

WA Wheatbelt

Stage 5 September 2018

After crossing the Great Central Way from Alice Springs to WA, we wanted to see the famous wildflowers in the Wheatbelt. This year's flowers were said to be the best in 25 years, following recent rains. Clearly that was worth seeing. So we headed on from Kalgoorlie to see what was to be seen. All was not to be smooth sailing.



WA Wildflowers at Mt Marshall campground

Outback Camps

This stage started on 12 September.

On the morning after the window's replacement in Kalgoorlie, we had coffee with Charles (our son in law) at the mobile coffee truck near the campground, sitting at a table under a nearby gum tree. Charles works in Kalgoorlie and flies home to SA on his longer breaks.

Then, with our nice new car rear windscreen installed, we headed West toward Perth on the Great Eastern Highway, and travelled first through Coolgardie (a town with glorious old buildings but a hangdog look about it) and on toward Karalee Rocks. The country looked healthy after recent rains, and for the first time we started to see flowering bushes on the side of the road. We have camped here quite a few times and think it is a very special spot. I think it is particularly attractive due to the pleasant bush setting as well as the dump point, toilet and tap. And the good phone reception.

Karalee Rocks

S31 15 1 E 119 50 29

Just off the Great Eastern Highway between Perth and Kalgoorlie, this peaceful spot is a treasure. It has a flushing toilet, a dump point, a water tap and not least, mobile phone and internet. Karalee Dam is located off the Great Eastern Highway 34 km east of Southern Cross, heading towards Kalgoorlie, (18 km past Yellowdine Roadhouse). Turn left and continue on gravel for 4.2 kms. Karalee Dam was constructed to provide water for slow steam trains en-route to Kalgoorlie. The site was



chosen mainly because of the granite outcrop; With rain the outcrop becomes a natural catchment area. Construction occurred between 1896-1897, its capacity is 10.6 million gallons, it is 1487 feet above sea level and 25 feet in depth. Retaining walls of granite slab, all cut from the top of the rock and laid by hand, surround the enormous rock catchment. This enables the water to flow off the rock into the dam via a large semi-circular aqueduct of steel, hand riveted at each joint, which is still in very good condition considering its age and the natural harsh

elements. To reflect upon the unbelievable manual labour and horsepower involved in this construction, is well worth the journey.

Since our last visit the Telstra mobile phone reception had improved and the Optus phone worked as well. And also, there were some wildflowers in bloom, especially around the dam walls. It was quite busy during our stay, with a few other vans each night, including a group in the middle with an enormous great fire leaping into the night sky. We tend to be a bit wary of fires now, after moving to a fireprone area. Although we enjoy sitting around a fireplace in cooler weather, it isn't essential to our enjoyment.

We had two nights here and then moved on to the West, through Southern Cross and Bullfinch to Mukinbudin (where we picked up water at the town park) and had morning tea at the coffee shop. After filling up with fuel we kept heading West towards the small town of Bencubbin and pulled into the nearby campground at **Mt Marshall. S30 50 21 E117 54 13**

A nice campground next to a couple of granite rocks, the camp has only a drop toilet and some cement tables and chairs as facilities. But it has a pleasant bush setting with trees and shrubs, and scatterings of wildflowers on this occasion. It is located at the foot of one of the granite outcrops which is easy enough to climb.

Soon after arriving and setting up we had a cup of tea in our chairs in the shade of a nearby tree.

Val suddenly jumped out of his chair and declared that he could see we had a broken spring on the van! Not good news. And it was a Saturday afternoon so very little could be done about it right then. The van's springs are leaf, independent and load sharing suspension which means (as far as I can gather) that the remaining spring on that side would take the weight of the broken one. But the broken spring stopped on the chassis rail and was supported fairly safely. This meant that it could have been damaged some time back on the Plenty or Great Central Road - who knows when.

