

Outback Odyssey 2012 - Part 2

Graham and Chris on tour - 2012 Part 2

One years sabbatical then on the road again.

After leaving Yowah we headed out the Black Gate road to Lake Bindegolly. A hard days slog of 40km (well we *ARE* retired and not in a hurry). The Black Gate road was a fabulous drive. A fairly narrow winding dirt road that the Variety Bash had come to Yowah by. I can imagine how much fun they had with their motley collection of cars.

The northern part of Lake Bindegolly is a national park whose southern border is just north of the main road that travels in an East/West direction. Just south of the road and on the southern part of the lake is a quite extensive bush camping area. So we decided to check it out. We drove in the access track as far as we possibly could, beyond the reach of caravans and set up camp in an area that I doubt has seen a camper for years if ever. We spent a total of 3 nights at the lake. The first two days were very windy and on the third day we set off and did a



Must be spring time



Our curious neighbours at Bindegolly



Little Black Cormorants heading south to roost for the night - (see story).

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*Reminder of times past at
Bindegolly*

10km walk into the national park. Some of the walks were closed as the lake is unusually full, cutting off the tracks. Each morning flocks upon flocks of Little Cormorants would head northward past our camp heading for the northern end of the lake, and then each evening at dusk, these thousands of Cormorants would pass our camp heading south to roost for the night, some of them roosting in the bushes and dead trees near our camp. The following morning they would once again head to the northern end of the lake. Why on earth they do this we have no idea as one would think that there is plenty of opportunities to roost anywhere in the lake. However it made a very interesting scene as they were silhouetted against the red sky at dusk (see photo page 1).

On the 19th of August we drove to Thargominda. It was time to do some shopping as supplies were virtually non existent at Yowah and I also needed some liquid refreshments for sundowners, plus we needed to attend to laundry matters. Thargominda is a great little town, very friendly, except for the grumpy female licensee at the pub, boy what a grouch. The husband and wife who run the Caravan Park more than made up for the pub grouch however. Wonderful promoters of Thargominda then add to this unlimited Wi-Fi was available in the Caravan Park for \$5 a day.



Noccundra Hotel

On the 20th we drove to Noccundra. Actually its official name is Noccundra Hotel but everybody simply calls it Noccundra despite being the only building in the "Town" except for some public toilets and showers that are separate from the Pub. It is unclear who supplies and maintains these facilities. In years gone past they had well maintained tennis courts and a community hall. I guess it was perhaps a focal point of the local pastoralists. Noccundra has a population of approx 4 but can vary by 2 either way.

Noccundra is a popular spot for a number of reasons. People with caravans who want to go to Innamincka and the Dig Tree



Yellow Billed Spoonbill



Black Kite on the prowl



Common but great to photograph



White Necked Heron - very photogenic.

often leave their caravans at Noccundra and then tent it into Innamincka. Additionally the water hole here (the Wilson River) is Carp free and offers some good fishing and plenty of Yabbies (or as the Queenslander call them "Red Claw" but they actually have blue claws :- Queenslanders?????).

We found ourselves a sensational camp spot a little further down the river from where most people were camped. It took a little finding and it was obvious that others were unaware that it was there. We gathered up at the pub most nights for sundowners with the rest of the temporary population (travellers). We met a great couple from

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Our camp at Noccundra



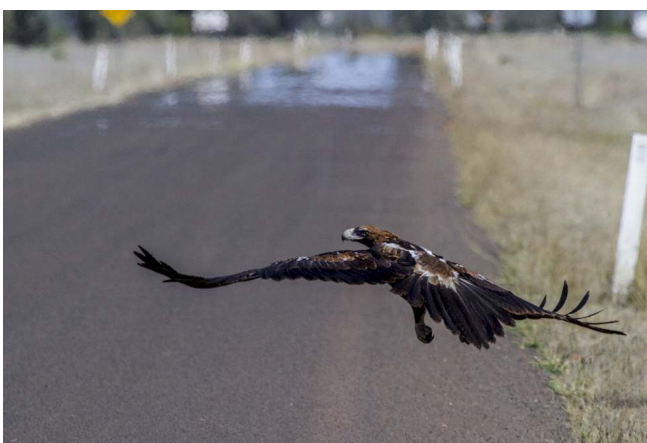
Eromanga pub. "The furthest town from the sea"

Vermont, Geoff and Kay. He, like me, detested **cats** and **generators** and loved his Toyota Prado. We were both a little dismayed that the pub owned a cat that was allowed to wonder around without any limits on it's movements.

