

ACROSS THE TOP
8 - 29 September 2010

ACROSS THE TOP
(with Outback Vic and others)

Day 1 – Wednesday 8th September – Karumba – Burketown

T’was the night before Christmas and all through the house.....oops! sorry, wrong story. There we were gathered, on a street corner no less, not a red light in sight, outside that famous Karumba establishment The Fishbreath Café.

The meeting was very formal....some stood to attention, others just leant on each other (depending on how much you drank last night) all awaiting words of wisdom from our esteemed leader Vic and his sidekick Eric. It was soon evident that this was to be a very informal meeting as friendly banter started flying and Vic was forced to intervene with a firm “There’ll be no in jokes on this trip thanks!” With the necessary words of wisdom completed, we duly set forth on our way to our first port of call – Normanton.



Go on you tell him he has bad breath!

It did not take very long before the first trivia question arose. “Do Brolgas have a natural leaning towards the left or the right hand side of the road??” Answer “Depends which way you are travelling!” I could see that the opening line of this diary did indeed have parallels to Christmas, we appear to be travelling with at least 3 wise men!

After travelling past Krys the croc as we entered Normanton, I feared the stories on this trip may well be as big as he was. After a few Sturt Deserts and some cannibals in the group getting their fix of red meat we set sail for Burketown.



Grevillea at the lunch stop

First stop was camp 119 where we stopped to ponder what on earth Burke and Wills were doing out here in the heat and the dust (supposed to be a balmy 39 degrees today). Not wanting to hog this

special spot to ourselves we once again hit the beaten track towards Burketown.

Eventually Vic's grumbling stomach convinced him to pull off the road at a gravel pit by the side of the road where we managed to find a shade tree for each vehicle and we set about devouring lunch. Whilst stopped we noticed a lot of grevilleas growing around us that had obviously adapted well to the local environment (better than me!)

Onward we travelled, passing a profusion of...Calatropes plants (as we were informed by a lovely lady listening to our rantings and ravings from a nearby station). Our informant told us she was running a meagre 13,000 head of cattle on her property (one of the small ones) and was hanging out for the wet season come December/January.



Leichhardt Falls

After travelling past and through Termite City, we eventually arrived at Leichhardt River and falls. There we encountered fellow travellers of all types. One brave fellow was having a swim....but he was safe I guess as it was so hot even the crocodiles were stuffed (or was it actually dead?) One even braver traveller (from Brazil, by the flag on his vehicle) was doing the track on a push bike. Needless to say he was stretched out under the shade of a tree.

I'm not sure if he had done the 70kms of tar and had the 230km to look forward to or the other way around! Although the falls were not actually falling it nonetheless gave you a good picture of what it must be like when the big wet arrives.

As we hit the black top towards Burketown further trivial questions hit the airwave...."would anyone be carrying a cordless drill and if so who and why?" "Would the general store be carrying its normal array of goodies?" and the most important question of the day for bird lovers...."how did the Sore-Arse Crane get its name???" Oh, there was one other little gem (speaking of cranes) "Where would one likely to find a spare grub screw??" and so it was that we arrived at our shady air-conditioned campsite at Burketown.

Dennis and Robyn

Pps Was it my imagination or was the Little Bynoe River larger than its big brother the Bynoe River?

And just when you thought your job was finished.....

Nocturnal Notes -

After circling the wagons we circled the chairs and the night's participants in the Great Divide Tour's master chef competition took centre stage around the BBQ plate. Meat in all shapes and sizes and flavours hit the hot plate vying for meal of the night.

There was the great Aussie standard the snag, a couple of boutique steaks, a T-bone that looked like it had been taken off a dinosaur and mystery number that Vic threw on as a late contender. Alas, no winner was declared as it was too dark to see how well they had been plated up.

And being the first week in September, what should a young man's fancy turn to over dinner but...football!! Ah, you could see it in the women's faces – not that again! Don't we ever get a rest from that even out here. Never fear ladies it should all soon be over.. 'When the Saints Go Marching in!!' (St George that is!). *(Ed note: not all ladies need a rest from footy, of course Tigers footy)!*

Enough for one day, I'm retiring (in more ways than one!). **Dennis & Robyn Mk11**

Day 2 – Thursday 9th September

It was another warm night and the 'morning glory' did not eventuate. BJ had some mechanical issues to be seen to, so we all wondered around the old town of Burketown. In many ways, Burketown lived up to the reputation of that ill-fated explorer.

In 1866 the whole town was evacuated to Sweere Island to escape Gulf Fever, but by 1867 some had returned to set up a steam driven factory to manufacture brine cured beef for export to Batavia. It was abandoned in 1869 – no beef, no market. Several explorers found their way to Burketown, but none appeared to have distinguished themselves there.

Some of the group visited the artesian well at the beginning of the town. Finally, everyone was ready and we headed west at about 9.30am with a temperature of 31.

It was mainly bitumen at first across a very flat grassy plain. Just after the turn off to Gregory Downs we paused at a picturesque glade called Beames Brook before continuing south. It was a flat dusty road but smooth and easy. There

was more calatrop and more cattle on the open savannah grasslands which were occasionally interrupted by water courses marked by green eucalypts and acacias.

At about 10.30 we stopped for morning tea on a tributary of Beames Brook, which was lined with palm trees, eucalypts and melaleucas. A strongly flowing stream made a perfect stop.



Morning tea stop

We continued south. Vic recalled the sign showing car eating cattle as a few feral bovines appeared by the side of the road. We continued on a road that alternated between smooth gravel and bitumen until we finally reached Gregory Downs. The town (well, the pub really) is on a flat, dry plain, but only a few hundred metres away is the swiftly flowing Gregory River surrounded by all kinds of greenery and featuring the Crimson Finch (thanks Tony). It was a perfect place for lunch.

In the afternoon we headed west on the Wills Development Road towards Adels Grove. The journey was interrupted a

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couple of times by pesky warning lights, but we finally arrived and set up camp in the 'Grove' at about 3pm. By then, it was time for a swim in Lawn Creek, as the temperature was over 38 degrees.



Lunch stop on the Gregory River

If the diary is a little disjointed and hard to read, think of oppressive heat and marauding insects and take pity on the writer.



Stan demonstrates his adaptiveness

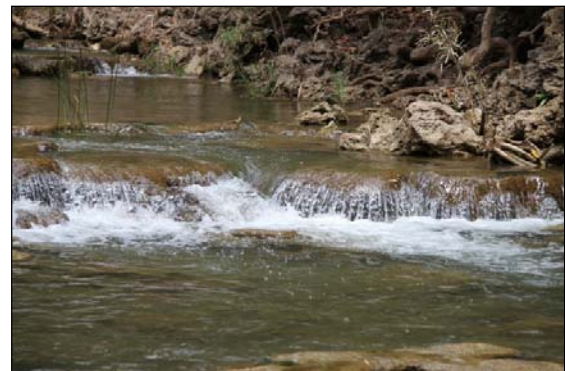
In the evening, we all gathered and had our evening meals around an imaginary campfire, then gradually turned off all the light in the hope that the insects would be discouraged. It was an early night.

Hugh

Day 3 – Friday 10th September

Adele Grove Camp - as we were to spend 2 nights here, we were able to have a leisurely breakfast and not take down the tents or pack up. However, we were awakened early by a cacophony of sounds by the numerous birds that roost in the Grove. Some melodious and some very sharp and harsh.

We left for Lawn Hill (Boodjamulla) National Park approx 15kms away. Vic and Tony, Dennis and Robyn, Hugh and Heather, the energetic ones, all went canoeing through the gorge. The remainder of us walked to the cascades across a steel suspension bridge which fortunately just skimmed across the surface of the water and not from a height. Brian and John both managed to reach the cascades with a great deal of effort from them both. Well done! Total distance close to 2kms return.



