

## **Stage 16 Adelaide to Mildura**

We have found during this period that longer than usual periods of time were spent in each location (generally). This allowed us to properly explore places, and to relax properly. I managed to get a bit more of a quilt done (I am hand piecing a top) and we managed to do a few walks. Weather-wise we had a mixed bag. Some days were wet and cold (rained out of the Flinders!) and in other places we enjoyed crisp sunny Autumn weather. Overall, it has been great weather.

Our favourite for the period of this report? Mount Crawford Reserve, near Williamstown, and only an hour from Adelaide, followed closely by Moorook Nature Reserve on the Murray River.

### **Mount Crawford Forest Reserve (Rocky Paddocks Campground)**

**S 34, 43 .100 E 138, 56 .395**

This has to be one of the most delightful of camping areas and so close to the city of Adelaide. Near Williamstown, on the edge of the Barossa, is a delightful series of campgrounds in a forest of pine trees and gum trees, and perched up a hill. It is only open for camping between April to November, due to the likelihood of fires, and is quiet and tranquil. We picked a spot well away from the main toilet block (a 'drop' toilet only) and had the whole forest to ourselves for two nights. On the third night there was another group but we didn't know they were there until we left.

We had our little forest glade all alone to enjoy, and it was such a pleasure to sit in peace and quiet after the hectic activity at the caravan park. And being alone meant we could play our music (ahh, Pavarotti and Freni in Madame Butterfly again!) and try out our new Webasto Diesel Heater. Nights and mornings were so cold that the heater made a huge difference. It works superbly, heating up the cabin within about 10 to 15 minutes. I am so glad we invested in the heater although its cost has been a financial pain (\$2700).

We were not allowed to have an open camp fire due to the dryness of the area and the fact that it is not yet the end of April, when open fires are allowed if it is not too dry. However we were allowed to have the Cobb cooker, and we made a roast one evening, good cold weather fare. A port in the evenings was also a good choice, and an occasional glass of cask red. Unfortunately, Val accidentally pushed the cork into the port bottle and we had to drink half a large bottle in one sitting. Not to be recommended for the faint-hearted.

On our departure we saw that another group had been camped closer to the turnoff and had a huge bonfire burning, with sparks shooting up into the pines. The group was made up of four Aboriginal men, and clearly were not at all concerned about the likelihood of fire in a forest. The historic plantings in this area (going back to 1914) could never be repeated if burnt out, but these muppets couldn't care less. We reported them to Forestry staff as we left.

It is a strange thing, but in our almost two years of travelling, the only times we have seen illegal activity in reserves or national parks (three occasions), it has involved Aboriginal men...I suppose the politically correct would not like me making this observation.

**20 to 22 April 2007**

**Mambray Creek Campground, Mt Remarkable NP**

**S 32, 50.328 E 138, 02.327**

**(Site 14)**

And so, as we promised ourselves, we came back to Mambray Creek, to see what it might be like in cooler weather. It rained in the afternoon, a light and refreshing shower, which I am sure the animals and the foliage alike enjoyed. It is so much cooler than our last visit; at that time we sweltered in summer heat and left after one night. Our first night on this visit was a low of 8 degrees and the days (apart from the first few hours on the Friday morning) were cool and sunny. Crisp Autumn weather. It was a delight to be here in this season, and with all the foliage so fresh. The smell of the gums was a treat in the early mornings.

While camping, we usually get up in the morning, and sit outside with our first cup of tea for the day. After that is finished, we treat ourselves to a cup of brewed coffee and breakfast. Then we struggle to do the five minutes of housework (making the bed and cleaning the bathroom). . Actually, to be perfectly honest, this is our habit on all days while travelling with the van. But is so nice to sit outside in the morning with a view of the bush.

**23 and 24 April**

**Quorn**

Quorn is a lovely little town, which has a basic caravan park (our favourite sort) and a great hotel for evening meals (the Austral) as well as a café with nice food and coffee (the Quandong from memory). It was still raining intermittently when we arrived, and continued during our stay. The CDMA coverage was patchy (calls kept dropping out, but NextG wireless broadband was fine...).

We drove out to have a look at Warren Gorge, which is a great free camp, although not so pleasant in the rain perhaps.