We were going to head off after a couple of days when early in the morning a severe northerly blew up. As we were intending to head NNE, towards Eromanga and then on to Quilpie, we felt that staying put was the best option as our camp had some protection from the wind and the consumption of diesel, heading into such a strong wind, would have been alarming. Consequently we stayed another two days.

On the 24th August we left early for Eromanga. Another outback town that we had little knowledge of but were hoping to find somewhere decent to camp. After all it was about \$185 km, which is a respectable distance when you are retired and not particularly in a hurry and indeed committed to smelling the roses. Arriving in Eromanga a little before midday we checked the place out. What we found was yet another unique town, but this uniqueness was not particularly appealing however. In fact, when uniqueness factors were distributed to all the outback towns in Australia, Eromanga was gifted two. Firstly, as you can see by the photos of the pub, Eromanga claims to be the furthest town from the sea. I can only assume that only refers to Australia. Secondly the fuel outlet provides fairly cheap fuel. So what is unique about that you may well ask, as there are probably some fuel discounters somewhere else in the bush (not that we can ever find them). Well what is so unique about this fuel supply is the oil well and refining plant is 200 meters behind the bowser. So what appeared to be cheap fuel was actually fairly expensive when you consider that no transport etc was involved in getting it to the fuel pump. "Yeah mate - the oil comes out from right under where you standin', gets refined in our plant here behind me, and straight through the fuel pump into yer truck".

We bought an ice cream and headed for Quilpie and struck Eromanga off the list of possible future camps. Arrived in Quilpie, had lunch at a café, did the shopping then headed to Lake Houdraman to camp - 6km out of town. We ran into Geoff and Kay, whom we had met at Noccundra, so after setting up camp we invited them to "come over for a cuppa". Next morning we went back into Quilpie to shop for the items we had forgotten and to fill up



"Catch me if you can" - road to Quilpie

our water tanks before setting off for Adavale via the "Old Adavale Road" - a grand distance of a little over 100 km (but it is a rough dirt road).

We had been to Adavale in 2010 and had promised ourselves a revisit as we had rushed through on that occasion, only stopping for a free hot shower in the "Town Hall". On arriving at Adavale (pronounced Ada Veil - something to do with Ada and her Veil), we went straight to the pub. There is simply nowhere else to go. No shops, no fuel, nothing at all except a few houses, police station and a pub. The publican had changed since our

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Koss (with the glasses) with his customers on a very busy day



Checking out "Outback Australia - volume 1"

last visit and it was now owned by Koss, a music teacher who doesn't drink. Very nice bloke and the pub had two other customers, a younger couple who were camped nearby. This pub specializes in beer and "ding" food.

Stupid me of course enquires "What is DING food?".

Koss replies, "Shut the door, push the button, and 3 minutes later, 'DING' it's ready".

Making conversation I ask, "when do you get busy".

Koss says, "Right now!, this is the busiest I have been in a month".

We were intending to spend a night nearby so with the help of Darren and his wife, the other customers, and Koss, we received enough guidance to find a camp spot for the night along Blackwater Creek.

The next day, with map in hand (produced by Koss) we headed to Charleville via Mariala NP. The NSW Parks and Wildlife Publication makes a couple of interesting points regarding Mariala NP. Firstly that it is featureless and secondly that it is "Patrolled".

The park is about 50 km east of Adavale so it was a leisurely drive. The park was originally a Station property whose income was derived raising horses for Cobb and Co. The park is remarkable because of its untouched expanses of Mulga that has never been cleared.

We, with difficulty found the gate and very small sign to enter the park. The gate looked like it had not been used for some time and the track in was not well defined with young tree saplings growing in the middle of it. Remembering the words in the NPS literature of "patrolled park" we were rather intrigued. Despite almost losing the track and with the aid of our trusty Hema Navigator we found our way into a clearing (the park is a forest of dense Mulga trees). This is a very remote area and I don't think I have ever felt quite so isolated as we did in Mariala.