The cascades at Lawn Hill

The scenery was amazing, showing the full after effects of a wet season flood, with hundreds of trees uprooted and many re-sprouting branches from horizontal trunks. Huge palms also uprooted, caught in the Y of a tree branch and the top seen growing perpendicularly. Several of us had a dip in the swimming hole down from the cascades. The water was beautiful with

a very strong current heading towards the gorge.

Stan had a mishap and falling awkwardly, fortunately apart from some bruising and losing a little bark; with camera intact – made it out under his own steam.



Stan listens intently to another of Vic's stories

We returned to camp for lunch and a rest. Temp in mid 30's. We then regrouped and several of us ventured off to "Riversleigh", a fossil site approx 50kms away towards Mt Isa. Several good specimens were able to be seen around the base of the stony out crop and some of our group made the trip to the back of the site and return. Temperature now very hot; some of us staying in a replica cave – interpretive site with a giant crocodile and bird species from the era modelled in the wall of the cave, together with some stalagmites and stalagtites.

Our journey was eventful with our car having computer problems with Eric joining John on the return journey to try

and diagnose the problem. Calls made to Toyota at Mt Isa, but not much help. Filter cleaned out in camp – some sample of the fuel taken had some debris found in it. Fuel filter fault light now out. A trial run seemed as if problem now sorted.



One of the Troglodytes we saw.

After tea (later tonight) to avoid flies we sat around chatting and all reminiscing and telling each other our first cars. Some sedate, some sporty and some plain old – but each special bringing back many memories.

Then to bed – all tired after an energetic day.

Barbara and John (BJ)

Day 4 – 11th September

After a lovely stop over 2 nights at Adel's Grove we woke up to the news that our next camp – Kingfisher Camp – might not be open after all! However, after a phone call or two we are told that the farm manager has left but there is a young man there running the shop and the office who will honour group bookings already made. Thus we begin our journey to the Kingfisher camp.

It is a fairly good road through Lawn Hill Station which has some great scenery, very reminiscent of the Kimberley. There are also lovely wide, open plains. We have our first creek crossing of the day with what appears to be fairly deep water. So Vic, our intrepid leader, dons water shoes; rolls up his shorts and walks across – not on – to find if there are any hidden snags.



One of the many river crossings

At the next creek the water was wider and consequently looked a lot deeper. Vic once again did his walk through and once again it was okay to drive through safely. However, by this time after all had taken lots of photos, it was time for morning tea. So we all pulled off the road in time to see sixteen horses all come cantering to the creek, obviously looking for a drink. They drank their fill and continued their way.



And another

We continued on towards our camp, but, unfortunately, BJ started having car problems again. The engine would cut out and after a few seconds he would be able to start the motor again. This gradually got worse so that he was only going a kilometre before it stopped again.



Some real horsepower

Hugh and Heather had to stop and swap batteries as the one on the fridge was not charging properly.

BJ was now being towed by Eric so various options were canvassed as to what could be done. In the end it was decided that BJ and Barbara should take their vehicle to Burketown, accompanied by Eric and get the insurance man to have a look at it. He could then decide whether it was able to be taken to Mt Isa on a flat top vehicle and hopefully be repaired. BJ and Barbara would then catch up with us along the way.

Meanwhile, we left the lovely Lawn Hill station and went through to Bowthorn Station. To me, the scenery was less eye catching and the actual station property looked quite run down. Apparently it was once owned by a Kerry McGinnis, who used to do scones and tea if she knew you were coming! She has written a book called 'Pieces of Blue' detailing her childhood in living off the land and

moving around the Northern Territory from station to station.



Beautiful Kingfisher Camp

We have been through lots of gates today stopping always to open and shut them. The effort was worth it when we came to Kingfisher Camp. It was lovely and grassy and with loos and showers – super! Too hot for a fire but we had the usual “chat” time round a tea light.

Pam and Jim

Day 5 – 12th September – Kingfisher Camp to Calvert River

We woke up with a jolt at 5.30am. There’s a fire in the campsite. Relax! It’s the donkey being heated for the morning showers. Now there is time to enjoy the morning calls of the numerous birds around KFC. A Kingfisher has been spotted. A blue-winged Kookaburra looks down on us from above and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters dart among the trees. A cane toad intruder to Heather and Hugh’s tent came to a sticky end under Tony’s boot.

Vic has news from Burketown. The RACQ has inspected BJ’s car and arranged for it to be picked up this morning and taken on a flat top to Mt

Isa. Eric and Anne will join us at Hell’s Gate Roadhouse at morning tea.

At 9.00am we leave our green oasis and stop at the kiosk for a retail fix. Before long it is back to the bull dust. Along the way there is much bantering about the percentage of blue sky/land seen from the various vehicles.



Stan and bulldust seem to go together

Emerging onto the Savannah Way we have the luxury of a sealed road for a while. The rocky outcrops that give Hell’s Gate its name begin to appear indicating that the roadhouse, morning tea and the meeting with Eric are close. At Hell’s Gate we are warned that the road ahead is corrugated and there are water crossings. “Keep to the right when crossing the Calvert” the proprietor urges. Wollogorang Station, which we had heard was a wonderful place to view the Gulf and its’ crocs is now closed for business.

For lunch the promised beach with palm trees does not eventuate. Instead it is a quarry with red dust and one sparse tree.

Along the way our convoy is overtaken by a Jeep in a hurry. Tony remarks that he hopes he does not drown himself. It’s a premonition. We reach the Calvert and there in the centre is the drowned Jeep. Vic, Eric and Tony go to the rescue and

he is towed clear. Our convoy (keeping to the right) crosses without incident.



Uh oh, we told you so

Our campsite is a come-down from the oasis of last night – a bush camp above the Calvert. But it does have water views with birds soaring high above the river. Eric and Anne, the good Samaritans who stayed behind to assist with the Jeep belatedly can relax in camp. Bucket showers in a tiny bubbling creek cool us off after a very hot day.



The night rider

The usual after dinner chatter was interrupted by the sound of an approaching road train. Instantly everyone was on their feet to see the river crossing. But the truck stopped at the top of the hill. Lights went off and after a while they went on again. It then very slowly descended and crossed the river only to come up the rise and stop

outside the camping area. Lights off again! The prime mover turned and headed back towards the river. The penny dropped – one trailer had been brought across and the driver was returning to pick up the other left on the other side of the river. Most of the males in camp took off for a closer view of the action.

What an unexpected and exciting conclusion to the day.

Pat and Brian

Footnote: the truck was carrying cattle from Wollogorang to Daly Waters and took close to an hour to cross the river in the dark.

Day 6 – 13th September – Distance for day 435kms

Calvert River – Cape Crawford (Heartbreak Hotel)

It's 5.45am. It is still, not a breath of wind. Light is seeping into the tent. All around, birds are stirring – a few quiet chirps at first, slowly building till the raucous call of the blue winged kookaburra drowning the rest. The drone of an engine signals the first river crossing of the day. Having forded the river, the vehicle accelerates up the hill and fades into the morning. The camp is stirring.

Each camper pursues his or her own agendum – folding tents, breakfasting and packing the vehicle.

After a briefing by Vic, we assume our assigned positions in the convoy and move off. Vic's cruiser accelerates into the billowing dust. No wind! The dust hangs like a brown curtain till the particles slowly settle back to earth. I

have to hang back to avoid being enveloped.

Corrugations pattern the road, but, fortunately the Pajero skips across the top at 80 kph.

