

Outback Odyssey 2012 - Part 3

Graham and Chris on tour - 2012 Part 3

The River Run then homeward bound.

12th Sept 2012.

The Darling River runs from midway between the towns of Brewarrina and Bourke where the Barwon River meets the Bogan River and becomes the Darling. However "The River Run" is considered to be from Walgett (133 Km west of Brewarrina) to Wentworth where the Darling joins the Murray. The River Run is promoted as an outback trek following the Darling river for it's length.

It was our idea to follow the Darling from Bourke to at least south of Pooncarie where we would detour to Mungo National Park. So our "river run" commenced in Culgoa National Park with the Culgoa River which is a significant tributary of the Darling. From our camp at Culgoa NP we passed through the small community of Weilmoringle, an aboriginal settlement on the Culgoa River then followed the Culgoa River all the way to Burke. A very enjoyable drive but not to be attempted in wet weather. It was a total distance of 200 km, so by our standards a solid days driving. It was a dirt road, not much more than a track in some places.

We arrived in Bourke, set up camp, had some lunch then set about organizing an oil change for the car, shopping and laundry. Shouted ourselves a night out on the town by having dinner at "Diggers on the Darling" restaurant. Quite a creative name for an ex RSL club. The name "restaurant" in this neck of the woods usually means a bistro rather than a restaurant, but the tucker was good and it was an enjoyable night. We had some difficulty getting an oil change due to every mechanic being heavily booked out, but the locals soon set me in the right direction to help us out. Very helpful and obliging. In fact this second visit to Bourke on this trip has opened our eyes somewhat and we now start to see why the locals love living there. Whether it was the shelf stackers in the supermarket or the mechanic at the garage, everybody is extremely helpful and friendly. Everybody acknowledges you and gives you a friendly "G'day".

So after getting enough supplies for a "fair stint" away from any decent supermarkets, we headed out of Bourke. Our first stop was Gundabooka NP just south of Bourke as a potential place for the night, but we decided it wasn't for us and headed on to Louth which is about 100 km down stream from Burke.



Shindy's Inn - Louth

Walked into the Pub (Shindy's Inn), had a beer and lunch. The barman/licensee asked where we were headed or if we were hanging around. Since we weren't in a hurry to head anywhere he suggested some spots on the river to camp or indeed in the pubs own camp area.

After lunch we headed off to check out the camping possibilities and blow me down if we are not 50 metres from the pub when we spot Darren and his partner (forgotten her name), the fellow campers we had run into in Adavale on the 25th Aug and it was now the 14th Sept. Each of us had travelled a couple of thousand kilometers since we last met and then ended up running into each other in Louth. Following some advice from them we set up camp a couple of hundred

meters away from them where we stayed for a couple of nights. They had been there for two nights already. If we had had there camp spot we probably would have stayed longer as it was perfect. The following evening

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they trotted over to our camp and donated some yabbies as they had been catching plenty and were setting off for home the following morning. So that night we had yabbies in green curry (YUM!).

After a very pleasant stay and some interaction with some locals who had a roadside stand that they appeared to man 24hrs a day while sucking on cans of XXXX Gold, we headed off for Trilby station. Huge days driving of about 22km. Trilby Station puts a fair bit of effort into promoting itself as a "Station Stay" and with good reason. If you ever find yourself in this area of the woods, do yourself a favor and stay at Trilby Station. Their facilities and hospitality are first class and Liz, her and her husband Gary are the station owners, goes out of her way to make your stay pleasant. The camping areas are pre defined along the banks of the Darling River and no 2 camp spots would be closer than 300 meters from one another. So you get a camping area to yourself. You are welcome to have fires, borrow yabby nets with bait and look around the station. Liz provides each tourist with a folder where she has authored the history of the station, gives great detail of stock that is held, where their income comes from (once again feral goats are a significant income source) and also gives and insight into life



Trilby Station - Transport and Accommodation for fencing contractors that liked a beer (see text) and Circa 1940's Peddle Car left where it was last used.



