

# On The Road Again 2010 - Arkaroola to Cambrai

*Graham and Chris (less Nicko) on tour - 2010 Part 4*

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In part 3 we were about to head out of Arkaroola to try and get to Innamincka.

So on leaving Arkaroola we initially headed south to chase up some apparently stunning displays of Sturt's desert pea at Balcanoona Station. I do not know if it should be "Sturt's desert pea" or "Sturt desert pea", so if somebody is an authority, please let



*You think this is an impressive display of desert pea - keep reading*



*Pink and white flowers occurring amongst normal desert pea*

us know, and, by the way, the desert pea is the flower emblem of SA. Balcanoona is a working station but is also the Ranger HQ for Gammon Ranges NP (Both Balcanoona and Gammon Ranges NP are managed and run by a completely Aboriginal crew which is really good to see). A couple who we were chatting to at Arkaroola, had said that the head ranger at Balcanoona had told them about a field of desert pea that was a "once in a life time occurrence". In addition there are some pink and white desert pea. Again we are by no means knowledgeable about desert pea but it appears that the desert pea can occasionally mutate and some unusual colours are the result. At Balcanoona we ran into some fellow travellers and told them that we were tracking down some desert pea particularly some mutations, so they decided that they would follow us out to the spot where the desert pea was supposed to be.. We only had sketchy directions but off we headed. The other guys were about 10 Min behind us and we kept them posted over the 2 way radio as to the turn off's etc, as it was a half overgrown track that we needed to head down. At my suggestion that we



*Pink and white desert pea - amazing*



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should leave our trailers at Balcanoona, as it was supposedly 4WD only, they scoffed at me, saying they have never been down a 4WD drive labelled track that was a problem with their trailers. I shrugged my shoulders and we set off. Well the track wasn't that bad but there was one dry creek bed that had a very sharp entry that required some care, next thing we could hear on the radio were the others deciding to leave their trailers at the creek. Now this wasn't a very bad crossing at all in our view (although Chris was gritting her teeth as we ventured down the steep bank), so I have no idea what 4WD tracks they had been down before.

Anyway a little further on we discovered the desert pea and it certainly was a stunning display but we could not for the life of us find the "pink and white" desert pea. So while delighted with our find we started to head back to the main track. The other travellers had told us that while Chris and I were trying to find large tracts pink and white desert pea, that is not how they will occur. They occur just as an odd plant in the middle of the normal ones. So now we at least new what to look for.



*View from our camp at Wetloona - Gammon Ranges*

then head north the next day through Mount Hopeless. So in reality we had only travelled a total distance of about 50km for the day.

After a pleasant night at Wetloona we headed north with Innamincka clearly in our sights but knowing that there was a little rain

Just after turning around and heading back to the main road, one of the other cars spotted some desert pea off the track about 50M or so and checked to see if we wanted to investigate them, just in case. So what the heck, we did, and as we approached Chris spotted them first. What a great find, thinking that we would probably never see an occurrence again in our life. Now some of you may be laughing and have seen mutations of the desert pea and think it is a bit "ho hum", but for us it was quite a thrill and apparently quite rare. We were also not to know that we were going to encounter more remarkable desert pea displays later in our travels.

We had already decided that we would camp at Wetloona camp ground for the night in the Gammon Ranges and



*Remote areas warning and Chris checks out the wildflowers on Mt Hopeless road*

on the way.

The first thing that you are confronted on the Mt Hopeless road is a sign regarding travelling in remote area of SA. The trip up the eastern side of the ranges to Mt Hopeless confirmed our suspicions regarding the people getting bogged and calling on the local cattle station for assistance. We got all the way to the Strzelecki Track with hardly a scrap of mud getting on our tyres.

So we joined the Strzelecki Track without incident and then stopped at Montecollina Bore in time for lunch. Great camp spot complete artesian hot spa. We new that rain was headed our way and decided that if need be we would camp at the bore until the roads dried out. Even though a couple of travellers told us that they and others had gotten out of Innamincka in case they were caught there for weeks. The word was that there was a great deal of rain headed into the area. But still we thought, might as well stay here and assuming that the rain would come from storms we would get enough power to our solar panels to see the distance. Well the following morning we awoke to a very light drizzle with the sky a dull grey from horizon to horizon. After breakfast we made a decision to pack up and set off ASAP. But importantly we refuse to head SOUTH again, we needed to find some warmer weather and instead of Innamincka, where we were likely to get trapped for a week or so we decided to head for Cameron Corner and all going well onto Tibooburra. We really dislike doubling up and heading back to Tibooburra, where we had been in June was a pain. But we did not have much choice as the only other option was back to Lyndhurst where we had passed through only a couple of weeks prior.

