

## Crossing the Simpson and other Central Australian Highlights

Sunday September 16 -The Roy disco 2 clocked 250,000 km and our eldest son, Cameron turned 25; we also met our fellow travelling companions at Two Wells for the familiar trip to Blinman. One disco 2 lost a bolt (harmonic balancer- I am told) en route, also an obligatory call at Stone Hut Bakery. Camped at Angorichina Village, had dinner at the Hotel and enjoyed the first of many many warm nights.

Pies and quondongs called and Copley Bakery was the next stop (we had one trip member with a bakery app on his screen- more were to follow at Birdsville, Alice Springs, Kings Creek Station, Ayers Rock and Melrose; unfortunately the one at Farina was closed!)

We made our rendezvous at Balcanoona with John and Jan Cooper with their series 3 for which we had brought a part (lift pump). They were to be fellow travellers but a leaking fuel tank meant a return to the city. (John has since given an entertaining account of his travels at the meeting) Montecolina Bore made a great campsite en route for the following days travel to Innaminka. The boys had a good play down by the coolibah trees on the banks of the Cooper removing a blown suspension airbag on the front of G4, and replaced the original springs using various aids provided by the party members. We had a good dinner at the pub and enjoyed morning showers before going out to Burke's grave and the dig tree

Whilst there we noted the 6 metre high 2010 flood level which was quite amazing, then northward to Cordillo Downs with its famous stone woolshed with its self supporting curved roof- a mecca for pastoral history buffs. Camped at Cadelga ruins with the mozzies and then to Birdsville, by now the temperature had reached 40 degrees and shade was at a premium. Spent most of the afternoon at the bakery and the tourist info centre in air conditioning. The art gallery was visited by most of the party including our resident artist, Kaye Cunningham (google her at red bubble). Unfortunately Kaye was unwell and their frelander had to return to Adelaide. Now the 4WD part of the trip was to begin with a few ascents of big red and onto the QAA line to visit Poeppel Corner. The sandhills were quite manageable and with their interspersed claypans the plants were spectacular. As most people cross on the French line, Dave planned to travel south on the K1 line then west onto the Rig Road- this is where the fun began!! The sandhills are marked on the map as being "alive", hence there were not marked tracks across the tops and the clay flanks were heavily eroded making a run up difficult with steep drop offs on the other side. Dave did a great job of finding the safest route, but after a couple of hard days and in 42 degrees it was decided to return to the French Line. One night we made camp by the side of a spectacular salt lake, after a stunning sunset we turned into bed under clear skies, the Roys with only their inner tent erected and very minimal pegs; it started to rain and blew a gale and all the tent dwellers were out banging and repairing flappy tents including Keith who had special problems and Hans and Em wishing they had their T-van. Packed up quickly in the still windy morning and continued up the Knolls track, to join the French Line where there were more sheltered camp spots. The sandhills were spectacular and we made it across most of them first go (so that I did not had to show my lack of reversing skill), but had to hand over to Kin a couple of times and once had to defer to the skills of Dave- he just loves to play in sand!

Talked to some other travellers at Purnie Bore, this was the end of the sandhills and the beginning of the gibber plain country. The birds around the overflow were quite something and we missed our landrover twitchers for more detailed descriptions.

Dalhousie was the next destination and we had a great swim in the warm waters but made a note not to

camp there again as the mozzies are quite immune to all the types of repellants we tried. I had to get up in the night again to put on the tent fly due to a few drops of rain and the mozzies had a midnight feast.

Drove past 3 o'clock creek-( maybe a better place to camp to avoid the mozzies next time) and travelled to Mt Dare for fuel and on through sandy country with tussock grass and mulga to Finke aboriginal community. Drove along to the Finke River where I got bogged in sand whilst looking for a lunch spot- had to be pushed out- (backwards did not help). Shortly after Keith had a diesel leak which took 2 hours to fix with parts from the PCB spares box- note to all to check our wheel nuts to check that they are not too tight. Drove along the old Ghan line to Engoodina ruins to camp, no mozzies huraah. Headed north following the line and looking at various railway remnants, then turned off to Maryvale and reached Chambers Pillar following the grader which was a treat. The pillar lived up to expectations as did Castle Rock and many photos were taken- maybe one of them will win next years photo competition. Icecreams at Maryvale Store and headed north still following the railway to Alice Springs.