Liz & Gary - Trilby

on a station. She also provides touring maps of the station (if I remember rightly it's about 320,000 acres) with lists of flora and fauna along with the stories behind the various old pieces of equipment, car and bus wrecks that can be found while touring around. The double decker bus pictured belonged to a couple of old fencing contractors, and as was their want, they liked to have a beer, so the height of the bus and the relative height of a bridge was not foremost in their minds when coming home one night. Hence the bus with the modified top deck. The old Holden cars were also contributed to the landscape by the same two guys.



Trilby Station - Steam power to pump water from the Darling



Trilby Station - steeped in history - horse drawn cart.

After our wonderful green yabby curry that we had experienced in Louth, we decided to grab a yabby net from Liz at the homestead and try our luck. We left the net in overnight and the next morning we were delighted to have about 30 yabbies in our net. Needless to say we had another yabby curry.

Well after 2 wonderful days at Trilby we decided that our experiences thus far with station stays were so good we would travel a little further down the Darling and try out Kallara Station. We did bypass Idalia Station that

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Our Yabby Catch at Trilby

banks were a dust bowl.

I think that at Kallara there was only one other camper plus somebody staying in some accommodation at the Homestead.



Brown Falcon



Like a park - The banks of the Darling River on Kallara Station



Tilpa Pub - OK I guess for a population of 9

shopping for food etc, filled up with diesel then headed further down the Darling on the western side of the river, testing a few tracks on the way to find somewhere for a great camp but ended up deciding to visit a station stay called Nelia Gaari.

When we arrived there was a sign up for campers to advise that the owners were "out bush" labeling sheep and would not be back until the following evening. They had at that stage been away for a week. The sign invited us

was only about 19 km down the road, but we will investigate that Station Stay on a future trip.

Kallara was a real contrast from Trilby. Everything was fairly casual, no formalities, "Yeah you'll be right, just head out that gate there. You will see the camp spots over to your left after a couple of kms. The further you go the nicer they are. When you decide to leave, just come up to the house". Well the bush camping had no facilities, which of course is OK by us but it was sensational. Like camping in a manicured park. The banks of the Darling River are covered in green grass and trees. A far cry from only a few short years ago when the Darling was dry and the

I real thrill for us on the first morning was the opportunity to get up close and photograph a Tawny Frogmouth. Many people actually call them an owl and I understand they are closely related. We new they were around as in the evenings and into the night you could often hear their "hooop, hooop, hooop" but they are somewhat nocturnal like an owl and are very hard to find.

After two nights at Kallara, we headed to Tilpa - population 9. We were for warned that there were not many camping opportunities around Tilpa so we pushed on, by-passing yet another station stay with an historic homestead (leave something for next time), and headed for the Coach and Horses camp ground in the Paroo-Darling National Park.

It was now the 20th September so we still had some time up our sleeves to arrive home on the 6th Oct. When we arrived at the park we had it to ourselves (it was early afternoon). However during the afternoon it quickly filled up with campers looking for an overnight stay. The Paroo-Darling NP was the first NSW National Park that we have experienced the ranger actually being visible and not only that, inspecting peoples self registration payments. Also making sure that nobody was lighting campfires. He was indeed a most diligent fellow, but obviously loved his job, enjoyed a chat and suggested where we could go for a walk the following day despite there being no actual bush walking tracks.

Once again we stayed for two nights and then headed for the mighty metropolis of Wilcannia, arriving there mid morning. Did some



The illusive and un-photogenic Tawny Frogmouth

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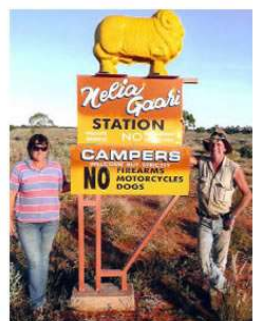
to head to the camping area and make ourselves at home.

