

Desert Trek 2009 - Sydney to Birdsville

Graham and Chris on tour - 2009 Part 1

Two steps forward, one step back

Well we set off from Sydney on the 21st of June after having visited our son and his family for a week and taking part in the Sydney walk for MS. We headed directly for Broken Hill, a distance of around 1200 km, so one overnight stop which happened to be at Nyngan on the Bogan River. We travelled until fairly late and it had rained all the way from Sydney so we took an overnight cabin at the Nyngan Riverside Caravan park. Excellent spot and one of the best caravan park cabins we have ever had. Interesting architecture, very different from the normal run of the mill rectangular boxes that one tends to get in a caravan park. We have noted Nyngan as a place to revisit at some later date but as we had promised to meet our friends Allan and Lorraine in Silverton on the



River Red Gums at Silverton



Silverton Hotel, main street and Mad Max's car; good beer too.

22nd we set out first thing in the morning and once again had rain for most of the day. Stopping for a stretch I noticed that the trailer brakes were not working and for those of you who can remember the saga that we had had last year with our trailer brakes, we were somewhat frustrated. We arrived

in Broken Hill mid afternoon, did some shopping for supplies and then headed to Silverton. Silverton is about 18km from Broken Hill and is where they first started mining in the area and has since been abandoned. We met up with our friends, set up camp at Penrose Park, a very historic and pleasant park that was used in the early 1900's for picnics and outings for the miners and their families. They were transported "en-masse" in open top rail wagons from Broken Hill, dressed in all their Sunday finery.

Silverton was eventually abandoned and the whole town was moved, including most of the buildings, to Broken Hill. However it's more recent claim to fame is the filming of Mad Max II and many other movies and television ads which required the inclusion of an outback hotel or town and some moonscape like terrain.



Chris has found something of interest

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Now our camp at Penrose Park was delightful. We had a lovely grassed area with a half 44gallon drum for fires; perfect. We arrived back at camp after site seeing to find someone camped within 40 meters of us. Now to put this into perspective, Penrose Park is 75 acres of camping with at most about 5 or 6 campers at anyone time, so why on earth you would camp right next to someone else I will never know. Well blow me down if another idiot doesn't pull up and make as if to camp along side of us also, so Allan decides he will point out all of the other wonderful camp spots in the park, but to no avail, he still decides to camp next to us. And then the final straw, after returning from an evening drive to check the sunset and gather some firewood we



Silverton - the ghost town



One of the Sculptures at the Living Desert - Broken Hill just visible in the Background



Sturts Desert Pea in the Living Desert

return to find yet another caravaner parked next to us. So there we were, our camper trailer, Allan and Lorraine's small van and three other caravans within a 80 meter square while the rest of the 75 acres remained vacant. We were speechless. Chris and I couldn't wait to get to the more remote parts of Australia where there are no caravans.

On the last day of our stay we visited the Living Desert Park where a number of artists had been congregated to create a number of sculptures in the desert to celebrate the history of broken hill. This was very impressive and made for some great photos. While checking out the local attractions we found an auto



Storm Clouds brewing over our Camp at Penrose Park



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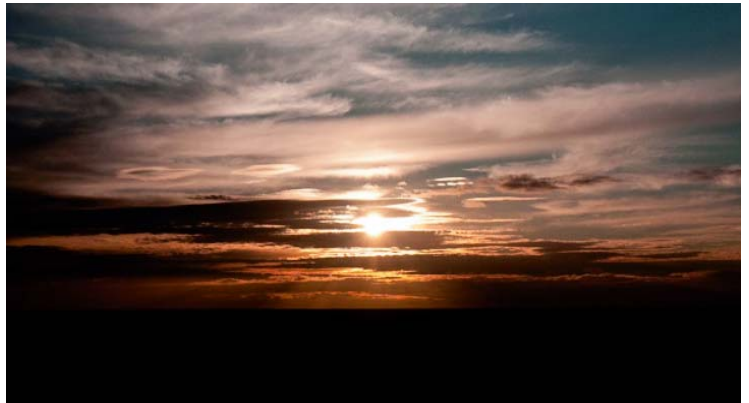
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Nice Red while we watch the sunset from a lookout near Silverton

electrician to check out the trailer brakes and determined that it was perhaps a fault with the in car brake controller so we had this replaced, but unfortunately this made no difference to the trailer brake performance - \$200 bucks down the drain. We certainly didn't feel we should tow a 1.8 tonne trailer into the outback without trailer brakes so the decision was made to head for Adelaide before heading north. Originally we had intended to head for Ti-booburra and then via the bore track through Bollards Lagoon Station to Innamincka but now provided we could get the brakes fixed in Adelaide we would head up the Birdsville Track. Chris had



