

PROJECT PLATYPUS

UPPER WIMMERA LANDCARE



MEDIA RELEASE

April 14 2020

Antarctica expedition bound to create change

A Jallukar Landcare member has sailed to the end of the earth as part of an all-female entourage learning about leadership and climate change.

Anthea Nicholls is the project manager for Stawell's Biggest Science Experiment and made the voyage to Antarctica as part of the Homeward Bound Program.

"The Homeward Bound program is an international initiative," Nicholls said.

"It started here in Victoria and runs for 10 years. It aims to equip 1000 women, or 100 a year, to speak up and have a voice in the policies which run our world."

The voyage took place in the last three weeks of a year-long leadership program for women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM).

In November 2019 Nicholls flew to Argentina to meet 100 women from over 30 countries and sailed with them on a small ship to Antarctica, where they stayed for 19 days.

The voyage took several days to cross the notorious Drake Passage, where the previous cohort sent photos of gigantic waves crashing over the deck.

"Some of us were secretly hoping we would be able to impress our home folks in the same way, but for our passage the Drake was a kitten," Nicholls said.

"When the expedition arrived in the South Shetlands, the weather was bleak. On land we were shown fossils from the time when Antarctica was covered in tropical forest and we listened while keeping our backs to the freezing sleet. And we thought, 'Well, this is Antarctica after all'."

"But then the clouds lifted and revealed a magical world in brilliant white and blue."

As well as daily landings, participants took part in workshops focusing on leadership and the science behind the world they were travelling through.

"I used to think, 'How are we supposed to concentrate when Narnia on steroids is moving past our windows'," Nicholls said.

“After a silent cruise amongst the icebergs that looked like a gallery of ice sculptures, I said to one of the crew, ‘If you can take us to a place more beautiful than that I will eat my hat!’ And he said, ‘Well, you had better put salt on your hat’.”

According to Nicholls, the experience galvanized the group, as the Homeward Bound Program intended.

“Eventually we headed north again, blown away, bonded as a group of women from all around the world, and totally motivated to take our place back in our workplaces and homes. We knew it meant we had to stand up and speak out.”

“I took my courage in both hands and took on a local community science project with the WAMA (*Where Art Meets Nature*) Education Team,” Nicholls said. “We got financial support from WAMA and the Northern Grampians Shire.”

“My rationale was that because Stawell was about to find itself on the international science map, with its dark matter physics lab, we needed to be a science savvy community.”

"We also need to be thinking about, talking about and understanding science, because it is teaches us about climate change, unprecedented bushfires, drought and now viruses."

“It is all about asking questions and answering them in logical ways, ways we can check out.”

“So, I’m hoping people will check out the Biggest Science Experiment website and get involved. As we register on the website we become part of an even bigger experiment happening right across Australia to see how many people are getting involved in science at home, at this crucial time when we need to understand just what it is.”

"It is just one of the many projects trying to help us all to find a place, and where we can take our place, in the things we need to do on this planet we love so much."

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