For 2 hot nights we stayed at the Larapinta Caravan Park- showers, washing machines and a pool which was very refreshing, some would say cold. The back doors on both discoveries decided to remain closed regularly and required attention as did Keith's leak.

A relaxing day in the big smoke- coffee, lunch and dinner out at the Red Ochre Grill, gave us some respite from the hot weather. Kin went to the movies to see "The Saphires", very cool and restful whilst most of us did the shopping.

Following a steamy night with thunder, lightning and rain, we headed west to Lawrence Gorge and Owen Springs Station ruins for smoko. This area was spectacular and I hope to spend more time there on another trip. Wallace Rockhole town was the next stop where we had lunch in the playground, unfortunately the art centre was closed, then drove along a powerline track through the wattles to Hermansberg. The track to Palm Valley followed the wide Finke river with its great rock walls to a busy but organised campsite. The ground was once again tent peg resistant but we all had great views. Jura and I went for a walk up to Katarranga lookout over sculptured sandstone hills. Keith was out morning and night with his camera. Drove the 4 kms into the valley the next morning- quite a challenging low range track over flat sheets of rock and rock steps. Livistonia palms and older cycads, red sandstone cliffs, fig trees and native pines (same species as those in the Flinders).

The afternoon trip around Merenie loop to Kings Canyon involved assisting a german family in an avis rental – they had a blowout and the spare tyre was already punctured. After an hour and a half trying to fix it, our cars were reorganised to take the 3 people, their luggage and wheel over 100 kms to Kings Canyon. Camping was \$37 to pitch a tent, overpriced, over crowded, and poor amenities- we all completed a feedback form! However we had an excellent meal and met up with the german travellers for drinks and chocolates.

After a leisurely stroll along the canyon floor, headed to Kings Creek Station for morning coffees, and learned a bit about their sponsored student exchange program- there were 2 boys from the station at PAC with our youngest son, Callum.

Curtain Springs for lunch and enjoyed great views of Mt Connor and booked in at Ayers Rock campground which was very well organised. Enjoyed the traditional nibbles and drinks to watch the sunset on the big rock.

By this stage in the trip the Roys have managed to rise from bed and be on the road in 40 minutes.

Keith and Jura left to head back to Adelaide and we visited the Olgas and the cultural centre. Headed east through big fires which were quite frightening, another good lunch at Curtain Springs and headed south on the Mulga Park Station road and east on part of the gunbarrel highway camping at Birthday creek on Victory Downs. Headed south on the Stuart Highway to Marla and onto the Oodnadatta track,

calling into Todmorden Station where my cousin Douglas showed us around the homestead with a glimpse into the running of his vast cattle station. Camped at Angle Pole near Oodnadatta, then down the track the following day to Mt Dutton, North Bridge, Algebuckina and onto William Creek. It was decided not to go out to Lake Eyre as there was no water, motored on to Coward Springs and Blanche Cup and another hot camp at Pole Creek. A hot thirsty dingo had emptied our soaking washing-up overnight. Drove into Maree for a coffee on a hot windy dusty day. Stopped at Farrina for a look- lots of history and a great campsite for another time. The day was so hot that the airconditioned vehicle was the only place to be, so we went on to Melrose where we went to the pub for a seafood meal. Two nights were spent in Melrose- a fitting end to a great 3 week trip.

Thanks to Dave and Maureen for organising everything.

Our fellow travellers Keith Miller and Jura, Hans and Em, Mike Turner, and part-time Neil and Kaye Cunningham

Technical support-Peter Brown.