

On The Road Again 2010 - Melbourne to Porcupine Gorge

Graham and Chris (and Nicko) on tour - 2010 Part 1

Here we are back on the road again in 2010. This is a very belated journal for various reasons. This years adventure includes our good mate “Nicko” (Tony Nicholson) who currently lives in Kalgoorlie. He drove to Melbourne in 2 days from Kalgoorlie



Campsite on Darling at Pooncarie

and then hung around while we prepared our gear for departure on the 2nd June. Chris arrived home from Canberra on the 31st May after grandma duties and we departed on the 1st June at about 1 PM. I had arrived back from Canberra a week or so earlier to prepare for this years adventure. All of us were eager to get going. First night we grabbed a motel room in Birchip and walked to the pub for dinner. Lucky we walked as the local copper was stopping every car that was on the road. Quite unusual in a one horse town. We were to find out much later (8 weeks later in Darwin) that he was paranoid due to the fact that his little girl was killed by a drunk driver, so he is on a personal vendetta. Mind you, he was a pretty friendly chap and waved as he drove up and down the main street of town. The population couldn't be much more than 1000 so I guess they all know not to drink and drive.

Next day we headed for Mildura and shopping for fruit and veg (can't take fresh fruit and veg into the Fruit-Fly Zone). That evening we made it to Pooncarie near Lake Mungo and camped on the banks of the Darling River and had dinner at the pub. Small country town pubs are always a bit of fun and a good place to see some of the local colour. Next morning as we were preparing to pack up, I notice a bloke with a very large video camera and got talking to him. It's just amazing how some people make some money. He has an interest in trains, no matter if they are railway trains or road trains, and started to take videos of them whenever he could and post them on YouTube. He started to get so many hits that Google eventually (YouTube belongs to



Medindie Lakes Tenant



Campsite on Medindie Lakes



View from our camp at Medindie Lakes

Google) asked him if they could run banner ads across the bottom of his videos. He now gets a monthly check depending on how many hits there have been. The Japanese are the ones that seem to give him the most hits.

We then set off for Medindie Lakes where we stayed 2 nights. Plenty of water around and not a bad camp spot. Nicko got to try out all his new equipment like his Coleman instant hot water machine and his shower tent. Things that were fairly old hat to us and new and exciting for him. He also got to try out his solar panels.

After 2 nights we pushed on to Broken Hill where Nicko got an Auto

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Electrician to fix a stop light problem on the camper and I booked our car in for a service. We then headed out to Silverton to set up camp. It was now the 5th of June and Nicko's birthday. We had secreted a chocolate cake all the way from Mildura and used



Medindie Lakes Scene



THIS is a frost!

it to celebrate his birthday that evening. It was very, very cold, and so we invited a couple of fellow campers over to our camp fire to warm up. The couple, Wayne and Lana, worked for the Country fire Authority in NSW.

You may remember from previous journals that we went to Silverton in 2009 but Nicko was keen to check the place out and we



Silverton - XXXX was the dominant colour.

we were happy to revisit as it is good camping and a nice area. A good place to use as a base to check out the Broken Hill area, Broken Hill being only 18Kms from Silverton. The folk at Silverton were a little excited as there is a new Mad Max movie to be produced and as tradition would have it, Mad Max movies are made at Silverton. As I mentioned it was "bloody" cold and next morning we not only had frost on the car and on the canvas, we also had frost on the under side of our canvas at least 1/8 Inch thick. Must have been minus 4 or less.



Silverton - Micks on the hill, Protestants below as usual



Silverton scene - The Outback is greener this year



No outback trip is complete without a photo of Sturt's Desert Pea

By the way: I have been requested by some readers (grand children in particular), to use more pictures that contain people. As one can understand, children's eyes start to glass over when they have to look at too many scenery shots so in an endeavour to keep them happy, and in an even more desperate effort not to write 2 versions of our journals I will try to keep the peace with my grand children. They have also requested that the people they want to see pictures of are Grandma and Grandpa doing "stuff". So if there appears to be too much of a narcissistic slant or indeed a seemingly over eagerness to show pictures of Chris, I hope you, the reader, will understand.

Much of this years trip was roughly planned to take in some of the areas that Nicko had never been but we have, plus some that we have never been and he has and some that none of us have seen. Well as someone once said, even the best laid plans can fall

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into a heap in a heart beat. The first part of the plan was to get to Innamincka area via Broken Hill and Tibooburra, one of our most favourite destinations. Well with all the rain that had fallen this year, we were getting sketchy info on what was accessible around Innamincka. We also had had some contact with my brother (Rod) and his wife (Bette) from Brisbane who were touring



Sunset at Lake Cobham - normally the lakes in this area are dry but the significant rains this year have filled the lakes and the outback is as green as.

around the outback at a leisurely pace. We had some contact with them and it appeared that they would arrive in Tibooburra about the same time as us, as coincidence would have it.