Mariala NP

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Not that we were that far away from people (only 60 km to Adavale) but I doubt if there has been a patrol or visitor into the park in 12 months or more. There was certainly no evidence of anyone having ever camped there at all. If we were to have run into car trouble or had an injury of some sort we were faced with a walk of 13 km to the infrequently used road (Adavale to Charleville). When we set out on this years adventure we did not



Magnificent old Steam Engine - Mariala



Mariala Camp - very isolated

think that we were going to be travelling in areas that were as remote or unfrequented as previous years. For this reason we did not renew our sat phone contract and so were only able to rely on our UHF radio for communication. In the case of a problem we would have to hope that a radio call coincided with the occasional passing vehicle who was monitoring the frequency that we chose, travelling along the road 13 km away.

However despite this feeling of isolation, it was a fabulous camp with some real evidence of the history of the place. The clearing where we camped was obviously a key part of the properties history.

After two nights we headed for Charleville. As we needed to do some laundry we decided to set up in the Evening Star tourist park just out of Charleville (8 km). Very nice park it was (as Caravan Parks go), with sundowners each night around a huge fire pit and bar with reasonably priced drinks. (Noccundra - Beer \$5 a can, Evening Star \$3 a can). The caravan park was on a sheep station, adjacent to the station homestead. In our eagerness to get everything done and move on from Charleville (too many bloody tourists - how dare people tour when we are touring), we threw the 2 loads of washing into the washing machine. Now I say Chris rushed me too much, but she has a different story. "Darling have you seen my iPhone". "No, it'll be in the camper somewhere" she replies. To cut a long story short, if you would like to clean your iPhone (or any phone for that matter), do not use commercial washing machines not even on the delicate cycle. While the phone comes out perfectly clean it ceases to work. I duly noted this issue in the visitors book in the laundry warning other users not to wash there phones with the laundry as they would not survive the robust commercial washing machines that were installed there.

Well dam, in to town we head, first place of call is the Telstra shop. With a wry smile and a bit of a giggle from the two lovely girls in the phone shop we undertook the purchase of a new phone.

Phone duly selected, "Sorry we do not have that phone in stock, we sold the last one yesterday".

"Oh dear, what about this one then".

"Sorry, we need to order that one in"

So we waited in Charleville until the selected phone was flown in. The downside was hanging around

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Doing the morning weather report - Charleville



Hotel Coronas - Charleville

Charleville. The upside, other than our visit to the Weather Station and the Cosmos Centre where we looked at the sun through a special telescope, we were also in town for our wedding anniversary. So we dropped into the Telstra shop and asked the girls about what restaurants were in the offing.

“The Thai restaurant at the Warrego Club is pretty good”.

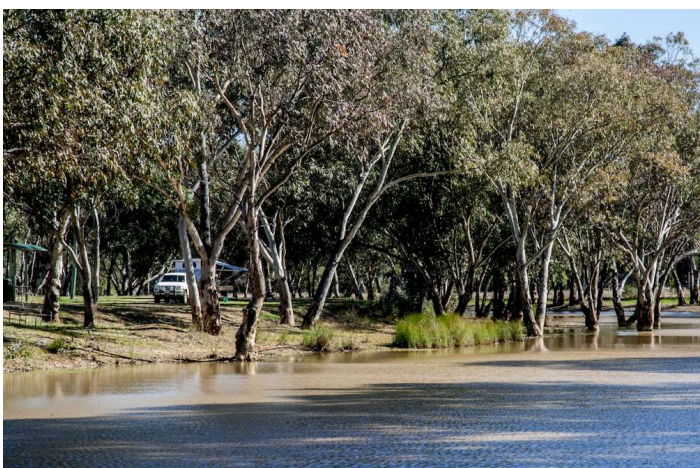
So that is where we celebrated our wedding anniversary (our 43rd) on the 30th August. For a very informal bistro type “Restaurant” the tucker was not too bad.

Friday morning the 31st August, after taking delivery of the new phone, we headed a little further east to the



Quaint police station in Morven

town of Morven who provide wonderful camping and even powered site on the local water hole. All they ask is a donation with an honesty box at the ablutions. The facilities are very well maintained and include hot showers. As you can imagine, it being on a bitumen road, there were plenty of caravans. We tossed up whether we would stay the night or push on to Mitchell. It was a very small pleasant looking town so we decided to set up camp a little bit away from the madding crowd and went for a walk around the town. We were able to do the whole town in 30



Camping in Morven with full facilities :- cost = donation



Kerosene can hut, Morven - many of these in the area during The Depression housing homeless families from the cities

minutes if we took it really slow.

