

Graham and Chris – Travelling

Hi all

Just thought while taking a breather in Darwin for a few weeks (3) that I would bring those of you who are interested up to date with our trip so far along with a few pics.

We left Sydney after visiting the grand kids on the 16th May and headed for Bourke.
We stayed at Lake Burrendong the first night.



Not a bad start to our journey and the bird life was a taste of things to come,

We made it into Bourke on the 17th. What a dump – all the business houses and shops boarded and shuttered for protection from the drunken mobs and indigenous kids at night. Local Bowling Club has bus shuttle service to dinner at the club from the camp ground.

Great coffee though at the bakery (roast there own beans).

Headed through Wanaaring on the 19th and bush camped about 700M off the road (no fences once we left Bourke).



Bush camps are usually our preference

We then headed for Tibooburra and spent some time there soaking up the atmosphere. Had lunch at the family hotel. Once owned by Clifton Pugh with the obvious resulting wall decorations.



Tibooburra Main Street



Clifton Pugh murals on the bar walls



Found a local lad who was a fitter on a mine nearby to change the oil in the car and then headed off for Sturt National Park en route to Innamincka.
Camped that night at Fort Grey.



Bird life



Sunset



History

Next day we headed for Innamincka via Cameron Corner (spot where NSW, QLD and SA meet) and then to Coongie Lake.

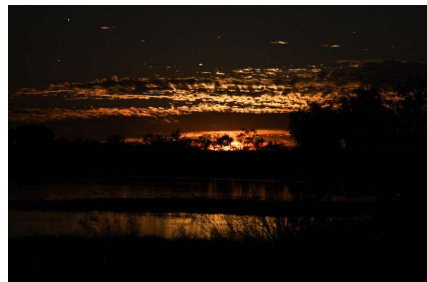


Near Cameron corner is the Dingo proof fence where all travellers must open and close the gate.

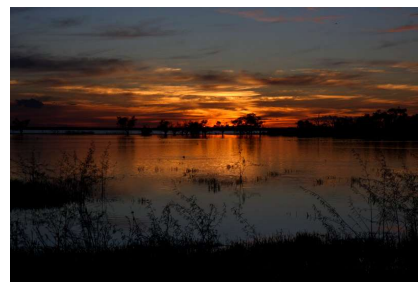
Neither Chris or myself had ever been to Coongie Lake before and were we ever in for a pleasant surprise. We were going to spend a night or two but ended up spending 6 nights camped on the banks. One of the most moving and magnificent camps we have ever had.



Sunrise 1



Moonrise



Sunrise 2

And the most amazing thing is only 1 or 2 other campers each night.



Sunrise 3



Sunrise 4



Sunrise 5

This unbelievably is in the middle of the desert.



And the bird life was awesome



Whistling Kite eating lunch



Whistling Kite nest 50M from our camp

The sunsets weren't too bad either.



I'm not sure how Chris will adapt to doing her exercises in Donvale again after this. Please make no reference to this picture as I have been threatened with all sorts of misadventure if I included it.



After 6 wonderful days at Coongie we headed into Innamincka for supplies.



What a bustling metropolis, Pub, Store and Rangers HQ. Had “Organic” hamburger with the lot for lunch, refuelled and headed for Cullyamurra Waterhole, about 15Km to the east. This was also a brilliant camp spot and we spent 4 nights there.



The bird life was once again outstanding.



Chris on the river bank doing the laundry



While I go boating



In this area we visited Burke's grave and Wills memorial at the spot where he died. After 4 nights we set off for Windorah to meet up with my brother from Brisbane who was to be camped on the banks of the Coopers Creek catching fish.

Everyone has their photo taken at the turn off to Hadden Corner (NE corner of SA)



The trip up to Windorah was about 450km. On the way we visited Burkes Dig Tree (rip off). One of the hardest days travel we had but very interesting country. About 150kms was through heavy sand and the rest was mainly sharp gibbers. We had head winds all the way and chewed up a lot of diesel. The last 100 k's was bitumen (very narrow – one car width) but even worse head winds. Arrived at Windorah late and decided to camp in the Council Camp ground (\$10 per night for powered site) and then head out to Coopers Creek to catch up with my brother in the morning. However heavy rains all night (25mm) and still raining when we got up in the morning. Decided to see if we could muster up some brekky in the pub to no avail so decided to take a drive out to see how my brother and his wife were fairing on the Coopers after all the rain.

