

Desert Trek 2009 - Canberra to Arkaroola

Graham and Chris on tour - 2009 Part 5

Boy oh boy was it ever good to see the last of Canberra. It was a maximum of 7°C with sleet in late September - obviously no global warming in Canberra. We weakened and got a Cabin in the caravan park for the night and headed north west as fast as



Only thing worth Photographing at Willandra was another Carrot Slice



Lunettes at Mungo National Park



Sand Hills and Wind—Mungo NP

we possibly could after dropping Amanda and the kids at the airport for their return to Manila the next morning. Camped that night (28th Sept) at Cocobarra NP near Griffiths. The rangers were using a heli to cull feral animals but as we were late and we were heading off early they said it was OK to stay. We did like the look of the park however and have vowed to return and do some more exploring. The next morning we headed north to Hillston then onto Willandra NP which is very flat and desert like. Chris and I were feeling lousy from a wog we had picked up from the kids and we had a great camp spot so we stayed for 2 nights even though there was not a lot to see in the park. There was a very grand old station homestead that gave you an insight to the life style of some of the wealthy stations in the early to mid 20th century. Accommodation is available but must be pre booked. There was nothing very photogenic at Willandra except another carrot cake cooked on the campfire.

We then headed west to Mungo NP, and entered the back way through Willandra Lakes Heritage Area instead of from Mildura. Didn't see another car all day until we got to Mungo. Registered at park headquarters and headed off to Belah Campground half way around the Mungo Lake tourist drive. The main camp near the park HQ was not too our liking. On the way to the camp we stopped to look at the Lunette formations. The next day was cold wet and miserable so we hibernated in our camper and read. We had two fellow campers the second night, none the first night. On the morning of the second day we headed off to continue around the lake (it is a one way track) and stopped to look at some of the features. The weather was a little better but not much. While Mungo was interesting we had a little trouble understanding the extent of the visitors centre which includes some very good accommodation. On the way past the visitors centre as we left the park we had a fantastic hot shower. Weather wise we were happy to move on and headed for Mildura. We needed to stock up on fruit and veg in Mildura as we had not had a chance to do so since entering the fruit fly free zone prior to Griffith. After lunch and shopping we headed for South Australia and at the border we were stopped by quarantine and handed them all of the fruit and veg we had just purchased in Mildura. So you see, entering the fruit fly free zone means nothing to SA. It absolutely makes a farce of the fruit fly free zone and to top it off I can take fruit



The Black Stump of Paringa

and veg on the Western Highway from Melbourne to SA without being stopped and then enter the fruit fly free zone within SA and not get stopped either. Indeed I could have gone to SA via a back road, which is normally our style and not have been stopped or checked. Likely is that there would not have even been a sign advising of fruit and vegetable bans, as I know there are no signs on the back roads around our mallee block which virtually straddles the fruit fly free zone border. I do wonder if they stop each fruit fly who happens to be on tour. Bit like a nuclear free council area. Bloody waste of time if a nuclear bomb is dropped in the council precinct next door.

Anyway after the border theft by quarantine we stopped at Paringa to try and get some food for that night's dinner. Now you would think that an enterprising town straight after the quarantine station would have a really good stock of fruit and veg even at exorbitant prices but not on your sweet Nellie. A couple of shrivelled up tomatoes was about it. We

were intending to make camp nearby and so had to resort to some tinned food that we keep for absolute emergencies. While we were in Paringa we did take a look at "The Black Stump". Now we have all heard of "The Black Stump" but does anybody

know where the original is? Anyway this one has quite a story. It was found many Km up the Murray River after a flood (obviously before the current Murray Darling Crisis) had bared the roots of a huge river gum. They dragged it into the river, stuck an outboard on it and sailed it to Paringa. A journey that was not without mishap and took several days. We camped that night at Murtho Forest Landing and then set off the next day to continue our quest to visit the Gawler Ranges. As we were sticking to sealed roads we made fairly good time and decided to head for Port Augusta and catch up with Chris' sister and her husband who were due to leave on holiday. We arrived mid afternoon, set up in a Caravan park in Port Augusta (or as it is often called "Porta Gutta") and had dinner with Heather and Steven. After dinner we headed with them out to the "Shack Area" to visit friends. The shack area is about 15-20Km down the western side of Spencer Gulf from Port Augusta and is the site of many historically unofficial holiday shacks. The government I think in recent years decided that there were to be no more shacks and gave the shack holders freehold right (at a cost) over the land. The fact that there were to be no more land available for shacks of course made the existing land that much more valuable and is increasing by the day. Many seachangers now live there permanently in substantial homes. The view back to the east across Spencer Gulf looking at the Southern Flinders Ranges is quite unique. So when I saw the moon rising over the Flinders Ranges I grabbed the camera and took a few shots.

