



**SERIES 3 STARTS ON MONDAY 27 NOVEMBER AT 8PM ON ABC**



## Back Roads is back!

Now in its third series, **Back Roads** returns to ABC TV introducing viewers to more of Australia's most interesting and resilient communities. These are towns full of colourful characters whose grit and good humour will uplift and inspire. In this nine-part series, award-winning journalist Heather Ewart uncovers more wonderful communities defined by their strength and humility. These Australians are as awe-inspiring as the landscape that surrounds them.

"They're proud communities like my hometown, full of surprises, fight and spirit", says Heather.

This series you'll meet 34-year-old Hunter McLeod, a former Melbourne commercial radio DJ turned pilot, who lives and flies in one of this country's most remote areas, South Australia's Oodnadatta track.

You'll meet best friends Doug Sheather and 'Snags' McKimmie, old 'bushies' from the foothills of the high country around Corryong in Victoria. Doug's bachelor shack is basic to say the least - with a view to die for. These cattlemen are as authentic as the whips they hand-braid.

And there's also Wayne Quach. He loves mangoes so much he left his life as a successful software developer in Arizona, in the USA, and moved to Pine Creek in the Northern Territory to become a mango farmer. The former Vietnamese refugee now runs 12 mango farms, and has recruited his son Robert from the US to help out.

*Back Roads* highlights the significance of place and how it inspires lives and passions writ large.

First stop is the Victorian high-country town of Corryong, before this nine-part series heads to the small Tasmanian town of Dunalley, which has re-invented itself after a bushfire almost wiped out the town. Then *Back Roads* traverses the Oodnadatta track in South Australia, on to Canowindra in NSW, Pine Creek in Northern Territory, a journey through West Australia's Pilbara with female truck-drivers, Robe in South Australia, and to a place close to Heather's heart, Violet Town, in Victoria.

Production credits: *Back Roads* is the flagship series of the ABC Regional Division. Executive Producer, Brigid Donovan. Series Producer Louise Turley. Supervising Producer, Kerri Ritchie. Field Producers, Lisa Whitehead and Karen Michelmore.

For further information and interviews Amy Reiha on (02) 8333 3852 or [Reiha.amy@abc.net.au](mailto:Reiha.amy@abc.net.au) or Xenica Ayling on (02) 8333 2733 or [ayling.xenica@abc.net.au](mailto:ayling.xenica@abc.net.au). For images visit [abc.net.au/tvpublicity](http://abc.net.au/tvpublicity)

## Episode One: Corryong, Victoria – Monday 27 November at 8.00pm on ABC

Presenter Heather Ewart arrives in Corryong with Fanny Lumsden, a talented local singer song-writer who won best new talent at this year's *Tamworth Country Music Festival*. Fanny and her musician husband, Dan Stanley Freeman, may be on the road for many months of the year but they feel blessed to call Corryong home. Like many young people growing up in the country who headed off to the bright city lights, Fanny has been lured back to Corryong, a place that for many years has seemed frozen in time.

Heather has arrived as preparations are in full swing for the town's biggest celebration of the year, *The Man from Snowy River Festival*. Each year the festival attracts thousands of visitors to town, who yearn to learn more about the old bush ways.

Heather meets Joan Sinclair, one of the region's best horse and cattlemen. Joan is 83 years old and still riding, because in her opinion it beats walking. Joan was just six weeks old when she arrived at her property outside Corryong, and she's lived there ever since. She's had two husbands, both now deceased, and believes horses are a lot less trouble than men.

Heather also meets two true-blue bush characters, 'Snags' McKimmie and Doug Sheather. These old friends have spent their lives in the high country, mustering cattle and catching brumbies. 86-year-old Doug makes traditional leather whips at his bush shack, which is basic to say the least, with a view to die for.

Corryong has its share of struggles and full-time jobs are scarce. But the town has realised that its future lies not only in preserving the past. They are coming up with creative new ways of creating opportunities for their young people who chose to stay.