Well we soon found him, caravan bogged up to the axles and no hope of retrieving it until the ground dried out had we not wandered along. Bette, his wife was suffering from mild hypothermia as they had been up all night trying to move their caravan from under the gums which can be very dangerous in the high winds that prevailed most of the night. In trying to position my vehicle to pull his van out with my winch the trusty Prado became bogged. So we then used the winch to retrieve the Prado and then proceeded to recover the van. Grey gooey bloody mud everywhere. We eventually got them safely set up in the Camp ground in Windorah and a day or so later headed for Bedourie.

My brother is doing a video documentary on the trading routes of the Aborigines from the Flinders Ranges to the Gulf of Carpentaria. An important part of the Aboriginal trade before white man arrived, included the trading of processed Pituri bush. This bush has a very high nicotine content and when correctly processed (only the tribes near Bedourie knew how) would create a hallucinatory drug. If incorrectly processed it was very dangerous to health. Pituri is quite rare and difficult to find.

We camped at the No 3 Bore about 250k west of Windorah.



Bush Camps are always so much better than most Camp grounds.

In Bedourie we contacted the manager at Carlo Station after a tip off from a local aboriginal that the manager knew where there were some Pituri bushes on his property. Others had told us that we would have to venture all the way to the NT Border, well into the Simpson Desert to find Pituri.

What a great guy the manager (Greg Woods) happened to be, and a real character. So we made a time for a rendezvous the next day by the old fridge at the airstrip on Ethabuka Station, some 150km to the west of Bedourie in the Simpson Desert.



Very interesting country en route to Carlo Station.



Greg chats to the girls at the site of the Pituri Bushes.

We had intended to camp the night at Carlo but the western skies looked very grave so we headed back to Bedourie.



That's not rain in the distance but the dust from our vehicles.

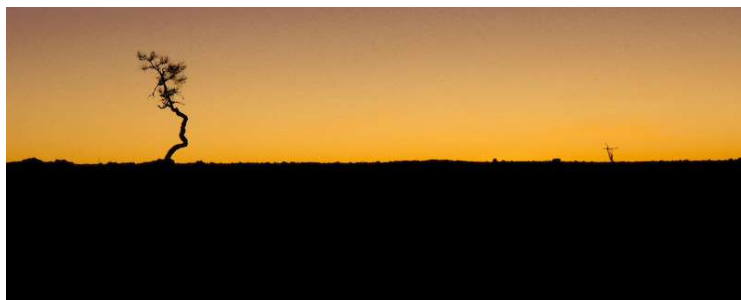
Over the next 48 hours there was considerable rain in the desert and we were trying to reach Birdsville. This proved hopeless as Birdsville ended up having about 100mm rain and the roads looked like being closed for a considerable time.

So we headed for Boulia about 250k north of Bedourie.

Boulia is the home of the Min Min lights, a strange phenomenon (light) that is often observed in the desert areas around Boulia.



Not a lot of trees around Boulia.



Makes for interesting sunsets



Emus wandering around the main street of Boulia



The clear desert night makes the moon very clear.

We left my brother and his wife in Boulia to set out across the Plenty Highway to Alice Springs (Birdsville was still not an option), while we headed east to the Diamantina Lakes.



Main intersection Windorah, Boulia,
Diamantina Lakes



Chris is great at opening gates - main road to Diamantina
Lakes through Springvale Station

While interesting, we probably wouldn't go out of our way to revisit Diamantina Lakes National Park



We stayed 2 nights and then headed for historic “Old Cork” Station through some magnificent country. Diamantina Lakes National Park was originally “Diamantina Gates Station” and was part of the old droving routes from the channel country to Oodnadatta. Just NE of Diamantina was the ruins of the “Maine Hotel” which was a favourite spot for the Drovers to rest up, but it makes you realise just how tough it must have been.



Maine Hotel ruins and cemetery



Typical country around Diamantina Lakes

Along the track to “Old Cork” we ran into a couple of “snobby” Bustards. They always stick their nose in the air and strut.



Camped a night at “Old Cork” and then set off for Lark Quarry. The worlds only recorded dinosaur stampede. In the photo you can see the large Tyrannosaurus foot prints and then the hundreds of footprints from the terrified small dinosaurs all solidified in the mud about 20mill years ago. Lark Quarry has world heritage listing and is regarded as a very significant world site in the study of dinosaurs.



The countryside around Lark Quarry was amazing with many colours and hues.



