the same rule applies and although some accommodation can be made in times of shortage, even the presence of New Zealanders on a project in Australia and vice versa is normally not on. Unions also decide how many people will crew a vessel. This can lead to a situation where on a centrally controlled trailerdredger an extra chair has to be purchased and mounted behind the pipeman's chair because the union rule book says that for every suction pipe there must be a pipeman. Once you know these rules and learn to live with them one generally finds the Australians and New Zealanders great people to work with.

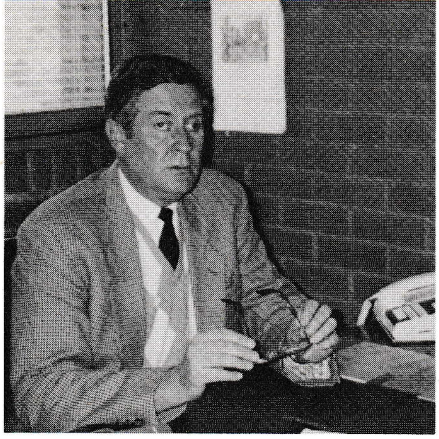
Confirmation of this is the fact that during this Company's 40 years of operations, there have been probably 2 weeks production in all lost due to industrial action; whereas one of our recent overseas competitors had as much strike stoppage as working time, 4 months of each.

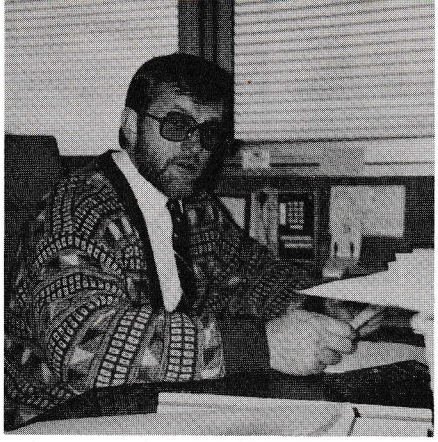
Over the years Australian Dredging of course had a lot to do with our colleagues in Holland and has welcomed many of them. All the 'Dutchies' who have been in Australia, for either longer or shorter periods, have retained a special place in their hearts for this large island. We understand that these days there is an 'Australian Club' within the dredging company, where only people with more than 2 Australian years can apply for membership.
No doubt the wide open spaces have a lot to do with this love for Australia, but probably even more the character of the people played a major role, open minded and friendly. Very soon one talks on first name terms, respect is reserved for what you do and not for a title.

**The Office**
The head office of Australian Dredging is located on the fourth floor of 1001 Nepean Highway in Moorabbin, a southern suburb of Melbourne.
From our fourth floor, which is also the top floor of the building we can just see a glimpse of Port Philip Bay and the entrance to the Port of Melbourne.
It takes us about one hour to reach the airport, all of which is through built-up area.
Although Australia is a vast open country, the major population centres sprawl over very large areas; Melbourne's suburbs cover an area of some 1600 square kilometres! This vast urbanisation is a reflection of affluence, independence of character and the Australian dream, every family owning their own house on their own block of land.

The climate in Melbourne varies from high 30's in summer to just about frost levels in winter. In Melbourne however, the weather can be very unsettled and temperature changes of some 15° in a matter of one hour are quite common, especially in the warmer seasons of the year. A well known phrase is that if you don't like the weather, just wait for an hour.

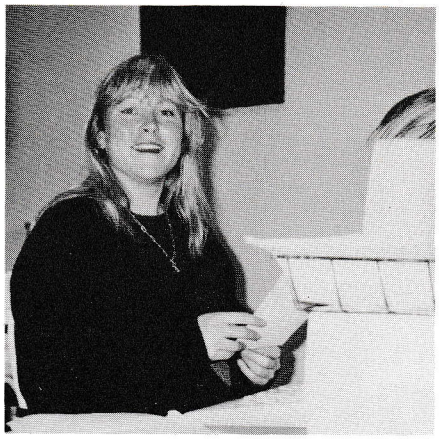
From our Melbourne office, we administer all activities both in Australia and overseas. A registered office is established in Wellington in New Zealand, but this is for legal and tax purposes only, and not manned by anybody in our employ.
The total compliment in our Melbourne office consists of 6 bodies: Heini Evers and Hadyn Pike look after the contractual and acquisition side of matters, Christopher Robbins and Michael Power make sure that our books are kept in order and people get paid on time, whilst Robyn Diamond and Claire Pattinson look after the typing and the filing, the reception and the telephone.
In New Zealand we have a 'permanent' site office which is run by Melody Leveridge. Making themselves useful outside any of the offices are Willem Scholte, Kevin Smith and Adrian Lewis.

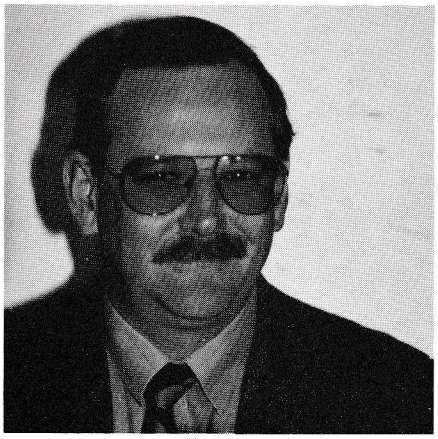




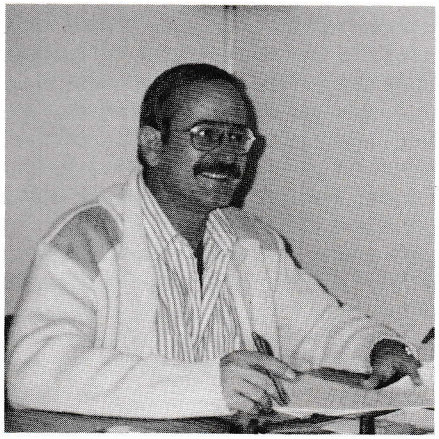


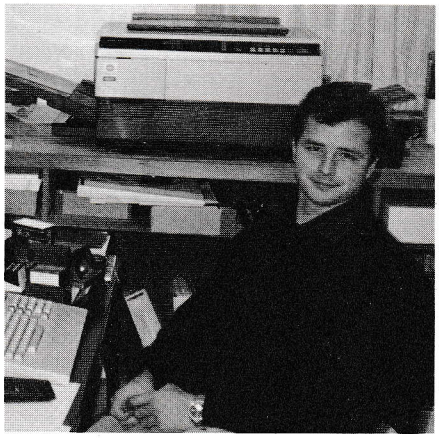






In Melbourne: Heini Evers
In Melbourne: Hadyn Pike
In Melbourne: Robyn Diamond

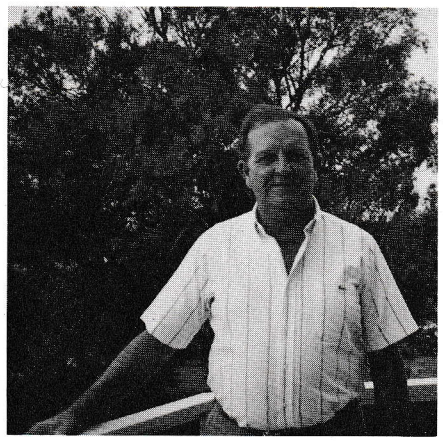




In Melbourne: Michael Power
In Melbourne: Claire Pattinson
In Melbourne: Christopher Robbins

With Pelican: Willem Scholte
With Pelican: Adrian Lewis





Permanent New Zealand Site Office:
Melody Leveridge
Ubiquitous Kevin Smith

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