## Episode Two: Dunalley, Tasmania – Monday 4 December at 8.00pm on ABC

Presenter Heather Ewart heads to Dunalley, a small Tasmanian fishing village, which is one of Australia's oldest towns. Four years ago, Dunalley was almost wiped out by devastating bushfires, which destroyed the Primary School, bakery, sawmill, police station and community hall.

Somehow this resilient little community found the strength to keep going, and has reinvented itself in the process.

Heather meets sheep farmer turned oyster grower Tom Gray and his photographer wife Alice Bennett. Since the fires, oyster farming has become the biggest employer in Dunalley. Tom says the bushfire gave many in the town a blank canvas to start again.

On the day of the fires, Alice Bennett took shelter in the deep waters near the oyster shed. She captured the terrifying experience on her camera, as she protected her baby from the thick smoke. (See fire photo below.)

After the fire, Tom and Alice joined forces with local farmers who lost their woolshed in the fire. A restaurant was built in its place, and they went into partnership. The oyster shed now employs young locals including 19-year-old Jaidyn Panton. When he's not working as a kitchen hand, he's down at the boxing gym. The gym was one of the positives to come out of the fire. Former Tasmanian boxing champ Scott Griffiths built the gym with insurance money he received from his own house burning down.

Heather also meets Kevin Daly, one of the volunteer firefighters who battled to try to save the 128-year-old Primary school. When it burnt down, Kevin says he found it hard to look people in the eye. But then fellow local Elizabeth Knox stepped in.

Elizabeth was the head of the school association at the time of the fire. She set up an office at the pub, the only place that still had power, and headed up the campaign to save the school. The government wanted Dunalley children to go to schools in nearby towns, but Elizabeth lobbied the Tasmanian Education Minister and the Dunalley Primary school was rebuilt.

This is a place that never gives up. It's a town that has been transformed, with sheer determination. The story of Dunalley will inspire and uplift.



### Episode Three: Oodnadatta Track, South Australia, Pt 1 – Monday 11 December at 8.00pm on ABC

**Back Roads** heads along the legendary Oodnadatta Track in outback South Australia. Heather Ewart begins her journey in the small town of Marree, where the Oodnadatta and Birdsville Tracks meet.

Heather is flown into town by pilot Hunter McLeod. Hunter was once a commercial radio announcer in Melbourne and a DJ at music events around the world. Hunter wasn't sure how long she'd stay when she took up a pilot's job in William Creek but she quickly fell in love with the place.

Marree is 700 kilometres north of Adelaide and is home to descendants of camel drivers who came from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other middle eastern countries in the late 1800's and helped open up inland Australia. The cameleers, always known as Afghans, built Australia's first mosque here.

Marree was once a bustling railway town but now only 100 people call it home. The population swells when the annual Camel Cup is on, an event which celebrates the town's unique Afghan heritage.

Heather's tour guide for the next part of the journey is Aboriginal man Bobby Hunter, who takes her to Lake Eyre, the amazing salt-lake that is one of Australia's natural wonders. The temperature out here can reach more than 50 degrees and it seems incredibly dry, but Heather learns they're driving over one of the world's biggest underground water basins. She visits the string of natural springs, following the route Aboriginal people traded along for thousands of years.

Their destination is the tiny town of William Creek. Trevor Wright arrived in William Creek 30 years ago, and today owns pretty much everything in town. His aviation business has a fleet of 20 planes and he employs Hunter McLeod and a number of other young pilots. Trevor was drawn to William Creek by the isolation and the wide-open spaces. He says it's important that small towns like this one are preserved.





## Episode Four: Oodnadatta Track, South Australia, Pt 2 – Monday 18 December at 8.00pm on ABC

**Back Roads** continues to journey along the Oodnadatta Track in South Australia, meeting the people who call this remote area home.

Heather Ewart hitches a lift along the Oodnadatta Track with truck driver Kris 'Wally' Wallis. They drive from William Creek to Oodnadatta, where Wally drops off groceries and hauls unexpected cargo – once he got a call to pick up a dead body. They pull in to Oodnadatta, population 200, which is preparing to host the annual campdraft and bronco branding competition. The busiest place in town is The Pink Roadhouse, which is owned and run by Adriana Jacob and her husband.