From Lark Quarry we headed into the grand metropolis of Winton. Winton lays claim to the birthplace of “Waltzing Matilda” and has a very large tourist centre and museum based around Waltzing Matilda. Very commercial but also very good. Up until this point our travels had been off the beaten track and we were not quite prepared for the onslaught of caravans, motor homes and grey nomads that we experienced in

Winton. We really had no idea that there were so many people just travelling from caravan park to caravan park. Unfortunately we had to stay for a couple of nights to replenish food stocks and to replace the second battery in the car. This of course was the most important issue as that battery powers the drinks fridge. However we couldn't wait to head bush again.

While in Winton we booked ourselves into Lawn Hill National park. We couldn't believe that we should have to book, but were advised strongly to do so. So we set off to spend a few nights getting to Lawn Hill via Julia Creek and Gregory Downs.

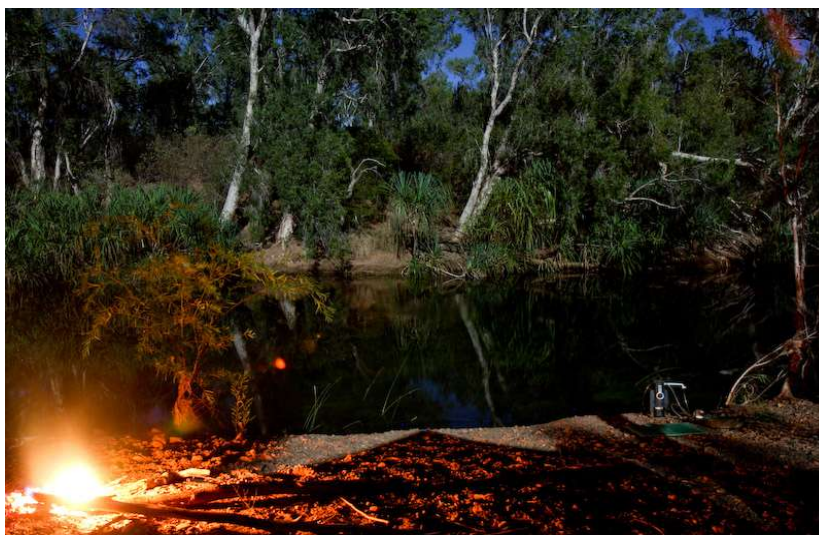
On the way we visited the billabong that is purported to be the one that the swaggy jumped into in our national song.

We passed through the small town of Kynuna and were a little surprised at the sight we saw.



Brolgas wandering across the highway at a very leisurely pace.

After a bush camp and a puncture we made our way to the Gregory River. I had been here before and knew of some great camp spots just south of Gregory Downs.



Believe it or not this photo was taken by moonlight only, on a 30 sec exposure.

What a wonderful spot. Used the river to find the leak in the punctured tyre and repaired it (there are no repair facilities in any of the small towns so you have to be prepared to do your own puncture repairs.)

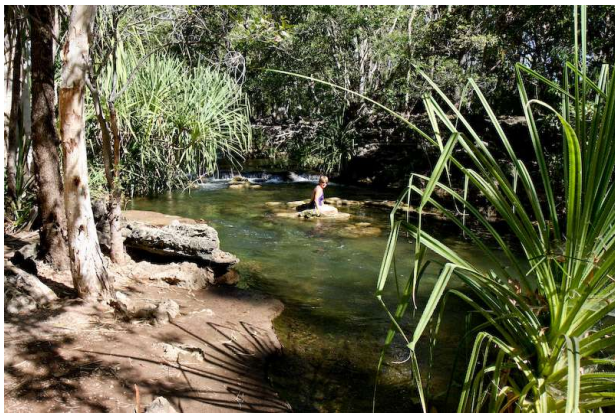
We ran into a lovely older Swedish couple (Aussies for 20 years) who were camped there for 10 weeks.

If you were to see this river you would understand why somebody would camp there for 10 weeks.



Our Gregory River camp – late afternoon. Daytime Temp about 30 C

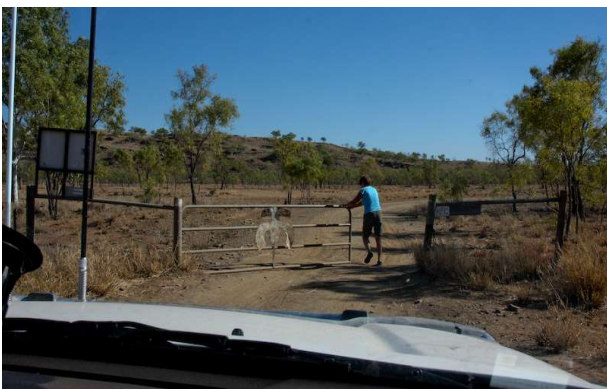
Unfortunately we had to head for Lawn Hill after 2 nights due to our booking in the camp ground. The pics of Lawn Hill speak for themselves.