This was not good news (a serious understatement). Being mechanically challenged I had no idea what it meant but knew it was not ideal. As it turned out it meant we were greatly inconvenienced as we needed to order a new set of springs and wait where we were until they came. While the van could be moved it would need to move slowly and cautiously, so it was thought best we just stay where we were until we could get new springs. I had some dark fears about the length of time that might take. They were realised by events.

Val rang the supplier in Brisbane first thing Monday morning, and arranged for two new springs to be delivered to Perth where he would pick them up. The reason for ordering two units was the thinking that if one had gone so may the other and he had better have a spare ready if that happened. All went according to plan and the springs duly arrived in Perth the following Tuesday when Val drove down to pick them up, a trip of 300 kms there and then back again.

But I am getting ahead of myself. In all we had 11 days sitting at the bush camp at Mt Marshall waiting for the new springs. As places go it could not have been better. We had a nearby toilet and tap with good clean water, and it was only 8 kms from the small town of Bencubbin. The town had a small general store and a café so we could get provisions fairly easily. And there were nearby towns to go visit and see. And it had pretty good phone reception.

There were geocaches too, and that took up some time to clear out the whole district of every geocache we could find. There was a particularly good one at the museum in Koorda - it was dangling on a string in a sea mine (a bomb).



The following weekend friends in nearby Merredin (95 kms away) drove over and camped with us, bringing their Kedron van and putting it next to ours. It felt wonderful to have good company and someone to chat with us while we waited out the time for the springs to arrive. Karen and Paul had been only names on the Kedron forum, and now we were able

to meet them at last.

The following Monday, a long weekend in WA, we all drove back down to Merredin and Paul and Karen stayed close to us in case the van had a mishap. Karen cooked us a lovely roast dinner that night and it was so enjoyable to have good company as well as a home cooked meal!

So we camped in Merredin at the handily provided freecamp there on the outskirts of town, which is a pleasant spot not unlike our camp up at Mt Marshall, and spent two nights there. A 'quick camp' usually means not putting out the awning or table and chairs, and having minimal outside seating set up. Given we were only meant to be there 24 hours we wanted to do what was needed and get away, as we are always reluctant to abuse the timeframes on such camps.

Val unhitched the car as he would be heading into the city for the springs on the following day, and we had an early night. Our concern was that the parts may not have arrived, despite our having been told they were most likely there. Val headed off to the city (300 kms away) about 8.30am after a quick confirmatory phone call to the distribution point, and had a long day of driving, collecting springs and driving back.

To top it all off, while he was gone, and I was minding the van, I soon noticed that there was no sun coming into the batteries. Well, there was a small amount from the small portable panel but a technophobe like me was even able to work out that the problem was related to a fuse and that nothing was being produced from the rooftop solar panels. The small portable panel kept pace with the fridge's needs (about 5 amps per hour) but that was it. When Val got back at about 4.30pm I

greeted him with the good news that he needed to fix the problem, whatever it was. He looked exhausted, and I hated doing it to him but the issue was important. Not serious, but important.

He fitted a new fusebox, dangled the offending burnt fuse for me to admire (?) and that problem was addressed. Val being Val, of course he had a spare fusebox in that pile of stuff in the box of 'stuff' secreted somewhere in the van.

And the next day he got under the van and within about two or three hours had fixed the new spring into position. He decided to keep the new spare until another one goes, if or when it does. As it probably will.



This had been a bit of a nuisance for us and meant nearly two weeks of sitting in one place waiting for the new units to arrive. But, and it is a large but, we had a lovely spot to wait in, and we were joined by good people to chat with and commiserate with us while we waited.

The other major plus was the helpful support of people on facebook and by emails etc who gave us suggestions for

places to go and see while we waited, and also contacts for mechanical support if all else failed. This made a huge difference. I am particularly grateful to Karen and Paul (fellow Kedron owners) and Stephen and Judy who we have now known for a long time from Caravaners Forum.

As I said on a couple of forums, life is not always a bed of roses when we are travelling, although friends and family often imagine it is, I imagine. These things happen and you simply have to deal with them.