

Barossa SA to Yelarbon (QLD)

Stage 1 July 2018

This year was an unusual travel year. Earlier we had spent nearly four months in Tasmania (during Winter no less) and only returned home in the Barossa for two and a half weeks. We needed to tie up the annual business and personal tax returns, see to maintenance on the van and car, and prune the roses. The most valuable task was the servicing of the diesel heater. All that done, it was time to hit the road again.



Yanga Woolsheds

Outback Camps

The First Few Days

This stage started on 23 July. The day we headed off was overcast and threatening with rain (all highly desirable to local farmers and gardeners but less appealing to caravanners) and we didn't get underway until about 9am. We parted with the Labradors at the gate and they looked suitably glum as if they knew it would be a while before they saw us again.

Underbool

S35 10 11 E141 48 32

It was an easy day's drive along the Mallee Highway until we came across Underbool, a small town on

the main highway and with a good, no great, rv rest stop. With hot showers, toilets and power at cheap prices we thought we would stay here and make an early day of it. The powered site at \$10 a night was appealing as it was cold and rain had set in, so we used the heater up until bedtime and watched TV for an hour or so before crawling into bed. I gather there is a pub for meals but we didn't get to check that out. Overall the day had been uneventful and relaxing. But I can still see those sad little Labrador faces at the gate as we left home.... They are actually our daughter's dogs but they think we all belong to them and miss us when we are gone.

Mamanga Campsite, Yanga NP

S34 39 58 E143 31 4

In a previous year's travel through this area we saw the turnoff to this area and said we must call in on a future trip. Well, this is the future and here we were! It is a quiet place on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, among big gum trees and fairly thick vegetation given the country is in drought. The camp site is not all that far out of Balranald, a reasonable sized town where we repaired for grocery shopping. Some of the areas available for camping are on the banks of the river but they were too shaded by gum trees for our liking, and we camped a slight way out in a cleared area within sight of the river and with a nice outlook of trees and mobs of kangaroos.

It could not be more different than our recent camp sites in Tasmania! The lovely crisp, clean air was delightful and it was warm enough to sit outside for morning coffee and afternoon drinks. Magic.

About 300m away is the famous Yanga Woolshed. So we went over and visited this iconic outback place where there is so much history just laid out for you to wander through. The Shire website says:

Located along Murrumbidgee River, Yanga Woolshed was built in the late 1800s. Once the largest, most modern woolshed in the district, it housed 3,000 sheep and provided work for up to 40 shearers at a time.

Today, the woolshed is in Yanga National Park, part of Murrumbidgee Valley National Park, and you can wander through it on a self-guided tour, exploring its runs and pens, getting a feel for an authentic 19th century woolshed and a taste of Australian history.



You'll also find an interpretive display to fill you in on the history of the area – once Yanga Sheep Station. Close your eyes and breathe in the smells of the past, imagining the sounds of docked paddle boats outside, waiting to transport their wool cargo down the river highway.

I thought it was a fascinating slice of history, and fairly recent history at that. I could still smell the sheep droppings underneath the boards! But the old houses were equally interesting and are open to visitors to look through. I reckon an OS&H person would have conniption fits at the

thought of the public wandering through these derelict old buildings but I am so glad we had the opportunity of making up our own minds whether it was safe.

After a pleasant couple of days we headed on Northwards.

Hay, Sandy Point

This pleasant camp is on the banks of the Lachlan, which flows deep and wide at this point. Of course, you can't camp on the banks of the river (the place is too popular for campers to be allowed to do that) but they have day use shelters and barbeques overlooking the river, and a clean toilet block with non-potable water, all within walking distance of town. We managed to get a nice spot out from the branches of a eucalypt tree, and enjoyed two nice nights here, as well as a nice dinner at the RSL Club on the second night.

Lake Wyandra

S34 12 46 E146 0 59

A fairly easy morning's drive NE from Hay saw us at one of our favourite spots to camp; Lake Wyandra, out from the town of Griffith. This lovely spot is on a gentle slope overlooking the lake and is completely free. The only facilities are flushing toilets and a water tap, but the view is lovely, with plenty of space on the grassy slopes.

