

ACROSS OZ

5/8 – 20/9/06



Day 1 – 5/8/06

After great anticipation, frantic packing and late nights the day had finally arrived. The vast majority had assembled at 7am at Mona Vale Beach. It was a very wet morning with heavy showers occasionally.

We were fortunate that the rain held off whilst I was able to greet everyone and hand out their Desert Park passes and T Shirts. We did the traditional collection of Pacific Ocean water – ready to deliver into the Indian Ocean.

With sad farewells to family we set off just before 7.30am. We collected 3 more participants at Richmond and climbed slowly over the Blue Mountains in our heavily loaded vehicles. It was cool at around 6 degrees. We had morning tea in a service station before doing a slow lap of Mt Panorama – the weather was clear and sunny from here on.

It was a long haul to Cobar with lunch at Wellington and driving into the setting sun from Nyngan, arrived at 6.20pm

A good meal at the bowling club helped us to get to know everyone better.

Looking forward to getting onto the dirt tomorrow.

Vic

Day 2 – 6/8/06

After a cool morning, ice on tarp, briefing by Vic left Cobar for Louth at 9.30am. Road very good. Few wild goats, very green after rain.

Vic had couple of micro-sleeps. Radio very quiet. Tilpa Hotel has a lot of artists, had an eventful journey to White Cliffs. Top meal in underground motel. Finished early. Great Day.

Ray

The morning tea at Louth was in a lovely picturesque spot near the Darling River, which was unfortunately coated in green algae. The sun was shining, the sky was blue – good company – very promising for what lays ahead. We were all in good spirits and eager to push on to Tilpa. Some lucky travellers saw some kangaroos. The road was good, became a little rutty and there were some creek crossings to throw up a bit of water (the guys like that, it's a man thing). Believe Adrianna and Ron took a bit of an unexpected tour – good for the adrenalin!

The Tilpa pub produced man size steak sandwiches with the works, which kept us going till we arrived at the White Cliffs Underground Motel around 5.15pm with plenty of time to have a nice shower before an enjoyable 3 course dinner in the dining room. The cave like rooms caused both wonder and consternation, but we saw no bats!

Jenny

7/8/06 - White Cliffs to camp near Noccundra

The day dawned bright and sunny, if a little chilly, but after a hearty cooked breakfast we were all ready to take on the day. Had a quick circuit of White Cliffs and a visit to an opal shop and all met at the pub in town to set off at 9.,30am.

Unfortunately, Ian from Kangaroo Tents has alternator problems and has to divert to Broken Hill to fix before rejoining us further down the track. The track was smooth, the landscape flat and the puns are deteriorating! We are counting windmills with a vengeance at this rate we'll reach 1000 by Sydney!

Stopped at Morden Creek for morning tea, a little breeze stirring. Drove on to Milparinka for lunch, seeing en route some goats, more eagles devouring road kill, corellas and the occasional kangaroo. Milparinka has an historic courthouse, in which is recorded much local history, photographs and artefacts.

Drove on to Tibooburra for refuelling the sunshine is wonderful and I've only seen one fly! Drove on to find a lovely spacious camp site (didn't make Noccundra – too far) where the guys made a super big camp fire and finally our real outback adventure has begun! (The camel tracks kept me wondering however).

Jenny

Tuesday – 8/8/06 Day 4

We woke to a crisp morning around 5 degrees. Everyone was busy with breakfast and the task of repacking their tent and belongings.

Before we left there were congratulations to Sam and Andy with chocolates and balloons, for their 42nd wedding anniversary. The temperature increased and reflected another perfect day, blue skies and sunshine, as we travelled across stony ground of

the Gibber Plains. Sighted emus in a creek and kangaroos bounding away as well as a big black bull and a number of cows.

Dust was heavy in the air as the road changed and a welcome stop at Wilson's River Camping Area at Noccundra was a good relief. As we ventured along the Adventure Way we sighted "donkeys", (oil well type) as this area criss-crosses our landscape with the Jackson to Moomba Oil line. The countryside is varied and frequently changes from rocks to sand, to grassy areas and a good bitumen road past the oil wells.

It is easy to imagine how water could easily flow across the land in floods, as 15 years ago when the Cooper River flooded. It is so flat. We had a side diversion on the road as a road roller had broken down and we drove off to the side to pass. John and Barbara had to stop soon after as they had a bolt loosened, however they were soon on the road when we met Ian again on the road to Innamincka. We visited the Burk and Wills Bridge before driving to the famous Dig Tree. It will always be a mystery, why they didn't tell anyone they had returned from the Gulf and sad that they died that way.

We then drove along a good stretch of road to a panoramic view of Saint Anne Range. The colours and beauty of nature was spectacular.

As we followed each other into the afternoon sun to our camp site, along the red sandy road, it reflected that Vic was our (quote) "shining light in the distance" (unquote) and we would follow him anywhere.

Under a full moon we set up camp and enjoyed the company of fellow travellers around the campfire, on the road to Arrabury.

Narrelle and Keith.

PS Don't forget our dingo. He looked great watching us from the roadside.

PPS Just by way of a note

Narrelle's great uncle was a man called "Duke" Tritten a fairly well known character. Duke was a swaggy, bush balladeer, poet, author, friend of Henry Lawson and columnist for the Bulletin.

He wrote and recorded many bush folk songs that are still sung today including "Send her down Huey" – "Goorianawah". He spent much of his life in and around this part of the country as a shearer, rouseabout etc. He wrote a number of articles songs and poems that were published in a book called "Time means Tucker". The book title is from a Henry Lawson poem which goes "For time means tucker and tramp we must, a man can trust, Not a mountain peak to guide.

Very appropriate for the country we just crossed!! - Keith

Wednesday 9/8/06 Day 5
Arrabury to Birdsville

We awoke to the tinkling sound of tins being collected from the fire. The appeal of a warm morning fire tempted us from our sleeping bags and we emerged to a bright and spectacular setting full moon just as the sun was about to peep out from behind the opposite horizon!

Breakfast of pancakes with sugar and freshly squeezed lemon juice fuelled us for the morning. At the morning meeting the wanderer of the party returned and we were very relieved. Then Vic gave us a run down of the schedule for the day, after which Ian from Kangaroo Tent City presented us all with a thermal cup courtesy of Black Wolf. Thank you Ian!

At last it was time to head off. We finally spotted emus promised at Tibooburra's Sturt National Park – obviously these are migratory birds who avoid cold winters and they moved into sunny Queensland to keep warm.

Morning tea at Haddon's Corner – the marker was surrounded by a boggy waterhole teeming with some small crustacean like yabb-ish creatures! Fascinating what do they do when the water dries up? We all signed the visitors' book. Vic 'marked his territory' by adding an Across Oz 2006 sticker to the box!

We had lunch in a shady spot by the river just before Betoota. It was a pretty place and we enjoyed it! Then a quick photo stop at the deserted Betoota pub and we noted the Betoota Club Race Cup meeting will be held on 16th September 2006 – maybe Vic will bring us back for it after we stop off in Broome for a quick swim.

By this time the day had warmed to a beautiful 25 deg bright sunny day (after a 4 deg start). An eventful run into Birdsville saw us finish the day with a mouth watering and huge meal at the famous Birdsville Hotel. A great day, great dirt roads, great company and great food. Couldn't have wished for more!

David, Maria and Sebastian (AKA Daz, Maz, and Bas)

Thursday 10th August 2006 Day 6 – Birdsville into the Simpson

Our last chance for a long hot shower this morning before packing up at the Birdsville Caravan Park. The touring party mustered at the Birdsville Working Museum just before 9am and were treated to an on-the-move tour with non-stop commentary on Australiana of yesteryear. There were great reminders of old "brand names", appliances dating back between 50 and 100 years, mechanical gadgets of varying practicality and a terrific collection of old Cobb and Co carriages and coaches. For those over 50 (that's us), it was a trip back to the past.

From there it was off to the bakery to stock up on fresh bread or indulge in pastries (curried camel pie and quondong tarts), fill up with fuel (\$1.54 a litre diesel), send post cards etc, before group photos of the party and vehicles outside Birdsville Pub. Vic led Group One off at 11.05am with two new members, Michael and Lynn, plus Ron and Therese. We headed west for the Simpson Desert, the world's longest parallel sand dune area with some 1,100 dunes running north-south.

After nearly 40kms from Birdsville, we reached Big Red, the first of the dunes. Vic selected the traditional track over Big Red and after skirting north along the foot of the dune, we stopped to reduce our tyre pressures to 25psi for front and 22 for the rear tyres. All made the climb easily in high range first gear, although one of the new arrival vehicles, Ron and Theresa Bryan, found themselves with the first puncture of the trip. After more photos of the fleet atop Big Red, we descended to the Eyre Creek flood out below and paused for Ron's tyre change.

We pushed on, up and down dunes for about 16 kms before stopping for lunch around 1.35pm in the best available shade although insufficient for 20 plus vehicles. After a 40 minute break, we narrowly avoided having to negotiate 4 vehicles travelling in the opposite direction, just before our convoy got under way. We rolled (or bumped and bounced) westwards at an average speed around 25kms an hour. Encountered two old Blitzers heading toward our group. By now, we had well and truly passed into the Simpson Desert National Park, 78kms from Birdsville. It is the largest national park in the state of Queensland.

At around 4.20pm, after travelling about 110kms from Birdsville, we turned off to set up camp for the night. A successful and enjoyable first day of our first desert section. Enjoyed a mild evening under a full moon and copious moths before calling an early night just after 9.30pm

Ron and Adrianna

Day 7 Friday August 11 2006 QAA Line to Poeppel Oil Well!!

Awoke to yet another beautiful day. Mild overnight temperature and around 8 degrees on arising. We set off around 9am for another adventure across the desert. We met another convoy of vehicles travelling east just as we were about to hit the track. Vic had already turned onto the track when he received a message over the radio that this convoy was in progress in the vicinity. After they went by we all headed off across the desert. Over many more sand dunes – some steeper than others and others very bumpy. We travelled slowly and soon came across another convoy. Refused to communicate with Vic and barged their way through. One almost came unstuck charging up a dune into our oncoming convoy, fortunately Brian and Adrienne came over the top of the dune and they were able to come down safely with the others having to go off the track to avoid them.

We continued on over numerous more sand dunes – seeing the occasional salt lake as we crested another dune. Eventually heading south off the track driving around the perimeter of a salt lake then across further dunes to reach Poeppel's Corner, the border between SA QLD and NT. Here we had morning tea. We then headed north to Poeppel's Oil Well, now abandoned and then had lunch.

We then travelled north diverting to "Beachcomber Oil Well" now also abandoned, then headed north east following sand dunes towards Hay River. Spinifex becoming more evident, but mainly blackened, dried out with little green, some grasses and

different coloured bushes in various colours of green, an occasional green and white wildflower in some areas.

Only a few birds seen. We did see one family of camels. A larger dark coloured camel, a lighter smaller one and a baby about 1 to 1.2 metres high – they took off over the sand dunes before following vehicles came by. Lots of evidence of damage done by heavy rains in the past with numerous washouts over the track.

We covered quite a distance before finding camp with mainly Spinifex and a few bushes – a campsite didn't look possible, but in Vic's usual style another good camp was found in a swale between the dunes, nice bushes and small trees for some shelter and plenty of room to spread out. Another good campfire.

Vic talking to Murray Wilton live on 2GB. We kept most of the lights off tonight so the moths didn't bother us as much as last night. Still a bright moon and the stars and milky way looking brilliant. A perfect end to another day – looking forward to what tomorrow brings.

Barbara and John "BJ"
Approximate distance travelled 148kms

Day 8 Saturday 12 August 2006

Another great day, cool in morning still so Heidi was standing on covered fire pit to keep warm. Lynn arrived in purple socks and fluoro pink vest soon changed with Vic, he looked good in pink!

