



# FLOATING ON AIR

by WENDY CREIGHTON & DREW CREIGHTON

THERE is a luxurious, self indulgent quality to a hot air balloon ride.

Perhaps it's the absence of sound.

Perhaps it's the sense of distancing yourself from everyday worries.

Perhaps it's the silken smooth flight over scenery which looks familiar, yet alien, from your gliding, woven perch.

Perhaps it's due to the shared pleasure of the experience with your companions - strangers at the start of the flight, friends by the end.

Whatever the cause of the euphoria, a hot air balloon flight is an unforgettable experience.

And Graeme Day from Floating Images Hot Air Balloon Flights knows how to ensure everyone on board the substantial cane basket has plenty to reminisce about after the event.

Graeme has been operating the flights over the Scenic Rim for over a decade and his quiet professionalism quickly steadies any nervousness amongst our group.

And there were nerves among a few of us as we arrived at the flight pad just on day-break.

There was an apprehensiveness from a few who admitted to normally only feeling safe when their feet were firmly planted on solid Australian soil.

Others were wondering if the money they had paid for the experience was well spent consid-

ering the smoky haze which had blanketed the Fassifern the previous day.

But these worries soon fell away, distracted by the activity of helping unravel the giant balloon. A definite lifting of early morning spirits as the strikingly-coloured cloth took shape as 2,200 cubic metres of air was fan-forced into its interior.

The balloon is three-quarters full and the burners are lit. The play of flame and colour adds a feeling of excited anticipation.

We get a thorough safety run-through from Graeme and climb aboard.

One man jokes that ... 'if we make it back it will be local news, but if we don't, it will be national news' ... nerves are again evident in the sudden chattiness of my companions.

As we lift off they fall silent. The only interruption to the tranquility is the periodic trumpet of lit propane as it is pushed through a pilot light to send hot air into the big, bright bag above our heads. Yet the noise becomes a 'nothing' as we are, as one, mesmerised by the view which has begun to unfold.

Slowly the basket rotates giving everyone a view of the whole panorama.

The flight feels safe, safer than on an aeroplane, there's no swaying or turbulence, no engine noise ... no worries.

The smoky haze has been replaced by clear air, our pilot is in control, there is nothing to worry about except remembering to capture as much of the view as possible on camera.

We see the snaking path of the Teviot, the horses, cattle and kangaroos making interesting patterns on the landscape and get an eagle's view of the mountains.

The mood among my companions has grown quietly festive. Everyone is trapping descriptions in their memories to share with the unfortunates who have never floated in the sky.

Wonderful sights of farms and scenery, of birds and animals, of a landscape we have lived in but have never experienced like this.

Wonderful. And then it is time to land.

We slowly descend, the pilot calls out to a man standing on his porch, asking permission to land on his property, he agrees and we land.

We meet up again at The Vue restaurant for a champagne, buffet breakfast and a chance to look at the photos taken on the 'sky-cam' which was fixed above us during the flight.

Unforgettable!