Having been warned, Surprise Creek did not catch us unawares. The crossing was rocky, but not difficult.

Once across, the convoy moved on. CB chatter kept everyone informed of approaching vehicles or potential hazards in the road's surface. We wiz by grassland dotted with small trees, apparently devoid of life, save the occasional bird darting through the canopy.



Tony crosses another river

After seventy three kilometres, the Robinson River cuts across our path shallower and less rocky than the Calvert, it is easily forded. On the other side, a small clearing provides some shade for morning tea. The heat is building towards the high thirties.

Soon after morning tea the scenery alters. A swamp stretches away on both sides of the road. Then taller trees appear, while the under story is marked by Macrazamias of varying heights – hardy plants for a harsh environment.

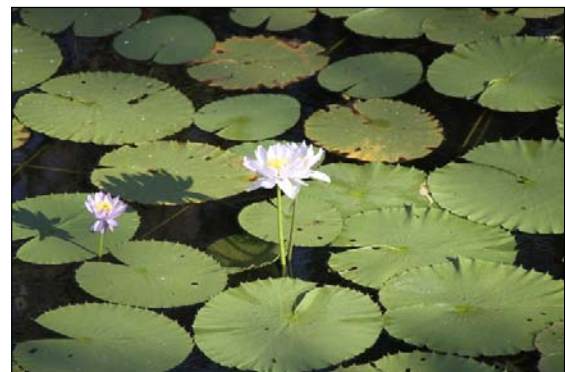
Vic spots a Jabiru standing beside a small waterhole and halts for a photo. I glide to a stop behind him and alight with camera ready. The Jabiru is a fine example, with bright orange legs glowing in the sunlight. As I raise my camera to shoot, powerful muscles activate huge wings and the Jabiru rises into the air. Curses! Missed! All that remains is a lone Darter fishing for lunch.

Vic vanishes into a dust cloud and the convoy pursues. Occasionally, as he rounds a distant corner, I glimpse a glint of sunlight on glass leading the dust cloud, like an earthbound comet hurtling down a dirt road.

Whisps of smoke from smouldering logs on a blackened landscape betray the burning off that precedes the wet season.

As we neared Borroloola, the road detoured through the river bed from which a new bridge is rising.

Last year, I travelled 30,000 k's around Australia and I could not recall a less inviting town than Borroloola. It does not even provide public toilets! One member of our group described it as a '*@*!!dump'. Appropriate!!



Lily pond on the way to Heartbreak Hotel

Having refuelled both our vehicles and ourselves, the convoy reassembled for a drive to Bing Bong, sixty kilometres distant, lying on the Gulf.

The dust of the morning became a memory as we sped northward on a good sealed road. Denied access to the port for security reasons, we pursued a dirt road along to Mule Creek boat ramp from which the gulf could be viewed. A fishing boat perched atop rocks and straining at its tether, indicated how high the tide rises when it comes in.

Upon returning to the port, we climbed the lookout tower where a gentle sea breeze afforded temporary relief from the oppressive afternoon heat.

From Bing Bong, we retraced our route to Borroloola. A brief pause to view art at the Aboriginal art centre completed, we continued southward on a tar road to Cape Crawford.



The three wise men, Vic, Eric and Tony?

The campground at Heartbreak Hotel looked inviting. Green grass spread out before us beneath tall shady trees. It proved to be a mirage for sprinklers prevented us utilising most of the grass. After a false start on the only dry grass available, the manager shooed us away claiming pipes close to the surface precluded the use of tent pegs. We

reluctantly settled under the trees on a mostly dirt area.

The facilities, dirty though they are, allowed us to wash our dirty clothes and ourselves. Some members of the group took advantage of the opportunity to enjoy a meal at the hotel. The remainder circled the barbeque for dinner before retiring to our tents where the constant generator note lulled us to sleep.

Tony
Day 7 – 14th September
Cape Crawford – Lost City – Poppy’s Pool

The morning started with us all gathering in front of Heartbreak Hotel waiting for the helicopter for our trip to the Lost City. The helicopter was a small two seater and the whole party was transported one at a time to the Lost City. We were split into two groups. When the first group was assembled at the Lost City with guide Sandra, they commenced the tour. While they were doing the tour the second group was transported. When the second tour started the first group was transported back. The helicopter trip each way was about 12 minutes.



Sandra in the Lost City

Sandra was a delightful guide and had a good knowledge of her subject. The

Lost City was a fascinating ancient structure of large rock pillars in appearance. Sandra explained that they were much older than the Bungle Bungles and were formed from an ancient sea.



Lost City from the Helicopter

On return from the tour we had lunch at the Heartbreak Hotel Caravan park. Our guide was met along the road and she led us to Poppy's Pool. The road in was a bit rough in places and required low range the last bit of the trip.



And again

Poppy's Pool is located on Bauhinia Station. It is a jewel in this harsh country. It is a magnificent waterhole, surrounded by towering red cliffs, paper bark trees and pandanus plants. It is fed by a hot water source and the water is drinkable.

We spent the afternoon at Poppy's Pool. Sandra had two beat up old tinnies and paddled up to some higher water holes – one cold and one hot. The hot one was a little warm for this day noting the temperature reached 41 on the journey here.

We spent a pleasant afternoon swimming and cooling down. We then used the tinnies to return to our camp site. Several people actually swam back. During the boat trip the views were spectacular.



The hot Poppy's Pool

During the afternoon there were spectacular reflections in the water from the paper bark trees and the towering cliffs. Camping was very tight and the ground was not very friendly. However, we all fitted in. Vic camped by the water edge and his swag was soon surrounded by small frogs and cane toads. They kept him company for the night.

Too hot for a fire again. A very pleasant night was spent around the common area discussing a wide range of subjects with our guide Sandra.

Stan and Lyn

Day 8 – Poppy’s Pool – Lorella Springs

As another day dawned we were greeted by beautiful views of pink and orange rock faces behind shady palms and gum trees – and all from the comfort of our Ultimate with the shades pulled down. Campers stirred and breakfast was consumed before an early pack up.

Some ventured back up the creek to the warm pool whilst others floated around in the water near the camp site. Those in the ‘hot tub club’ claimed to have seen a pair of water pythons swimming in their midst. Although, who knows what to believe after some of the tall stories told so far on this trip.

And so it was, that we broke camp and headed off towards Lorella Springs with a short stop at the nearby ranch to thank the locals, take a few pictures and say goodbye to Sandra. Along the way out some talk of ‘wild horses’ hit the air waves – alas not the Rolling Stones classic but fair dinkum brumbies playing chicken with the convoy.



Dennis and Robyn in their block of units

Onward we ventured until we took a right hand turn – 29kms to Lorella Springs Outback Resort (or words to that effect). The owners had cleverly posted signs on this bit of ‘highway’ to distract

the drivers from the bulldust and sandy trenches. Many a promise of great delights could be seen nailed to trees but these seasoned travellers had seen it all before and were prepared to take a ‘see it to believe it’ attitude. We finally arrived at our destination and waited as Vic did laps of the camping grounds looking for a likely spot. Unfortunately, grass and shade were at a premium, so we did the best with what we had.

After setting up camp the tired and weary travellers dragged themselves over to the ‘hot’ spring’s pool only to be attacked by ravenous flesh eating fish (well they tickled a bit anyway). Already the following day’s 4wd trip has been cancelled because of the road condition.



Jim and Stan discuss the merits of keeping your head

The afternoon was spent avoiding the sun’s rays as much as possible and replenishing much needed energy reserves. Plans were afoot to keep our stay here to a one night stand and so it was that a decision was made at a war council as the afternoon shadows lengthened – we were moving on!