The sunset - a little disappointing



Enjoying a Red by the Campfire



The Kay Estate - Cambrai

at Cambrai with one overnight bush camp. The area had experience considerable rain so the car and trailer were quite a mess. What a delight to arrive at our mallee block. We had never seen it green in the 4 years that we have owned it, so it was a great thrill.

The next day we headed for Adelaide and brake repairs. Going to Adelaide ended up not being without some benefits in that we caught up with some friends for Dinner and some others for Lunch and we were also able to

never travelled this iconic Australian road so the plan was settled. Heading south wasn't too enthralling as it was very cold in Broken Hill and the weather reports for Adelaide were terrible. We had already suffered a number of days of rain including considerable rain in Broken Hill. So after 5 days at Silverton we headed for Adelaide via our 210 acres of Mallee scrub that we own WNW of Adelaide. Allan and Lorraine set off for Wentworth. The drive to Adelaide also gave us the opportunity to investigate some of the outback between Broken Hill and Adelaide and so at Yunta we headed off the main road along outback roads and tracks and wended our way to Morgan on the River Murray and then onto our block

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visit Chris' ailing mother. It took the rest of the week to get the brakes fixed which turned out to be water in a junction box for the manual override switch which operates as a handbrake. So Friday afternoon we set off for the Birdsville Track.

On our way at last - 2 steps forward and 0 steps back

After leaving Adelaide we headed due north up through the Clare Valley (not stopping for any wine tasting),



Driving North into more rain



Even the Flinders Ranges had rain - not a site often seen

once again experiencing a lot of rain, and then onto Hawker where we grabbed an overnight cabin and set off first thing in the morning for Marree. At last we escaped the rain only to find Marree absolutely abuzz. People everywhere. Two reasons it appears; water in Lake Eyre and the Camel races the day prior in Marree itself. It was pandemonium, so we grabbed a sandwich from the general store and set off up the Birdsville Track. We hadn't done much more than 100km when "BANG—phsssst". Bloody blowout in a brand new tyre. I had just bought 5 new off road tyres for the trip prior to leaving Melbourne and after the terrible experience we had had with tyres last year I was not a happy chappy. On inspection a sharp stone had spear itself under a tyre lug and put a 3inch gash in the tyre. Non repairable. Fortunately I took the precaution of insuring the tyres with Beaurepaires when purchased and they undertake to replace pro rata for the life of the tyre. Downside is I have to cart the bloody tyre around until I find a Beaurepaires and while

there are a lot in the cities they are very rare in the bush. After changing the wheel we pushed on and bush camped at Lake Kopperamanna which was about 50Km short of Mungerannie. Next morning we continued into Mungerannie roadhouse and hotel. With the interest in Lake Eyre, Scenic Flights were operating out of Munger-



Check out the parking meters at Mungerannie.



Mungerannie airport nice and handy to the city centre.

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annie with 2 Light Aircraft and a Heli. Interestingly the road into Mungerranie, a distance of about 500meters off the main road, was being used by the planes as an airstrip. So every time a plane needed to take off or land



Heading out to Cowarie Station



Our Camp on Warburton Creek

someone would wander out and hold up any cars that may happen to want to get in or out of the roadhouse while a plane took off or landed. Like Marree, there were too many people hanging around Mungarranie so after a bit of a nose around we headed north for a short distance before turning left and heading out west to Cowarie Station, a distance of about 50km off the Birdsville Track, nestled virtually between the Simpson Desert and North Lake Eyre. They allow camping on their property on the Warburton Creek, which is actually the continuation of



Hot Artesian Bore along the track— about 70°C



Lunch time on the Birdsville Track

the Diamantina River, the system which provided most of the recent water inflow to Lake Eyre. We found ourselves a nice remote spot on the Warburton and set up camp for 2 nights. While initially fairly excited about camping on nice clean fine white sand, the following day heralded quite strong winds, resulting in a coating of fine sand over everything. Despite that it was a very scenic spot and we enjoyed our 2 nights, then headed for Birdsville.