Heather heads out to an isolated cattle station called Todmorden where almost all of the staff hail from overseas. The station overseer, Harvey Vermeulen, is from Namibia and the cook, Altea Salami, is from Italy.

Back in Oodnadatta, Bridie Ferguson is competing in the bronco branding event. Bridie, her husband and small children, have driven 650 kilometres to be here. Bridie says it's a rare chance to socialise and catch up with old friends.

Adriana at the Pink Roadhouse receives a visit from the former owner of the business, her old friend Linnie Plate. Linnie and her husband Adam lived in Oodnadatta for 40 years and turned the roadhouse into a landmark and painted it pink. Sadly, Adam was killed in a car rally accident five years ago. Adriana is continuing Adam's commitment to looking after people who adventure along the Oodnadatta track. The people out here are drawn together by a reliance on each other. Anyone who has lived here finds it very hard to leave.



## Episode Five: Robe, South Australia – Monday 1 January at 8.00pm on ABC

Heather Ewart arrives in the South Australian seaside town of Robe on a South Rock lobster fishing boat. Jack Perkins is at the wheel – he’s lived and fished in Robe for more than 20 years. He says Robe is preparing to hold the annual ‘Blessing of the Fleet’ event, to wish local fishermen a safe season.

Back on land, Heather meets Jacqui Bateman, a local farmer and photographer. Jacqui believes Robe is the best place on the planet. She says the town has a generosity of spirit. Jacqui met a veteran a few years ago, and decided Robe could help young service-people recently returned from Afghanistan and Iraq. Jacqui set up ‘Robe to Recovery’, where local families offer up their holiday houses to veterans who are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The veterans are given seafood platters, free cheese and milk from the local dairy, and they get a voucher to spend at the local hotel.

**Back Roads** meets Leith Bache and Brendan Hardman, two veterans who are enjoying time in Robe. Leith has visited Robe once before and says he was overcome by the town’s generosity. Brendan Hardman says when he was suffering from depression it was incredible to come to Robe, and it was clear the town really wanted to help him.

Next Heather meets Maris Biezaitis, who was on a working holiday when he fell in love with Robe. He’s set up The Robe Town Brewery, and he has some interesting techniques. He forages for ingredients and his Moby Dick Ambergris Ale is made using whale vomit! Heather also meets Steve and Sam Woolston who run one of the oldest family run surf shops in Australia. The shop was started 51 years ago when Steve was a young shearer turned surfer.

A highlight of the trip is when Heather meets another shearer, Daniel ‘Telf’ Telfer, who is known around these parts as ‘the naked shearer’. Jacqui Bateman photographed Telf after he took off his clothes while shearing. The picture went viral and just won an international award. Heather questions Telf about what he was thinking when he did it. “I wasn’t thinking much really.” Robe is a town that gets in and does things.

Heather also meets Elise Lehmann, a young blind woman who is a stand-up comedian. Elise lost her sight at the age of two from a brain tumour. She says Robe is a supportive community, without wrapping her in cotton wool.





## Episode Six: Canowindra, New South Wales – Monday 8 January at 8.00pm on ABC

In episode six, **Back Roads** visits Canowindra in New South Wales. Heather Ewart arrives in town in spectacular style with hot-air balloonist Steve Campbell. Steve grew up in Canowindra and balloons have always inspired him. Canowindra's International Balloon Challenge is about to be held, and teams have started arriving for the week-long competition.

Canowindra has a rich history and some are even managing to make a living from it. Local history buff Craig Lawler has made a business out of recreating a three-day siege in the town by infamous bushranger Ben Hall.

Heather also meets Sam Statham, who moved here 20 years ago. His family turned an overworked piece of land into a communal farm that now supports eight families. He makes a great organic wine too!

She also visits a family who have experienced first-hand Canowindra's extraordinary community spirit. The Read family triplets have a type of muscular dystrophy and all three children are in wheelchairs. Now aged 10, the kids and their parents live in a brand-new accessible home which was paid for, and built, by locals.