Well again another complete contrast to previous stations. Everything was so neat and tidy. Air freshener



Camped on the Billabong at Nelia Gaari Station - no it is not planted grass/lawn

pressure packs in the long drops, hand towels and soap at the out door hand basins. Austere but neat and tidy hot showers. In general everything gave you a sense that the owners were fastidious and fussy. Every campfire is cleared of ash when a camper leaves so that it is perfectly clean for those that follow. All of the station vehicles, equipment, tractors, trailers, very neatly lined up, most unusual for many stations. So we thought "my golly, looks like these might be some well healed city folk who have bought them selves a hobby farm. Probably going to be a pain in the butt," particularly as the sign into the property said "Nelia Gaari Station - nature reserve. Campers welcome but strictly no Firearms, Motorcycles or Dogs."



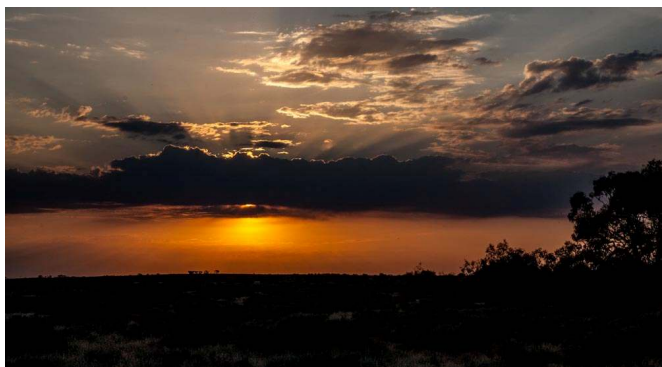
Greg and Lily - Hosts



Wildflowers - Nelia Gaari

Well on our second night at the camp ground the owners returned. The image that we had in our mind of what they would be like could not have been further from reality. A nicer, down to earth, welcoming, genuine couple would be hard to find. They went around to each camp, introduce themselves, made sure that we were happy, made sure we felt at home. This place was a great find and we would not hesitate in heading back there. River access is great and launching a boat would not be difficult. We elected to camp on the quite large Billabong behind the riverside campground as the view was superb.

On the 25th September we headed for Menindee and set up on Lake Pamamaroo. We investigated a few camp spots but returned to where we normally camp at Menindee lakes. It is free camping around a fair stretch of Lake Pamamaroo and also along the banks of the Darling. The weather



Some not so good weather heading in from the west at Lake Pamamaroo

came in cold and wet and windy, as seems to be the habit each time we come into this area, and as we were in a fairly protected spot we decided to stay until the weather improved. So on the morning of the 29th after stocking up with what we could from a rather small IGA that had limited choice and filling up our water tanks, we headed to Pooncarie on the eastern side of the Darling. We did consider stopping at Pooncarie but found that the Pooncarie races were on that day and camping spots would be at a premium and so decided to push on to Mungo Lake National Park.

We arrived at the park, paid our registration fees and headed out to the Walls of China to check out the "lunettes" before making our way to the Belah Campground for the night.

The last time we were at Mungo we were both laid low with sever colds and the weather was terrible, cold, wet and a howling wind. So our lasting impression of the place was not very good so we thought that Mungo needed another chance to redeem itself.

We arrived at the Belah campground and had a very late lunch. We were both absolutely famished. At that stage we had the campground to ourselves and thought, as was the case when we were last here, that everybody camps in the main campground near the park headquarters. That was not to be, because by nightfall there was probably eight or so other campers set up.

The set up at Mungo is for a self guided tour around the lake, around about a 70km drive. The road from the park headquarters to the Walls of China and the boardwalk, a distance of about 6km, is "two way", but beyond that it is a one way track. The Belah campground is situated about half way around the track. So this is really good, you can explore the lake at your leisure over a two day period without having to go over the same ground twice. Must admit we were a lot happier with the park this time round, and we both felt that we captured some better images than we did on our last visit. Interestingly I note on NSW Parks web site that caravans and trailers

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The Walls of China Lunettes - Lake Mungo

are not aloud on the circuit. Glad we didn't know that when we were there.