The following day we headed for Mitchell. At this time I should remind the reader that we are not doing any marathon here. Charleville to Morven is 89 km and Morven to Mitchell is 89 km, but as I have often said, we are retired and in no hurry. In Mitchell we tracked down a gift shop/café that actually makes an excellent coffee

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Butcher bird on the take on Chris' chair



Maranoa River, Mitchell - chilly mornings, brilliant days



Courthouse Hotel - Mitchell

(few and far between in these outback areas). The gift shop is only open 3 days a week and we struck it lucky. So after a coffee and baked cheese cake, we set up camp at Fishermans Rest (after researching a couple of other possibilities). There is a weir on the Maranoa River which has created a wonderful water resource for the town. We were camped on clean white beach sand on the river bank and so decided to stay for 3 nights. The camping area was infested with scotch thistles which seemed a shame for such a great spot to be shortly rendered useless by the spread of the thistles. So we set to and cleared the area of scotch thistles:- our small contribution to the environment. Actually we should do our bit, as weeds are being spread by the likes

of us, not on our tyres or in our cars and trailers so much, but with the camp floors that we spread on the ground each time we set up camp.

On the morning of the 4th we stocked up with fuel, food and water, and headed for Thruston NP. Thruston is another park that is very remote and seldom visited. Again there was no obvious entrance other than a very non descript gate and a small sign that would easily be missed if not aware of where the park was supposed to be. In we went, and similar to Mariala NP, it was also supposed to be "patrolled". Once again there was no evidence of anyone, including rangers having been there at any time recently. So we set up camp by some ruins of shearers quarters and a shearing shed. Later that afternoon, bugger me if we don't hear the sound of a car coming through the bush. A younger couple who had come into the park looking to do some GPS based hiking. Each of us stayed 2 nights. We figured that was the most visitors the park has had in the last 12 months, and certainly the most that it has had at the one time



Ruins, shearers quarters, Thruston NP

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Stock yards Thrushton NP, taken over by the ants.

maps indicated that it required a permit to travel along. We figured that if we weren't supposed to head down the track it would be sign posted but it was going to potentially save us about 50 km of driving. Well we arrived in Bollon after Chris must have opened and closed ten or more gates. We are sure every bush mechanic has his own idea of how a gate should be latched. Either that or it is their little IQ test for city folk, traversing their land, having a little chuckle over their beer, at the thought of us being dumbfounded by the intricacies of their gates. Chris swears she is going to write a book titled "Gates I Have Opened".

Many people we had spoken to in our travels this trip had sung the praises of Bollon as a place to camp on the Wallam Creek and while it wasn't too bad, and the community provides free showers and toilets, we decided that it wasn't for us and moved on but only after having chatted to the lovely older lady in the information office for an hour or so. You think many of these very small outback towns just continue on with a minimum amount of community issues, but when you scratch the surface you find some rather frustrating issues for the residents that are completely confounded by city based bureaucrats. Now the Government wants them to hand over the houses that they have had built with government funding to help them attract trades people such as mechanics, electricians etc., to the community to enable the community to function in a normal manner. But the government now wants to put unemployed homeless people from the city into them and eject the current tenants. When you think about that it is mind blowing. Homeless people need support from various services that are not available in towns like Bollon. And what on earth are unemployed people going to do in Bollon as there are no jobs there anyway.



Hebel General Store - its name does not engender any great expectations but if you are ever heading north from Dubbo on your way to Longreach, do not fail to drop in. It is an absolute delight. Friendly, quaint, wonderful décor and great tucker. (See story next page)

ever. We could find no evidence that any body has camped there other than the human evidence of the ruins. The weather had turned for the worst and because we were reasonably well protected from the strong winds we thought that we might as well hang out in the park. The down sit, and quite alarming downside it was, the area was infested with ticks. They were burying themselves into our skin as fast as we could remove them. Chris received a couple of terrible bites coming up in large lumps and one in particular making her feel quite ill.

Our fellow campers left fairly early on the morning of the 6th Sept and we left an hour or so later. We elected to travel via the back road to Bollon, which on some

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wonderful small community, steeped in history simply disappearing of the map. So where do the people who have lived there all their lives go.