So with that in mind we set off on the 8th June and got as far as Lake Cobham which happened to be just north of the turn off to Mount Arrowsmith Station. Now the significance of this is that Chris was governess at Mt Arrowsmith when she was 17. This was also the period, by the way, that I was courting her. So her disappearance into the outback way back then, was not much to my liking. Anyway, she has never been back to this area since she was 17. Our previous trip to

Tibooburra was via Wanaaring in NSW. Anyway, our relationship obviously survived the 12 Month separation.

The camp spot at Lake Cobham was quite outstanding from two perspectives. Firstly it was very scenic and secondly, by some oddity that only Telstra could explain, we had regular Next G phone coverage. We were about 100Km from Tibooburra the closest town with phone coverage that we could gather. The only explanation that we could figure, would be a large Mining operation nearby that we were not aware of, or an aboriginal community that we were unaware of. Anyway we received a call from Rod who was in Burke and about to head to Wanaaring the next morning, which is 234 Km east of Tibooburra and 192Km west of Burke. We discussed the latest reports we had gathered regarding Innamincka and it was fairly obvious that it would be a waste of time heading there. We agreed to either meet up in Wanaaring or Tibooburra, which ever came first. It had become apparent that there was little use heading on up to Innamincka.

Next morning we set out for Tibooburra. Weather still very cold, especially nights and early mornings. About 60Km



Milparinka

north of Lake Cobham we called in to the virtual ghost town of Milparinka. A couple of grey nomads were there working as volunteers in the small museum which has been set up by the local pastoralists to try and keep some of the history of the area alive. It was here that Chris found a photograph of Mr Evans, her boss when she was governess at Mt Arrowsmith.

We arrived in Tibooburra in time for lunch and a shower. We decided that we would try and make Wanaaring that afternoon



Whim - Sturt National Park

to meet up with Rod and Bette, so headed east, dropping into Sturt National Park on the way to check out the Whim which we thought Nicko might be interested in seeing. A whim utilises a harnessed animal (mule usually) to raise water from the bore and fill a tank made from galvanised iron. Once we had visited the whim it was mid afternoon and we still had over 200Km to do on dirt to get to Wanaaring. We made it by



Around the camp fire with Rod and Bette in Wanaaring

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about 5:30 and set up camp. Rod and Bette had gambled on the fact that we would push on to Wanaaring and had cooked a wonderful roast dinner in the Cobb Cooker for dinner. The camp ground and general store at Wanaaring are owned and run by a young couple and he (Ben) amazingly set off very early the next morning in his truck, headed for Dubbo to pick up supplies. He was due to return by Midnight of the same day, round trip of 1200Km (400 Km of dirt). If you ever wonder how some of these outback towns get their supplies, it is often by somebody working very hard and doing it tough. Makes you a little more understanding of the seemingly high prices that you sometimes have to suffer in remote towns.

That day we all (5 of us) went out to King Charlie Waterhole on the Paroo River in Nocoleche Nature Reserve. The bird life



White Necked Herons and Australian Pelican - King Charlie Waterhole

was simply amazing so we had 5 camera buffs madly taking photos of anything that moved. It was our turn to cook dinner for all so we rustled up a great spaghetti bolognese, followed by warm cooked cake (on the Cobb again courtesy Rod) and coffee and ports. What a life!



Our convoy at the Dingo fence - Hungerford



Hungerford Pub



Nicko gets fuel in Hungerford

That night we all heard Ben come home with the supplies at about midnight as planned. Next morning we packed up, replenished our supplies and all headed for Hungerford. Hungerford like Cameron's Corner is the site of gates through the Dingo Fence. We wandered into the Hungerford Pub, actually there is little else in Hungerford except the Dingo Fence and a police station, and had lunch. In the bar we chatted to the local copper, he was there for lunch also. Now this guy is really something. Nice enough guy but really takes himself a little seriously. I doubt whether there is any crime in Hungerford as the population is at most about 30 people. There he is in the front bar of the pub looking like a member of the local SWAT team. Gun, baton, handcuffs; the lot. His body language oozed "I am the law and don't you forget it", but helpful, you couldn't find a more helpful guy. Rod and Nicko bought fuel. No such thing as bowsers here, overhead tanks only. After lunch we headed for Currawinya National Park just 40Km up the road. We found a great campsite on a spit in the waterhole and set up camp. Great spot, great camp and plenty of wildlife. We were camped a fairly long way from the toilets so Chris set off in the car to go to the toilet the next day. Well on the way back she became lost. We watched her going back and forth in the bush without seeing us. Well we all put it down to the fact that women are from Venus and men are from Mars. Hence men have a sense of direction and women don't. She did eventually find us after we walked out to the track and yelled and waved.