Well, we are on the way for a day of fun. Tuned in to channel 18 who were doing a radio check. 15 mins later the first of many photo stops for the day. This one was of many small footprints in the sand. Another stop was a very long sand hill showing the movement of the sand from east to west. A tree area for morning tea. Some of the trees and small bushes had seeds or berries or flowers on.

Later on a triangle area of Spinifex took our eyes.

And did the sand hills take their toll. Adrienne and Brian got stuck twice and Ray also had a moment not to mention Mat and Jo. (We won't spill the beans on Vic). Gum trees seem to say the start of the Hay River.

Birds nests in the trees today in some very precarious places. Lunch was at 12.30, very 'hot'. After lunch Vic's team took a wrong turn (scenic route) eventually catching up with Pete's team around 3pm. We stopped at the 'Cecil Madigan Tree'. He passed by this way in 1939. lots of sign posts here. Temp outside 31 degrees. All getting tired as the day went on.

Finally getting a small camp area on the roadside at 5pm.

Adrienne and Brian Watty

Day 9 Sunday 13 August 2006
(Fascinating facts: weather at lunch 26 deg and 1001mb
130m above sea level)

Another chatty night around the campfire last night and many were 'chipper' after a refreshing shower in Eric's shower tent – BYO H /20

The track turned from sand dunes to twists and turns through gums and other greenery soaking up the water from deep below the Hay River. We passed the turnoff to Madigans Track and Vic quickly crested an itinerary for a 2008 trip! Deposits for the trip began rolling in at morning tea. After a cookie and coffee, we were off again.

We saw a few hawks in trees watching us go by and another tree of bright green budgies. Lunch break came about 50k from Lake Caroline. We track to meet up with our brilliant bush/city mechanics! (Eric and Pete). then heard Peter had done his front end so we left lunch to move up the They worked under a big tarp out of the heat and prepared to get the welder fired up. We left them to it and journeyed on and group 2 joined in, in true tag-a-long fashion. Now all on channel 16, the afternoon became an interview station! Interesting facts learned:

- Irene and Alec have slept in swags in their tent (until last night they slept under stars)
- Ron and Theresa's Christmas dinner feeds approx 35, their immediate family!
- Broome is still the preferred destination of many participants on the tour!

A few more k's revealed white and yellow wildflowers and then the Hay River – this time to be crossed! The sandy river bed was soft!! After about a kilometre travelling along the river bed, we drove up and out onto a clay plan on the edge of Lake Caroline. Afternoon tea/cool drinks while we waited for our recently enlarged convoy to meet up at the salt lake.

With all vehicles backed up against a small dune on the edge of the lake, we had a group photo shoot in the hot afternoon sun.

Overlander editor Matt Roudonikis and mate Grant Henderson arrived and then joined the convoy back across the Hay and on north to our campsite on the edge of the river bed.

Already corellas are squawking and making their presence known!

The mechanics (Eric and Pete) and their support crew (Anne and Ngaire) arrived safely back in camp about 8pm after a successful repair on Pete's car.

Around the campfire, Michael cooked a camp oven damper, which many enjoyed with golden syrup – 'cocky's joy'.

Lynne and Michael

Day 10 Monday 14 August - Riverside Camp to Batton Hill Camp

A very happy vocal magpie practised his vocal chord stretches way before sunrise this morning and went on until he was sure we were awake. Dingoes then took over the wake up call and had us listening to a sound we hadn't heard before this journey. Vic forgot to tell the locals we were having a sleep in this morning! Lots of laughter and chatter as people had their breakfast and welcomed the beautiful sunrise – Lynne and Michael cooked pancakes at the camp fire site on Vic's barbecue and yummy!

Peter and Ngaire went off to Lake Caroline for their photos and look-see. Our camp by the Hay River is truly magical with parrots and various birds singing in the beautiful gum trees. The sunrise spectacular. We have a lovely breeze to take the sting out of the sunshine.

Left our river camp to head to Batton Hill Camp after 10am on the way we saw the scene change from tall gum trees to smaller, straighter trees then lots of beautiful desert flowers in colours of white, yellow and the bush tomato purple. Lots of bull dust and whirly- whirly dust spouts. We saw camels and a bush turkey and the bustards.

Lindsay Bookie welcomed us all when we arrived at Batton Hill camp and we set up in the heat of the day and headed for a very welcome shower after lunch.

We headed off for a bush tour which concluded at watching the sunset at Goyder's Pillar. Great! Most of our group also climbed the mountain to see two blow holes and took in the spectacular scenery from the top.

We had a lovely surprise to find Lindsay Bookie had cooked us a delicious evening meal. A further surprise was had by all when Lindsay presented Vic with a beautiful Aboriginal oil painting done by Lindsay's daughter.

Another full, exciting day of fun came to a close! (Andrew Harper walked across the Tropic of Capricorn in 1999.)

Theresa and Ron

Day 11 15th August

Left Batton camp approx 9.30 led by Lindsay Bookie.

Banana vine, coolabah or boxwood, bloodwood, whitewood which the cattle and camels eat. Stopped on top of hill lookout, Pebbly Hill, went landrover gully.

Lindsay bogged in dry creek in Toyota. Troopy had to be towed out by another Toyota, Vic roadrunner Widman.

Had to stop for lunch to let the system cool down a little. After lunch several more talks on edible plants and animal tracks. Arrived back at camp at approx 3.45pm after a very enjoyable day with Lindsay.

Ray

Day 12 – 16th August Batton Hill to Alice Springs

We all rose early to be packed up by 8.30am – a little out of the habit after a 2 night stay at Batton Hill – such luxury not having to fold the tent and deflate those wretched (but very comfy) sleeping mats. Glorious sunny day. Ray (Emu) was presented with a zip jacket from Engel and then we all pulled out to head for Jervois Station to top up with fuel. Long straight dirt road alongside fence for 70 odd ks.

We saw our first camels but they didn't stay around for long unfortunately. Turned on to a wide corrugated track, over the Marshall River and left into Jervois Station. Many of us refuelled and even treated ourselves to an ice cream cone!

Pressed on back to the Plenty Highway – fast dirt road – picked up a bit of speed. Eventually, after a thwarted attempt at a “scenic route” we got onto the Stuart Highway – bitumen – so straight on to Alice. Strange to come across traffic lights, commercial businesses etc.

Comforting for some of us, not for others. Arrived at the MacDonnell Range Holiday park around 4pm, waited to be allotted a campsite and made our home for the next 2 nights. The washing machines got a good workout, and after a great shower we (nearly) all went for dinner in spite of the long wait for service. A few of our group 2 are leaving us over the next day or so, so some sad goodbyes were said.

We went to bed with the strange sound of traffic in the distance and a beautiful crescent moon.

Ian and Jenny

Day 13 – 17 August Alice Springs

A free day for washing, multiple showers, shopping for food etc.

Day 14 – 18 August

9.30am start as Group 3 was formed! We bid farewell to those not continuing on and headed off through the stunning Mc Donnell Ranges, a dingo crossed the road in front of us. We walked to the waterhole at Ormiston Gorge and took photos of the water pool, trees and steep rock sides of the gorge.

Then onto Namarjira Drive where road conditions were rocky, sandy, with dips and sharp gutters. Lunch stop just past a river bed – with reports from the convoy of cattle and goannas seen on the road just travelled.

Ron and Theresa had a puncture and were helped by recent arrivals Mark and Craig. We drove towards Haast Bluff and Round Hill and stopped numerous times for photos. At one stage, Vic climbed on his roof for a good vantage point. Past the

huge, sharp Haast Bluff for more photos. Through Papunyah Aboriginal community and we saw the sign to Kintore spray painted in fluoro orange and green on the road!

Several camels were spotted by the front vehicles of the convoy and by now we were looking for a camp site in the Spinifex! More camels closer to the road seen.

We drove in off the road, picking Vic's track through the crushed grasses, over a dune and into an area for a camp. A few ants nests spotted!! An area cleared for a camp fire and it was a great camp site. Vic went on 2GB again and Michael made a bread and butter pudding and we heard some hilarious stories and tales from Mark.

Lynne and Michael

Day 15 – 19th August

Left our bush camp in convoy with beautiful sunshine on our backs and headed for Kintore where we filled up for the next leg of our travels. Kintore is a very busy, bustling Aboriginal Community near Mt Strickland and Lysaght. Travelling here we saw and photographed more camels and enjoyed seeing bush pigeons, green budgies, major mitchells (cockatoos) and hawks etc. We had our morning tea break in Kintore as well.

Travelling on, we came across many beautiful flowers of all colours and grevillea shrubs and many oak trees in different stages of their growth. We stopped for lunch at a magical spot with the look of a perfect picnic spot.

Moving on we travelled to the WA border at Mt Teitkins where the road had its smooth and rough patches and corrugations. This was the Sandy Blight Road another famous road forged by Len Beadell. We passed Mt Webb and drove into the settlement of Kiwirrkurra to visit the site which houses Len Beadell's supply truck, or rather, the remains of his supply truck.

The convoy camped by the Pollock Hills in another beautiful scenic place. We were treated to a talk given by Len Beadell about the time when he was asked to find a place where the atomic bomb could be exploded. Len Beadell's talk was full of laughter but it was obvious to all, the hard work that went into forging roads where no white man had ever been. Len Beadell opened up the Gunbarrel Highway and all the desert roads. Truly a great man. Vic also played a tape of his 2GB interview on the Canning Stock Route. A very full and exciting day and night.

Theresa and Ron

Day 16 – 20 August

Left bush camp 7.33 WA time. Beautiful sunrise over mountain. Very warm already slight breeze. Convoy photos taken winding our way out to main road.

Coming along very flat out to right, see for miles. Temp at 8.30am 24.5. the vegetation changes all the time. Have seen so many different shapes, sizes and colours in wild flowers and spindly trees. Came across a small village in the middle of nowhere on our way to find the "Tree" Len Beadell planted in 1960. After a round about trip, we finally found it. On the way to Jupiter Well for morning tea we saw another lot of camels. The well is still pumping and the water is drinkable. The temperature had risen to 32 by this time 11.26 am WA time.

Carried on further and had lunch on the side of the road – no trees or shade and was 37 by the time we left at 1.25pm. Many photos of Red finches and blue budgies. Came across a couple from Adelaide towing a caravan.

Drove to find 2 x 44 gallon drums with directions and signs written in white paint. There was a visitor book which we all signed, at Gary Junction. Now heading to "Well 33" along the Jenkins Track to Kunawarritie turn off and in the middle of nowhere appears a Telstra Red Phone box – no phone – or superman!!! This road is the old Canning stock route and the corrugations are BAD.

Set up camp and the sunset was great. We have had "bush showers". Still on EST so has been a long day but most enjoyable and night has fallen and can hear the crickets and the night sky is glowing with stars and the stillness is something all should experience.

Hope I have been able to write and explain the feelings of the day.

Leslie and Ray

PS Anne and Steve had problems with fuel lines.

Day 17 Monday 21st August

We slept soundly last night – we'd had the most welcome "bush shower" last night at Well 33 on the Canning Stock Route. So nice to wash off a layer of dust or two. Around the campfire Vic asked us all to give a snapshot view of ourselves, some decided to run a whole movie! All good fun.

Awoke at daylight as we moved our watches back 1.5 hrs. Temp reached 24 by the time we left – sunny blue/ blue sky, a few flies came out to play. We watched a flock of colourful budgies flying around near the well as we waited to depart. Headed off to Kunawarritji Aboriginal community for those who needed to refuel (and grab an early ice cream). Drove on into the Wapet Road/Kidson Track (we are half in the Great Sandy Desert and half in the Gibson Desert), which is smooth driving, wide road, with occasional sandy sections. Plenty of tracks but no sightings of camels yet.

