

Couple recalls the glory days of the Catalina

By STAN GORTON

A COUPLE who last year went on an epic journey to record the history of the legendary Catalina flying boats are temporarily living in the Narooma area.

Peter and Trish Stuart-Smith normally live in Canberra but have been lucky enough to move to Dalmeny for six months while they are between jobs.

Mr Stuart-Smith is a geologist but his main hobby is flying and also helping to record the history associated with the Catalina flying boats.

His father flew a Catalina during World War II.

And so when he built his own amphibious SeaRey aircraft several years ago, it was always his intention to go on a journey to visit the remaining flying boat bases on Australia's northern coastline.

Last year, his dream became a reality when they went on a two-month journey in their aircraft travelling to the top of Cape York and right around the coast to the old bases.

"We wanted to go and visit the old wartime bases and record them," he said.

"We wanted to relive my father's wartime experiences but also record the bases as they are today because they are not likely to last much longer."

They are also writing a book and producing a documentary to raise funds for the Catalina memorial aircraft recently acquired by the historic group at the Rathmine base at Lake Macquarie.

The working aircraft is a living, flying museum and memorial to Australia's Catalina pilots and the venerable aircraft.

While in Narooma the Stuart-Smiths have spoken to the Lions Club about their experiences.

They keep their plane at a private airstrip south of Narooma and on the weekend had a bit of a family reunion including their son Rob who lives in London who they had not seen in two years.

The reunion was a chance to take family members up in the plane for some sightseeing.

"This stretch of the coast is one of the most spectacular, particularly between Narooma and Wallaga Lake with all the lakes and green fields and Dromedary Mountain."

For more information about Catalina history, check out www.catalinaflying.org.au where there is a link to the Stuart-Smiths' journey under the news/events headings.



SPLASHDOWN: Pilot Peter Stuart-Smith lands his SeaRey amphibious aircraft on Forster's Bay on Friday. **BELOW:** Peter and Trish Stuart-Smith walk back to shore while their sons Rick and Rob handle the aircraft.