That evening Rod decides to take Bette to the toilet and on his way back he totally let down the male gender and got lost. Not only had we turned our lights on and he still didn't see us but he called us on the UHF radio and we told him where he was in relation to our position; he refused to believe us as he believed we should have been on his left and not on his right as we told him. I am sure his



Entering Currawinya NP

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male pride is still recovering from the embarrassment. We thought that Bette may have been a little concerned but when she alighted from the car she was almost in tears from laughter at Rod's little misadventure. We all cracked up much to Rod's embarrassment.



The Granites - Currawinya

While at Currawinya we went to the Pinnacles and the Granites. The pinnacles consisted of numerous old mound springs that are now dry. Mound springs are mounds that have been formed by the artesian waters coming to the surface naturally and have slowly built huge mounds like mini volcanoes. The calcium in the water contributes to the formation of the mounds. The last time we experienced live (wet) mound springs was on the Oodnadatta track in 2009. The granites area was very picturesque and while not dramatic, were very photogenic.

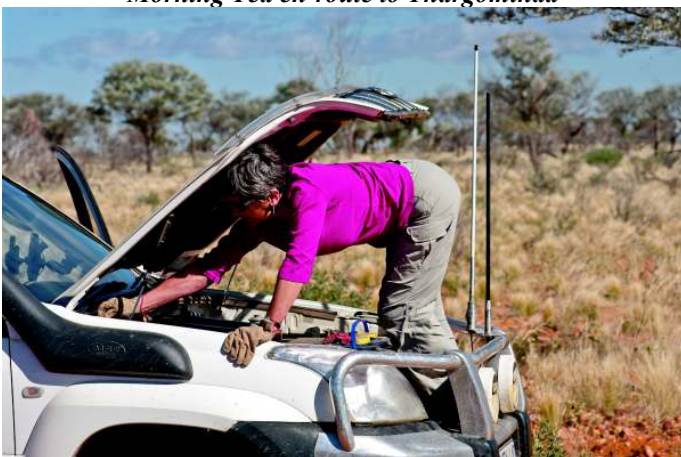
On the 14th June (2 days at Currawinya) we headed for Thargomindah. Checked into the Caravan Park and had a decent shower. Excellent camp kitchen, did the washing and had a BBQ for dinner. Thargomindah brag about having been the first town in Australia to have geothermal power. Well that may very well be true but now they use a diesel powered power station. A little surprising when you think about the fact that Birdsville now uses geothermal power. Thargomindah have restored part of



Morning Tea en-route to Thargominda



Geothermal Heat for Power generation



Chris cleaning out Locusts from the engine bay

the old system as a tourist attraction and demonstrate the process by producing enough power to light a single bulb.

The next morning we headed out, leaving Rod and Bette at Thargomindah. They were going to head towards Noccundra while we decided to head directly north to Quilpie. We were intent on wending our way towards Undarra Volcanic NP and the lava tubes. On the road to Quilpie we experienced many swarms of Locusts. There is currently a locust plague in many parts of Australia resulting from the extensive rains that have been recorded in the outback. This was not our first encounter with these creatures but certainly the worst. Do they ever have hard bodies. Driving through a swarm is quite an experience. If you drive fairly slow, say 60Km/hr they survive the impact, but if you drive at 80Km/hr they tend to get a little damage and ooze this terrible sticky substance all over your car which then

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collects dust from the dirt roads. Our radiators, turbo intercoolers and air ducts became infested with both live and dead locusts. Arrived in Quilpie in time for lunch. Nicko treated himself to a pair of elastic sided boots at the general store. We camped 7Km



Budgies to a drink en masse at Lake Houdraman



Lake Houdraman

out from Quilpie on Lake Houdraman. Again there was a lot of bird life, in particular flocks of budgerigars. Next morning we headed back into Quilpie for coffee then headed for Blackall via Adavale along some quite remote dirt roads. Adavale was a very interesting town. We had lunch at the pub but they were not licensed to prepare food so we were restricted to a Chicken roll or a pie heated up in the microwave. We opted for the pie on the recommendation of the girl behind the bar. There was not a sole to be seen in the town except for a guy that had run down the road in his athletic gear. Obviously some sort of fitness nut. Then he runs into the grandest house in the whole town. So while I am waiting for lunch to be heated a wander down the road with my camera toward this grand house where the athlete had disappeared. As I approach the house I see the police sign and then when a get closer the copper, having showered, walks out onto the porch of the house with a towel wrapped around him. He says "G-day" to which of course I say "G-day". He says "hold on I'll put on a pair of shorts". Then he comes out again and starts to chat. Mexican sombrero and a pair of shorts. Turns out he loves being stationed out in the middle of nowhere and says there is no law breaking going on in his patch as they are all good people. Doubt that he ever wears his gun. What a contrast to the "SWAT team" member only 400Km down the track at Hungerford. Even in the police force a guess it takes all sorts.