The evening meal was as relaxed as it could be considering the stillness was occasionally interrupted by a scream of “CANE TOAD”!- followed by a loud ‘THWACK’ as Tony notched up another kill on the handle of his shovel.

Dennis and Robyn

Day 9 – 16/9/10 – Lorella Springs to Butterfly Springs

All packed and ready to go at 10 to 8 already 25 degrees. Many talked of the dingoes heard during the night. The birds were noisy early this morning.

Dennis had to stop after a short time as he had to release the frog he had in his shoe!!!!

We drove on the Adventure Track at Lorella Springs, out to Wildfire Gorge and Emerald Springs, both requiring walks at the end of the track. Although the vegetation was varied and interesting, the pools were low and disappointing – certainly not suitable for swimming.



Great shot Hugh!

Back to our campsite to pick up the Ultimate and have morning tea – nobody interested in a swim in the warm pool! Leaving Lorella Springs we did not get

far as Vic had a flat tyre. Good work by Eric, assisted by Tony and Vic and the tyre was changed.

Twenty nine kilometers back to the road, then about 11km to turn off to Southern Lost City. This amazing 1500 million year old geological wonder, with a 2.5km walk, had many formations and contained more ironstone than the Lost City we visited.



The Southern Lost City

The temperature was rising, so a short walk for most, but good views from car park. Had lunch here and set off about 2pm.

A short drive to the Butterfly Springs turn off (about 30km) where there were several camps set up. A walk to the cool and large swimming area was all we needed to convince us to camp here.



The fish were biting!

Set up camp then down to the Weeping Paperbark lined swimming area waterfall at one end and rocky hillside. The cockatoos were not too thrilled with our arrival but their screeches did not deter us.



A great place to reflect- Butterfly Springs

Brought our chairs and after a cooling swim (sandy bottom good for cleaning the feet!) we lazily sat in our chairs on the edge of the water. Spent a couple of hours here, enjoying the Common Crow Butterflies and watching a Merten's Water Monitor swim to a warm rock. There were many thousands of butterflies 'resting' on the shady rocks around the water. Also lots of little fish in the water – some Archer Fish giving good displays at Butterfly Springs. Both Hugh and Tony saw snakes on the track, yet to be identified.

Returned to camp after it had cooled down and enjoyed our usual routine sitting together, getting dinner and chatting around our camp candle fire – some not so pleased about the small snake that slithered through.

Then off to bed – 25 degrees.

Heather and Hugh

Day 10 – 17/9/10 – Butterfly Springs to Mataranka

The start of another beautiful day with the sun coming up over the rocky outcrops. This would be heaven if not for the mosquitoes which have been flying around all night and this morning.

We are on time for an early start today....well, just before 8.00am! We are all in agreement Butterfly Springs is a great camp. We enter Nathan River Station which is now owned by National Parks. There is a very well kept air strip and the gravel road is excellent. We cross Limmen Bight River which is very pretty and then spot some wild buffalo. The Nathan River camp is good, with toilets, but I think ours was much better.

We then cross over the Cox River and Vic spots a fresh water swordfish. I've never seen one close up before.



Wild buffalo seen on the Savannah Way

Then we cross the Towns River and arrive at the camp site high up on the river bank (pity about the crocs!). We stop here for morning tea which was a lovely spot but not much shade. Two snakes were spotted and I believe the general opinion was that they were western brown snakes.

We cross the Towns River again on the causeway and it was very pretty. Vic

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then spotted a rubbish tip and thankfully we got rid of a lot of rubbish.

We then cross Little Towns River and come to St Vigeons Ruins. These were originally a mission set up for the Aborigines. We move on to Lomerieum Lagoon covered in lovely water lilies. Our bird experts spotted Restless Flycatchers (mother and two babies) and a Kingfisher flying over the lilies. Also seen were a Greater Egret and a Cattle Egret. Stan took a photograph of the lilies which was brilliant and hopes to enter it into a competition.



Another river bites the dust, well errr.... makes a splash.

We go into Roper River and have a look and Vic has taken a picture of a sea eagle in flight. We cross the Hodgson River and leave the Limmen National Park. We pass a fire on the road and lots of black Kites are hovering over to get any tasty morsels.

Roper Bar was not very inviting for lunch with little shade, so we move onto the campground for lunch.

There is a memorial to Ludwig Leichhardt who made a crossing there in 1845. At Fizzer Creek we hit the bitumen. We pass Elsey Station which has been made famous by the book "We of the Never- Never". We arrive at

Mataranka and set up camp. There are reasonably good facilities. We have our usual 'chats around the fire' discussion. However, we have heard lots of the roads are closed so we will find out where we go after Tennant Creek, which is our next known stop.

Pam and Jim



Stan gets that winning photo

Day 11 – 18/09/10 – Mataranka to Tennant Creek

We wake to a beautiful sunny morning but know that this may be the last for a while. The forecast to the south is not good. This is also likely to be the most exciting of the trip – a 570 km run down the Stuart Highway.

Tony starts the day with a splash. He decides to wash his car the easy way by remodeling the campsite's plumbing.

After refueling, adjusting tyre pressures and restocking our larders we are ready for the long trip. Before taking off a local provides us with some entertainment.

To keep us awake, games of trivia are devised. One competition is to guess the number of cars to overtake the convoy during the day. Another is to estimate the number of road trains travelling the

opposite direction. After great discussion precise rules are laid down. Vic will shout ice cream for the winners.

Morning tea is at the Hi-Way Inn near Daly Waters. We are all impressed by the huge size of a truck with two B-Doubles coupled together. It has 54 wheels. Naturally, Vic has to pose beside it for a photo. Tony's a winner again. This time he takes off looking at the rear end of three horses in a float.

We stop for a quick lunch break at Elliot WWII Staging Camp which is now a memorial to all those who fought in wars. From 1941 it was a lunch stop for convoys three days out of Alice Springs heading south. It was an overnight stopover for troops heading south. Due to the presence of a water bore 1500 could be sheltered. The camp had a vegetable garden and a bakery.



Big boys toys

A stop at a rest area during the afternoon yields some really interesting plant life. As we're leaving a car and caravan pulls in. A friend Vic has not seen for many years has spotted his vehicle. The rest of the convoy moves on to Tennant Creek leaving Vic to catch up with his old friends.

The competition winners are decided. We've all greatly over estimated the

number of vehicles to overtake the convoy. Vic wins as he has the lowest estimate. Pat and Brian have guessed the correct number of road trains – 13.

Tonight is luxury. Our cabins have lovely hot showers and comfortable beds and dinner is at the restaurant.

Pat and Brian

Day 12 19/09/10 – distance for day **294kms** **Tennant Creek – Epenarra (bush camp)**

What a contrast! Awaken to overcast skies, a strong breeze and a temperature of 14 degrees. We all refuel, then head south down the Stuart Highway following the amended schedule.

Our turnoff to the Davenport Ranges slips behind as we head for the Devil's Marbles about 20 kms further south. The convoy spills into the campground where some people indulge in morning tea, whilst others scatter, cameras in hand, to capture that special photo of the marbles.



OK, who broke the marble?

Stops at two other parking bays provide more views for additional photos, and welcome relief from the incessant wind.

The convoy retraces its route to the Davenport Ranges (Binns Track) turnoff. Stretching before us lies a red gravel road, good enough to enable 80 kph to be travelled comfortably. Green spinifex lines the track, stretching away on both sides. Its lushness contrasts with the patches of red earth that deny the spinifex a foothold. Modestly sized eucalypt trees are scattered across the green expanse.

