



ARGO BARGE

Restoration - Stage One: A plan to restore the hull as the first stage objective was undertaken and took over three years to complete. Fund raising donations, in-kind support, grant monies of \$25,000 of Centenary of Federation funding from the Commonwealth Government, \$10,000 from District Council of Renmark Paringa and volunteer labour combines at accumulate \$52, 000 spending and \$10,000 hours of work. Ninety percent of the wooden hull was replaced with 92 planks each measuring 5.2m x .3m x .075m. Of the bolts used to fix the planking, 3,000 were made by volunteers and the main fund raising revolved around a "Buy-a-plank" scheme to purchase the imported Marbou timber and Red Gum when available.

Beside the many helpers over the period there was a core group of six to eight workers who with an average age of 72 years became known as "Dad's Army". These men worked regularly for 3 mornings every week at the dry dock moorings just up stream from the entrance to Ral Ral Creek at Renmark.

The culmination of stage one saw the "Argo" Barge re-floated again on 1 August 2001 and then handed back to the community of Renmark Paringa on 8 September 2001 at a ceremony during the "Source to the Sea" flotilla of craft down the Murray River, an official celebration of the Centenary of Federation in Australia.

Completion - Stage Two: The "Argo" now floats proudly at a mooring on the Riverfront at Renmark awaiting the refitting of decking and a replica pump house and quarters structure. She is on view to visitors along with her former work mate of years gone by, the Paddle Steamer "Industry".



RENMARK

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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ARGO BARGE

THE ARGO BARGE 1915-2001

Barges were the trailers of the river trade era, using paddle steamers are the prime movers and capable of carrying loads far in excess of their modern day equivalents and were known to freight up to 1700 bales of wool or 200 tonnes in weight. The barges although under tow were skilfully guided by a barge master with the aid of its independent wheel and rubber although they were also towed without a barge master and sometimes pushed or tied along-side and even left to float alone with the flow. The "Argo" Barge was different to the normal freight carriers as it was built for the S.A. Government's Department of Irrigation & Drainage by the Engineering & Water Supply Department of S.A. to be a floating pumping station.

The "Argo" was built at Mannum in South Australia in 1915/16 (probably by J.G. Arnold, boat builder) as a permanent pumping station and was the only one of its kind on the Murray River and the crew comprised a pump master and fireman to operate the wood fired steam driven pumps. At the time of its retirement in 1964 it housed a 20" (508mm) Robinson Pump. Originally, it was used to help dig irrigation channels and after WWI it was used 23km upstream from Renmark at Woolenook Bend during times of low river flows to pump water to the Chaffey Pump in order for the Chaffey Irrigation District to be irrigated.

During the 1920's, it was employed in the construction of the locks, weirs and barrages along the Murray River in South Australia. It was also used to pump water from the Coffey Dams during the construction of the Paringa Bridge. When Lock 5 was completed the facility became redundant in this area. The "Argo" and the E.&W.S. work boat Paddle Steamer "Industry" were common sites along the Murray over the years as they performed many and varied chores. Assistance during and after floods, maintenance of the river installations and assistance in the building of the Morgan-Whyalla pipeline were some of the jobs undertaken.

THE STORY SO FAR ...

Mypolonga was the permanent mooring place for the "Argo" from 1958 to 1964 where it was used for irrigation before being taken to Mannum and stripped prior to its sale to Swan Hill in Victoria in 1987.

Specification: The "Argo" was one of the largest barges built on the River Murray, its hull was 120 feet (36.6m) long, 23 feet (7m) at the beam and 8 feet (2.4m) high and had iron topsides and 3" Kauri below waterline and weighed 80 tonnes. An analogy to the carrying capacity of a barge can be appreciated and when it is thought that every 1" (25mm) displacement of the "Argo" relates to the equivalent of 7 tonnes in carrying capacity. An iron clad shed type structure on deck with curve shaped roofing housed the pump, wood fired boiler and also quarters for the operators.

Resurrection: In 1993 the "Argo" was purchased by the Renmark Council at the instigation of its works manager and P.S. Industry enthusiast John Halliday from Lawrence Martin for \$2000. It lay on dry ground across the River Murray from Swan Hill on Murray Downs Station NSW and a small team from the Council made basic restorations prior to the advent of a rising river, so that it could be refloated. Its journey back to Renmark was under tow by the P.S. "Impulse" to Colignan and then by a six horsepower outboard motor fixed to the barge with assistance from the strong flood current.

The barge lay bottomed at a mooring in Renmark until the Argo Restoration Committee was formed in April 1998. This was spurred on by moves from interested parties at Murray Bridge who made purchase offers to the Renmark-Paringa Council.