

# **Trip Report – Victoria, NSW, QLD and Northern Territory 2021 Carnarvon QLD to Innamincka SA**

We had been enjoying a relaxed pace for some of this stage of the trip, but then things changed. Covid had become an extra traveller in the background for pretty much all of this trip, albeit at a distance. It nipped at our heels right back at the beginning, with a near miss near Goondiwindi and an infected woman a day after we visited the town. And all along, there were outbreaks in other states. Finally, there were outbreaks in Victoria, NSW and SA, as well as Queensland too. It was the outbreaks in the SE of QLD and of NSW that bothered us enough to make us turn for the border. That run for the border was quite an adventure.

## **Special points of interest:**

- **Inland outback towns**
- **Outback camping**
- **Border Run**



## **Mitchell**

When we left Carnarvon Gorge it was a cool, clear day, and we drove South from the turn off, to the small town of Injune. Last trip saw us camping on the outskirts of this lovely small town. On this occasion we filled up with water and fuel at the truck stop (it saved us 14c a litre there!) and the nice female attendant told us of a short cut down to Mitchell. She

suggested we take the Forestvale Road which headed directly West from Injune, then turned South directly to Mitchell. Then we found a special campground, at a spot where in 1846 Major Mitchell and his second in command Kennedy, established a depot for one of their expeditions. There was nothing much there except for a (clean) drop toilet and a bough shed with wooden table and bench seats. But it was very appealing, with nice pine trees and good levels of vegetation. We didn't make it down to the river to check it out...



We spent a lovely night here all by ourselves. And when it was time to leave in the morning, we only had 44 kms to Mitchell and our next camp.

We headed straight out to the Mitchell Weir to the "by donation" camp and found an OK spot in a relatively quiet spot. It was fairly quiet out there and we enjoyed three relaxing days,



The road into Mitchell's Camp, through a shut gate



interspersed with visits to the nearby artesian pool. We bought a three day pass and thought it great value.

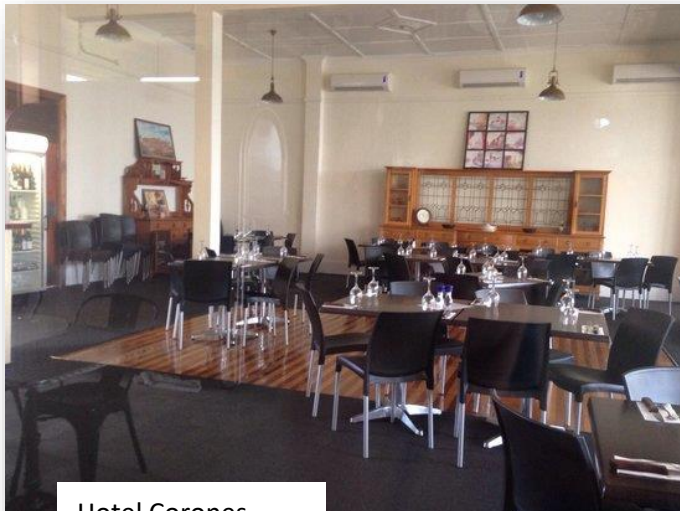
Since our last visit here they have introduced a café on the verandah and that was an excellent idea I thought. Two of my favourite things; coffee and a hot pool.

Now, friends back in the Barossa will laugh at our encounter with a barmaid at Mitchell. We went to the hotel for dinner (and the meal was great). The young barmaid

asked what I wanted to drink. I said a dry white wine. She asked if Moscato was dry; so I told her it definitely wasn't. With a frown she replied "Well I don't know anything about wines". Right. So Val asked for a pale ale. She said "I don't know anything about beers either. You need to tell me what brand you want". This is a barmaid in a hotel!!

So, leaving behind the land of Artesian pools, good bakery and hopeless barmaids, we moved on to Charleville. This is a true outback town with a wealth of character and history. It also has a CMCA (Camper, Motorhome Club of Australia) campground for members. We had booked online and simply rolled up on the day. They had a friendly camp custodian in situ and she welcomed us warmly, telling us about happy hour at 4.00pm. I am not a great fan of happy hours but know they can be valuable in making sure people have a place to gather and chat at the end of the day. We went the first of our two days stay, and enjoyed sitting around a fire chatting with other like minded folks.

On the second night we went to their hotel for dinner. Hotel Corones is clearly an historical asset to the town, and is built on grand proportions. The ceilings are high and with plaster moulding, the stairway to the upper floor is a polished wood affair and the dining room is a treat. The stained glass windows are beautiful too.



Hotel Corones

Initially we had planned to stay three days at Charleville but by this time there started to be disturbing stories about troublesome CORONA virus cases in Brisbane and 11 Local Government Areas (LGA's). It occurred to us that SA could well place restrictions on those in Queensland who wanted to cross the border to the state. I started to monitor the police website, which details the state of play through publication of

Determinations affecting each state.

It dawned on us on the morning of our second day that things were getting serious with the virus in QLD (by now NSW was beyond containing) and that we should head for the border as soon as possible.

This essentially meant abandoning our plans to stay at Yowah and its lovely artesian pools, and making a move toward the SA border sooner rather than later. At this stage we didn't think it was urgent.

## Thargomindah Rest Stop

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The border was 600kms away so we banked on nothing changing in 24 hours and set a target for the first night just West of Thargomindah. This is a spot we have stayed at before on two occasions. It is simply a clearing on a ridge with a view down over a valley. About



55kms from Thargomindah, it is quiet and peaceful and we had it all to ourselves as we had each other occasion. It also (amazingly) had phone coverage and this is one of its major appeals.



It had been a hot afternoon but comfortable enough to sit outside with a drink at about 5.00pm, and it started to feel appreciably cooler by bedtime.

I got up at 1.00am as I often do, and sat reading for a space. I decided to look at emails and messages – and its just as well I did. There were messages from two friends saying the SA news broadcasts referred to a need for South Australians in QLD to get home as soon as possible. This meant “get across the border ASAP”.

Now the background to this is a gate across the highway between Thargomindah and Innamincka at the SA and QLD border. In circumstances such as this, the local police simply lock the gate. Bona fide travellers can get the lock code and get through the gate. I had spoken to the police and reassured myself that they would give us the code if we needed it, and while passing through Thargomindah I was again told by police that the gate was not yet locked. All good. But this news about an imminent change to the border restrictions meant the gate would be locked soon. Very soon. We would have access to the code as we had permits to cross the border but any newly imposed SA testing and quarantine requirements would still apply regardless.

So I woke Val up from his happy snoring, we threw our clothes on, got some travelling coffee mugs together, and we pulled out at 2.00am. It was freezing cold and the sky was a spangled stretch of stars above us as we travelled cautiously West through a pitch black landscape.

The road is a narrow bitumen strip here, with good wide vegetation free verges, so we could see any wildlife before it hit us. But in the 400kms drive that night, we saw only one solitary bird on the road, and one truck. That was it. In the dark, we could see the lights of Santos mining camps all the way along, a reassuring sight as we travelled steadily on toward that border.

Strangely, it felt like quite an adventure! In the entire 400kms from our camp site to Innamincka that night, we saw only one other vehicle, a truck. And the only wildlife we saw was a small bird in the middle of the road.

At 5.30am we reached the SA/QLD border gate (still unlocked!) and realised we were safe. Relief.