Our convoy is overtaken by a Troopie carrying ten occupants – eight in the back on longitudinal seats and two in the cabin. A roof basket is piled high with ten bags, giving an unsafe top heavy appearance to the vehicle. I match his speed at up to 90 kph, hoping he doesn't topple over.



Whistle duck water hole

Vic leads the convoy in a right hand turn to Whistle Duck camp, 22ks along a mostly winding gravel road, through the gates to the National Park. With adept parking the group squeezes into the day area for lunch and a short walk to the waterhole. Water remains but there is no inflow. Predictably, no whistling ducks cruise the surface.

Following lunch and a perusal of the campsites, we retrace our path to the main track to continue towards Epenarra.

Just short of the homestead a rough track leads up to a lookout. One at a time the vehicles slowly ascend to the summit for an expansive view to the north and east. As the time is now 3.30pm, Vic casts his eye over the flat ground below and spies a flat area, hopefully lying in the lea of a small hill. We are guided in and scatter to find tent sites while I explore for firewood. Soon a camp has formed, warm clothes appear as we prepare for a cold, windy evening beneath scattered cloud.



The view from the lookout

The sun soon dissolved into the hill guarding our camp. Rose hued clouds spread across the western sky. The white light from a half moon washed over us providing adequate lighting by which to cook our evening meals. Our appetites are sated, a semi circle formed around a welcoming fire, struggling against a determined wind. Despite the radiant warmth, the numbers around the fire dwindled as the sanctuary of a warm bed beckoned. The last chairs were folded, the stragglers gone. The stars twinkle, the man in the moon looks down benevolently. The sounds of nature reclaim the night.

Tony

Day 13 (unlucky for some) 20/09/10 – Cloughs Bluff – Alice Springs

Another day dawned and whilst most of us were contemplating a few more minutes in bed, the quiet was shattered by the sounds of a maiden in distress. Quickly followed by a husband in distress. Dr Eric was quickly dispatched to an emergency situation 50 meters from camp where Lyn had succumbed to the dangers of an outback ‘comfort’ stop. All hands were quickly on deck as an ankle was immobilized and the patient was made comfortable and brought back to camp.

After phone calls were made it was decided to transport Lyn back to Tennant Creek in the back of a hastily re-arranged Stan Van with Tony running shotgun in the Pajero. The rest of us (down to 6) finished brekky and headed off to Old Police Station Waterhole. That meant - guess who got the diary again!!!



Policeman’s Waterhole

A quick morning tea was taken and then it was decided to head for Alice tonight with perhaps a room for the night to rest our weary heads out of the wind.

Dennis and Robyn set off via the normal route whilst the famous five tackled the 17km 4wd (no trailers please) track to Frew River.

Once the convoy of 6 got back together we headed off again and were surprised at the number of donkeys we encountered. A lagoon stop for lunch was followed by slow progress along the Binns Track towards Alice. News from Tony – Lyn was not good as they found 2 broken bones and she was being taken to Alice for further attention.



The Frew River track was a great drive

Alas, the track has got the better of us and we decided to bush camp for the night before hitting Alice tomorrow. Last night’s wonderful scones were followed by a delicious damper courtesy of Anne – now if only Jim would make us a pavlova!

Dennis and Robyn



Another perfect camp site

Day 14 -21/09/10 – Murray Run to Alice Springs

The day dawned clear, sunny and a cool 7 degree. The breeze was still there, but not nearly as strong as before. The poison chalice passed to Hugh and Heather (all the major mishaps have befallen the scheduled diary writers).

After a fairly quiet breakfast, everyone was ready to go before the 8.30 schedule, so we got started. It was a very smooth red track and we made good progress. At times we found it hard to tell whether the surface was mud or dry as there were patches of water but all the cars were kicking up dust.

We stopped for morning tea at the new Ghan railway line but could not find any trains. The soil was a rich (damp) red, the vegetation was brilliant green and the sky was a light bright blue.



Watch for the train

We reached the Stuart Highway and started down the bitumen at a steady (boring) 95. Brian needed some fuel and our tyres needed to be blown up for the bitumen so Vic suggested we stop at the Barrow Creek Hotel. What a thriving establishment! No diesel, no EFTPOS, no ice-creams and they charged 50c to use the toilet. It had been established in 1932 – the same year as the Sydney

Harbour Bridge was finished – and looked as though nothing had been done since. However, many visitors had lined the walls with foreign bank notes, business cards, photos and whatever they thought to add.

The road south was dull. There was some debate on the radio about whether this is the most boring road in Australia, but that would not take account of the brilliant colours of the wildflowers in pink, white, yellow and purple that spread across the green, green country on either side of the road.

We stopped for lunch at Ti-Tree, which promised much more than Barrow Creek, but the food looked dubious and the ice creams were expensive. Jim and Pam took their lives into their hands and ordered hamburgers with the lot – and it turned out to be the best they had experienced!

We continued on to Alice Springs. The news on Lyn was that she had been taken to Alice last night by Air Ambulance, but we later found the operation had to be delayed.

Vic stopped for an interview with 2GB and our final stop was at the Tropic of Capricorn, which is now adorned with a bright green crocodile! Eventually we arrived at Alice to stay in cabins at the Wintersun Park and met up with Tony.

Finally, we had dinner at the Firken and Hounds where Stan was able to join us. Everyone was pleased to catch up and wish Lyn a speedy recovery.

Hugh and Heather

Day 15 – 22/09/10

We farewelled Stan this morning at the caravan park in Alice Springs, wishing him a safe journey home and Lyn a successful operation and speedy return to full health.

It was a lovely morning, clear with a hint of the warmth to come and the park was also good – very clean and shady. We left in convoy and proceeded south down the Stuart Highway eventually turning off where most of us had to drop tyre pressure as we were once again off the bitumen and on to the sand and gravel.

Our first stop was Ewaninga Reserve to see the rock carvings. It was an interesting walk. We continued on and had morning tea beside the Finke race track. The view was splendid and so green. Today the wildflowers especially have been spectacular.



Brian takes in the view at Chambers Pillar

We pass the Old Ghan track and Maryvale Station on our way to Chambers Pillar. On the way we cross Hugh River where massive trees have been uprooted when the river was in flood and an enormous wash out where the water has overflowed. We pass lots of water on the road but luckily there are several diversions we can take.

We negotiate a steep ‘jump-up’ and get a view of the stunning scenery. We also get our first glimpse of Chambers Pillar so called by John McDougall Stuart for his financier, James Chambers. Beside Chambers Pillar there is a large unnamed rock with a large hole and further on a rock called “The Castle”. Then we get to the camp ground and really get up close to the “Pillar” itself.

After lunch is eaten in what shade there is we start the walk around the rock and most people climb the stairs to the viewing platform. It is very warm and the flies are horrendous.



Chambers Pillar

We re-trace our journey and just past Maryvale Station we turn off the main track and head along the Old Ghan historical trail. It is quite a good track mainly beside the Finke race track, although one or two spots so far have been a bit ‘messy’ with huge wheel ruts.

We have passed the Rodinga Siding where the remains still stand of the accommodation for the Ghan builders and maintenance gangs. We have a camp spot beside the track and at the moment we are watching the sun go down (and waiting for the flies to disappear so that we can cook dinner). Hopefully, we won’t be stopped by any

closed roads but our plans are not extremely flexible.

Pam and Jim

Ps. During the early evening Vic went in search of a photographic subject and comes upon four camels. They are not very friendly apparently, but he has some great photos and eventually returns to camp. **P&J**



This bloke got the hump and walked off



Dinner under a full moon

Day 16 – 23/09/10 – Old Ghan Track near Bundooma to 3’O’Clock Creek

There is a heavy dew this morning so tents are damp when folded away. The overnight minimum was 5 degrees quite a contrast to the 25 we experienced round the Gulf country. All are ready for the designated 7.30 start except Vic who quips that he changed the starting

time to 8.00 after everyone else was in bed.