At morning tea stop Adrianna produced a yummy cake for Adrienne's birthday, which she had cooked in the camp oven the night before. Complete with candles and

a little gift from Heidi, we all sang happy birthday. A birthday I'm sure Adrienne won't forget!

Some of us climbed up a rocky peak to get a super view. Back on the Wapet Road – still a good dirt road – to stop for lunch at a quarry about 5kms east of Pumnu, 33 and no shade, so we didn't stay around!

Up the road stopped at Lake Dora, a huge salt lake, looked as if it had snowed. On past the Telfer Mine – great roads – had to change wavelengths to 17 as they were using 16. camped about 1km off the road amongst the Spinifex – we had to clear it first. Had another happy campfire evening and Steve gave an interesting talk on mining.

Ian and Jenny

Day 18 Tuesday 22 August

David Sebastian and I spent a second night 'out' sleeping under the stars – an exhilarating experience. This morning we woke to find ourselves on the side of the road! Soon after we stirred, the sun popped up over the horizon and lit the sliver of moon that had only just preceded it. A quick pack up and then we had half an hour to spare to photograph the beautiful flowers and lizards that made our site a beautiful landscaped wonderland! Thanks Vic, you picked a good one again.

We headed back to the Telfer Mine Road and carried on to the west. We carried on with dunes on either side of us for a little while and then suddenly the road was winding and undulating around and over hills. The landscape changed dramatically and Vic told us we were in the Pilbarra. Along the way we were passed by road trains and we spotted kangaroos, eagles, bustards, bush turkey, lizards, cattle and plenty of road kill which reminded us not to play chicken with the road trains.

With the change of landscape there was also a change in the plants – more beautiful flowers and trees to photograph at every opportunity.

We stopped for morning tea at Carawine Gorge under some (not many) trees. We decided to check out Eel Pool as an alternative camping location. But Vic found it was too difficult to manoeuvre into, too small and not up to his high standard for camping sites for our group. Instead we retraced our steps to the 'Oak-Over River' where there was plenty of shade for lunch. Nearly everyone succumbed to the temptingly cool water for a swim, and some of the gang had already dipped in Carawine Gorge! The water was utterly refreshing!

We drove upriver a little and found some lovely shady spots for our campsites. When all the tents were up we could feel the relaxation in the air as everyone chilled even though the day had warmed to a sizzling 37.5. the spot is lovely with very tall ghost gums, paper bark trees and presumably there are also oak trees somewhere nearby. The ground is all pebbly – as you find when you camp in a river bed. There are some lovely and unusual flowers close to the water's edge (they look like poppies). The

bird life is a chorus all around us and they serenaded us as night descended. Our only negative feeling is the sting of those march flies by the water's edge!

Another fabulous day has ended.

Maria, David and Sebastian

Day 19 Wednesday 23 August

A great morning due to two factors – another cloudless blue sky and a day off! After much early noise from an owl who ‘barked’ rather than hooted and a cacophony of bird chatter, the camp was quiet and still until around 7.30am with all the group taking the chance for a sleep in.

The day was spent with people editing their photos, updating diaries and travel logs, doing washing, equipment repairs, reading and taking a dip in the waterholes. Most of the movement until late afternoon involved people moving their chairs to keep in the shade.

Some, such as Ray, Stephen and Mark H got their fishing rods out to practise their casting and check out various lures. There was some small success (in size) for Mark and Stephen. What a relaxing day!

A sing along session at the communal campfire failed to gather the same oomph and enthusiasm as Marcus's story telling and jokes and most people called an early night in readiness for the trip to Marble Bar tomorrow.

Ron and Adrianna

Day 20 - 24 August

Awoke to birdsong after sleeping a second night in the Oak-over River bed. We broke camp as usual at the morning ‘briefing’. Vic told us he had found a scenic route to Marble Bar. The SKULL SPRINGS RD ooohah! (and other pirate reference were made) On exiting camp Ron and Theresa discovered they had lost a shock bush. Craig, Markus Eric (and Anne) stayed back to replace the missing bush. The choice of route was well justified! Scenery was spectacular. Clear skies, brilliant white river gums, deep red stone outcrops, multi coloured floors. Every bend seemed to show a new scene. First river crossing had Adrianna nearly drown Vic! Too much speed. Having learnt my lesson on day 1 I was remarkably subdued as I crossed the second crossing. It was a bit deeper and longer. Nothing our vehicles couldn't handle.

We came across two animal skulls and a coil spring on a post. Hence Skull Springs Road!

During the days drive I nearly had a dingo as a hood ornament. He was about to leap on to the road from a 2ft cutting when he saw ‘Tinkerbelle II’ (the Patrol) bearing down on him. He jumped back in surprise! I made the call on the UHF and the rest of the party were able to see him. What is it with dogs and cars?

As he appeared to 'chase' the rest of the convoy, camels and kangaroos were also seen. We stopped for an ice cream and quick resupply at the Narragine roadhouse. Saw a sprinkler on a lawn! We passed a burnt out area and there appeared to be 5-6 whirly birds on it. It was not until we pulled into the Marble Bar Caravan park that only one vehicle in our convoy pointed out that we had not stopped for lunch! The scenery was so spectacular we had all forgotten!

After setting up camp we took a drive out to Chinaman and Marble Bar pools. The stone at Marble Bar would look spectacular just after a shower!

Evening meal consisted of several shared pizza's and a few beers with some of the group at the Iron Clad Hotel in town. Once again we were treated to stories and anecdotes as well as a couple of jokes from Markus. A spectacular scenery filled day!

Mark

Day 21 – 25-8-06 Marble Bar to Newman

We left Marble Bar around 9am after some of us refuelling - a couple with fuel and a few with ice creams and drinks. We were once again off via a 'shortcut' to Newman. We retraced our path past the Chinaman's Pool and Marble Bar pool and went along the Marble Bar Road.

Vic saw a sign to the Flying Fox Lookout and it was worth the short trip. A magnificent valley view with a flying fox across the top of the cliffs spanning the river valley water flowing below.

We stopped at an old Gold Mine called the Comet Mine, no longer operational, but a museum with district relics and jewellery and artefacts made from local gemstones on show and for sale. A short stop turned into a marathon of shopping. We ended up having morning tea here before setting off once again. We detoured via Glen Herring Gorge where most of the group clambered over rocks along the edge of the gorge to get a good view.

The temperature was rising and became very hot getting to about 40 in the cars. We traversed some spectacular country side with predominantly rocky hills and Spinifex. We drove by a couple of properties having to open and shut a couple of gates.

One range to the left looked like a pale green cake with chocolate icing running down the sides. We stopped for lunch on a rock platform where David R found some aboriginal rock paintings, with kangaroos, dingo, a man in ceremonial head dress and other objects featuring. After lunch we celebrated Heidi's birthday with a choc cake and candles that would not light and 3 balloons 2 of which burst. We continued onto Newman over undulating farmland covered in Spinifex and stumpy trees. As we got closer to Newman the road widened and we increased speed but had to spread out further because of the dust.

We arrived in Newman just before dark setting up camp in a very confined space (at Deerloves Caravan Park). We had never been all together so close before. A few of the group stayed and cooked tea at the campsite but the remainder ventured out to the Newman Chinese kitchen where we all had a nice meal. The caravan park was very noisy with a generator going all night. A noisy rooster crowing for a good part of the night and road noise. Mine workers going off to work at 5am and several trains going by as well. Not a lot of sleep for most of us.

Barbara and John

Saturday 26th August 2006

Day 22 – David and Heidi Newman to Karijini NP

Another day of bright sunshine. Refuel at BP Met at 0800 at the information centre for a spot of shopping and to dress in our Bob the Builder costumes before hopping on a bus for a tour of BHP Iron Ore Mt Whaleback Mine tour at 0830 for 1hr – 1.5 view of brown ‘lego-land’. Mt Whaleback is the longest single open cut Iron Ore Mine in the world, 5.5km long and 1.1km wide, for more information refer to your statistics sheet.

We getting old now
We worrying for mining companies
They think we stupid
Treat us with no respect for culture and land
Government mob too
We know how to look after our country
It very special to us
You’ll see
You’ll understand

Ngunytjo Napanangko Mosquito
“Footprints Across our Land”

On return, we had 1hr to shop for groceries. We left Newman at 12.15 and took to the black top road, that wound its way like a ribbon wishfully towards Karajini NP.

Our lunch stop view The Governor Mt and again beautiful wildflowers, pink, mauve, blue, yellow, white, every road train that passed us blew their horn. We moved on into the shire of Ashburton, low woodland. Our much anticipated drive into Karijini NP did not disappoint the sides of the road thick with wildflowers, we made our home for the night nestled closely on the red stony ground, amongst the Spinifex in this savannah land.

The evening colours of red, crimson green, blue as we walked along the ridge from circular pool Three Ways Lookout Fortescue Falls the sunset and the echo of frogs calling bounced off the gorge walls, the moons thin crest a cup as the stars spilled out across the black sky and we made our way home along the sweet smelling path that the wildflower blossoms made.

Sunday 27th August

Day 23 – Karijini National Park

When we got up this morning we discovered the car tyre (back right) had finally gone flat. We had to change it and finally headed off for our walk from our camp site at Euro site 97 at 8.30am

We decided with David and Heidi to start at the circular Pool and make our way back along the gorge floor to Fortesque Falls and the fern pool

It was a steep descent into the gorge (Dales) and no sooner had we started out when we heard some familiar voices behind us. It was Mark, Marcus, Craig, Michael and Lynne. The rock formation along the way were fantastic and so was the circular pool. When we arrived there we took lots of pictures and the hordes of tourists descended and some went for a swim too. Circular Pool water wasn't very cold.

We then started walking back along the bottom of the gorge and who should we run into but Vic and Eric in their GDT uniform looking like 2 school boys. We walked at a leisurely pace and took heaps of photos. The area is incredible. We could hear the gushing water of Fortescue Falls before we got to them. Once again was a fantastic site. Marcus and crew caught up to us there and overtook us. We could see the reflection of the rippling water on the rock wall. It was like looking at a lava lamp. We then went onto the Fern pool, but it was spoilt by too many people who were drinking and were loud and noisy. We didn't stay long, but really liked the big trees there with their sprawling branches.

It was a fairly steep ascent, but once there we ran into Theresa and Ronaldo. They showed us the tree that had bees in the base of it. You could put your ear up to a hole near the bottom of the tree and hear them. What a fantastic morning it has been.

This afternoon we went to the information centre (how lovely and cool inside) we paid our \$2 each for a cold shower. There was only one shower in the ladies and men's toilet blocks. The information centre has some beautiful photos of the Pilbara area. Everyone from GDT seemed to be there buying souvenirs and ice creams.

It has been a very memorable day. Hope tomorrow when we get to Weano Gorge is as good or even better.

Ann and Stephen

Day 24 – 28th August

Great sing song at the camp last night. Lynne did a race call that was fantastic.

On to today. We start out with a fine sunrise again. Off to Vic's tent to start the day by down loading Vic's pics on to the computer.

We then leave in convoy with Vic, Anne and Eric, Barbara and John and ourselves.

The graders were working on the road and the valley was so green and lush with trees. We head into Kalamine Gorge the first of many today. The gorge was so calm and the sunlight was shining on the hills and water, big slabs of slate lay on the sides of the gorge, what a delightful sight. On to Joffrey Falls, another great experience, such a deep gorge. Two bikini clad ladies were enjoying the water. At Knox gorge the volunteers were remaking the stairs to the view and said the park at Dales were thinking of putting in spiral stairs to the Circular Pool to save on maintenance.

We had lunch at Weano Gorge then Anne and Barbara and John with us returned to camp via fields of mulla-mulla, a goanna or perentie crossed the road in front of John and Barbara. We emptied our garbage at trailer and came back to camp. Another great day was had on the road around Australia.