We spent the allowed three nights here, and as the weather was nice and sunny did a couple of loads of washing (carrying water from the tap at the top of the hill) and going out to dinner at Guiseppi's Italian restaurant. I can well recommend the restaurant.... Next time we must go visit the nearby wineries. Mind you, I said that last time too.

Barellan

S34 16 41 E146 34 45

We had not planned to stop at the small town of Barellan, but as we were driving North from Griffith, we saw the town had a Showground which offers powered sites for \$10 a night and welcomes visitors. The main street was full of lovely old buildings with real character. The town has a fascinating history, and is the birthplace of Yvonne Goolagong. Just to cement the history there is a huge tennis racquet displayed in the main street!

The Showgrounds proved to be a pleasant spot to stop and we put the van under the pepper trees near the toilet block, and connected to the power. We felt the power was unnecessary given the weather continued to be sunny and pleasantly cool, but at this price it was a good deal. That meant we were able to put the sheets and towels through the machine, as well



as all our clothes. How it does all add up in such a short time!

On our third day here we took a quick drive out to Cocoparra NP, and were impressed with the national park facilities which all look nice and new. They have clean drop toilets and bench/table units throughout the park. The Woolshed camping area was quite nice and we thought we may come back and camp there sometime.

We also had dinner at the War Memorial Club on the Thursday night and found it to be a large and impressive building with attached bowling green. For such a small town there was a lot of facilities, including a nice swimming pool. As we were eating, a local came up and introduced himself and welcomed us to the community. Another local came out and had a drink with us in the afternoon. It helped that Val gave him a shot of his whisky...



After three quiet nights here we headed on North, through rolling wheat pasture country, and dry, dusty conditions. A high wind was against us and the dust made very hazy conditions. At present the state of NSW was 98% under drought and it showed.

Forbes

There is a lovely freecamp along the Lachlan River at Forbes, with toilets, a dump point and a few taps spread throughout the camping area, which runs along the river. This is a peaceful and pretty spot, and generally very busy. Perhaps due to the dust swirling around when we arrived here, we were the only campers up until dusk when one other camper pulled in. The second night it was full with at least a dozen or more rigs, and it was like old times! Overnight it rained and the wind died down, so the next day dawned bright, fresh and calm.



We took a drive out to nearby Bogan Gate (yes, that is the town's name!) and as it was a weekend, the local ladies had morning tea on at the railway siding museum. What a treat!

The next day we again tracked North on the Newell Highway, but not far. All of 89 kms to be precise...to wait for it...Bogan Weir.

Bogan Weir

S32 43 24 E148 7 37

This camp site is on the Bogan River, outside the small country town of Peak Hill. Only six kms out of town, it has good phone reception and TV coverage, and the camp site has absolutely no facilities other than rubbish bins. So campers need to be fully self-contained with water, shower and toilet. The river was way down and it was very dry indeed. Last year we saw the river full to the brim and the camping area was green with grass. This year, the grass was dry and patchy and the river level low, although the water was quite clear. Nevertheless, it was a lovely, peaceful spot to camp, and we enjoyed the sound of birds and wind in the trees.

I noticed a number of cars camping overnight, with fairly young occupants. One wonders what their toileting arrangements are, as there are no facilities here whatsoever (well apart from rubbish bins..)

From Bogan Weir we travelled up to the outback town of Narrabri. Interestingly, as we drove North we could not help but notice a huge amount of litter on the sides of the road before and after Dubbo. It was astounding, and I don't recall seeing so much rubbish on the side of a road in recent years.

Narrabri

This mid-sized town (it has a MacDonaldis) has a nice Showground which provides camping for a reasonable fee, and is neat and tidy. On arrival we were asked by a sign to place a registration envelope with our details and money into a sealed metal box and having done that we didn't need to speak to anyone or arrange anything further. We camped down the back alongside the fenceline. Unaccountably the fence was topped with barbed wire. I am guessing they have a problem with crime here. However, our night was peaceful and trouble free. The town is neat and the parks had fresh green grass which was a pleasant surprise given that NSW is now officially 100% in drought.