The countryside is a vibrant green with flowers of many colours bordering the track. Small birds dart in and out of the bushes with flocks of budgies flashing emerald green. A stop at the water tank at Bundooma gives Tony the opportunity to do his morning exercise up and down the ladder. The sign board optimistically advises that 18km of flat ranges and rolling hills lie ahead.

At last there is good news from BJ and Barbara. The repairs to their vehicle are complete. At 5pm yesterday they picked up the car and immediately escaped from Mt Isa and are heading for home.

Corrugations incur some rattles that need to be checked en route to Engoordina Siding. Here we read that Jerome Murif in 1897 rode a bicycle from Glenelg to Port Darwin. He identified the greatest problems encountered on his record breaking adventure were loneliness and isolation.

Pam recalls her trip on the Old Ghan in 1970. She remembers two days of endless flat red vistas. Coming from England it was a real eye opener.



Hugh ploys through some soft ground

For morning tea we pull off onto the race track. The energetic amongst us climb a sand dune only to look out over more dunes and more green. We cross the wide and waterless Finke River and drive into Finke, the finishing point for the Finke Desert Race.

After a brief stop at Charlotte Waters siding the fun starts. Many sections of the track are covered with water, quite often impassable so we need to resort to muddy bypasses. At one point Eric takes to the paddock. At another Hugh picks the wrong route and becomes bogged only to be rescued by Eric.



Jim and Pam follow Hugh's example

Lunch is at Mt Dare hotel where we hear that water recently topped the levee bank. Less than 1km from the hotel Eric comes to a stand still – bottomed out with all 4 wheels spinning. Jim pulls him clear. The former rescuer has become the rescued.

At the turnoff 60km from Dalhousie Springs the road changes dramatically. We now bounce over rocks but still interspersed with water crossings.

Vic sights the perfect campsite and we prepare to set up. Swarms of huge starving mozzies appear instantly and we quickly abandon the site. At 3 O'Clock Creek (approximately 10kms from

Dalhousie Springs) the mozzie population is sparser and less hungry so we settle in for the night.

Pat and Brian



Brian takes a bath



Dennis & Robyn make a splash



A fiery sunset at 3 O'Clock Creek

**Day 17 – Friday 24/09/10 – 3 O’Clock
Creek to William Creek**

Through the narrow opening in the tent I observe a tree silhouetted against the descending full moon. Is it still night? From the direction of the creek the morning songs of the birds tell me it is morning. It’s time to emerge from my tent. Clear skies stretch overhead. The worrying cloud of last night has dissipated. A few coals still burn from last night’s fire making it easier to start a new one. A few twigs and a little coaxing soon produce a small blaze to boil the billy. This begins another day on the road.

By eight o’clock the convoy has assembled and Vic leads it out. A few kms later we stop in the car park at Dalhousie Springs. Swimmers donned, we straggle to the hot springs and slip into the hot water. Small fish surround us, nibbling at the dead skin on our bodies. From a fellow bather, we learn that a couple of days previously, the campground was full of people stranded by the closed roads.



The claypan before Dalhousie Springs

A short distance down the road from the springs lie the ruins of the Dalhousie settlement of the nineteenth century, where hardy pioneers attempted to graft a living from the harsh countryside

raising sheep, goats and even trying crops. The ruins stand as testimony to an optimistic spirit and sheer hard work. The buildings are constructed from stone conveyed to the site. The remains of camel yards still stand. Built from hand hewn local hardwood, posts still thrust upward from the earth, surviving weather, termite attacks and vandals, who removed some for firewood. Two remaining date palms frame the scene. Dennis alerts us to the presence of a small snake warming itself in the morning sun. It treats us with disdain as we gather round to peer.



Most of the date palms have been removed from Dalhousie ruins

Vic offers me the chance to lead so he can fall to the rear to take photos, without impeding the convoy’s progress. There are still some washaways to negotiate and progress is slow. The scenery changes as a vast gibber plain replaces the trees that have been accompanying us.

The slow progress alters dramatically when we emerge at the Oodnadatta Track, which is wide and smooth. I am sacked as leader.

Oodnadatta comes into view just on two o'clock. A late lunch – Vic and I order an Oodna burger each, but as they take so long to cook, Vic suggests to Eric that he leads out the rest of the group, leaving Vic and me to follow.

The good smooth road soon deteriorates the further we go. Vic takes every opportunity to stop for photos. Occasionally we can hear the chatter from the group. Then it fades as we fall back. The surface of the tracks scarred by the wheel ruts of vehicles who negotiated the track in the wet. It must have been a harrowing experience, slipping through mud for kilometre after kilometre, not knowing if you will make it.



Another Desert Pea, but this one is real!

Just as Vic and I gather in the rest of the convoy, Dennis announces that he has a flat tyre. Vic resumes his place at the head of the convoy and vanishes into the dust. Eric and I apply ourselves to the task of changing the tyre. Fortunately, it appears the culprit is a small hole that Eric hopes to mend.

The tyre changed, our small three vehicle convoy sets off to William

Creek, forty kilometers away. In the distance, the buildings of William Creek loom out of the dust. In the side mirror and through a small gap between the luggage in the rear, the vermillion ball of the setting sun captures my attention. We draw into the campground as the sun melts into the horizon.

Tony

Day 18 – Saturday 25/09/10

Departed William Creek about the usual time with Anne and Eric in the lead again to give Vic and Tony some more photography time.

Many stops to make on the way ; Beresford Ruins, The Bubbler and Blanche Cup Springs, Curdimurka, Lake Eyre South lookout (water in the lake) and on in to Marree for fuel and lunch. Passed a man with two camels pulling a 'caravan' along the road.



You guess is as good as mine.

The main convoy headed for Cooper Creek ferry while Dennis, Robyn and Tony waited at the Marree store for tyre repairs.

Lots of horses and accompanying camels on the track to Cooper Creek. All arrived at the ferry late afternoon and

had 'rides' across the Cooper and back before setting up camp in a nice sandy clearing.

At dusk the little black insects invaded and made cooking and washing up difficult, but they disappeared by bed time.

Anne and Dennis listened to the footy game with Vic helping Anne (*he was not much help at all!! Anne*) interpret the last few minutes. A close game: West Tigers 12 – St George 13.

Robyn and Dennis



The amazing sunset over Cooper Creek on the Birdsville track



Day 19 – Sunday 26/09/10 - Cooper Creek to Parachilna Gorge

Sunrise just after 6am, a flock of black cormorants overhead, a gentle breeze.

Packed and ready to leave by 7.45, so all could head over to the punt.

Robyn, Dennis and Tony had not experienced this the afternoon before so we were keen that they enjoy this adventure.

Vic took his car on the punt – with Robyn, Dennis and Tony as passengers. We waved them off across the Cooper. Like other spectators around we all enjoyed watching the punt and its 2 able, efficient and friendly 'drivers' for some time.



Ahoy there me shipmates

Vic had to wait in line on the other side for the return trip. It should be noted that Vic put his life jacket on inside out – prompting one of the 'drivers' to suggest to his mate "Watch him, he may be trying to steal it". We decided these 2 fellows should get the tourism hospitality award!!

Vic (*which way do these headphones go on?*), Pat and Brian then went on a 15 minute helicopter ride (\$70 each) over the Cooper and described vast expanses of water, channels and partly visible roads. Apparently SA Main Roads tried to travel to usual track last week and became bogged, then the tractor pulling them out got bogged. \$20,000 and another grader and they were free! The

punt will continue to operate for at least 2 more months.