Adrienne and Brian

29 August – Tuesday Karajini to Tom Price

We woke a little stiff and sore from a big day climbing down into the gorges and swimming in the rock pools (Hancock Gorge before lunch and Weano in the afternoon. Mark, Craig and Michael went to the end of each gorge seeing stunning rock pools for brilliant photography. Lynne went about 70% of the way, stopping before the handrail at Weano Gorge. We saw Eric and Vic adventuring their way through too).

So this morning after a quick stop at the tip we are off to Tom Price. We drove through the Munjina East Gorge and many photos were snapped while driving! A morning tea shop at the Auski Road house where choc milks, ice creams and other goodies consumed!

Onward to the old Asbestos Mining town of Wittenoom visiting the souvenir/gem shop and reading their maps and mining info. We drove around the base of the Hamersley Ranges with crimson red escarpments rising up on each side of the track. The bitumen road was washed away in parts. A couple of river floodway crossings and some rocky crossings, with some asbestos tailings visible high on a mountain side. Lunch in a gorge near a lovely clear water pool with a rope dangling into the water from a tree. Lots of scenic shots to be had here! A cake was made last night and we celebrated Leslie's birthday.

We drove on to Hamersley Gorge, past stunning countryside of the ranges. We drove through one mountain with steep sides next to us. The Gorge was a fairly steep walk down red ochre steps to a crystal blue pool. Markus put on a show sea world would approve of, 'sea lioning' from a higher pool, down a slide into the main pool. What a Hoot!

The caravan park is at the base of Mt Nameless which we will visit tomorrow. A group of us drove in to town and on speaking to some locals, found Warrawini Lodge, a cafeteria/buffet where we enjoyed a 3 course meal with plenty of the town's miners and workers. A great feed and another super day across oz!

Lynne and Michael

Day 26 – 30 August

Most of us were woken up at 4.30am at the Caravan Park by workers leaving for their shift at the Hamersley Iron Mine.

The morning was allocated as free time giving us the time to shop and fix tyres. Lunch was held at the Caravan Park.

In the afternoon we planned to drive to Mt Sheila, but to do so we had to use the access service road for the Hamersley Railway. Hamersley required every driver to watch a video on the use of their road which we dutifully did.

Before the trip to Mt Sheila we went up the 4wd track to Mt Nameless for views of the town of Tom Price and the incredible Hamersley Mine.

From Mt Nameless we went on to the railway service road which was in fair condition. The climb up Mt Sheila was real 4wd driving. The grades were very very steep. The view from the top of Mt Sheila is awe inspiring and was worth the effort to get there.

On the way back to camp at Tom Price we saw two iron ore trains back about 2.5 kilometres each. Most of us stopped to take pictures. Vic got on top of his 4wd and took a video. Both the trains were headed in the opposite direction. So one of the trains had to stop on a siding to let the other one through. Driving back most of us kept pace with the train while a discussion was held as to how the trains were unloaded. Some said the cars were tipped, some said a magnet was used to lift the metal out. One method was discounted was to park the cars over a pit and the iron dropped through the bottom of the rail car. No firm conclusion was reached.

Reached town at sundown.

Ron and Theresa Ryan

31st August - Day 27

All up and about early – very sad farewell to David and Heidi. We are heading West to Exmouth!!!. Yabadabadoo - no dirty roads for a while and surf and sand here we come!! Stopped at Parabadoo for morning tea at 9.50am and left at 10.20am. lovely little park with beautiful red bottlebrush trees for shade. Stopped at Nantarra Road house for the lunch break , very expensive – not impressed, ladies loos dirty and not flushing. All others and bush loo's much better. Country side changes very flat now and squat trees, very few wildflowers.

At 3.35pm turned right heading to Exmouth at last. Very long hot, dry day. We have made camp the other side all the way to Lighthouse Beach the other side of Exmouth.

Yes, it is a lovely camping ground all facilities available – me personally very angry once again away in the never- never to the town and back tracking once again.

Leslie and Ray

1st September – Day 28 Exmouth

We finally reached the coast last evening and the sight of the ocean was like coming home. Nothing, not even the beautiful desert, will ever compare to the ocean. We awoke relaxed, there was quite a strong wind blowing which is apparently quite usual around here. More laundry and showers, general tidying up and washing off dust while Vic was organizing a trip out to see the whales this afternoon.

Some of us chose to relax during the morning, going into town to pay for our whale trip, do a little shopping, visit neighbouring beaches and checking out Flaming Head Lighthouse. Some of us went with Vic to see Shothole Gorge, then we all met back at camp to be picked up in the mini bus by Richard at 1pm to be taken to the marina.

Here we boarded our tour boat for Exmouth Gulf, hopefully to see some whales. We were not disappointed. Richard was skilled at finding where they were and giving us plenty of time to view them, everyone taking enough photos and video to make Mr Kodak rich all over again! We were all ‘ooing’ and ‘aahing’ constantly, completely awed and some of us even emotional over the spectacle of such magnificent creatures. They breached, they spouted, they played hide and seek, they showed us their tails, they were perfect. And we even saw dolphins, a turtle and a manta ray. We felt very lucky, especially as the water was so calm for us. We arrived back at camp after going up to the lighthouse for Vic to get reception to ring 2GB.

Some of us met up at the café after dinner to listen to a band whilst eating yummy pancakes.

Ian and Jenny

Day 29 – 2nd September Exmouth to Coral Bay

We left Exmouth at 8.30am and headed down the coastal road with the plan to stop at as many beaches as we had time for. At the first beach we were thrilled to see a crab, sea gulls, sea turtle and were told by a fisherman that it is the place where sea turtles lay their eggs when in season.

The second stop was where we saw a sea eagle feeding a chick in their nest. The mate was standing in a pool close by. The third stop was at the Milyering Visitor Centre – but we had to go to the water first because it was a beautiful spot with

fantastic colours that are completely different from the desert but equally breathtaking! Here Sebastian found a green crab. Everyone walked around the point to the next bay/beach and enjoyed the coastal paradise.

The visitor centre was equally worth the visit. Sebastian had a great time reading, colouring, learning and playing with the toys and other children. Sebastian said that he loved the preserved animals in the centre, especially the moray eel.

We had morning tea before moving. On the way down the road we saw a man taking a photo of the sturt desert peas on the side of the road. The convoy for some reason, were not interested in stopping at all to do the same! (We had already seen hundreds of them).

Soon we turned into Turquoise Bay where we had an hour to play in the water and snorkel and explore. It was fantastic and we didn't want to leave the snorkelling. Folk spotted lots of fish of many colours.

At 12.30 we were on the road again. We stopped in at north and south Mandu Beaches and then at Sandy Bay before reaching the Yardie Creek Crossing – the end of the sealed road and our lunch spot. There a couple were having mechanical problems and Mark helped them out (as he always does) while we grabbed a bite to eat. Vic tamed the flowing creek for us and we took the plunge across to start the best 4wd drive down to Coral Bay (well I really enjoyed this particular afternoon's drive). On the way we saw plenty of wild life, including kangaroos, emus, goats, birds and even more goats. Not to mention sheep that politely looked both ways before running across the track in front of us.

There was breathtaking scenery – the gleaming white sand dunes contrasted against the scrub land and gleaming turquoise waters was irresistible and I had to call heaps of Kodak stops to try to capture the magic of it all on film. Even if we cant reproduce the perfection, the images will take us back there when we look at them again!!!!

We pulled into the Bayview Caravan park in the late afternoon and put up our tents – totally satisfied and very happy!
Thanks again Vic

Maria, David and Sebastian

Day 30 – 3rd September Coral Bay to Carnarvon

Woke to cool morning and while the south westerly wind had died down, there was dampness from the dew. Surprise cards and a gift wrapped present reminded that it was not only the first Sunday in September but also fathers day. So happy fathers day to all the Dads on the trip.

The schedule for 17 of us meant meeting at 7.50am and walking down to Coral Bay's main beach to board a glass bottom boat for an hour cruise of the coral in the bay. One of the key facts from the boat operator – 150 people reside in Coral Bay (other

than tourists) 30 of which are retired and remainder are employees of various tourist companies/groups. The coral observed was “hard coral” and not as colourful as that seen on the Great Barrier Reef. The main fish (or largest) were about when the skipper tossed food in from either side of the boat.

Packed up the gear on returning to the caravan park and after shopping at the bakery, the group assembled for 10.30am departure. A quick detour to a look out area overlooking the next bay south provided photo shots over multi shades of blue in the lagoon and we then headed for Carnarvon around 11am.

Arrived at Minilya service centre for lunch shortly after midday. Price of diesel was unknown (\$1.68 a litre at Coral Bay) large parking area but not much shade. Departed for Carnarvon after a 50 minute break. While parked for lunch, we met a fellow with a horse float who had been in Tom Price for the camp draft at the same time we camped there. He had also been to Newman and Pannawonica with his 3 horses. Vic spoke to him on radio as we pushed south and he advised that he was a fireman from Wanneroo, north of Perth on 3 weeks holiday.

The drive revealed scrubby country that remained unchanged until just outside Carnarvon, the type of unproductive hinterland that turned the Dutch explorers away when they mapped the WA coastline in the 1600's and 1700's. however, as soon as we reached the Gascoyne River, just outside Carnarvon, we came across banana plantations, a sudden contrast to the previous 90 minute drive.

Checked into the Coral Coast Caravan Park early and most had set up tents by 3pm. This allowed time to drive around the town centre and visit the Heritage area including walking the One Mile Jetty for exercise. The entire travelling party went out for dinner at the Harbourside Café and dined on oysters, seafood delicacies and various puddings – sticky date, fig and ginger. The convoy rolled back to camp around 9.30pm ready for a 10am departure tomorrow for Shark Bay.

Ron and Adrianna

Day 31 – 4th September

Had I started this diary first thing in the morning and written as the day progressed it would have been different. However, I didn't. I was making notes in a separate book as the day unfolded. At around 2pm the day's events seemed less important and yet just as important. The group heard that Steve Irwin had been killed by a sting ray barb to the chest.

Whether you liked or loathed him, he certainly was a ‘good ol’ aussie larrikin. He certainly did a lot for the Australian tourism as well as the protection of native wildlife and although not a family member nor close friend, the death of a celebrity still has impact, the media scrutiny brings you into their lives and you feel as you know them. And this brings me to my original point. The day's events were important as they showed you should live life to the best, take advantage of every minute you have and do what you enjoy.

We witnessed several people doing just that. There were the groups a “Trek” group and a “Bash” group driving in their cars and costumes. We had Shrek, Spiderman, Batman, Pirates, Catwomen and many others. They were enjoying themselves as well as raising money for charity.

If the tragic events of the day tell us anything it is that we have to make the most of life, enjoy it. Don’t waste it, that’s why we are out here doing what we love.

On behalf of the 2006 Across Oz Tour I would like to express my condolences to the Irwin family and friends, a character who will be missed and showed us to live life to the fullest. A difficult day to be ‘stuck with the diary!’

RIP Steve Irwin 04/09/06

Mark

Tuesday 5th September – Day 32

Denham – Monkey Mia – Cape Peron

A blustery night and day. Roaring gale force winds forced us into cabin accommodation last night and today, still windy and cool. Not a pleasant day for visit to the Dolphins at Monkey Mia. An early start leaving Denham just before 7.20am for the 28km drive to Monkey Mia using the black top.

Many of our group and tourists braving the cold wind and standing with their feet in the water to be close to the dolphins. A couple of our group were selected to feed the dolphins. Lynne and Sebastian, which was quite special. To thaw out after this we all had a nice early morning tea in the Monkey Mia Resort Café. After a visit to the shop we headed for Cape Peron National Park. This park is a peninsula with many lovely bays and lagoons accessed by sandy roads – true 4wd tracks, crossing dunes and claypans and salt lakes with low salt bush and mulga bushes in differing colours of green.