So we set off and as was the case when we had come down the Birdsville Track, the light rain seem to have no effect on the road but gradually it became sticky like glue. Just short of our turn off near Merty Merty, we passed a couple with a small Caravan/ Camper who had stopped on the side of the road. After we passed them we slowed slightly and they were soon in our rear vision mirror. At the turn off to Cameron Corner we stopped and spoke to them to see if they were interested in travelling together. After our experience on the Birdsville Track and the Marree road only a couple of weeks prior we thought that travelling in convoy would be a safer option. They thankfully were in agreement. We organised our UHF frequency and headed off. As you may very well guess the road gradually got worse but not too bad. About 30Km after the turn off we spoke to another large 4WD Truck/Camper who suggested we should put our ice skates on as it was very slippery from where he had come. He had left Cameron Corner that morning.



*A brief gap in the rain headed towards Cameron Corner lets us check out the wildflowers*

erion Corner. Our fellow travellers, Jeremy and Robyn, needed fuel at Cameron Corner and were also keen to get some Lunch. Chris and I were keen to push onto Tibooburra because the road was only going to get worse as the rain hadn't abated. The woman behind the counter at Cameron Corner tried to convince us to stay for lunch by telling us that the food was better than we were likely to get in Tibooburra and besides, Tibooburra will be chock-a-block full of stranded travellers. Well the proprietor then entered the bar and to his credit said, "I know it is lost income, but I would suggest that you push on or else you will not get to Tibooburra any time soon (in the next week)". The road that we had been on to Cameron Corner had been declared closed and was obviously closed while we were travelling along it. The road closure signs are centrally controlled by satellite and the fines for travelling on closed roads are quite horrendous. I do not know however, what the rules are if you are on the road when it starts to rain and is subsequently closed while you are still travelling.

Well, we pushed on for Tibooburra and what a trip it was. Our trailer started to dominate control of our car and at one stage completely jack knifed to the extent that the stone deflector dented the rear fender of the car. It was this little event that dragged the car first one way then the opposite until it completely dragged us around 90 Degrees to the road. We had spun out into the side of the road, car, trailer, the works. We got mobile again and Jeremy, who we were learning had a very dry sense of humour, came over the radio with the comment "That was impressive". My reply was "You are of course expected to follow suite". "Yeah right" was the curt reply.

We did get to Tibooburra and had some very needed lunch then booked into the caravan park. We went to disconnect the trailer and then realised that we could not get near the tow hitch for mud. So we found a tap and hosed it down.

Jeremy and Robyn also checked into the caravan park and they also had to wash down there vehicle and caravan. We were all soaking wet as the rain still had not stopped and we were pretty well covered in mud by the time we had set up camp. So a steaming hot shower and some warm clean clothes were most welcome.

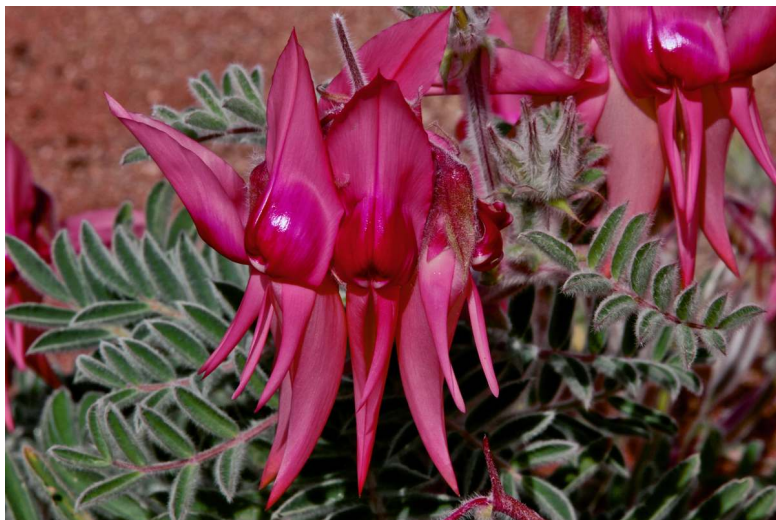
Jeremy and Robyn were a couple in their early 40's and had hired the caravan to get away for a few weeks. Would love to see the expression on the face of the bloke at the caravan hire place when they return the van. That night we had a great time at the pub with Jeremy and Robyn, dinner and a few drinks and recounting the days excitement.