We all enjoyed this very special place, water has not been here for 20 years and took 2,000 kms to get here. Amazing!!!



The ferry crossing from the helicopter

Then the 150km drive back to Marree, lunch in the park and south to Lyndhurst where some purchased fuel and some purchased ice creams. Prices getting a little cheaper! Vic told us he had travelled 9,999.9 kms on this trip – but could Brian help him reset the trip meter on his GPS please?

A left turn at Parachilna and into the Flinders Ranges. Found a campsite beside the (almost) dry river in the Parachilna Gorge and marveled at the recent flood damage we saw along the way – huge amounts of gravel on the road/creeks. In the gorge, large trees swept downstream.

An early camp gave us time to relax, wander up the gorge or just enjoy sitting by the fire. A leisurely evening with Vic finally telling his goat joke, we sat around a cheerful fire, thanks to Tony for being such a good wood collector.

Heather

Day 20 – Monday 27/09/10 – Parachilna Gorge to Broken Hill

We are up and packed early today as a pancake breakfast is planned for 7.30am. After enjoying the large cook-up Jim and Pam are farewelled as they are heading southwards home.



Don't blink, you may never see Vic cooking again.

Setting out at 8.00am we head further up the valley seeing evidence of flood damage everywhere. School holidays have begun and campers are set up on every available flat piece of land. The hills of the Flinders are in dramatic contrast to the flatness of the desert we have just left.



The Flinders were beautiful

Reaching Blinman, Vic is most surprised to find the road to Hawker has been sealed and soon finds an opportunity to return to the gravel at the turnoff to

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Brachina Gorge. We enjoy the beautiful scenery at Brachina and Bunyerroo Gorges on a perfect morning. Flowers and greenery line the tracks with the hills forming a dramatic backdrop. Vic comments that he has never seen the Flinders looking so good.

Back on the tar we reach Hawker at 11.30, so decide to stop for lunch. There are no quandong pies here so we make do with the contents of our diminishing larders. Our journey continues through Craddock heading for Yunta. Ruins dot the green landscape, evidence that pastoralists were lured by false hopes in good seasons such as this.



Green fields and ruins

From Yunta with 200kms to go Vic quizzes each of us to help pass the time. We each identify the best and worst aspect of the trip. All agree that the injury to Lyn and the early departure of BJ and Barbara were the low points of the trip. The heat in the north, tiredness after long days, mozzies and bugs were minor in comparison.

Most mentioned as highlights were:

Davenport Ranges – for the scenery and driving

Old Ghan Track - for the flowers, history and driving challenges

Cooper Creek – for the fact that we were there to see such an amazing and rare sight.

Poppy's Pools - for their beauty.

Suddenly we are at the NSW border with only a short distance to go. At last there is news from Stan. Lyn was operated on last Thursday as scheduled and will be ready to fly home tomorrow. She must not put weight on the ankle for 6 weeks, so still unfortunately has a long way to go in her recovery.

After booking into cabins we head out for dinner at the Musician's Club.

Pat and Brian

Day 21 – Tuesday 28/09/10 – Broken Hill to Willandra

Today was our second last day. We began by farewelling Dennis and Robyn who had elected to make their way home to Valla Beach, while the remaining members of the group headed towards Sydney. This emphasized the awareness that our journey was nearing its conclusion. Soon we would disperse, returning to our normal lives, no longer cocooned within a small family making our way around the countryside.

Vic leads us away from the silver city following the bitumen towards Menindee Lakes. There we paused for morning tea whilst gazing across the vast expanse of water. Vic noted the level had risen about ½ metre since he visited a short while ago.

Kinchega was our next destination where we meandered along the river, weaving amongst the trees before we halted at the old wool shed for a wander.

Ivanhoe was our next destination along a poor dirt road flanked by wildflowers and scenery that alternated between barren plains and stunted treescape. Vic searched in vain on the vast flat landscape for a lunch site amongst the trees. Time ticked by, but the barren expanse continued. Eventually a small grove of trees beckoned, so we took a lunch break. A cold wind reminded us that winter was not quite finished.

At 2.30, Vic announced that he was going to stop to ring 2GB and asked me to lead the group forward, waiting at Ivanhoe for him to meet us. Having regrouped at Ivanhoe, our convoy set off for Willandra to make camp. As we neared Willandra we kept a vigil for firewood. Some trees just off the track looked promising. We all scouted amongst the trees and soon scavenged enough firewood to satisfy our needs. Vic and I loaded the wood on our roof racks, secured the load and made for Willandra, hoping to set up camp before dark.



Fields of green and gold at Willandra

Wildflowers were profuse along the roadside. White flowers carpeted the ground left and right. At times metre high bushes of yellow flowers formed a corridor of colour through which we hurtled. Further away on the right, a field of yellow stretched to the horizon.

Two wheel tracks cut through the colour conveying us out to the campsite at the station. With the sun gliding out of sight, we erected our tents before dark.

This was our last camp, sadly our last night encircling the fire. Our dwindled numbers now formed barely a half circle lit by the glow emanating from the fire.

Tony

Day 22 – 29th September – Willandra Station to Home
By Little Teddy

Oh WOW, it's my turn to write the diary at last! I spend all day sitting on Daddy's dashboard watching all the wonderful sights pass me by, I can't begin to tell you how much fun it is up the front with Outback Vic (my Daddy). He drives very fast sometimes and other times he gets lost, sometimes he drives through lots of dust (I loved it when it burst over the windscreen on Lorella Springs station) and sometimes he drives through mud and red water that splashes all over the windscreen – this makes me jump with fright and try to duck the splashes! The best bit was when he was driving through a big puddle of water near Mt Dare and suddenly the whole bonnet went under the red morass! Wee! That was funny! I think Daddy swore!

But today is sadly our last day of our big adventure. Everyone seemed to wake before my Daddy, he was still cocooned in his green swag when everyone else was cooking and breaking camp. I think Daddy did not want the trip to end.

What a beautiful spot we were camped in too! I have been here before at Willandra Station, but I've never seen it

like this. There was green grass everywhere under the lush trees and if I stood on the bonnet of my toy car on the dashboard I could see water in the creek just beyond the tree line – there wasn't any water there last time.

Daddy was talking to Hugh around the camp fire and I heard Hugh tell him how lovely the homestead was at Willandra, Hugh said the building went up, across and back down. Hugh showed Daddy what he meant with his arms outstretched. My Daddy watched his arm movements intently and followed his description with great interest. Then Daddy went off to explore the homestead to see for himself. I wanted to tell him that everyone was ready to leave but my lips were sewn!

Anyway, eventually Daddy came back to the patiently waiting group, although I think Uncle Eric was getting a little impatient, as he had that look on his face. Aunty Anne said, "Be careful when Lambeck gets that look!". This didn't stop Daddy telling Hugh how he could see how the homestead went up across and back down and how ingenious the construction was to capture the breeze – you see it's normally very hot out here.

Anyway, Daddy finally got going (it does take the old bugger a bit of time these days – oops, don't tell him I swore!). But we soon stopped at the Willandra woolshed to take lots of photos, too many if you ask Jim, but I can't say anything to him as my lips are sewn! It was a very beautiful drive out of the National Park, we played chicken with some cows?? Well, we weren't really a chicken more like a big Emu if you ask me. Then Daddy noticed a road train stuck on the road.

The big friendly truck driver needed us to help pull him out of his bogged location and you should have seen Daddy's eyes light up. He said 'Sure thing mate, as long as I can get some photos of me pulling your big rig'. Daddy thought he was speaking truckie talk, but he forgot to swear like they do, I've heard them on Daddy's CB thingy!!