Each cove had a toilet and BBQ supplied and well set out interpretive signs about the area. We went to Big Lagoon,, Herald Bight, Slipjack Point and Cape Peron. Not seeing a lot of the aquatic inhabitants of the area – as it remained very windy and possibly keeping them further out to sea. The only things sighted were a small thorny devil, cormorants a Wambo Python and Vic was followed along the beach by some dolphins. The area was spectacular with its red dunes and red rocky cliffs into the sea and then other areas with white rock and sand, sandwiched between making a colourful contrast to the vivid blue sea and white sandy shores.

After we found our ‘lost’ leader we headed home via the homestead looking at the display of feral predators they are eradicating. We then had a quick dip in the artesian ‘hot’ pool before getting back to town in time to go out for a farewell meal with Ronaldo and Theresa.

A beautiful sunset was viewed on the way back to camp reflecting in the ocean and lagoon nearby.

Safe travelling Ron and Theresa

Barbara and John

Wednesday 6th September Day 33

We got up early to see the sunrise. A beauty again. Wind had got up again and stayed all day. We said goodbye to Theresa and Ron and wished them a safe journey.

We headed out of town to the Useless Loop road and on to Steep Point. This drive on the tarmac to the road took $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. We hit the dirt road but it was very good and was being graded in one spot as we passed by. The windmill count is still on and we saw 5 today.

The only radio available is AM666 and the music is constant and not too bad but eventually we loose the station. Lots of bottlebrush were at the last stages of flowering along the roadside. The road is very white. One of the comments on the radios from Brian was about the road and he said it was “a wheelie wide woad” www of the internet.

On the coast are salt works and lakes of water are caught to dry out then produce the salt.

Dirk Hartog Island is quite large in the beautifully coloured sea. Timala Station is the first one we past then Currang Station is near Steep Point as is the lighthouse. We did help a blue tongue off the road and saw an emu, goat and rabbits coming home but scenery was the event of the day.

Adrienne and Brian

Day 34 – 7th September Thursday

Heading to Kalbarri stopped at Shell Beach as it is Brian’s birthday today for a birthday cake. Before leaving had to say farewell to Ron and Adrianna as they are heading to Perth. Well, we have been very lucky with the weather to date, unfortunately it changed last night – rain, and today is very dark. Sun is peaking thru every now and again. We had lunch at Billabong Roadhouse then continued on with the landscape changing and seeing more beautiful wildflowers and we visited Hawks Head Gorge and Ross Graham Lookout.

Beautiful in their own right but do not measure up to what we have already seen. It is lightening and thundering tonight, no rain as yet, but very threatening.

Emu and Leslie

Friday 8th September Day 35

We survived a wild and woolly night – guess we have been super lucky so far with the weather, so no complaints! At least all the tents had all the dust washed off! The

lightning was bright, the thunder loud and the rain came, but the wind hung around all night and tested our ropes and pegs. The morning brought some relief, but as we left for the gorges the wind and rain returned. We stopped at the Z Bend and walked down to a beautiful rocky lookout with the river beneath. Rocks easy to climb and take some more happy snaps.

Rain easing, left for the Loop. A 1 km walk in and out – rocky and a long way down to the Murchison River. We spent some time at Natures Window. A natural ‘hole in the rock’ through which we could view the river far below. It was a popular spot for other tourists and some of us swapped stories. We went back to camp for lunch, however some of the group continued exploring gorges and other attractions like the Rainbow Factory – Australia’s parrot breeding place, whatever we did, it was a relaxing afternoon, fitting in restocking on food, diesel and gas topping up and generally checking out the Kalbarri area. The weather seems to have settled by afternoon, but still some clouds hang around. We watched a boat negotiate the tricky entrance to Kalbarri harbour after a day’s fishing.

We went to bed tired and hopeful of a peaceful night even though light rain started again.

Ian and Jenny

Saturday 9th September Day 36 **Kalbarri – Mount Magnet**

Quiet evening in for some of the group just chilling out in the camp kitchen at the Caravan Park. Drizzle started at around 9pm but it was not so hard or gusty as to keep us awake all night long. When we woke the ground was all wet and rain started again – but it didn’t dampen our spirits and all were ready to roll by 8.30am. Sebastian even managed to get a morning play in the playground before we left.

Emu and Leslie filled us in on their fishing and family catch up adventures of yesterday as we left Kalbarri behind us.

Craig blew the clouds to pieces as we drove on down the road. Mark H took Ian to the airport and caught up with us at the Pink Lake at Port Gregory where we had a Kodak moment.

The rest of the morning flew by as the lead cars of the convoy played a competitive game of windmill spotting!

Morning tea stop was in Geraldton. We drove through town led by Stephen and went to a lighthouse to look out at the ocean. Unfortunately, our Geraldton leader ignored all the requests for a stop at a bakery (or somewhere where we could get morning tea) and most of us were less than pleased!

Stephen – still wanting to be leader – not realising how bad he is at it – then led everyone all around town looking for a service station. When we were all refuelled we headed west – picking up Michael and Lynne at the Geraldton airport on the way out.

Our lunch stop was at Mullewa – at a little park – after which we stopped at a church/museum called ‘Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church’ It was a lovely looking building and worth the Kodak moment!

Vic searched for a good site for a bush camp and true to form he found one about 30km west of Mount Magnet. Everyone was happy and all the camp ovens were dusted off and set to good use as some great gourmet camp meals were prepared.

Craig and Mark did a great job with the fire, not to mention the atmosphere. It was great to listen to the happy chatty conversation around the fire, before during and after dinner.

A great end to the day. But what was the windmill tally for the day! Adrienne counted 108 of them!

Maria, David and Sebastian

PS After dinner when everyone was settled around the fire, the evening was capped off with Ian’s fantastic recital of three Banjo Patterson classic poems, The Man from Ironbark, Mulga Bill’s Bicycle and of course, that classic Man from Snowy River. Lynne’s hiccups let up long enough to give us some belly laughs as she called the infamous Namatjira Drive Cup Race and Mark sang and played the shovel in true Williamson style.

Fantastic!

Sunday 10 September – day 37

Spent an apprehensive evening in a bush camp, would it rain? If it did would we be stuck? As it turns out it was a very pleasant if sometimes windy evening! As we left the camp and proceeded towards Mt Magnet great pools of water could be seen from the road. BJ wanted to go and ‘play’ however, Barbara ‘reigned’ him in. On the way through Mt Magnet we encountered 2 wide loads, RR buckets for Telfer Mine trucks 8.5 wide. Apparently, it takes 5-6 days from Perth to deliver them. We then visited the Granites Aboriginal site, however, I believe we saw more at a recent lunchbreak. The stone structures were varied and fascinating.

After morning tea, Ian and Jenny did a rear tyre, possibly a piece of wire or a rock. Mark, Craig, Eric and Anne stopped to replace the tyre. We looked over Lake Ballard from the Snake Hill lookout.

Anthony Gromley’s “Inside Australia” statues are located in Lake Ballard. The 51 carbonised steel figures are based on laser modelled scans of local identities and have been located around a 7 sqkm area of the normally dry salt lake bed. Gromley’s vision is seen as a “tribute to the spirit of the people who survive in the extremes of harsh climates.

It was a fantastic dirt road drive today. Apart from the tyre no other mishaps were to be had. Arrived late into Kalgoorlie. Great caravan park. Once again fantastic and enjoyable day although, we are now on the drive home. Driving into the rising sun not the setting sun. a lot more happened but I have forgotten!!!!

Mark

Day 38 – Kalgoorlie

We are staying at Kalgoorlie accommodation village caravan park. It rained last night and all the tents are wet. Ian and Jenny had water flowing through their tent.

Stephen, Ian and Brian have gone into Boulder Street Tyre power to have repairs done. It is a free day for everyone to do as they please.

It's 9.15am and the rain has stopped. When Stephen arrived back from getting 2 new tyres, we decided to go up to the Super Pit, which now consumes the old "Golden Mile". It is an open cut gold mine. It looked the same as what we saw at Newman.

It is the largest open cut gold mine in Australia. It will end up 3.8km long x 1.3 km wide and 500 metres deep. They will blast around 1pm today on two different benches. The first was a bit of a fizzer and the second one we could hear the dynamite going off in progressive delayed blasts. It made a good cloud of dust.

They move 85 millions tons of material every year which makes it the largest open pit operation of any commodity including iron ore in Australia. The mining works 7 days a week 24 hrs a day, 365 days a year. You could see the holes in the walls from the old mines.

We then went out to the "Hall of Fame" which consisted of the history of mining in general in Australia. The story of Lang Hancock's life was very interesting. He grew up on Mulga Downs station. The rock samples were really fascinating.

Craig's land cruiser was seen parked outside Questa Casa Brothel. The feedback from Marcus was that they had a really interesting tour. Vic asked us to get pictures of Craig's car.

The rain has started up again this afternoon. Kalgoorlie is a very interesting town. Love the old pubs in Hancock Street.

Ann and Stephen

Day 39 – Tuesday September 12

A later start this morning to let our tents dry in the sunshine. Only a few clouds, otherwise brilliant blue sky. We can hear a few small planes taking off from the airport near the caravan park. We head off to Norseman through countryside full of goldfields, blackbutt, a eucalypt common to the area from Menzies to Kalgoorlie and Norseman – the lower part of the trunk all black.

Morning tea break at Widgiemooltha Roadhouse, the home of the Golden Eagle nugget. We took photos of some old machinery and an old thunderbox toilet with a

toy red back spider on it! Onto Norseman for a quick refuel and we saw a couple more huge mine trucks, apparently en route to Newcastle.

We arrived at Fraser Range Station before 2pm and after a bit of lunch had a 3 hour tour of a small part of the property from owner Paul (wife Teen) and Manager Rick. Our stops included:

- . old stone water tank brimming with water
- . a hill with microwave comms for the region
- . an uninhabited wedge tail eagle nest
- . a quarry
- . an old stone dam wall
- . a disused cottage and other tin cottage remains

During the informative tour we saw kangaroos, galahs, parrots and apparently the property also has brumbies, goats, sheep, camels, rabbits and a wild dog problem (managed with baits and the activities of a 'dogger' brought in to help cull the sheep eating beasts!)

On return to the caravan park area, we set up tents on fresh straw/mulch and saw the sun set. Facilities for cooking are good and there are lovely showers and toilets. It is a great station set up, providing a wonderful tourism opportunity.

Lynne and Michael

Day 40 – Wednesday 13 September

Waking at peaceful Fraser Range – what a delight! This morning, Paul the owner started up the machine that drives the clippers to shear the sheep. It revs slowly @ 800 rpm. Out on the road at about 9am. Plenty of time to shop and take photos and chat to Dave Cornthwaite – a British guy skate boarding from Perth to Brisbane. We felt inspired by him in pursuit of this challenge and goal – for charity. We then felt sorry for him when we went through a good 15kms of roadworks, slowing to 40ks across gravel and through detours.

Then on to Balladonia Roadhouse for morning tea stop and cake for David's birthday – a beautiful coconut cheesecake made by Maria. A few ks down the road and we stopped for photos at the sign indicating the 90 mile straight – Australia's longest straight road at 146.6km yes it is long and straight! At the other end is Caiguna Roadhouse and our lunch stop.

A little further on and we turned right, off the Nullabor and towards a Bird Observatory, with 4WD engaged again we drove over white sandy hills, among beach scrub and came to the old Telegraph Station. We'd been following the disused poles on the side of the track on the way in. The current volunteers at the Bird Observatory (Apad, Mary and Zac) a family residence there for not quite 2 months, were surprised by our numbers! We enjoyed a brief chat/tour and history of the place before 4WD towards the beach and walking out on the fine white sand to touch the icy Southern Ocean. An old boat wreck was a popular photo subject for us. The sun was fading as we drove back along the sandy tracks, turning at Green Bottle Junction,

our driving lights showing us an 'enchanted forest' of closely hanging trees. Twists and turns on the track to a clearing where we set up camp on both sides of the track.