In Tibooburra there was not much to do except hang around and wait for the roads to open, the first of which was likely going to be the road to Broken Hill.

We had arrived in Tibooburra on Sun 22nd Aug. The rain had stopped by that evening and it was dry all day Mon but no roads were opened. Tuesday morning first thing, the Broken Hill Road was opened, and then later in the morning the Wanaaring road was opened, at which point Jeremy and Robyn headed off as they were both due back at work that following Thursday in Brisbane. We were still undecided where we wanted to head so procrastinated for another day. But it was actually worth it. We had been chatting to the couple that run "The Country Store" about Sturt (Sturt's??) desert pea and mutations. They laughed and

Well he was correct, it got very slippery. The Merty Merty to Cameron Corner Road traverses ridge after ridge of sand hills that run 90 Degrees to the road. The road became so slippery that had we stopped we would not have gotten up enough inertia to get over the next ridge. We would have slid backwards down the hill. The couple of times that we did stop we made sure that there was enough run up to the next sand hill. Even with 4 wheels driving us we had trouble getting traction to get over the sand hills. After some heart stopping slips and slides we made it to Cam-





*Pink desert pea in Tibooburra back yard*

said “heck we got plenty of those growing wild in our back yard”. So with that we got directions and wandered around to their house for a look. And indeed they had desert pea growing throughout their yard; wild.

That evening we wandered up to Sunset Hill Lookout and ran into a fellow caravan park tenant. A woman (Charmaine) about our age who had been volunteering at historic Milparinka in the information office. Chatted to her for some time and reckon we might do a couple of weeks volunteer work at Milparinka next year. The woman, Sarah Sandow, who organises the historic sites at Milparinka is from a Cattle/Sheep station called Theldarpa. Theldarpa also welcomes campers and/or provides accommodation in the shearers quarters for travellers. With this info, we decided that is what we would do, head out to Theldarpa the next morning and stay for a few days.

We contacted Sarah and made the arrangements, arriving their late morning on Wed 25th. Her and her husband were heading to Broken Hill that day and would not be back until the following Monday. When we enquired as to who else was at the station she replied “Nobody - your on your own - if you need to contact us, drive to the top of that hill over there where you will get a Telstra nextG signal”.

In the eating area called with some poetic licence, the “dining



*Tibooburra from Sunset Hill*

room” at the shearers quarters there was an honesty box and info on the station and interesting self guided tours that could be done. There was also hot showers but you needed to light a fire in the donkey boiler about an hour before you shower.



*See if you can spot the car from the top of 3 Sisters - and Theldarpa homestead, shearers quarters and sheds*

We set up camp down by the creek, about 1.5Km from the homestead. It was a great camp spot and so we decided to hang around for 3 nights. Plenty of fire wood so we cooked a carrot cake. During the day we explored the station. The weather was still fairly lousy with winds but we had reasonable protection camped on the creek. On Thursday we headed out to the 3 Sisters which are 3 pinnacles on the station about 40km out from the homestead. While Theldarpa is not a huge station by any means when compared to some others it certainly looks vast from the top of the 3 Sisters.