Unfortunately no amount of photos can really show the extent of the wonderful walks and the canoeing opportunities at this great national park.

From Lawn Hill we headed for Burketown. I am so glad I have a fit and healthy wife. We lost count of the number of gates on the main road, but here are a few. We think there were around 10 altogether.



The best tourist attraction in Burketown was the guy (Frank) in the information office. We had a wonderful hour or so talking to him. Can he ever tell a yarn, ex miner from Mt Isa. Bought a bottle of Bundy and had to almost get NASA security clearance for the purchase. Had to sign a stat deck that I wouldn't sell it to the local Aboriginals.

Burketown has a 100 hundred year old artesian bore that comes out of the earth at over 65 C and is therefore fairly useless but the local fauna seem to like it



Next day we set off for Kingfisher Camp on Bowthorn Station, where we stayed 1 night. It is worthy of a repeat visit and a longer stay. Even maybe as caretakers that they are always looking for. Should be a bit of fun for a few months. Good fishing too.



Kingfisher Camp

We then headed for Borroloola via the Savannah Way. Road kill always attracted a few raptors and for some time we had always come across Wedgetail Eagles where there was road kill.



I so far had had little success in getting a photo but with some tips from the Raptor Zoo keeper from the

Alice Springs Wildlife Park who happened to be camped next to us in Lawn Hill I was able to get a little closer. While this wasn't perfect it was an improvement.

Once we arrived in Borroloola we headed out of town to Batten Point for a couple of nights and found a great camp spot and the inevitable Willy Wagtail.



At every camp-site we seem to have a Willy Wagtail who adopts our camp-site as his own and hangs around for the duration of our stay.

After Batten Point we then stayed in Borroloola for a night and had a very interesting night out at the only "Restaurant" in town. Wine only available by the glass – frightened we might on sell.

We then headed west and our first stop was at Lorella Springs. While only a short trip (about 150kms) we got 2 puncture in the space of 2 hours which is very off putting when there are no nearby facilities. We limped into Lorella Springs and the next day I spent repairing tyres. One tyre was fairly well destroyed but I put some serious patches in it and a tube so that it would pass in an emergency. We still had about 500 km to get to Katherine and a proper puncture repair service.

After repairing the tyres we set about enjoying Lorella Springs Station. Met some great people and the caretakers were fantastic, a story to tell at another time.

At Lorella Springs there was a spot they called the water slide. So we ventured out some 20 km.



The rocks have become very smooth and with the smallest amount of flow it becomes a wonderful water slide. The water is warm and clear. What a great day we had. Best part was no other tourists. The trip in and out was interesting.



After 3 nights we set off for Limmen National Park. Our first point of call was “Southern Lost City”. There are a number of lost cities and parks in this area that have been formed by the same process. Some are called “Lost Cities” and others simply nature parks, but they are all quite dramatic.



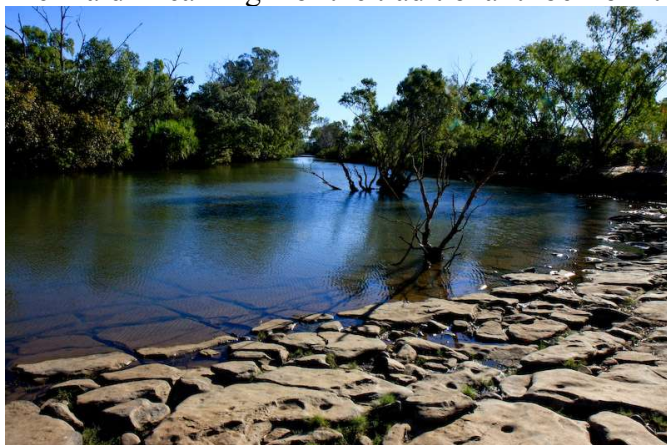
We camped the following night at Butterfly Springs and could not get a photo that did it justice. Then the following couple of nights we camped at Towns River.



Early morning view from our camp at Towns River

From Town River we headed west without any clear destination in mind. After many exploratory dead ends down various tracks we found what would have to be the most exquisite camp site possible. We found it with the help of our Magellan GPS. It was a spot called “Rocky Bar Crossing” on the Hodgson River just 30km short of Roper Bar.