A roaring camp fire, some warm dinner and dampness and chill in the air. We put our clocks forward 1 ½ hours – another sign that the east is unfortunately getting closer and our journey has just a few days to go.

Lynne and Michael

Day 41 – Thursday

Eyre Peninsula

Had a very cold night at camp – the sun was out while packing up but is now very grey. We are to continue on dirt track. We are heading for the ruins only timber and wire structure still standing and overgrown with vines and bushes. Walls and fences lined with old kerosene tins which had been split at the seams and flattened out and still to today the "Shell" insignia can be seen stamped into the tin.

Winding our way across east very flat out to the right and escarpment running parallel on right. Since smoko, vegetation has changed more dense and taller trees. Went through dingo fence on Madura Station. We have pulled into the left and there are old ruins maybe of another homestead? We have seen many old ruins and a car cemetery and have now arrived at the Madura Roadhouse for lunch. Unfortunately, there has not been very much wildlife or birds. At least we have had some left and right bends instead of all straight roads. We have just arrived at Eucla. The breeze very cool but in the sun out of the wind, beautiful. It has been another fine day. We had dinner in the restaurant both good and service good.

Emu and Leslie

Day 42 Friday 15th September

Dark awakening – since our clocks went forward, we have to be patient for the daylight. We are late leaving Eucla because of slow breakfast service in the café, then we all get back on to the Eyre Highway, stopping at various lookout points along the way – beautiful coastal panoramas, some with precipitous cliffs which need to be approached with great care.

We crossed the border to South Australia about 12kms out of Eucla. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, but there is a band of grey cloud along the horizon. We stopped at the Great Australian Bight Marine Park, the Nullarbor National Park, sighted a whale in the distance and took lots of photos.

We arrived at Nullarbor roadhouse where we had lunch. Temp quite warm. Proceeded along highway and stopped at Head of the Bight, which had a modern visitor centre, but more importantly, we were able to view several different families of whales in the bay. It was entrancing. I shall never forget watching mothers and calves playing in the deep water really close in – the viewing platforms were down a well constructed boardwalk, which zigzagged down to the water. It was a definite highlight of the trip.

Of all coincidences, we bumped into Addie and Ron on their way home from Perth! We tore ourselves away from the whales to knock over a few k's of the homeward journey. Turned off at Fowlers Bay and followed a dirt road to a sleepy little fishing town on the coast where we set up camp in the caravan park and then took off to explore the dunes along the coast. It was a lovely peaceful evening and some of the beach and cliff views were spectacular. We even saw another whale and her calf in one of the bays. Lowered our tyres for some beach driving and drove along the beach and finally the boys couldn't resist. Some high dune driving. We all got a big thrill getting up and down a huge dune. Darkness was falling and we were still on the beach.

Will we find our way back? Well, yes we did, thanks to Vic's navigating/map reading skills. Some of the keen drivers made plans to get up early and go again in the morning.

Ian and Jenny

Day 43 – Saturday 16th September Fowlers Bay to Elliston

This morning before dawn arrived, there were the sounds of packing in our campsite, as keen sand – 4wd'ers got ready to head out to the dunes to watch the sunrise and enjoy the morning colours.

In the words of Craig it was “Supercalafragialisticexpialadocious” It was unreal, fantastic, wonderful, excellent!!!! They returned to camp invigorated.

At 8.30am everyone was ready to fly and Vic went to settle the bill while we enjoyed a little moment on the jetty out and over the bay, before saying goodbye to Fowlers Bay and the Fowlers Bay Caravan Park.

We took the road out through Penong. Sebastian spotted the first windmill of the day! This made him so happy that he decided he wanted to spot and call them all. Instead he kept a tally (well at least until he got bored of it). His total to the other side of Penong was 71.

In Penong we took a detour out to Point Sinclair, where Vic said we'd find Cactus Beach – a world renowned surfing beach. Again the views were spectacular and we spent a little time watching surfers on the huge waves. Another pink salt lake on one side of the causeway only demanded a Kodak moment, as did the huge sand dunes, whose tops were blowing off thanks to the gusty winds. This detour was well worth the stop!

Another side road took us to Port Lahurt Harbour where we stopped for morning tea. Beautiful. Some of the group took a dip, but others were more cautious after reading the plaque that explained how an eleven year old boy had been taken by a shark in the 80's. it was hard to believe that such a tranquil idyllic spot could also be a landmark

for deep sadness for at least one family. Needless to say, David and I were triggered to appreciate our beautiful son and we didn't let him swim.

On the way back to Penong we learned that Edward John Eyre passed by on 15/11/1840. Wow so many years ago!!

Next stop was the inspection point for fresh fruit and vegies on the edge of Ceduna. This was predominantly a refuel stop and we were on our way again quickly, but not until we'd done a couple of laps of the "Ceduna speedway for Citizens and Tourists". We got really dizzy and made locals stare in wonder before making tracks to Streaky Bay for lunch.

Sebastian was all set to eat fish and chips, so when we arrived we hit the Bistro of the Streaky Bay Hotel and ordered snapper and chips and sat outside, looking over the water while we enjoyed the sumptuous fresh fish.

On the road again after half an hour and the next quick stop was at 'Murphy's Haystacks'. Amazing rock formations, that triggered different memories in different members of the group – some thought they looked like 'Evans Crown' or 'Kangaroo Island' or even the 'Devil's Marbles'.

A final quick sprint down the highway brought us to the Waterloo Bay Caravan Park in Elliston, where we were booked in for the night. After pitching tents quickly, most of the group headed out for a look at the cliffs and views at Waterloo Bay and Elliston Lookout – where they watched the sun set.

This was the last night that Mark and Craig were going to spend with the group and some of the group went to the pub to party with them. As bed time approached the boys said their goodbyes and lots of tears were shed – the last few days of the trip will be very different without them. We will really miss their antics!

Maria, David and Sebastian

Day 44 – Sunday 17th September

We awoke early today to bid farewell to Markus and Craig, needing to be home for work they decided to shoot through. Big shock to get home! Early pack up to beat the sandflies. We had a run out to the local lookouts where the edges, a lot of them, were undercut and only between 100 to 200 mm thick!

Steve radioed in to Vic 'spectacular scenery'. There are six surfers and 1 great white in the water, wait 5 surfers and 1 great white in the water!

On the way through Port Lincoln we drove around the harbour and saw Australia's, possibly the world's biggest fishing fleet, all the boats were called "Jenn-ny" (Forest Gump voice).

We had a rest stop at a wetlands. Ian entered the amenities and wanted to know how to use it. If you don't know by now we can't help you!

We pushed through to Port Augusta, the southern Flinders Ranges are visible on the horizon (a trip for next time). Tonight is Michael and Lynne's last night with us. We will be eating and drinking into the night.

We are in another great caravan park (still not as good as the worst bush camp!) Big 4 Port Augusta Caravan Park. Markus and Craig rang from Broken Hill with a special goodbye message for Sebastian (he slept through their departure). They actually met up with another Great Divide Tour group being guided by Wayne.

Michael and Lynne have just won the draw for the set of Cooper Tyres, congrats to them! We spent the evening describing our highlights of the trip, too many to mention (you all know your own!). A fantastic evening had by all. Future trips are already being planned!

Mark

Day 45 Monday 18th September Port Augusta to Mildura

As we were to go back to EST our departure time was set for 8am. After farewells to Lynne and Michael, who were heading off to Adelaide via the Barossa Valley and a "Kooli" dog display or show then home to Melbourne. We headed off south also before heading into the Southern Flinders Ranges via the Horrocks Pass, crossing over 2 bridges and one causeway to get to the turnoff. It was a lovely climb through the hills and interesting to see the remains of old stonework from the old road. Many old ruins, brick and stone buildings left to deteriorate scattered along the route.

Large water pipes also followed the route for many kms. We also saw an old stone viaduct with several arches supporting it still in very good condition but no longer used. The countryside was quite hilly in parts and quite flat in other with a good portion of it under cultivation or with stock, predominantly sheep, goats and small amount of cattle. Many windmills were sighted and the tally mounted. Gum trees and pine trees also dominating the scene.

We stopped at Gladstone for morning tea and had a "Sturts" break. Here some lovely old buildings still in use from it's heyday. The old station building was opposite our parking spot; now obsolete. Continuing on through beautiful farmland we came through to Burra, initially fore a look at the historic town, then make this our lunch stop. A few of the group browsing and buying items at the various antique and collectable shops in town. It is famous for its old copper mine and malachite stone which were found here. Some gold mining is still being done here.

After lunch we headed for Mildura. The countryside becoming flatter with less and less crops and the vegetation getting sparser, almost like the desert again. As we entered the Murray Valley to Renmark Vineyards became more prolific together with olive plantations and fruit orchards.

We saw a bush fire in the distance which apparently was a 'controlled' burn that got out of hand due to a change in the wind and was well and truly away with great puffs

of smoke clouds in the air. Once hitting the 'main' road from Adelaide we struck traffic and the convoy got separated by several "B" double trucks. Emu and John had a good conversation with a friendly talkative 'truckie'.

We arrived a little late but soon were all on board the Paddleboat PB Rothbury, heading off up the river. We were served a beautiful meal, chicken and lamb off the spit, jacket potatoes, carrots, peas and cauliflower cheese and later chocolate cheesecake or pavlova for dessert.

Vic called to Murray Wilton on 2GB and the Captain was also asked to speak to him then blowing the horn and whistle for the listeners.

A lovely relaxing evening on the River enjoying the sunset and passing view – beautiful homes along the bank, caravan parks, numerous houseboats moored in inlets and some tied up for the night with holidaying families and groups on board. Thank you Vic for a great farewell to top off a great Across Oz Trip.

Barbara and John (BJ)

Day 46 – Mildura – West Wyalong Tuesday 19th September

Left Mildura at 9.30am giving everyone an hour to take a look around the place. We met up down at the car park where we went on the paddle steamer last night. We stopped in Euston a little town on the Murray River for morning tea. We have now left Victoria and we are in NSW. It is very windy here at Euston.

We also stopped to buy local fruit on the way. Plenty of oranges, mandarins and lemons and avocados for sale only \$2 a bag.

The landscape changed as we left Euston and made our way to Hay. The need for rain was obvious as we looked at the dryness of the farm lands. It was so windy that the cars were being buffeted around. As we approached Hay we decided to have lunch at the Hay Shearing Museum.

Sebastian found some UNO cards there and had games with Jenny and Stephen until his lunch was ready. We left Hay around 2.15pm. Maria, David and Sebastian left us at Goolgowi and headed off to Narrandera to visit relatives. Everyone wished them well.

The landscape started to change as we approached Rankin Springs. It is obvious they have had rain in this area as we saw all the green grass alongside the road. We had a quick comfort stop there.

As we left we had about 100 kms to go to reach West Wyalong. We arrived at West Wyalong around 5.15pm. we are staying at the Country Road Motor Inn Motel tonight and having dinner at the local club. Tomorrow we head for home.

It has been a wonderful trip and have seen some amazing places. Thanks Vic, Eric and Anne.

Ann and Stephen

Day 47 20/9/06

West Wyalong to Sydney

The final day of our great adventure has arrived, the ease of camping in a motel was appreciated by all, we even missed packing away the tents and swags.

We had a great breakfast just 50 metres from the Motel and were on the road by 7.30am. A cold change had passed through during the evening and the temperature had dropped to 18 degrees, quite a change from the 34 degrees of yesterday.

It was a very somber trip home as not only was it the end of our great adventure but from 9am on ABC radio the memorial service for Steve Irwin was broadcast and it brought a teary eye to many of us. When we reached Bathurst it also seemed appropriate that we visit the Mt Panorama circuit where only the day before they held a service for Peter Brock, the flowers and tributes were still on the track and we had the chance to sign the condolence book for Brocky.

