

Tasmania: Devonport to Narawntapu NP

Stage 1 March 2018

This was our first trip to Tasmania and it involved some degree of planning simply because of the booking requirements on the ferry, the Spirit of Tasmania. And despite all the planning it ended up being Autumn by the time we got there and Winter was nipping at our heels.



Emu Valley Rhododendron Farm

Tassie Camps **The First Few Days**

This stage started on 21 March .

The Ferry

Our booking was for an overnight crossing of the Straits, and this meant we needed to be at the Port Melbourne Spirit of Tasmania (SOT) terminal by about 5pm which is when boarding gates opened. My anxiety levels were extreme when I thought about getting to an unfamiliar place in a big city with a large van on the back of the vehicle. So we had a dummy run a couple of days prior with only the car, stuffed that up by taking a wrong turn, and had a second successful dry run the next day. As it happens, the exercise of getting there was absolutely straightforward and we found ourselves smoothly driving onboard the ferry soon after boarding opened.

We had a small cabin in the middle of the ship, and as soon as we had left the van and car on level 5, we put our overnight bag in the cabin and went looking for a soothing nerve-settling drink. There were tables and chairs all over the ship, so it was easy to find a comfortable place to stretch out and unwind.

Now, I am prone to travel sickness (our son Janis probably wonders where he gets it from...) so I had cunningly bought heavy duty preventative tablets from a chemist, and popped one in my mouth just as we boarded. The chemist had said alcohol should not be taken with the tablets due to their strong sedative effect. I promptly had a drink before and during dinner in the hope they would work extra well. They did. About half an hour later I started to feel really, really sleepy. I was in bed by about 8.30pm and deeply asleep in minutes. Apparently, it was a rough crossing but I would not be able to tell how accurate that was. Val looked a bit crumpled so perhaps it was rough.... On the way back he might want to share my tablets!

As soon as we had landed, our rig was the first off the ship, at some ungodly hour. It was pitch dark as we drove off and onto unfamiliar territory at Devonport. We had chosen a camp site nearby to head to for the first couple of days, so put the GPS co-ordinates in for Forth Campground and headed there. The navigator smoothly took us the 15 or so minutes out of the city to the small town of Forth (on the Forth River) and we found a nice camp site to spend the next two days.

Forth campground is nice and green-grassed and with plenty of trees and has a toilet block and tap to fill up the water tanks. We were grateful for the safe haven to get over the stress of that ferry. The park was large but it did get fairly busy as the day wore on. As it was, we arrived early in the morning (maybe 7am?) and we found it easy to get a nice spot with a view of the Forth River out the back window of the van.

We spent two days here, mostly overcast but with enough sun to re-charge the batteries, and used the time to find a supermarket and get fruit and vegies, as we were not allowed to sail with these in the van. We had a look around the region and took a quick trip into Devonport cbd to buy the famed scallop pies (for Val) and to try to find me a warm Winter coat. No luck with the latter...although I later found one in Launceston.

Then we heard about a good camp site a bit to the South, called Railton. It is a lovely site especially for CMCA members (a motorhome and caravan club) and only for fully self-contained vans. As we qualified, we headed down there. It was \$6 a night, for a lovely green grassed area, with access to water and a dump point. The camp was within 100 metres of a pub for dinner, in a quirky old building, and a coffee shop not much further.

We discovered a community garden here as well as over at nearby Sheffield, with produce in season to be picked for a donation of whatever you felt was right. We got quinces, silverbeet, tomatoes, apples, and pears. All lovely and fresh!

Camped near us at Railton was another Kedron with a couple we actually knew; Rod and Jewel. How good was that! Then the next night other Kedron good friends Rick and Lea turned up, so we had a mini Kedron gathering.

From Railton we went back North to stay at a property with Rick and Lea, and spent the next four



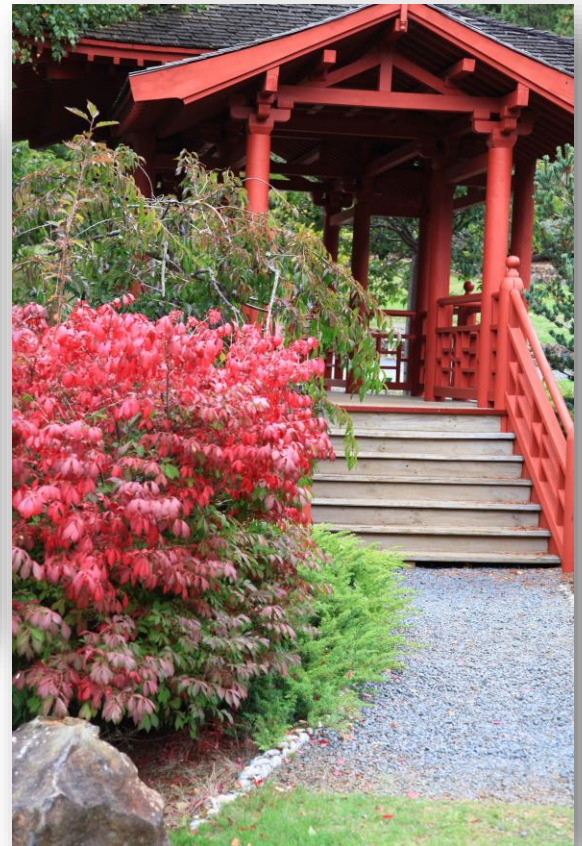
days in the most blissful surroundings imaginable. We were on the banks of a spring fed creek, with trees all around us and on lovely thick green grass. Fortunately, we were able to connect to water, and although power was available we didn't need it. As we enjoyed sunny, cool days here we were able to put the sheets and towels and a week's clothes through the washing machine and caught up with the housekeeping. The lithium batteries are a marvel; the washing machine barely makes a dint in the battery state of charge. As long as there is sun we will be basking in power to burn.

