

BENDIGO'S CROCODILE DUNDEE

By Sue Jackson

Awaiting broadcasting on Bush Telegraph *ABC Radio National*

I never expected to meet Crocodile Dundee in the flesh, but that's exactly what happened at my sister Jude's farm a year or so back. That was when I met Charlie, the roo hunter, Bendigo's own Crocodile Dundee.

The cowboy hat, the high heeled boots, the laconic manner and the irreverent sense of humour were all there. And Charlie even shared his namesake's prowess with weapons, as was obvious when he stood outside the back door, casually took aim and hit the bull's eye on a gas container in an old fridge in a distant paddock. The worms, whose safe new home the fridge has become, are most grateful.

Roo hunting is Charlie's night job. By day, he operates a digger which is why he'd come to the farm. Something I hadn't realised was that dams don't last forever; they need maintenance. And the height of a dry summer with the dam virtually empty was the ideal time for a makeover.

That hot afternoon, I sat in the shade of a gum tree above the dam watching Charlie in action. From my vantage point the digger looked particularly small. Yet in the space of five hours he managed to excavate the entire dam, piling the silt in neat hillocks near its rim.

There seemed to be very little margin for error. While maximum dirt had to be removed to increase the depth, the clay underneath needed to be left perfectly intact to limit seepage. Given that Charlie was using a blunt instrument, his precision was amazing. As the work progressed, the digger teetered on the ever-decreasing edge of the old dam. Each pirouette to tip dirt into the trailer behind looked fraught with danger. One false move and digger and driver could have toppled over. I watched anxiously until the job was done.

My next extended visit to the dam was in mid winter when Jude and I unearthed twenty-one indigenous apricot saplings for transplanting there. The rains had finally arrived and we were thrilled at how uncharacteristically easy it was to winkle the trees' roots out of the damp earth.

Brien, Jude's partner, explained how the red seeds of the apricots, though inedible, have a rich oil content, and were probably used as a skin lubricant by his Aboriginal forebears. Fortunately, all animals seem to find them inedible too, which enhances their chances of survival in their new home.

Installed in the man-made hillocks and reflected in the deep water of the dam the tiny trees looked great. I'm hopeful it won't be long before they grow into a luscious stand of tall apricots. Crocodile Dundee – you're a star.