So as you see it was a last day tinged with sadness but we reflected on all the amazing sights we had seen, it had been a truly amazing trip. I arrived home at 3.30pm after battling with the traffic of Sydney and wondering how long it would take for me to adjust back to the hustle and bustle of city life which is far more stressful than exploring Australia.

Vic Widman

Baked Ricotta Cheesecake

180g sweet dry biscuits (eg milk arrowroot), crushed
125g butter, melted
90g desiccated coconut
4 eggs
1 cup caster sugar
500g ricotta cheese
200g almond meal (or flaked almonds)
Finely grated rind and juice of one lemon.

Base

- mix butter, biscuit crumbs and coconut together and press into a well greased cake tin.
- put into fridge while preparing filling.

Filling

- beat eggs together and add sugar slowly while continually beating. Add lemon rind and juice and mix again.
- mash up ricotta cheese with a fork and mix in the almond.

- add liquid into ricotta and mix evenly.
- pour filling onto base and bake @ 180 degrees in a pre-warmed oven until the filling is set and light golden colour (about 1 hour). Cake should come away from side of tin when done.

Serve hot or cold!!

Springform tins are easier to handle

Maria Romeo

NAMATJIRA DRIVE CUP (read in 'race call' style)

Ladies and Gentlemen: Welcome to the Northern Territory races. Here we are for the running of the **Across Oz Namatjira Drive Cup**. An event held every 4 years for the 3 tonne and over class.

As they're lining up to begin today, just the one scratching, one scratching, Keith and Narelle Farmer not going the distance, and yes that's a great shame ...

Ok, they're lining up, they'reracing, out of Alice Springs and Ormiston Gorge and on the treacherous Namatjira Drive.

Vic Widman takes an early lead and spots an oncoming dip AND a vehicle. Michael was keeping pace, but OH NO, he's stopped for a photo! Ron and Theresa are rocketing along and ...NO, they've done a tyre, their second for the season, and they won't be happy about that. Emu passes a Landcruiser tray back and loses his false teeth on the corrugations!

Two Fords pass the Prado of Ian and Jenny – that's a Laser and Falcon. The Cruiser of David, Maria and Sebastian is cruising and they go through a deep gutter. Sebastian spots a skeleton. Craig and Mark stop to help Ron and Theresa with the flat. Yes, they are true bush mechanics!

But Vic makes a right hand turn and Ron and Adrienne slow for the hanging dust and then a steep dip. Mark moves up with corners that are loose and fast. He sees a cow on the road.

No Vic has a couple more good dips and John and Barbara are going through them now – WOOPDIDOOO!! David and Heidi are at the rear, they're out of touch and can't hear where lunch will be – questions will be asked of their trainer and syndicate.

Steve and Ann go through a quiet patch but the event is not over yet!

What are they doing?! Eric and Anne aren't in the race! They're bringing up the rear and They are COUNTING SOMETHING!! They are counting windmills – oh come on people, you can't miss the Namatjira Drive Cup!! Get on with it people!

But it's not over; hang on Emu has a problem – he's stopping – to check his nuts.

What's this?! Mark has stopped for a "Sturts". Ron and Theresa see a goanna and Vic's out front .. but he can't find the turn off to Kintore and its MICHAEL who finds the fluorescent sign painted on the road.

But Adrienne and Brian might be stopping for fuel .. are they? Aren't they? Will they, won't they? No they'll hold there in that position.

And that lets Vic through the turn!! Ladies and Gentlemen – what a boilover. **It's VIC, VIC, VIC – 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the Across Oz Namatjira Cup.**

A splendid day for the event and we'll check on dividends later!

Written by Lynne Cazaly

Mates of the Pods – J D

Sit beside me here Matilda
In this bit of shade
You and I are growing older,
You are very frayed.
I am grey and gaunt and haggard
You have thickened out,
Though I hate to use the phrasing,
You are "getting stout".
Miles through heat and wet, together
We have tramped the track,
I upon my broken boot soles
You upon my back.
In your grip you held the duffel,
Gathering of years,
Lighter then you were, Matilda,
Mem'ry tells with tears.
Time was when your outer garment
Matched the ir'ry's white
When the blue that broke its snowline
Was the blue of night
Comrade then and comrade ever,
You are dear to me,
As when first we took the highway,
Young and strong and free,
Though your like an old umbrella,
Bulge and flop and gape,
Neither of us from the other
Ever planned escape
Up again, the way is weary,
And we may not lag

To my shoulders old matildas..
Worn and ragged swag.

Heidi

SIMPSON AND HAY RIVER

AUGUST 5 – 16 , 2006

Group 2

Day 2 – 6/8/06

Mark Herzog in “Tinkerbelle II” (it is such a dainty little truck!) GUIV. Pressure is on, the first to write. I will try to be as specific as my memory allows. Left Cobar 9ish, tar for about 46ks then what we came for – dirt. Although this first section was well graded and smoother than most city roads!

Stopped for morning tea at Louth. Lunch at Tilpa Pub. Encountered some very badly chopped tracks and as this exception to the rule clearly shows it is acceptable to drive whilst the roads are wet. Also encountered ‘some’ water over the track. This has dramatically shown a design fault with series GU Patrols, it is impossible to prevent water and mud from attaching itself to the front, side and roof. I will be contacting Nissan in regards to this (could be loose nut behind wheel?). Unfortunately, Ian from Kangaroo Tent City has had an alternator fail in his Jackaroo, the battery is on a trickle charger, hopefully it won’t hinder his progress.

Staying the night in the White Cliffs Underground Hotel
To be continued ...

Mark

Day 3 – Sam and Andy

Off we go into the beautiful sun drenched morning, after a full breakfast and a night of good laughter in the grotto underground where we all slept like rabbits in a burrow. Continuing on our way to Noccundra we left the local situation via the Silver City Highway, to the township of the well known Milparinka, which by then lunch time was upon us. Unfortunately most of A Group including Andy and I were made to wait almost an hour for various orders. However, our young lady was absolutely stressed out by the time she served me, I thought she was going to throw the pies and

chips at me. Peter was not amused as we had fallen behind. All peace was restored when both groups made it together at Tibooburra for our much needed petrol stop.

Sturt National Park was our first night of camping, all arrived safely as we all proceeded to pitch our tents. Scattered about in the lovely area everyone is collecting firewood and no doubt once the fire is lit a barbeque will be forthwith and no doubt a beer and tale will be told.

I suppose the disappointment to most was, hardly a kangaroo not even an emu in sight, but then you can't expect all in a couple of days. Its been truly wonderful so far and can only get better in the forwarding days, roll on day 4.

8 August 2006 – Destination Arrabury

Extended lunch time due to overrun pub at Mikparinka and an excessive amount of time to fuel at Tibooburra meant we were 2 hours late and did not make our scheduled camp spot at Noccundra. However, we did make Noccundra water hole and pub for morning tea today. Lunch was at roadside and we struck camp at a "Vic Widman" special camp site. All beautifully secluded with ample privacy for all.

En route we were royally entertained, starting with the announcement that today is Sam and Andy's 42nd wedding anniversary. Expensive presents had been purloined from the unexpected and were appropriately presented. Heidi confessed to a nickname of Tinkerbell and related a Queen of the Desert tale on a trip she and David made last year – something like a fairy outfit tripping around the Simpson. To our horror, Mark – at 6'3 some 15" taller than Heidi and conservatively twice + her weight, also answers to a nickname of Tinkerbell. Could be the next Priscilla.

Good stone road, interesting stops at Bourke and Wills memorial at the Dig Tree, passing through the Jackson Oil Fields (donkeys at work) and some beautiful river gums in water filled creeks. Although the sun was a nuisance at times, it didn't stop eyes from spotting Alec's shovel that somehow dispatched itself from it's holder.

The forward group had issued that their tail end Charlie stayed with a temporary sick vehicle and our leaders Peter and Ngaire assumed the role of tail end to Group 1 and leader to Group 2. Under radio questioning, he admitted that he was entitled to double pay.

Sadly, today's author managed a fever that evening and could not ask the question of Vic and Peter over the camp fire. What wonderful support both Great Divide Tours and other members of the party gave to me – helped erect and strike camp, offered to drive next day, first aid advice etc etc. Comforting to know that such excellent assistance is available to unforeseen happenings. Thanks and well done!

Sadly, I went to bed before 6pm so have no gossip or otherwise from the camp fire (although there was much merriment and discussion)

Thanks for the opportunity

Jim McCracken and Les Park

**9/8/06 – Day 5 - Wednesday
Arrabury to Birdsville**

Venus is bright in the eastern dawn sky showing the way for the sun. The near full moon brilliant in the western sky, hear the twitter of tiny birds greeting the new day.

The beginning of the day started similar to Paul Kelly's "One Night the Moon". With Irene creating her own story "One Morning in the Sun" for it was so beautiful she wandered off over the dunes becoming geographically misplaced. Alec, Irene's hero, went to her rescue in his Cruiser 100 over the dunes to bring her back safely, needing some guidance from our leaders. It is amazing how strong the forces of the universe are.

We leave camp about 0900, leaving the sand and Spinifex in flower back into the flat gibber with small undulations, bright green shoots push their way through the red brown stones, small scrubby trees grow in the depressions, a flock of corellas fly low in front of our dusty corrugated path over another cattle grid and the odd muddy hole or creek with about 30cm of water waiting for our tyres to disturb it.

"Kangaroo and Emu Dreaming"

The country changes again with large red dunes to our right. the gibber stones becoming larger and we move up onto another plain on the jump ups. Out to Haddon Cnr, sand, dust, stones and a cattle fence left to decay, over a sand dune past 5 emus over another dune to Haddon Cnr SA/QLD for morning tea. Water lying around the post requiring a rock hop to sign the visitor's book. Time to head off again. We disturb 2 galahs as we drive through a small creek bed. A bird of prey hovers and circles in the vast cloudless blue sky, with large mirage lakes on the horizon.

While Stephen sleeps the drive is quiet for a short time.

Us being in the second we pass the 222km to Birdsville sign at 1235 hrs Birdsville Developmental Rd. a wedge tail eagle glides in the warm midday air and we keep 3.5kms behind the vehicle in front to keep out of the dust, the dust lingers in the still air and a fine layer settles on all that it pleases within the car. We stop in a creek bed before Betoota for lunch at 1314 hrs leaving again at 1354hrs. A brief stop at an empty Betoota Hotel. The day warming to the mid 20's. 2 whistling kites circle our party and we go through another puddle in the road. With a promise of a shower we head towards Birdsville.

No quiet time, Stephen is back on the airwaves.

The roadside dams contain water, another whistling kite in search of food. Not a cloud in the sky and the smell of dust fills our nostrils. We pass Moonda Lake to our left in the distance. The dunes becoming more a Spinifex and small scrubby bushes dot the dunes. Some bright with yellow flowers. We continue past the Cordillo Downs turnoff and a willy-willy twists it's way across our path. The low lying areas lush green and damp, the gibber continues between the dunes. Past one lonely horse near the Hobbit Cave. Past the Bedoone sign to our right onto a bitumen emergency airstrip. Past the first oncoming vehicle all day @ 1556 hrs.

We arrive at our campsite between 1630-1700 hrs at Birdsville Caravan Park. Sadly for Ian, he has to leave us yet again as he left his swag at Haddon Cnr. The moon makes for us a wonderful show as it blossoms to it's fullness and admires its reflection on the Diamantina River, frogs call to their mates and birds make a noisy entrance to their evening roosts. All bar one, enjoy soup, roast and dessert at Birdsville Hotel. Ian arrives safely back with his swag at 0300 hrs.

What a Great Day, Heidi and David

10th August 2006

Birdsville to QAA Line/Simpson Desert

Waking up to the sounds of the frogs in the water and birds at the caravan park in Birdsville, after breakfast we all pack up and head for the baker to restock and on to the museum.