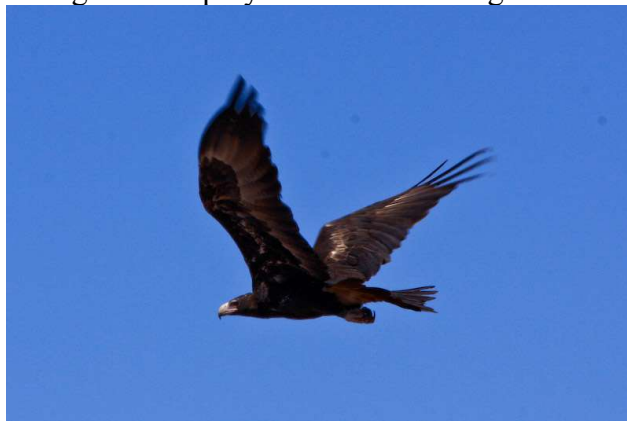
We set up camp then yours truly went and caught a 70cm Barra for dinner in the water hole. If it had not been for the fact that we ran out of food and booze we would probably be still there. We ended up staying 3 nights in total. A beautiful clean sandy Camp site under the paper barks - just perfect. Interestingly there was a lot of Aboriginal rock art scattered around the place and further investigation reveals that it is "Mermaid Dreaming" for the traditional tribe from the area.



Rocky Bar Crossing

Plenty of fresh water crocs and at least one very large salty.

Eventually we headed for Mataranka and the Stupid (Stuart) Highway. Once again we came across some road kill that enabled me to test out the advice on approaching birds of prey with the following results.



Some Half Reasonable Pictures of a Wedgetail Eagle.

Check out the size of those talons.

We made it to Mataranka with no more punctures and now we were fairly safe as it is all bitumen roads. With that however, we once again suffered the onslaught of Caravans, Motor Homes, Fifth Wheelers, Grey Nomads and Tourists in general. How dare they go touring while we are touring.



Sacred Kingfisher (I think)



Nice spot near Mataranka Falls

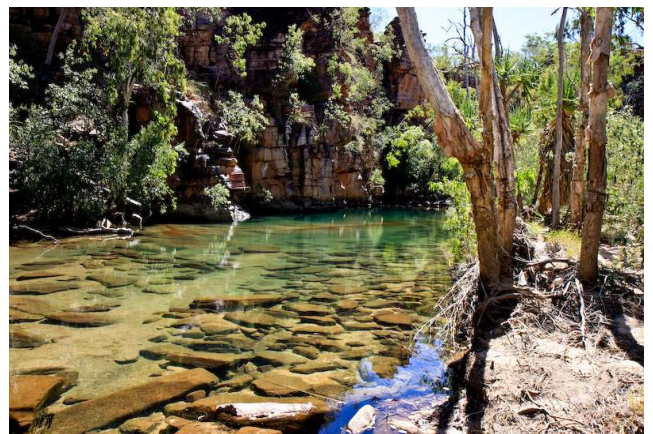
Mataranka hot springs are very impressive but not exciting due to the huge number of tourists. The 8 km walk to the Mataranka Falls was really good.

After 2 nights in Mataranka we head for Katherine. We have done Katherine Gorge a number of times so

we hired a canoe and had a leisurely paddle up the first gorge. We spent 2 nights in Katherine then headed to Edith Falls for a night. While the main falls and pool are fantastic the walk up the escarpment to the upper pools and falls are fantastic. Fabulous swimming.



After Edith Falls we headed to an absolute gem of a place; Umbawarra Gorge just out of Pine Creek. This gorge is fantastic and provided you are prepared to rock hop and swim, you can walk around 8kms up the gorge. The further you go up the gorge the more pristine and the more crystal clear the water as it is fed by springs all the way up the gorge. Also very few tourists.



Crystal Clear waters of Umbawarra Gorge.

After staying a night at Umbawarra we headed for Darwin. We had travelled about 8000 km, 7000 on dirt roads. Bought a new set of tyres in Sydney (5 X \$310) just for safety (the old ones still had about 20k remaining). However by the time we reached Darwin we only had 2 tyres that were worth keeping. So we bought a new set of 5 tyres and after some serious negotiations with the tyre company/importer we received a \$100 per tyre compensation.

We have now bought what are supposed to be a much more robust class of tyre. It will be interesting to see their performance across the Gibb River Road and the Mitchell Plateau.

Here's hoping.