## Episode Seven: Pine Creek, Northern Territory – Monday 15 January at 8.00pm on ABC

**Back Roads** heads to Pine Creek, a pioneering outback town in the Northern Territory built on the hard work of Chinese workers who came here in the 1870's. This place is used to boom or bust mining times, but since the town's biggest employer – an iron ore mine – closed three years ago, there's been a big exodus. Locals stay for the area's natural beauty, but the future looks unclear. Bunny Fountain drives Heather into town in the town's fire truck. Bunny has lived here for 15 years, after coming to play a gig, and deciding to stay. The gold rush festival is on in town, celebrating Pine Creek's mining history. Contestants have ten minutes to find as much gold as they can.

Local Chris Hodge – a former rodeo champion – takes Heather fossicking out of town to some of his secret spots. He also takes Heather to the Grove Hill Hotel which has a massive nugget on display outside. It's not real, but plenty of tourists think it is! The publican, Stan Haeusler, loves the area's history, and has a collection of old rabbit traps and crocodile skins.

Pine Creek attracted many Chinese workers in the gold rush. Today there's just one descendant of those workers left in the town, Eddie Ah Toy. Eddie is a much-loved local. Sadly, due to the mining downturn, Eddie was forced to shut his general store, which had been run by his family for 80 years.

But others in the town have moved here recently, sensing opportunities. Wayne Quach came to Pine Creek from Arizona in the United States. When he was young, Wayne was a Vietnamese refugee. He went on to become a successful engineer and software developer. He then decided to buy a mango property, and he now owns 12 farms!

Everyone here is committed to the town's future, but there are different opinions about what it will take to secure Pine Creek's future.



## Episode Eight: Pilbara, Western Australia – Monday 22 January at 8.00pm on ABC

**Back Roads** visits the Pilbara region of WA, an ancient place deep with red dirt and precious rock art. The mining boom is ending and some inspiring locals are creating new opportunities for their communities.

Heather Ewart meets Heather Jones who is a trailblazer in the trucking industry. The two Heathers hit the road, as Karratha's annual FeNaCING festival gets underway. The event celebrates the three commodities that rule the region, iron, salt and natural gas.

In her pink truck, Heather Jones takes Heather on a 14- hour trip south. In their pink shirts, the Pilbara Heavy Haulage Girls, as they are known, promote women in the trucking industry and help people get jobs.

Heather Ewart goes in search of some of the area's rock art. This place has one of the oldest outdoor art galleries on the planet. Local Aboriginal man Clinton Walker shows Heather around his home town of Roebourne. Clinton tells Heather he was the first boy in his town to finish Year 12. Locals in Roebourne recently made the decision to stop selling alcohol in the town.

Tangiora Hinaki is Heather Jones' latest student. Tangiora moved to the Pilbara from New Zealand and loves a challenge. Tangiora takes Heather to meet another group of strong Pilbara women, The Pilbara Motorcycle Sisters (PMS), who also do community work. These inspiring locals are making an impact, and changing their communities for the better.





## Episode Nine: Backroads: Celebrating Australia – Friday 26 January at 8.30pm on ABC

In this **Back Roads** Australia Day special, we take a look back at some of Heather's favourite stories from the last three series.

Coming from the country, Heather has always been attracted to small communities full of surprises and characters with spirit. She's chosen tales that best represent qualities uniting people of the bush. Stories of courage, love, of life in isolation and of reinvention.