Birdsville Pub— about to get sloshed and have dinner.

After a pleasant lunch behind a sand hill we arrived in Birdsville mid afternoon. After setting up camp in a nice spot in the camp ground we needed to see about a tyre repair or replacement. Unfortunately it needed to be a replacement and we had to buy a completely different brand to what we had (350 Bucks down the drain). Never mind I'll sell it on EBay, and in any case I was not confident enough to continue on with only one spare (started with 2). In my need to claim the tyre on Beaurepaires I had to strap the damaged casing onto the top of the spare tyre I already had on the roof rack; that is another story that I will get to,

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even though it is a bit embarrassing.

Had a wander around Birdsville (5 min) and went to the general store for supplies then wandered up to the Pub for drinks. Ended up having "dinner" in the bar, even bought a bottle of red. We drove back to the camp ground, I think a total distance of 500m ensuring that we avoided the breathalyser.

Next day we mucked around in the morning, got our emails in the caravan park office. Yeeks!, our house sitter advises me that I have been called up for Jury duty in August. This made us a little frantic, so firstly we replied to Kelsey (our house sitter) to see if she can contact the relevant office and make my excuses. By the time we rang Kelsey about 30 min later she had it all sorted, problem fixed. What a house sitter.



The Prado Conquers Big Red



This Chaplain is on his 7th Attempt

drove back down and went on our way.

Now as to the embarrassing issue with the extra tyre on our roof rack. On the way back to Birdsville from Big Red, a distance of about 30k, I noticed a strange vibration and growl from time to time in the car that came and went. When we got to Birdsville I thought nothing more of it. Next morning we broke camp with the intention of heading down the "Inside Track" which is the original Birdsville Track and is rarely open. It is currently closed but apparently has some great views and camp spots between Birdsville and as far as you can go. Not wanting to get a hefty fine by driving on a closed road, I dropped Chris off at the bakery to order coffees and curried camel pies and went to the police station to get advice on driving the road. Police station was closed so headed back to the bakery and asked the woman behind the counter if they new were the local copper was. "No but his daughter works here", so out she wanders and we tell her our predicament so she promptly rings her dad and tells him what we want to do. He says "can't give you permission but don't get stuck" and "if you get bogged don't call me". With that, after finishing the pies and coffee we headed off down the inside track. What a great drive. About 20k down we noted a couple of great camp spots on the Diamantina River and then continued on

Later that morning we wandered down to the Information Centre and then the Birdsville Museum (fabulous) then onto the Bakery, the famous Birdsville Bakery and had Curried Camel Pies for lunch then headed off out to Big Red, the iconic sand hill at the start of the Simpson Desert Trek. Even if you are not intending to cross the Simpson Desert, it is somewhat of a tradition to go and "Have a Go" to get to the top. There are two tracks across big red, the original high one and the easier low one that has been modified so that nearly everyone in a 4WD can get across. Well we tackled the easier one which was pretty much a walk in the park then we thought we would wander up to the "big" Big Red crossing to see what was happening. When we arrived there were a bunch of SES guys in about 5 vehicles, from Leigh Creek who travel up the Birdsville Track now and again cleaning up rubbish at camp spots etc and also having a bit of fun. Well one of their number was attempting to make it to the top, and I of course wanted to have a go. After the SES guy (who went by the nickname of "Chaplain" as he happened to be a priest) had made 5 attempts I asked his mate to get him to wait while I had a go, so Chris and I drove to the top of Big Red and sat on top of the sand hill to watch the fun and games as one after the other of these SES guys tried to make it to the top. None of them did it in less that 3 attempts and the "Chaplain" was still trying in his 100 Series Land Cruiser when we

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for about 80k. The plains we a vista of wild flowers from the recent floods and rain. The bird life quite outstanding and the views fabulous. Well now, we had hoped that the vibration and growl from the car would miraculously go away and only have been the result of different track surfaces causing the noise. The noise continued to come and go. If we hit a bump it would stop for a 100 meters or so and then return.. If I slowed down it would gradually decrease in frequency as if it was a wheel bearing. The back hubs felt hot, much hotter than the front hubs. So we made a decision to scrap the idea of camping and get back to Birdsville for some mechanical advice and aid. So we returned to Birdsville, booked into the Caravan Park and went and saw the mechanic. He took the car for a drive while I sat in the passenger seat. Once again on the bitumen road out of town, the growl continued, but going



The Inside Track and yellow wildflowers as far as the eye can see from the recent floods.