Immediately on arrival and hooking up to power and water we put on the washing machine and did a quick load of washing and hung it out to dry. Given the dry sunny day it was well dry by dinner time.

On a previous stay at Moree (further to the North) we visited nearby Mt Kaputar which is a wonderful national park with outstanding rock formations. It would repay a fresh visit...next time perhaps. On this occasion we were only overnighing.

The next morning we again put on a larger load of washing (jeans and shirts, and teatowels) which washed while we had breakfast and we then left the load in the machine to hang out to dry on our arrival at our next camp. In this manner we can use the power and water at the park site rather than our own while bushcamped. Our power needs are low and supplied largely by our own battery

system while at a caravan park so I don't feel too guilty about using a bit of extra water in this way. (Our fridge is probably the largest user of electricity each day generally, and our system's set up has the power drawing initially off our van's batteries which are then filled by us putting on the battery charger. Given the amount of solar we have coming into the system we don't put the charger on usually and simply run the fridge from our own batteries).

Bingara

S 29 51 49 E150 33 51

Our next destination was the small town of Bingara up near the NSW and QLD border. From Narrabri we headed North East on the Killarney Gap Road, and for a space of time wended our way through steep climbs and descents, and through hairpin bends; it wasn't quite as bad as all that and was quite scenic. We passed the turnoff to Mt Kaputar, which we have visited on previous trips.



Bingara is a pretty town which really values the grey nomad campers.

They provide a number of excellent camping sites along the Gwydir River and facilities like a dump point as well as cheap fresh drinking water. The water is available through a dispensing machine which gives so many litres for a \$2 coin. Of course, the real attraction is the camping on the river which is popular with travellers. We found a nice spot with ample space between us and the vans on either side, and settled in.

It was peaceful and the weather was just lovely. Sunny cool days and cold nights. It was still Winter so cold nights were to be expected of course. This was the first time in many months that we were able to sit outside without jumpers, and it was welcome.

Our neighbours were pleasant folk and we enjoyed a happy hour around the fire as well as a few chats. I think next time we would camp further out on the Copeton Dam Road as the sites out there were attractive and more peaceful.

Three days here was not quite enough but we did need to get further North before the warmer weather set in and then travelling in the outback becomes uncomfortable. So we headed North again, through Warialda to Yetman, and then along Holdfast Road, a dirt track of 40 kms to Yelarbon. I think the NSW/QLD border was delineated by the Dumaresque River which we followed through to Yelarbon on this track. It was dry and very dusty.

Yelarbon Recreation Reserve

S28 34 35 E150 45 25

Yelarbon is a very small town with a good hotel and a small general store. The population at the 2011 Census was 493 but I reckon it has shrunk since then. And as it is only 255 kms from Brisbane it is not too isolated. But its population is considerably swelled by the number of people passing through and who are sufficiently attracted to stay in their campground at the Recreation Reserve. A pleasant camp adjacent to the oval, it has showers and toilets, a laundry, a herb garden and powered sites for the princely sum of \$15. We have stayed here a few times over the years and always have dinner at the pub on one night of our stay. As we did this time too, together with a group of others from the camp. It was very busy this year, with every available powered site taken by late afternoon. I am glad we arrived early and got a nice site near a little tree.

We didn't need power but the water was invaluable to do a bigger wash of the sheets and towels which seem to have developed a nasty habit of getting dirty. We seem to be forever saying that we need to find a spot with water to do the dratted washing! Val has also developed an unfortunate habit of thinking I am exaggerating the need to wash sheets and towels so often. I ignore him, of course.

We only stayed the two nights as we wanted to move on to Carnarvon National Park. For our friend Michael's benefit that is Carnarvon QLD, not WA.... (My friend Michael, from back home, is my most valued trip report recipient. He claims, and I see no reason to disbelieve him, that he not only reads the reports but also prints them out to keep in a bound volume).

Anyway, the next report deals with Carnarvon and other delights.