SINCE starting with Bowls NSW in September, I have been on many trips with Mark Whiteman.

These journeys normally involve us travelling to bowling clubs, schools, seminars and expos all around NSW.

Our most recent trip was to the Carrathool Shire, mainly the towns of Goolgowi and Hillston.

Other than the fact Mark and I had never heard of these places before going, there was another difference between this trip and our previous trips across the NSW country side – we were joined by two more people to make up our awesome foursome!

Joining Mark and I were Tracy Barrell and her son Oscar.

Just to paint a picture for you, Tracy is a Gold Medallist Paralympian, an Order of Australia Medal recipient, and a great mother for two boys.

For anyone to achieve that is amazing, but to have achieved that with no legs and only one arm, shows how much of a true legend Tracy is!

I will also tell you a bit about Mark Whiteman, for the people who only get to see his head and stylish haircut in the development team picture.

Mark is also a Paralympian and an amazing athlete, having represented Australia in weightlifting, sitting volleyball and athletics.

He also became a TV personality while competing in the Sydney to Hobart in 2009. The boat on which Mark competed was part of a documentary shown on SBS, and now available on DVD.

Mark has done all of this with his two artificial legs (essential equipment for his “robot dance”) and one hand.

Just seeing these two people, having a chat and a laugh would be inspiration for most.

I was fortunate enough to spend five amazing days not only chatting and having a laugh, but also joining them in speaking to the community at Hillston, and schools in Hillston, Goolgowi and Griffith.

Over five days we chatted with six completely different audiences, and I still am not sure who was more wired and tuned into the stories of Mark and Tracy – was it me or the audience?

From the first sentence of the first chat to the last minutes of the sixth session, I was completely tuned in and couldn’t get enough of the inspirational and truly amazing stories heard every day.

Tracy’s stories included claiming gold at Barcelona Paralympics in a time 13 seconds better than the current world record, raising two boys as a single mother, driving her car, and being the ambassador and face of the “Don’t Dis My Ability” Campaign.

These stories plus many more were so inspirational, and added to the way she interacted with the young school children, made them feel so comfortable, and taught them to realise disabled people are just the same as everyone else.

Mark was the same with his ability to interact with the children and let them understand about people with a disability, and not be afraid to chat with them and ask questions.

He spoke of his brilliant Sydney to Hobart trip, his stories of representing Australia, showed the children and communities the artificial legs he has had at different stages of his life, and spoke of his amazing life doing everything fully able people do.

Mark opened up and told of a story that will stay with me forever of how he fell in the final 30m of the 200m Barcelona Paralympic final (he was in third place and almost assured of bronze had he not fallen).

Through the many stories and props these two amazing people had shown over the five days, think many of those in the audiences would have been touched and realised that you truly can do anything you put your mind to.

I know that I have, and those five days have personally changed the way I look at things in life and ways I go about everyday simple things.

It was a trip of just over 1200km that resulted in the journey of a lifetime for me!