On the 30th we finished the Mungo Lake circuit then headed towards Balranald thinking that we would check out the station stay at Turlee Station along the route. Arriving at Turlee and investigating the camping opportunities



The Board Walk - Lake Mungo



Sand Hills near Vigars Well - Mungo Lake



My wife, the intrepid photographer

we decided we would prefer to head into Balranald and check out camping at Yanga National Park. We were now a whole lot nearer to civilization and the bush camping concept was a little lost on the Turlee people. On arriving at Balranald we filled up with diesel and headed out to Yanga NP only to find a notice at the park HQ that Mamanga campground on the river was closed and the other dry campground was full. School holidays can be exasperating for us retired folk! The campground that was closed was due to recent flooding and ground water in the long drop toilets. While we were at the park HQ reading the notice board, the ranger wandered out and started chatting. "Yeah, sorry about that, but I am about to put a sign up at the day use area to say that camping is allowed on a temporary basis." So off we go to check it out and it was a fabulous

camp spot. The best bit was the ranger did not change the signs or the notice board that night, so we had the place to ourselves. Although some day use people gave us some long hard looks as if to say "what are you doing camping here, this is for day use only."

The following day when the notice board and signs were changed, we were invaded by other campers, but most of us stayed a few days and a bit of a community started to gather. It really was a great spot.

Yanga was/is a magnificent station, it was probably the main entity that spawned the existence of the town of Balranald. When the NSW National Parks took it over in 2009, it was a walk out walk in deal. Meaning that

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Yanga Homestead - drop log construction Circa 1870



Switchboards in Managers office one old one new!!!



View from our camp on the Murrumbidgee - Yanga NP

potential more thoroughly.

We hit the Murray at Barham, crossed the river into Vic and Bahrams sister town of Koondrook and set up camp in the Gunbower National Park on Gunbower Creek. Gave Geoff a ring, who promptly went AWOL from work and came and had a "Cuppa" at our camp. We decided to chill out for a day on the Gunbower and then on the Friday morning dropped into Geoff and Gales for smoko and then targeted Malden for an overnight stay in a caravan park so we could drive into our front driveway at about 11:30 AM on Saturday morning the 6th Oct. Our house sitter having moved out that morning.

The End.

See Map page 7

everything had to stay, furniture, books, machinery, old accounting ledgers, every thing. The station was owned by British owners with an Australian manager. It was still managed in the traditional way until the day they walked out. It was in a time warp of circa 1950's.

It really was most intriguing to wander around the homestead and see fixtures and equipment that were 60 years old. They had there own telephone exchange and one of the first that existed outside major cities. The old 1950's equipment still attached to the wall of the managers office. Except for the PC (circa 1995) and the commander telephones (circa 1985), I doubt whether the managers office looked any different in the 1950's. At its peak it employed a hundred people many who lived on the property along with their families. Had it's own shop, school, and other infrastructure that would normally be associated with a small town. And as I've said, not much was different in 2009 when the property was sold. Many employees to that day had worked there, their entire life.

Interestingly there is an enquiry into the purchase of the property by NSW parks. There are plenty of questions being asked regarding the tying up of excellent grazing land in a national park. So we may see a change of land use so that grazing land can be leased to bordering properties while protecting the areas of the park that are of national significance. The Park has 169km of Murrumbidgee river front, and has the largest single Red Gum forest in Australia. It also has significant Aboriginal heritage. The homestead is site on a lake (Yanga Lake), with a shoreline of 15km.

After leaving Yanga we left the Murrumbidgee and headed south east towards the Murray river and a revisit to Geoff and Gael in Cohuna who we had visited on the way out (Part 1). We were curious to see how the hunt for a Caravan/Camper was progressing and whether their bank account had taken a hit. On our way to the Murray river we followed the Edward River from Kyalite to Moulamein. This presented us with somewhat of a dilemma, in that we were now on a fairly tight schedule to get home and the Edward River showed great potential for Camping. So we resolved that on a future departure from Melbourne we will head north though this area and investigate it's



Superb Wren - Gunbower Creek



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