John Menzies, an extraordinary man, is our guide around the museum. 50 minutes of Australian history centred around just a few of the thousands of working collectables he has in his shed. From all over Australia, John has devoted his time to restoring and maintaining precious memorabilia. Finishing off his talk with a demonstration by one of his loveable mules.

Then, after a quick morning tea (another chance to sample something from the bakery) we are off to the Simpson.

We stop just before Big Red to adjust our tyre pressure and get some wise instruction from our intrepid leaders. Everyone makes the top with ease, as the recent rains have given us a firmer and therefore easier ride. One puncture casualty, which is fixed quickly by Eric once we are down on the clay plan.

As we venture further into the desert the scenery starts to change. Cane grass, Spinifex and the Gidgee Trees. Beautiful colours and trees that look like thousands of Bonsai.

Listening out on Channel 10 for oncoming traffic, we encounter a fire truck and recovery vehicle. It is easy to see how dangerous it could be if you come to the desert unprepared.

We have lunch by a dry river bed and enjoy a little shade under the trees. After lunch we enter the National Park. Shortly after we discover possibly, the resting place of Laurence of Arabia's brother, his bike, the only sign of his being there!

On the way we learnt about Aboriginal ways of testing bush food. One was yellow colouring – poisonous, green colouring – okay. We weren't too confident to test that theory, as it was Steve who told us this info, not an Aboriginal.

We also found out 100's and 1,000's are made in Brunswick, Victoria.

As we travel further west the dunes get closer together. Thousands of moths fill the air, aptly named Simpson moths!

After setting up and cooking the evening meal we all sit down to a good yarn around the fire. Tell a few furbey's and jokes and then off to bed. We slept under the stars, the moon is still very bright, but lower in the sky. It is deafening silent! No city traffic here. Just the odd person snoring peacefully.

Thanks for the taste of heaven guys!

Jo Sandford

11th August day 7

Left camp 9.12am going to Poeppel Corner. Had to wait for an east bound convoy to pass before we could get out of our camp site. 9.22am on the road west.

Passed many other groups of travellers – had to stop quite often to allow them thru.

Ann tried to pass Peter on a parallel track but got in trouble from Eric. It was amazing to see just how far the dried salt extended past the road/track. It would be very interesting to see it covered in water. Tinkerbelle is apparently going to put on her wings for all to see!!

On the track Peter pointed out an *Australis Invertus* tree however, David corrected Peter and explained that it was an *Australis Invertus Mortus* (a sub species). You would think that after all these that the tour leader would get it right.

We are apparently 2-3 weeks too early as there are no flowers (just like no camels, no kangaroos, no emus) unlike what it says in the Vic Widman promotional literature. Tinkerbelle and the rest of us are considering taking out a Class Action against Vic for false advertising.

12.20pm left Poeppels and went via the dunes. Ian advised that when he went back to Haddon Corner he hit a kangaroo, but did not bring any meat back to camp. Peter showed everyone another *Australis Invertus Mortus* but Tinkerbelle had trouble connecting the dots. Finally she identified a dead tree that was upside down. She then 'got with the program' and identified an *Australis Invertus Trailerus* – commonly known as 'dead trailer'.

Very slow going due to too many cars – Group 1 keeps getting bogged or stuck or something – Vic is their leader so everyone can understand why it is happening. Good view from the top of hill looking over the salt lake – very steep descent. Peter advised Ann lunch was in 5 minutes – we need to buy him a watch!

Matt and Jo got lost and took Ian with them. This was the first day that we had let Matt drive without us following closely behind him. Tomorrow, we will be back behind him because he just can't be trusted.

Sam and Andy pierced a tyre on the Troopie and Eric changed it for them. Peter said something about if it had been a Ferrari he could have done it. Eric will fix it tonight in camp. Eric's really good.

Because Matt and Jo were so late in we had a long lunch break. Jo was very embarrassed. Matt was Matt. Peter asked Ann to snatch strap Mat behind her – Matt was not happy.

We had lunch at Jackson Oil well, then proceeded on to the next one Beachcomber 1 to see another sign about that oil well. We were on the last leg of day when Stephen broke a shock absorber at 5pm. Luckily peter had a replacement one and Peter fixed it for us. We didn't get into camp until dark at 6.30pm. The moths once again were really bad. The camp was really spread out last night.

Thanks to David and Ian who helped us put up our tent. Also thanks to Peter and Ngaire.

Ann and Stephen

Day 8 – August 11

The stars were at their most brilliant until la luna rose late last night. She sailed through the sky until the sun broke our camp this morning @ 25 19 275, 137 53 36E and 44m altitude.

We left the campsite at 9.00 this morning after a sensational start – Vic resplendent in lolly-pink vest, Irene's purple socks spotted a matching pink. Sam looked splendid wearing a Liverpool scarf (or beer mat) subject of joint debate. First 4 kms we drove due east then turned left @ 25 19 04S, 173 56 29E. Vegetation is sparse – intermittent straw plant, Spinifex and a basket bush/fold-up bush. We drove along parallel with the dunes, the wind has sculpted the dunes to form a vertical (not quite) wall and metres high in places – tiny trails of little desert creatures cover the side and Sebastian's father observed they could well be the inspiration for Aboriginal Art.

Stopped for morning tea early, then continued on along a rough track. Sometimes parallel with the dunes, sometimes over. The sand was softer, the peaks lower but steeper than before – several vehicles came to grief – one car pulled off with snatch strap, the others over after a few tries. Driving through the dunes, sand was smothered with emerald green foliage – seedlings 25mm – 50mm high, about to flower after the rains a month ago.

Lunch was called at 25 01 48S, 137 53 55E – a dot in the desert, aside a track. After lunch Vic went the wrong way, so Alpha Team made the most of the opportunity and took the right track and the lead. As we toddled (Pete's description) along the track vegetation changed, grew more concentrated, thicker – passed gum trees vertically challenged, but it was new group clustered around dead trunks burnt out by bush fire 18 months ago. Beginning of Hay River district. Sand dunes as we travelled north were more mobile than those we crossed yesterday – they are almost alive, drifting across the track, consuming anything in its path – track, tree, plant. We stopped at 24

16' 03S - 137 44' 02E looking for camp 16 and the Blaze Tree (Madagan's camp) at 3.45pm, 30.1 deg in car at 24 44' 22S - 137 42' 49E.

Stephen's right rear shock absorber came to grief 24 hours after the left rear shock died, so Pete stayed behind to replace it and Alpha Team trotted into camp at 5.00pm behind Eric. Camped beside road at 24 38' 57S - 137 40' 11E.

Today's statistics -

Bottomed over sand dunes: 1 challenger, 1 discovery 2 landcruisers.

Wildlife seen: Eagles 3, Caterpillar 1, Birds 6, Moths ?, Camels 0, Kangaroos 0

Tracks seen: Dingo, camel, fairy camel, little desert creatures, snake and blundstones.

Another day in heaven - thanks for the guiding.

Alison and David Wiesenfeld - linent@bigpond.net.au

When we got sick of the banter we listened to sound track of Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (Bob Dylan) and 7 different versions of 'knocking on heaven's door' perfect music for driving through the Simpson.

Day 9 - Sunday 138

Hay River Bed to Lake Caroline

The day as Alec and Irene see it.

It was so sweet hearing John call his sweetheart - sweetheart this morning - first thing and I thought this is going to be yet another beaut day. Alec and I slept in our swags last night admiring the beautiful moonlit sky and bright stars.

A large hawk flying overhead as we left camp this morning to go to Lake Caroline via the dry Hay River bed. The vegetation changed all the way through, the blue grey colour in some of the vegetation with black witches brooms and beautiful river gums. There were beautiful corellas, finches, and king fisher. When we stopped for lunch Peter had suspension problems on his landcruiser.

Bulk of the party left Peter, Ngaire, Eric and Anne to repair the vehicle as we descended into the dry river bed, we drove approximately ½ km along the river bed where we exited the river bed and drove around 12km to Lake Caroline - passing through lunar like landscape - dry mud flats and black rocks of all sizes, some so small they appeared to melt into the surface like bitumen.

On our return back to the road - Sebastian spotted a lone camel, which we were all excited to see. When back on the main road, we drove 8km to camp - Pete, Eric and girls joined us at camp around 8pm.

What a beautiful sight it will be out here with all the lovely wildflowers just starting to appear, some in front of red sand dunes just spectacular - pen won't write any more.

Irene and Alec Wiseman

PS found another pen. What a fun-tastic trip. Thank you to everyone involved. we have loved every minute of it. Don't really want to go home. We have made some beautiful new friends. Thank you – Thank you.

With much love Irene and Alec

Day 10 – Lake Caroline – Batton Hill Camp

Late start this morning, dingo wake up call right on cue as requested previous evening. About 2-3 across the river. Everyone has now settled into the camp routine. I now believe the first days problems were due to “first day exuberance!” the drive into Lindsay's camp highlighted the ever changing and diverse Australian environment. Early botanists must have passed out with excitement!

Many photos were taken, I have no doubt they will not be able to do justice to the real thing. Lindsay's camp is an oasis in this harsh environment, toilet with walls! A shower (although previous toilets definitely had better views!) The sunset tour was fantastic, will be hard to explain to people back home, I don't think I will even try. Campfire dinner. I do hope Vic doesn't take up drinking! Could only imagine how long his jokes would take then.

Peter and Eric successfully fixed Peters cruiser. The Range Rover sport has now caught us after a 4 day pursuit. We appear to be famous as everyone reported our passing them on the track to the sport drivers (Mat 4x4 Aust) and Hendo. Hendo nearly passed out last night when Lindsay saw him with alcohol and told him this was a 'dry' community and he would be fined \$1000 for his drink! Lindsay's in joke was eventually explained. I think Mat passed out when Hendo asked him what was left in the 4 x 4 Aust budget. Looking forward to Lindsay's bush tour tomorrow, should be fantastic!

Mark, Ted and Tinkerbell

Tuesday 15th

Continuing on the final day and night on Lindsay Bookies land at Batton Hill, I did say on day 3 that we were having a great time, well, it has just got better and better. Right along the tour there has never been a dull moment.

So commenting on today, another completely different experience. Lindsay telling us about the different bush tucker and medicine plants, he also led the convoy around his land which covered kilometres of bush and flat top mountains. We had interesting walks and wonderful views and the colour of the rock formations at sunset was a standout.

Also to my relief (and every one else's) Lindsay provided us with toilets and showers. Especially after all this time on the road. A most welcome surprise dinner for all, after a rather long day.

What more can I say, we will be heading for Alice Springs tomorrow, our last day, always a sad moment, but life goes on and there will be another trip hopefully for Andy and I in the not so distant future.

Special thanks to Vic, Peter and Eric, not forgetting Ian, without you guys we wouldn't be here.

Thanks for the memory

Sam and Andy

Day 12 – 16th August

Lindsay had left camp the night previous, with family, for a land council meeting. Dawn therefore saw everyone rising and beginning the 'pack' to continue the adventure.

By 8.30am all were ready and all somewhat subdued by the thought of leaving such a peaceful and very interesting environment, lunch food for thought and reflection on the alternative form of living being experienced by Lindsay and family.

En route to our morning break and on the long (80k) drive through the property to the Plenty Highway, Heidi related her insightful discussions with Chris (stockman) who stayed behind to care for the camp and property whilst Lindsay and family were absent. The experiences of a tribal upbringing with minimal modern western living facilities were most interesting.

A short journey from the Plenty Highway to Jervois Homestead for refuelling, morning tea (and a very welcome ice cream at the shop).

The 3 hour journey to Alice Springs and our camp site was a good road, eventually on to white line marked bitumen, traffic and traffic lights. However, the plush amenities at our caravan park were most welcome. An evening restaurant meal for all was most enjoyable, a fitting end to a wonderful 12 days experience.