- Heather joins mobile hairdresser **Lyn Westbury** and her former-client turned apprentice Fil Stewart on a road-trip from their hometown of Innisfail to Normanton in Queensland's Gulf country.
- **Karumba in FNQ** is another example of isolation. Once a major fishing hub with a reputation for having the roughest pub in Australia, it's now attracting some new blood. Heather meets **Scott Jones**, a former American marine turned local Paramedic.
- In **Ceduna, South Australia**, Heather met **Bev Bedson**, who is paying the bills in a slightly different way. She runs one of the country's largest radio telescopes for the university of Tasmania.
- At **Winton in Queensland** she finds a town reacting to the longest drought in years, by coming up with some cracking ideas. They've enticed the film industry to embrace the nearby landscapes, but the most surprising of all is the discovery of dinosaur bones.
- When she was in **Hermannsburg in the NT**, Heather saw first-hand the clever ideas they've had to make school more appealing for the kids. This stunning Northern Territory birthplace of Albert Namatjira is full of culture and creativity, and it's working to nurture both in its young people.
- Visiting **Katanning** Heather hears how it took a while for the community to bond. This "ordinary" sheep and wheat town in **Western Australia** has now laid out the welcome mat to immigrant workers, and in doing so has transformed itself.
- **Derby in the Kimberly** is home to **Trent Ozies**. Local DJ and the first bloke to be crowned 'Queen' of annual *Boab Festival* – he's a big character.
- Heather's final choice for a story is in **Yackandandah in Victoria**. It's a town where they love everything. If a resident has an interesting skill, the whole town embraces it.



## Episode Ten: Violet Town, Victoria – Monday 29 January at 8.00pm on ABC

**Back Roads** presenter Heather Ewart drives herself into Violet Town with the family dog Wags, who years back was bought at Violet Town's famous monthly market.

Just over 1000 people live in Violet Town, but their welcoming ways and broadmindedness attract plenty more visitors, often for the many fundraising events that are held throughout the year.

Many travellers detour off the Hume highway to visit Violet Town's Op Shop. Staffed by volunteers, the Op Shop raises thousands of dollars each year, which is then handed over in cheques to local organisations in need of a boost. The Op Shop is also the ideal place to find a costume for one of the town's biggest community fundraisers – the annual street party, named *Nightmare on Cowslip Street*.

Heather gets some assistance picking out her costume from inspirational local Di Reeves. Di has a huge wardrobe of heels, dresses, and wigs at home, but for most of her life she's had to keep it a secret. Di is transgender and only revealed her true identity recently, at the age of 65. Before coming to Violet Town, she lived her life as Dave, a dairy farmer and truck driver.

Di gained more confidence when Violet Town's only policeman, Pat Storer, put up the rainbow flag outside the police station in the main street, as a gesture of solidarity and acceptance.

Pat didn't anticipate the huge impact flying the flag would have on many townspeople. Pat has struck up a friendship with the Victorian Gender and Sexuality Commissioner Ro Allen, who also lives in Violet Town. Ro Allen says it's this sense of inclusiveness that encouraged Ro and her partner Kaye to choose Violet Town as the place to raise their family.

Violet Town has also produced one of the biggest acts in Australian music, Killing Heidi. Their mother Helen Keighery and stepfather Howard are heavily involved in the community, and work hard to ensure the town keeps thriving.

Violet Town seems to constantly have new projects on the go, aimed at making people feel inspired and included, and to draw more newcomers to their patch. This is a place that welcomes diversity, and accepts people for who they are – the essence of a happy and cohesive community.







**Heather Ewart**  
**Back Roads Presenter**

Born and bred in country Victoria, Heather Ewart is one of the ABC's most experienced and skilled reporters and presenters. In a diverse career that has encompassed print, radio and television journalism, Heather has reported in bureaus in Canberra, London, Washington, and Brussels.

Her first job in journalism was in Melbourne at Leader suburban newspapers, where she worked while still completing her undergraduate studies in journalism.

After cutting her teeth at local newspapers, Heather worked at the ABC Radio Current Affairs unit before moving overseas to become the ABC's London correspondent in 1983. This led to a long posting in Washington, during which she reported on the Gulf War, the election of Bill Clinton and the first term of Clinton's presidency. She was then posted to Brussels before returning to Melbourne with husband and fellow ABC personality Barrie Cassidy in 2001.

Heather has been the National Affairs Correspondent for 7.30 and Chief Political Editor. She has reported on numerous Federal election campaigns, starting with the Malcolm Fraser era in 1980.

In 2007, Heather won a prestigious Monash University Gold Quill award for her story on skin cancer victim Clare Oliver.

In 2015, Heather was the presenter/executive producer of the highly-acclaimed three-part ABC documentary series, *A Country Road –The Nationals*, and she presented the first and second series of *Back Roads*.