We spied a notice in the pub that advised of the availability of showers in the old town hall. Well it wasn't hard to find, there aren't many buildings in Adavale so we all had hot showers (free) and then continued on our way. When it came time to start



Adavale Town Hall - Free Showers



Main Thoroughfare in Adavale

looking for a camp we were plagued by the road being fenced on each side. A situation that had not been the case a little earlier. We eventually found a makeshift camp site at the Washpool Waterhole on a station road. Next day we wandered into Blackall and shopped for supplies, diesel and had a coffee. Set off about 11:30am for Isisford and a camp spot that Chris and I had used last year on the banks of the Barcoo river. We were hoping to drop into the Isisford Downs historic shearing shed but found that it was closed for "OH & S" reasons. The nanny state strikes again.

Amazingly the camp spot that Chris and I had eked out last year was empty. It just happens to be the best spot at Isisford but a little difficult to get in and out of so caravans would not go anywhere near it. It was going to be a tight fit for 2 campers but with some modifications with spade and shovel we made it. Our intention was to stay there 2 nights but basically we had decided to



Camped on the Barcoo in



Young Whistling Kite - Isisford



Furphy Water cart

let Nicko make the call on how long we would stay. Well 2 days stretched into 3 then 4. Nicko was starting to slow down to our pace. So on the 21st June we headed directly north stopping for coffee at Ilfracombe where we needed to cross the Landsborough Hwy. Ilfracombe is a small town only about 20 Kms from Longreach and benefits from its close proximity to Longreach, in that it is a nicer place to stay and still have ready access to the Stockman's Hall Of Fame and the Qantas Museum. They have a very good collection of old machinery on display including a Furphy water cart. So for those of you who are unaware where the term

"He's telling a Furphy" comes from check the accompanying photos. The Landsborough Hwy is the main highway west through Longreach to Mt Isa and the NT, so we had to suffer the onslaught of caravans but only briefly. After coffee we took a secon-



Camped on the Broadwater, Muttaborra



Spoonbills - Broadwater



Colourful Broadwater Resident

dary dirt road north to Aramac, the origin of the Harry Redford (Captain Starlight) legend. Had a look around Aramac, bought lunch and fuel, and was entertained by the local village idiot while eating lunch. After lunch we headed west to Muttaborra then headed out to the Broadwater just 10km out of town to set up camp. Stayed here for 4 nights, another excellent camp spot and once again Nicko kept extending our stay to our delight. Tried to catch some Yellow Belly to no avail so concentrated on photography and relaxation plus cooking a cakes on the camp fire. Nicko very quickly became a fan of our carrot cake. We also experimented with cleaning up the muddy river water for washing by sprinkling ash in buckets of water. Works a treat, left over night, the mud/clay sinks to the bottom leaving clear water.

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On the morning of the 25th June we headed north once again to Hughenden, a trip of 220Km, set up camp in the Caraven Park. Nicko spent the afternoon looking for new connectors for his trailer that had come out while driving and all he had left was a bunch of frazzled wires. With some effort he tracked some down. The problem was he was using a plug format that is popular in WA but nowhere else, and so were very hard to track down. We took the opportunity to do the washing, buy supplies and diesel.

Had an excellent meal that night in the Pub then set off the next morning in the general direction of Undarra NP. Just 65Km up



Porcupine Gorge



Master Chefs - another carrot cake coming up



Rufus Bettong

the track we investigated Porcupine Gorge NP. It was interest enough to set up camp and have a good look around and do some bush walking down the gorge. We were not disappointed as it was very picturesque. That night we had a couple of unexpected cute visitors into our camp by way of Rufus Bettongs. They had no fear of us whatsoever and walked around our camp and around our legs looking for tit bits of food of which there was none and of coarse we did not feed them. Feeding wild animals is a no no, as it encourages them to be less able to feed themselves and in some wild animals can turn them into aggressive nuisances like the Kookaburras we experienced last year on the south coast of NSW who flew into our cabin and stole cooked chops off the dinner table.

The next morning, 27th June we set out for the Oasis Road House. We needed to kill a day before heading to Undarra where we had booked into the camp ground from Hughendon. We were advised the necessity to book in due to the QLD school holidays and as it was we were lucky to get a booking.

That's it for this Journal, I am writing this in of all places Copley (Leigh Creek) in SA freezing our butts off.

Cheers for now

Graham, Chris (and Nicko)

Acknowledgement - thanks to Nicko for the photos that Chris or I obviously could not have taken.