As it was a long weekend we had to wait for Tuesday



Moonrise from Phil ("Harro") and Leanne's front verandah looking east across Spencer Gulf towards the southern Flinders Ranges



Pitchi Richie Railway

to do some shopping for supplies so on the holiday Monday we drove up to Quorn for lunch, and happened to catch the Pitchi Richie Railway Train en route from Pt Augusta to Quorn. Had Coffee and lunch at the Quandong Café and checked out the Camping Ground for future reference. Very pretty little town nestled in the Flinders Ranges. On Tuesday we picked up supplies and purchased a 2 month holiday pass from SA Parks for Camping and Park Visiting Fees in SA covering all parks except Flinders Chase and The Desert Parks. We found ourselves on our way to the Gawler Ranges by mid morning. At Kimba Pub we found an excellent coffee a great hospitality. A really great pub and should be on everybody's itinerary if they are ever passing through. It is on the main highway to WA. I reckon the accommodation would be good too. Very town proud community who openly and unashamedly welcome tourists. We then headed north west to the Gawler Ranges. Found a great camp spot at Chil-



Our camp at Chillunie from the top of our adjacent hilltop



Taken from on top of the "Organ Pipes"



A weed but none the less picturesque - Salvation Jane



Looking West near Kolay Minka Falls



Kolay Minca Falls - no water



On top of Mount Wudinna

a shower in some of the towns we visit does not mean we do not shower in camp. As I have stated previously, we do have a portable shower, but with limited water supply, so we take every opportunity to have a really good soaking. Coffee was very ordinary but everything else was good. Another friendly out-

On Retirement:-
Chris: "Graham what are you doing today?"
Graham: "Nothin"
Chris: "But that's what you did yesterday"
Graham: "I didn't finish yet"



The wheat fields from top of Mount Wudinna



One of the salt lakes on Sturts Track - with water no less



Sturts Track - one way only



Common but good

back town. We took the opportunity to visit "Mount Wudinna". While in the area. Apparently the second largest monolith in Australia (after Ayers Rock). Scenery was really superb and the extent of wheat farming in the northern Eyre Peninsula is astonishing. Another reason to visit Wudinna was that returning to camp enabled us to traverse "Sturts Track". As are many of the track in the Gawler Ranges, this is a one way track, due to its difficulty and narrowness. The track skirts around some salt lakes and passes the Mount Sturts. Yes this is plural as they are twins. Unfortunately there was no vantage point to get a good photo but the countryside was stunning. I think we were quite fortunate that we visited the ranges when we did as there had been recent rains which added to the intensity of the colours in the Gawler Ranges. I would urge you to look at my web site for more photos (www.picsaustralia.net).

On Sunday 11th Oct we packed up and were about to head off when Christine notices we have a flat tyre - "Bugger". Took the wheel off and looked for the puncture for ages using soapy water. Eventually Chris saw it - a bloody flat head nail. It's amazing - you drive for 100's of Km over rocky roads with sharp stones and gibbers without a problem, and then you take one visit to town where they were rebuilding the Roadhouse (it burnt down some months ago) and you get a nail through your tyre. Originally I had dismissed the visible nail head as simply a small rock caught in the tread. We figured it was easier to repair with a plug and pump it up than change wheels, so that is what we did and headed off - still got away by our usual departure time of 9:30. We headed WNW through the park and then directly North and wended our way up to Lake Gairdner. The weather was building and we had heard that there was rain and sever winds on the way so we figured to head north to try and escape - famous last words. Rain threatened for much of the day, took a short cut along a track which involved a fair bit of gate opening and closing and arrived at Lake Gairdner's Waltumba Tank campground in time for a late lunch. Found a spot with a great view of the lake and watched as the clouds and wind continued to build. Very windy over night. Went for a walk up to Granite Hill in very fresh strong wind, first thing in the morning and then back to camp and hibernated out of the cold, wind and occasional shower. We decided that we might as well see out the bad weather here as anywhere and besides, we were fairly certain that the conditions were worse further south and we didn't want to head further north which would have been towards Cooper Pedy.



Our camp at Lake Gairdner with approaching weather



Lake Gairdner



HDR photo Lake Gairdner - adds a bit of pizzazz - overlooking the lake from Granite Hill



The weather certainly added a dimension to the photos



Wheels hanging in mid air after some wind action

Over night the second night the wind was so bad that the sand under the tyres of the car was almost blown away and each tyre was perched on a couple of cm² of sand only. After two nights we set off back to Port Augusta as it is the only route across to the Northern Flinders Ranges. On the way we stopped in at Mt Ives Station to check it out. They have camping facilities and you get access to many parts of Lake Gairdner and other 4WD tracks. It is also the station that hosts speed trials on Lake Gairdner. A meet was scheduled for about 4 weeks after our visit. We then went into Iron Knob, an old iron mining town (BHP). No more mining done but for some reason there is still people living there for what reason I have no idea as it is virtually a ghost town and ugly. We then headed into Pt Augusta and due to continued warnings of bad and windy weather we took a cabin for the night. Almost a waste as the weather turned out to be not that bad at all. Anyway early next morning we set off, did some minor shopping for supplies as we had no idea how long before we had access to supplies again. Our idea was

to head towards Arkaroola but were open to any camping opportunity along the way. Headed out through Quorn towards Hawker. These parts of South Australia are a litany of ruins from failed stations as a result of terrible droughts. (there must have been some of that global warming early in the 20th century). South Australia also built everything in stone. Rarely were homesteads built from timber as is the case in the rest of Australia. We have dropped in and visited a lot of these ruins but none so impressive as the Kanyarka ruins between Quorn and Hawker. The homestead was indeed extensive with servants quarters ,