Cruiser to the rescue

Daddy did a very brave thing then, he gave his very expensive camera, which makes even a Dodo like Daddy take good photos, anyway he gave it to his new bestest buddy Hugh (he did this on Lorella Springs when he drove through the bulldust, he must like Hugh as he doesn't usually let anyone touch his new expensive camera, especially not Stan, because he photoshops everything). Anyway, Daddy pulled the big road train back onto the road and Hugh took the photos yippee!

All the way into Hillston the flowers were everywhere and as we drove towards Lake Cargelligo there were even more flowers, with yellow, purple and white making the place look unreal (Daddy made me say that). On the way to the Lake we saw the Lachlan River and it was in flood, it was dry not that long ago. We had morning tea beside the Lake which was also full and dry not so long ago too! All the farmers must be

happy now. At the morning tea spot there were some funny signs, the first one said “No Smoking within 10 metres of this facility”. The facility was a toilet, maybe they were afraid it would blow up, I’ve heard this can happen in toilets if you aren’t careful with your cigarette lighter when doing number 2’s? (*maybe Daddy can show you some day? Aunty Anne*)

The other sign told you how to alight from your bicycle and had a picture of a person jumping off their bike, it was funny!

From here we drove onto Condobolin and then Parkes where we all parked in the park and had lunch. It was sunny but a cool breeze was blowing and it was much colder than some of the previous days. Here we said good bye to Hugh and Heather and Brian and Pat as all decided to make our own speed back home via Orange, Bathurst and Bells Line of Road. Daddy, Tony, Aunty Anne and Uncle Eric stayed together until Windsor and then it was just me, Daddy and Tony. We arrived home about 6.30pm and Sasha licked Daddy and wanted to rip my ears off!

I had a good time on this big adventure with everyone, thank you all.

Little Teddy

Well Little Teddy, I think you need to have a big rest before your next big adventure! You need to make sure your Daddy behaves himself on the next trip. Aunty Anne and Uncle Eric had a wonderful time travelling our country with you, Daddy, Tony and everyone else. What an adventure~!

MIS-HAPPEN-INGS

By Heather Daniel

The poetry’s bad,
Some events were quite sad.
But I tried to write every day,
Of mishaps along the way,
Across the Top and down.

Day 1. Karumba to Burketown

Karumba in the heat,
Was where 9 cars did meet.
One fridge and 3 batteries broke down,
An eventual start for Burketown.
Our first night’s camp at last.

Day 2. Burketown to Adele’s Grove

We left hot and dusty Burketown,
But some cars had to slow down,
Across savannah plains we drove,
Then we camped at Adele’s Grove.
Cool water for a swim.

Day 3. Adele’s Grove

Canoeing and swimming and palms of
green,
But John’s car was not so keen,
Perhaps that last Karumba fill?
We’re glad they made it to Lawn Hill.
The gorge is quite spectacular.

Day 4. Adele’s Grove to Kingfisher Camp

For a short while all nine,
But the cruiser declined,
And Eric towed them to Burketown.
The rest carried on through bulldust and
heat,
But Kingfisher Camp was neat.

Day 5. Kingfisher Camp to Calvert River

At Hells Gate we met Eric and Ann,
Barb and John to Mt Isa's the plan.
But there in the deep,
We found a drowned jeep,
And snatched him back onto the bank.

Day 6. Calvert River to Cape Crawford

The Ultimate shock,
Maybe hit by a rock?
But Eric replaced it,
It's been quite adventurous,
From Hells Gate to Heartbreak Hotel.

Day 7. Cape Crawford to Poppys Pool

The welcome that was directed,
Was not what we expected.
But the helicopter ride
And hearing Sandra's pride
The Lost City was quite a visit.

Poppys Pools, cool and hot
Towering cliffs, what a beautiful spot.
When cane toads came out at night,
Tony's shovel gave them a fright.
Poppys Pool made a scenic camp.

Day 8. Poppys Pool to Lorella Springs

An uneventful day,
Till we decided to play.
Hot pools at Poppys and Lorella,
Made us all quite dozey and mellow
So we sat around with barely a sound,
Till the sun went underground.

Day 9. Lorella Springs to Butterfly Springs

From spring to spring,
Not far today.
But Vic's tyre went flat,
Eric and Tony fixed that.

Butterfly Springs a cool place for a swim.

Day10. Butterfly Springs to Mataranka.

Eric went off the air,
So had to put on his spare.
Stan and a fireplace did tangle,
It wasn't much of a mangle,
So Mataranka here we come.

Day 11. Mataranka to Tennant Creek

Tony made a water feature,
Perhaps he needs a driving teacher.
Five hundred k's to Tennant Creek,
Nearly put us all to sleep.
But the cabin and meal revived us.

Day 12. Tennant Creek to Cloughs Bluff

The temperature was low,
And the wind began to blow.
Devils Marbles was the first stop,
The wind it did not drop.
Cloughs Bluff for a camp and a fire.

Day 13. Cloughs Bluff to Murray Downs

The day started with a yell,
"Lyn's ankle," all's not well.
Eric splinted, the rest supported,
A stretcher used, their camp was sorted,
Soon Lyn on the back seat was settled.

Tennant Creek hospital
Along way to travel
With Tony in front,
Stan travelled behind.

Three hours, what will they find?

The Ultimate's car would not start,
Eric gave CPR to its heart.
The Davenport Ranges were aglow,
The 4WD track though was quite slow.

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A bush camp for our dwindling group.

Day 14. Murrays Run to Alice Springs

There's a rumour about a young lass,
Who got lost on a walk in the grass.
When we hit the bitumen black,
We had to keep Vic on track.
To make it to Alice the plan,
To meet up with Tony and Stan.

Day 15. Alice Springs to Bundooma

'Wild' is the theme,
The flowers a dream,
The roads were a challenge,
But we all seemed to manage,
We set up camp amongst camels.

Day 16. Bundoona to 3 O'clock Creek

Hugh in the mud was stuck,
Eric's waterhole was bad luck,
But both were snatched out.
The Ultimate's shock is in doubt.
Mosquitoes, sunset and moonrise.

Day 17. 3 O'clock Creek to William Creek

The mozzies continued to bite,
So early we took flight.
The washouts were fewer
The rocks were a lure,
And Dennis's tyre went flat.

Day 18. William Creek to Cooper Creek

From creek to creek,
What scenery to seek.
Up to the Cooper Creek ferry,
The punt ride was quite merry.
We enjoyed this magical sight.

Day 19. Cooper Creek to Parachilna Gorge.

Vic wears his lifejacket inside out,
As for head phones, they're in doubt.
He's clocked over 10,000k's,
No wonder he's often in a daze.
Cooper Creek crossing was special.

Day 20. Parachilna Gorge to Broken Hill

Pam and Jim left us today,
Melbourne, they're headed that way.
We drove through floral Flinders
Ranges,
The recent rains caused floods and
danger
Cabins in Broken Hill.

Day 21. Broken Hill to Willandra

Dennis and Robin have set off to roam,
Towards Coffs Harbour, near their
home,
With five cars in the core,
We drove through wildflowers galore,
To Willandra station at dusk.

Day 22. Willandra to Sydney

There stuck in the gravel was a road
train,
Mighty Vic pulled him out with a thick
chain.
Now we are all off home,
We gradually set off alone,
It has been an interesting time.



Snake on the Oodnadatta Track



Do you see what I see?



A big dragon fly at Cape Crawford



Thanks everyone for a great trip.



A great camp fire