From Bollon we headed directly south on a back road to Dirranbandi and camped on the Balonne River a few km's out of town. Had a nosey around the town, locally called Dirra, population about 200, then the next day filled up with diesel and headed for Culgoa Flood Plains National Park via Hebel (pop 8) and Goodooga.

We stopped in at the Hebel general store for Devonshire Tea, what a great place, run by a very lovely lady and her off-sider. Thought we would be clever and asked for just one scone each, thinking of our waistline. The lady said that she thought that just having one scone each was an excellent idea as it should be more than enough. "Hmm, that's ominous" we thought. When the scones arrived we decided we would take one with us and share the other. They were HUGE. When we went to pay, the lady had a doggy BOX ready for our untouched scone with a very smug smile on her face. The Hebel Hotel is the best outback pub we have seen to date (see the pictures).

Obviously some artistic flair and some good humour from the licensee. From there we headed to Goodooga, not very well presented and looks horrible but I am sure if you scratch the surface it would have some wonderful attributes but none were obvious when we had a quick look around. From Goodooga, which is just south of the QLD/NSW border, we headed into Culgoa Flood Plains NP. This park is listed as being very remote and warns people to be very self reliant and well prepared, yet contrary to the 2 very remote parks that we had already visited, this park had a resident ranger who was contactable by UHF.

While this was another "featureless" park (QLD Parks literature description), we certainly enjoyed our stay, camped at the Red Bank Hut on an old station dam. Investigated the entire park on the second day we were there and were the only campers in the park for the entire time. After 3 nights we decided to head down the track into the NSW part of the park simply called Culgoa NP.

This park had more infrastructure and there were visitor and camping fees applicable. We set up camp and had lunch then went for a drive to investigate a couple of tracks that we had seen on the way into the camp ground. It is my habit to make mental pictures of car tracks in the dirt when we are in these unfrequented areas, just so that we are aware of comings and goings in and around our camp when we are not around.

So when I checked out the car tracks on our return to camp I could see that someone had driven through the



Hebel Hotel

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Old Cattle Yards - Culgoa Flood Plains NP



Camped on dam at Red Bank Hut - Culgoa Flood Plains NP

camp ground, past the toilet (long drop) and down a track towards the river. The track had a sign, "Authorized vehicles only" which means rangers only. For us mere mortals the signage was for a walking track. So I remarked to Chris that the ranger was down at the river doing something with the freshly laid concrete slab that we had seen down by the river. Probably installing some sort of feral animal trap.



Pale Headed Rosella - listed as common but often hard to find and photograph. Should not have been in the area according to our bird book.

A half hour or so later we hear the vehicle returning to the camp. No not a ranger but a 4WD tray top with three young bucks and three hunting dogs on the tray.

They tore into our camp, "Ya seen any wild pigs" they ask.

"No" was our reply.

After a few more words they headed straight through the barriers, through the bush to the main track. Obviously any regard for the park infrastructure was of no consequence to them.

That evening while we were having dinner, after dark, these guys came screeching into our camp, this time getting out of their vehicle. With that signal the very large dogs were off the back of the tray and excitedly nosing around our camp. The young bucks were clad in boots and board shorts (no shirts) with large belts and very large knives. Good grief we thought, "Deliverance", this can't be happening.

"Ya got any tomato sauce, we got sausages but we forgot the bloody tomato sauce".

"Yes" we said, quickly finding it in our camper, "You guys keep it, we don't use it anyway".

After a few more words regarding the sighting, hunting and killing of feral pigs (very wholesome subject matter) they piled back into their vehicle, dogs jumping on the back, and screamed off into the night past the sign "Authorised vehicles only".

Chris and I looked at one another and decided that they were harmless, to us at least. Next morning we heard them drive past our camp early, never to be seen by us again. We bought some more tomato sauce when next we did some food shopping, not regretting our donation to the pig hunters. It should be noted that in Burke there is a sign on the local vets premises "Lessons available, 'dressing hunting dog injuries'".

We headed out the same day as the pig hunters via the back tracks to Burke and the start of the "River Run" and homeward bound. It was now the 12th of Sept so roughly three weeks before we had to be home.

End Part 2.

See locality map next page.