Kanyarka shearing shed complex



Just a very small part of the Kanyarka Homestead Ruins

blacksmiths home, a doctors surgery, bakery, etc etc. The stone shearing shed that was about a Km away from the homestead and was also very extensive. Just short of Hawker we visited Yourambulla Caves which had some reasonable Aboriginal art and



The view from Yourambulla Caves - tiny bit of HDR



Yourambulla Caves - Aboriginal art



Wildflowers on walk to Yourambulla Caves

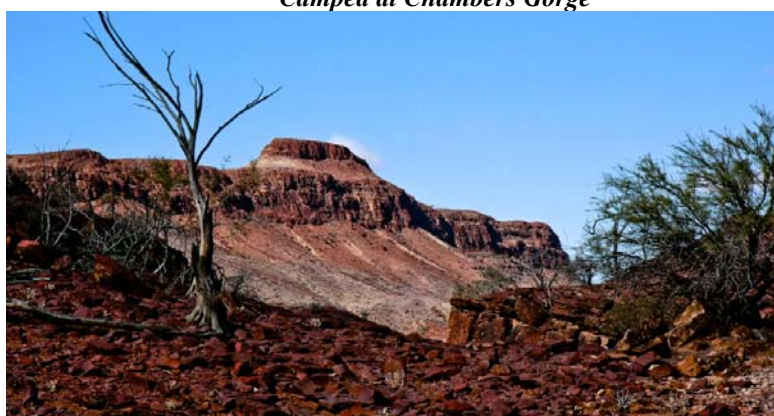
also there were some impressive wild flowers out in bloom from recent rains. In fact the whole area was uncharacteristically green. We then headed on through Hawker to Parachilna for lunch, and took part in some excellent cuisine at the Prairie Hotel. This hotel is in the middle of nowhere on the western edge of the Flinders Ranges, and has become quite famous for its food using bush tucker and feral animals both native and



Camped at Chambers Gorge



Aboriginal art etchings - Chambers Gorge



Mount Chambers

After Lunch we headed east through Parachilna Gorge and then across to Blinman past Wirrealpa and went into Chambers Gorge for an overnight camp. A delightful spot it was too. Next morning after breaking camp we went for a walk up the gorge to the Aboriginal art site which was etching in the rock instead of the traditional ochre paintings.

We then headed for Arkaroola and checked into the campground about lunch time. We also booked in for the Ridgetop 4WD tour for the following afternoon. We chose the unpowered bush camping area. Had to drive to the shower block but that is far preferable than living cheek to jowl. Had a great site alongside a river bed. After lunch, armed with a mud map we set off to investigate some of the tracks (mostly 4WD) around the Park. Tillite Gorge was our first stop. Tillite Gorge gets its name from



Chris explores Tillite Gorge



Tillite Gorge



Mt Jacob Backtrack



Heading for Siggers Lookout - Ridgetop Tour



Looking NE from Siggers Lookout



Siggers Lookout

the nature of the conglomerate rock that is found in the gorge. Tillite apparently means that all of the rocks in the conglomerate wear evenly so that the effect is a smooth conglomerate instead of the individual rocks poking out like exposed aggregate. Anyway, I think I have it right. I remember the conglomerate from the Bungle Bungle Ranges has the smaller rocks poking out of the host rock as lumps all over the surface of the rock.

After Tillite Gorge we headed down the "Mt Jacob Backtrack" that due to its difficult nature was 4WD one way only. We then headed back to Arkaroola via the "Station Backtrack", also 4WD one way only.

Next morning we lounged around camp, had lunch then went to the rendezvous for the Ridgetop Tour. This tour involves sitting in the open back of a Toyota 4WD and strapping yourself in REAL TIGHT. 5 people on each side of the vehicle sitting under a frame for roll over protection. 2 Vehicles head out so a total of 20 passengers. What a buzz it was, and you have no choice but to get very friendly with the other passengers. Sitting sideways going up and down extremely, and I do mean extremely, steep inclines means that you end up sitting on one another despite the tight seat belts. The tour last about 4½ hours and includes afternoon tea at Siggers Lookout.

For those of you who may remember a recent Mitsubishi Pajero add depicting a Pajero climbing a seemingly impossible slope, well that was at Siggers Lookout. The Toyota's did it with 10 passengers plus the driver. We met some great people and all



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went into the bar afterwards and had a great evening talking Swahili.

Next morning Chris and I did a 6½Km walk then had lunch in the bar, relaxed and set off the following morning to head south. I will finish this journal at this point but leave you with a selection of photographs from Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary.



Looking West from Siggers Lookout



Along the Ridgetop Track



1st stop on Ridgetop Track Tour



Mawson walking trail



The Pinnacles - Mawson walking trail



Ridgetop Track



Ridgetop Track