After 3 great days at Theldarpa, on Saturday morning the 28th Aug we set off for Silverton via the dog fence road. By way of explanation, there is a track that runs the entire length of the dog fence which is built on the border between SA and NSW. The track is strictly for the fence maintenance guys to inspect and maintain the fence. Public access is not allowed but there is another public track that runs about 50m inside the fence and for some distance is parallel to the fence. What a fantastic drive it



was but very lonely. After we had been driving for a few hours we were so used to seeing no other vehicles, and indeed little evidence that there had been any vehicles along the track for some time and certainly not since it last rained a few days prior, we got the fright of our life when an official looking 4WD came around a bend on Moorabie Station. The guy looked at us suspiciously and stopped. The thought went through our heads that perhaps we were not supposed to be on the road as there had been a few signs that were somewhat ambiguous regarding access to the station, something like "all visitors must report to the station



*Following the dog fence down the SA/NSW border*



*Lunch time*



*A great display of wild flowers.*

manager". We weren't visitors we thought, we're just tourists driving through. Also the lack of any other vehicles made us feel that it was perhaps a track that the public did not travel on.

Anyway it turned out that the guy was a permanent dog fence maintenance employee who was as surprised to see us as we were him. He explained the signs to us and allayed our concerns. He also gave us some instructions on how to get to Silverton via the track we were on and gave us some insight into the condition of the road ahead. There was one muddy washout that we had only just gotten through to that point, and we were concerned that if there were any more we might get bogged. There were certainly a lot of side tracks going around large expanses of water all along the road and the track was deteriorating fast as it became more remote.

We continued on and the track started to become overgrown and almost disappeared in a few places. However we pushed on and as we progressed further south and the number of homesteads increased, the track started to improve until it eventually became a formed dirt road. We only had one more difficult muddy section that we barely had enough traction to get through. The



*It is hard do imagine there is a more prolific display of desert pea than this.*





*Sturt's desert pea - the common variety*

trailer weighs about 1.8 tonnes and is a dead weight when trying to traverse slimy mud.

The drive to Silverton was about 350km and because of the road we were not likely to make Silverton comfortably that evening so we started look for a decent camp spot of the road. The country had become barren to the extreme and every creek crossing seemed always to be too close to a homestead. We had just crossed another creek near McDougall's Well homestead when Chris spots some desert pea (yeah I know you guys are sick of me going on about desert pea). It was getting



*Wild flowers beside the Barrier Ranges*

quite late but we just had to investigate. We walked into the bush down the side of the creek and with each step we were blown away. The photos don't really capture it but you can get some idea as to the extent of this desert pea display.

Now the afternoon was really at an end and we desperately needed to find a camp spot which we fortunately did even though we were surrounded by a flock of sheep in the morning when we awoke. We packed up and headed to Silverton but not without seeing some more impressive wild flower displays along the Barrier Ranges.



*A bunch of corellas decided it was bath time at Penrose Park*



*Some atmosphere in Silverton*

We arrived at Silverton, and set up camp at Penrose Park in time to have lunch at the Silverton Café. Over lunch it occurred to us that except for the dog fence maintenance guy, the folk at Silverton were the first people we had seen since Wednesday at Theldarpa and it was now Sunday. That afternoon we met a great young couple from Pakenham and that night we sat around the fire (it was freezing) and played cards. We learnt a new card game called "Shit Head". Terrible name but a great game. Next day we spent most of the day in Broken Hill, sort of washed the car. Had to, because the previous day I had tried to clean most of the mud off the car which left dried mud on the insides of the wheels putting them terribly out of balance. That night we got Narelle and Trevor (the young couple we had played cards with the previous evening) over to share a bottle of bubbly to celebrate our 41st Wedding Anniversary.

Next day, Tuesday the 31st August we headed out 130km to Mutawintji NP. We set up our large awning in anticipation of rain



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which had been forecast (again). After a leisurely rise and some brekky the next morning we did the ridge walk. That afternoon we were a little flummoxed when 2 bus loads of kids set up camp. One a bunch of teenagers from a Warrigal catholic school and the other, a bunch of 8yo's from Wilcannia. The teenagers camped next to us but, our trepidation was ill founded and they



*The Ridge Walk - Mutawintji*



*The Bygnano Range Walk - Mutawintji*



*Chris sees something to take a photos of on the Range Walk*

were a great bunch of kids. So were the 8 yo's.

Next day we did the Bygnano Range walk of about 10-12km. Mutawintji (Original aboriginal name is pronounced Mootwingee) was not on our radar until we ran into a guy in Ti-booburra who had just been there. Well we were not disappointed. The Bygnano Range walk was stunning. In fact the whole park was stunning. Cheap camping, hot showers, pleasant camp ground and very attentive rangers.