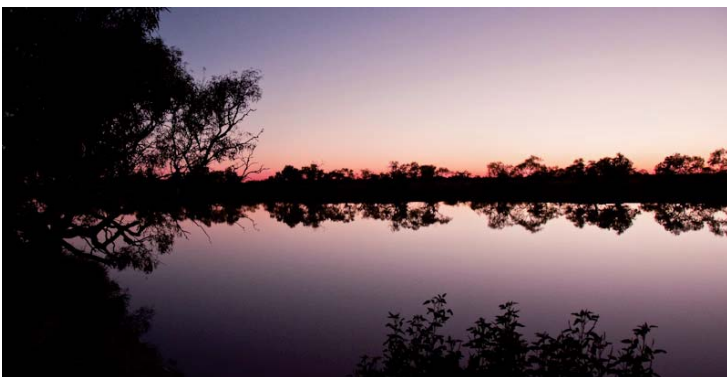


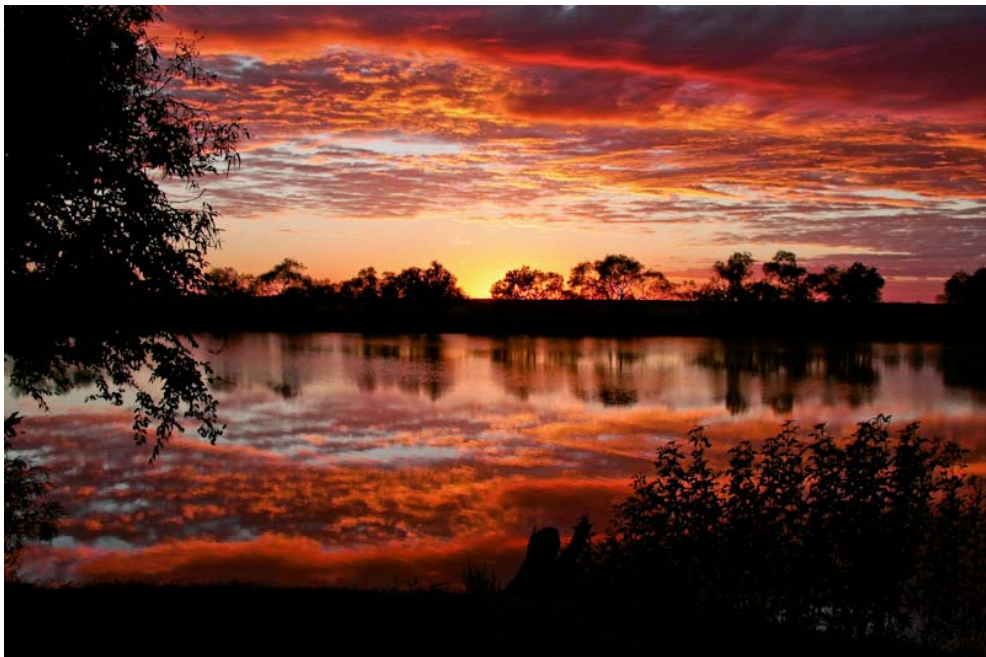
Pink san hills in contrast to the normal red sand hills.



The Inside Track

over a grid it would suddenly stop. The mechanic got his young off-sider to go for spin with me to see what he thought. They were completely baffled and couldn't work I out so the mechanic told us to bring it back in the morning and we will check it out further. So the next morning we had the car up on the hoist to do a visual check and then he removed a rear axle to see of he could find fault with the wheel bearing to no avail. Well we decided not to let this get in the way so we headed off back to the camp spot on The Inside Track. While camped Chris and I discussed this noise and decided that it had only started after putting the old tyre casing on the roof. The bloody straps that were now longer holding the 2 tyres on the roof and would vibrate in the wind and a bump in the road would upset the resonance of the buckle and stop the vibration for a period and then it would commence again. Chris and I decided that it was probably better not to let the Mechanic back in Birdsville know what the problem was and so after camping for 2 nights on the Diamantina River we picked up some supplies in Birdsville and headed Innamincka via Walkers crossing. Bought a slab of VB - \$55 and a 1.5 Litre Bottle





This is sunrise and has not been fiddled with

