

Adelaide to Melbourne (and return)

January 2010

This is a brief report on travels from home in the Barossa Valley (north of Adelaide) to Melbourne and Castlemaine (Victoria) and back home again.

The trip was undertaken with a 200 series LC TD (which has been modified by addition of airbags assisted suspension, tyre sensors, snorkel and a scan gauge); and a Kedron Top Ender, 19 foot internal.



Green Hill Lake Campground, near Ararat

From the Barossa

We had left this trip until after Christmas and our anniversary, so it was 31 December before we headed off. I have discovered that here in the southern states the weather can be variable, but I was not prepared for the huge variation in temperatures we encountered. We went from cold nights (about 13 degrees) to 44 degree heat! Admittedly not on the same day...

The route we chose was the Western Highway, as we had a wide choice of campsites to overnight at, as well as probably being a shorter distance (OK so don't quote me on that one!)

I had asked for advice from a couple of internet caravanning forums, seeking information on the best places to overnight. I got a wealth of great information, and summarised it for future reference:

1. Coming from Adelaide at just over half way there is **Kiata** (Camps 5 # 553) which is a large area and usually pretty quite as it is not that well known.
2. A little further on at Dimboola there is **Horseshoe Bend** (Camps 5 # 552) which is probably more "attractive" and can be quite popular.
3. Closer to Melbourne there is **Middle Creek** near Beaufort (Camps 5 # 530) which though very popular, is quite a large area. (as per Peter's post)
4. We have used **Wannon Falls** (Camps 5 # 642) on the Glenelg Highway when travelling to/from South East SA and have never found it to be crowded.
5. **Green Hill Lake Reserve**, near Ararat (Camps 5 # 533) just a half km off the highway.

6. **Middle Creek Campground** in Mt Buangor State Park (Camps 5 # 530). (Note: we had been given a warning re this site: Warning: do not attempt to tow a van into any of the **other** camping areas as you won't be able to turn around to get out. Middle Creek Camp Ground although not for dogs is still 1 of the best in the area, as for water there we have obtained water from the waterfall (a short walk from the upper campground),and is still free, lots of RV's also go there to give you an idea of the size of the camp sites.

Our first night was spent at Kiata (Camps 5 # 553) and found it as suggested, to be a large campground (in Little Desert National Park) with heaps of space and only two other groups camped there. The toilets were pit arrangements, but clean and with plenty of toilet paper! When we arrived it was 37 degrees and it felt hot. Sitting outside in the shade of the trees was marginally comfortable but we were happy to see clouds and a cooling rain storm approaching. That meant we could get a good night's sleep. In a national park you are not allowed to use a generator so we would have had to simply put up with the heat unless that cool change had come in.

I would recommend this spot as a good overnighter, or for a couple of days if you wanted to do the bushwalks in the park. There is evidence of the park staff planting native trees and looking after the park attentively.

We took our time the next morning, having a leisurely cup of tea then coffee before heading off. As we were really on a leisurely break, we decided that if a good second camp site appeared we would spend a second night on the road before arriving in Melbourne. (We had a booking at the Ashley gardens CP in Braysbrook, a Western suburb park).

And lo and behold, just before lunch, we pulled in to a lovely spot near Ararat, called Green Hill Lake Reserve (Camps 5 # 533). It was only 500 metres in off the highway and we

thought it was a truly delightful spot to stay for the rest of the day and night. When we arrived there was a bloke with a couple of dogs - off the lead (of course!) who told us we could camp wherever we liked and that although it was possible a ranger may come and collect camping fees, it was unlikely in his view. He said the town council encourages campers as it protects the facilities



Val relaxing outside the van at Green Hill Lake Reserve

from malicious damage. The facilities included a shower and toilet block (clean) with hot water and flushing toilets. All for free. The spot we chose was overlooking the lake and we spent the afternoon watching swans and ducks on the water.

It was not very busy there; apart from a Mitsubishi 4wd camper, and two backpacker vans we were there in solitude.

The next morning we drove into Melbourne, through drizzling rain and quite cool conditions. We arrived well before lunch and quickly set up, then relaxed over a later lunch and glass of red wine. I had foolishly not brought a jumper with me (it was hot when I left home) so buying a jumper was high on my list of priorities.

Ashley Gardens: From Badgers site: 129 Ashley Street, 150m south of Western Highway (Ballarat Road), 7 kms west of CBD. Coming from Geelong, take the Western Ring Road (M80) and turn onto Ballarat Road (8) and head towards the city. You will see the signs to the caravan park as you get closer. Ph: 03 9318 6886 or 1800 061 444. BIG4 member. No pets.

We spent 5 lovely days in and around Melbourne and enjoyed visiting the Victoria Markets, Lygon Street and Williamstown. The latter spot we were taken to by fellow forumites Colin and Julie, and had an enjoyable lunch at a restaurant on the foreshore.

On the sixth day we headed north to Castlemaine, a reasonable sized town, in an area steeped in goldmining history. The region abounds in antique shops, coffee shops and quaint towns. We visited a winery and a cidery as well as one of the best antique shops I ahve ever seen; the Restoration barn, right in Castlemaine.

We stayed at the **Castlemaine Gardens Caravan Park** in Doran Avenue, next to the Botanical Gardens just behind the old pump foundry. Ph: 03 5472 1125. I thought it was a pleasant park and we look forward to a return visit. I submitted a [ark report to the Badgers site (<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~badger04/>) which detailed the below information about the park:

It is hard to find with a GPS as most navigators do not recognise Doran Street. Thus I have captured the co-ordinates, making it easier for those with a GPS to find the place: S37 03 19.1 E 144 12 48.1 We liked the friendliness of this park, and the cleanliness of the toilet/shower block. The sites were mostly level, although some are on a slight slope. Many sites have shade, an important consideration in the January heatwave. The Bridge Hotel, 5 minutes walk away, provided wonderful meals. Park Rating 4.5:

Unfortunatly we developed colds while here and I spent a couple of miserable days and nights coughing and sneezing. Luckily we travel with a good first aid kit and we had ventolin puffers, as I get virally induced asthma and the puffer reduces chest symptoms. That made a huge difference and I was over my cold infection in just days. Val caught it from me and is still coughing, 10 days later at the time I write this!. I find that when I am travelling with a

van and get sick - which is very, very rare, all I want to do is be back home in a nice quiet house, with a nearby toilet, and a bedroom all to myself. In four years of travelling previously, I only got sick once, and I yearned to be back home at that time, right next to a flushing toilet.

Finally, the time came to pack up and return home. We could see that the return journey was only 660 kms from Castlemaine, so we decided to do it all in one hit. Luckily we headed out very early, as that day the temperature hit 44 degrees and there were Catastrophic fire alerts for the Wimmera, an area we had to travel through. It was so hot we decided to have lunch at a roadhouse, rather than pulling over and eating in the van (our usual habit). We had wonderful hamburgers at Bordertown....

Because Val's cold had made him quite sneezy and prone to feel tired, I took the lion's share of driving to relieve him. Of course, he so prefers to drive that I feel his anxiety levels rise accordingly.

And then we were home at about 3.30pm. Another successful trip completed.