We were still expecting rain the following day so we decided that if it was still fine in the morning we would do the Gorge Walk (6km) before the rain arrived. Which is in fact what we did even though the weather was threatening. That night however was a different matter. Very, very strong winds and

heaps of rain. The floor area under our awning was 2inch deep in water when we went out to batten down the hatches, in the middle of the night.

Next morning (Sat) the ranger came around at about 9am to check out how we were and to make sure we had enough food for a few days as all roads within the park and out of the park were closed until further notice. We could not move our car from where it was parked. The park had received 21.5mm during the night. There were only 3 campers left as most had decided to get out before the rain came.

We fortunately had anticipated this happening and were well stocked up with food. This was as good a place as any to be stuck for a while. But the following morning the ranger advised us that the road to Broken Hill was now open but no other roads were. We had been banking on driving to White Cliffs but a leak that I had noticed around the oil seal for the front drive shaft was enough to suggest we should get into Broken Hill and see if it can be fixed. Sooooo once again we headed to Broken Hill, the only good thing about this was the thought of a decent cup of coffee. We set off for Broken Hill and about 4Km down the road I see a Toyota 4WD coming up behind us, lights flashing. Thought we were in trouble for driving on a closed road and the ranger had got it wrong. We stopped and found it was a fellow camper who had thankfully noticed that the tailgate on our camper was open. So he hopped in his car and chased us down the road. We would have been in a right mess if he wasn't on the ball. We would have probably ended up with mud and dust all through our bedding.



*Kingfisher - Menindee*



*Camped at Menindee*



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Once again we camped at Penrose Park in Silverton. Spent a full day in Broken Hill while the oil seal was fixed and hung around our camp for an additional 4 days waiting for roads to dry out. By this time as you can imagine we are getting a little sick and tired of the rain and muddy roads. Once again we had to wash the mud off the car.

So, new plans. We decide to head to Menindee Lakes and then head down through Pooncarie along the Darling then across to Renmark, heading for our block in the Mallee.

We arrived at Menindee on Sat 11th Sept and found a fabulous camp spot on Lake Parmamaroo. Worked on part 3 Journal on the Monday as it was drizzling for most of the afternoon. Weather lousy and threatening rain again in the evening. Then it rained overnight but sunny when we woke. We packed up, not thinking that we had had enough rain to close the roads but

thought we had better check. Damn, all roads were closed except the Broken Hill Road. Bloody sick of Broken Hill. Well we immediately had a conference and decided to get to Broken Hill as soon as we could and then make a B line for our block and sit it out there until we were due in Adelaide on the 19th.

We got to Peterborough that night, rain was threatening and it was cold, so we took a cabin (yeah I know, squibs). Following day we made it to Burra for lunch then took some back roads to cut across to Sedan and our Block. While the weather wasn't the best it was certainly a little warmer and we had 4 very pleasant days there. The Mallee has had enormous amounts of rain and the whole place was green and lush. We have never seen it like this before. The hairy nosed wombats appear to have been very active as a result of the rain and have been digging holes indiscriminately in the middle of tracks and wherever they see fit. Rotters. Of course we simply create a new track by driving



*A scarred and battle worn hairy nose wombat on our block*



*Dusk at Cambrai*



*Our Camp site on our block*

we leave for Melbourne in the morning.

This will be our last journal probably until 2012 when we will be setting off in a new camper. We will spend 2011 swanning around home and taking short trips here and there and we may even fit in a couple of weeks of volunteer work at Milparinka Historic Town. The itinerary for 2012 is still very much unknown.

Hope we haven't bored you to death. Cheers

Graham and Chris

around their holes. The area is known for its colonies of hairy nose wombats. They are a threatened species, (unlike the common wombat) and one of the reasons for our block and other heritage blocks like it, is to help protect them and give them plenty of land to survive. They are nocturnal but you will often find them out of their holes in the late afternoon. The old battle worn wombat in the photo knew I was there somewhere but he could not see me. As I crept closer he could sense movement but was not sure of what it was. I was down wind of him so he could not pick up my scent. It is not often you are able to get the chance of a shot like this. Check out his powerful forearms for digging burrows in limestone rock.

Well this brings us to the end of this journal and pretty much to the end of this year adventure. I am writing this in Adelaide and