While staying with Rick and Lea we did day trips around the area and saw some exceptional camps right on the beach around Burnie and Penguin. Lovely spots. Maybe later we can go back and enjoy those camps too.

But the place which was outstanding was the Emu Valley Rhododendron Gardens near Burnie. We visited them last time about the same time of year, and again the Autumn colours were amazing. Of



course, we finished off the day with a scone and coffee in the café. The gardens occupy 11 hectares and have more than 22000 plants. It is managed almost completely by volunteers who do all the



planting and maintenance. It was started in 1981 by members of the Australian Rhododendron Society, and is a non-profit enterprise.

After all this fun and frivolity, we had to keep moving so headed to the small town of Chudleigh next. It is very small indeed but has a general store and House of Honey selling ice creams and honeys. We were urged to get some chilli flavoured honey as it can be used in stir fries, or with bread and cheddar cheese. Hmmm...we will see.

At Chudleigh we joined our good friends from back home who were travelling here in their van, and they had arrived before us and had a lovely camp site, so we tucked our van next to theirs and relaxed into the fresh air of this delightful town, surrounded by hills and fields. We had a trip-planning afternoon with AJ and Theresa, going over their map of travel in the seven months they had been here. Highly valuable information indeed.

Travelling through Tasmania is different to anything we have experienced elsewhere; it is compact, villages are twee and very British in 'feel' and everything is green and European in the vegetation. There are heaps of coffee shops, and around every corner is a view. So getting from A to B is an experience, and enjoyable. And of course each little town has so much to see and do.



From Chudleigh we all decided to travel further East and stay near Launceston at a campground called Old Macs Farm. Right on the outskirts of the city, this campground provides nice green grassed sites, and taps set around two lakes and has a lovely café on the hill overlooking the camp site. It is really quiet and peaceful. We spent six nights here and thoroughly enjoyed the stay.

Each day we did trips around including an excursion to the historical village of Evandale, which had a market on that day, and we bought a heap of jams and vegetables. Another day we visited Josef Chromy Wines for lunch and splashed out on the chef's menu. It defeated me. I was literally unable to eat the last course of dessert and asked them to not even bring it out! Imagine.

Evandale had lovely antique shops, as you would expect of an old village like this. Every nook and corner had something worth seeing.



Evandale



On another trip into the city we visited the markets held every Saturday, and it was a wonderful experience too. So much to buy; meats, cheeses, honey, hot foods, fruit and vegetables, breads, fresh butters, etc. And I nipped over the road to Anaconda, a shop which sells a variety of camping and outdoor gear, as I needed a winter coat. At some considerable expense I found a padded jacket which is waterproof. Success!



But six days at Old Macs Farm was enough, given we had to see the rest of Tasmania and had so far not got more than 100 kms from Devonport, our arrival port. So, on the Tuesday morning we headed up to the national park camp site at Narawntapu.

Narawntapu National Park stretches from the low coastal ranges to the long Bass Strait beaches, and includes an historic farm, a complex of inlets, small islands, headlands, wetlands, dunes and lagoons, all with an amazing variety of plants and animals. It lies on Tasmania's north

coast, adjoining Bass Strait, between Port Sorell in the west and the mouth of the Tamar River in the east. And it is about 20 km east of Devonport, 60 km north-west of Launceston and 250 km north of Hobart. It is said to house wombats and Tasmanian tigers but we saw none of them here. We did see lots of wallabies and kangaroos - hundreds of them!

The national park was a gorgeous camp site. While there are more secluded spots down near the beach, we chose the sites closer to the ranger headquarters, and with power. There is a shower and toilet block, and dump point. All this for \$16 a night. We hunkered down here as bad weather was predicted and our chosen camp was quite protected with trees and vegetation. While there was wind and a bit of rain it was not too bad so we had a great time here. Most days we visited places in the region including Latrobe and Port Sorell.

In fact, we attended a geocaching event over at Latrobe on our last day here and met a heap of locals over a sausage sandwich and salad. What a welcome!