**25 April**

**Brachina Gorge, Flinders Ranges**

**S 31, 20.021 E 138 34.654**

Tucked into a delightful spot at the foot of a cliff, and surrounded by gums and undergrowth around our site, we felt very contented indeed. We had hoped to be here for a few days at the very least, but wintry weather arrived and steady rain with it. While we don't mind the rain (in fact, it was pleasant, as the rain was soft and misty, not at all like the torrential downpours we are used to in the Top End)

a visiting ranger who called by after dusk said the roads would become 'sticky' and he advised us to leave the following day, ahead of further expected rain.

In the morning, the rain had continued, and our breakfast was among misty gums and soft morning light. When it rains in the Flinders, the colours are all muted greens and pastel browns and creams. This is a treat for photographers or artists.

I tried to persuade myself that all would be well regarding the roads, but by 2pm, we decided to heed the ranger's advice, especially as we didn't want to damage the roads with our three tonne van. As I had a flight to catch back to Darwin (for a Board meeting) on 2 May, we didn't want to risk being 'rained-in'. So we left, again for our favourite camp site, Mambray.

### **26 to 28 April**

#### **Mambray Creek Campground, Mt Remarkable NP**

**S 32 50.328 E 138 02.327**

It was no hardship to spend a few more days here but the rain continued, and that started to become a nuisance (although the local farmers were reportedly ecstatic to have the welcome relief of rain). I mused from time to time on how I will feel once we started travelling up the route from Adelaide through Victoria and NSW in winter. Would the rain restrict us from enjoying the trip?

In the end we simply decided to take it as it comes and adapt as well as we can to the weather conditions. We have prepared for the cold as well as we can, with the addition of an annexe, and the installation of the Webasto heater.

### **29 and 30 April**

#### **Clare CP**

It was interesting to see Clare in full Autumn colours, which are spectacular. Again we visited the Skillogalee winery restaurant for lunch one day and breakfast the next, and to relax on their verandah over a pot of coffee. Their gardens have been refreshed by the rain too...

And we popped in to Neagles Winery (right on the highway) for some more of their delicious chilli jam.

Now it's cooler weather we are no longer drinking champagne each evening, but have moved on to red wine. From a cask, often, as it is not only cheaper, but easier to carry.

### **1 to 8 May**

#### **Adelaide beachfront CP**

Back to the Beachfront! It is starting to feel like home now. Val was to do some work on the van while I flew back to Darwin for my meeting. In this week he repaired the suspension bolts and bushes on the van (whatever they are!) and had our bed's woolen underlay dry cleaned. (NB The woolen underlay was a very expensive purchase when the van was still young, and has been invaluable.

It is soft and springy to the touch, so it cushions our old bones; it keeps us warm in winter; and it keeps us cool in hot weather. We bought the best quality we could get our hands on and it has been a good friend to us). And he took my Canon EOS camera in for its annual cleaning. That removed some dust spots from the sensor.

Once I got back, we had a final dinner with Val's mother and headed off on the next stage of the trip. Nuriootpa will be the first stop, just so we can do a final tour of visits in the Barossa and the Farmer's Markets at Angaston.

### **9 to 18 May**

#### **Nuriootpa**

What wonderful weather we had up here in the Barossa. Autumn was definitely alive and well in the vineyards, and all the towns seemed to have tree-lined streets with English trees that display vivid colours; russet reds and glowing golds. For us, coming from the tropics, and unused to any season other than Wet or Dry, this is lovely.

The caravan park at Nuriootpa is also quite lovely and hence our extending our visit from the initial four days to 10. The park is near Coulthard Reserve, and a 100 metre walk leads to a large pond with ducks and swans. There are walks around the pond/lake, and it is a delightful experience in the early morning or late afternoon to meander around the trees and foliage. The weather has been crisply sunny with cold nights, so we were very happy to spend the time here.

One evening we walked down town for a dinner at the local pub –very nice!- and other days we spent driving around the district to Gawler, Tanunda or Angaston. Another day we visited the Whistling Wall, which is an amazing engineering feat. Val visited the motor museum at Birdwood (I smartly elected to stay back at the van, and walked down town for morning tea).

Red wine at sunset is now the order of the day. Only one glass, you understand...Of course, with winter coming, dusk arrives early, so we have drinks at 4pm instead of 5pm.

While at the park we met up with some nice folk who also belong to the Caravaners Forum (Mary and David), so we had drinking companions. Their brand new Regal was very impressive, and makes me jealous of anyone with a new van!

### **19 to 21 May**

#### **Hogwash Bend, Murray River**

**S 34 03 .917 E 139 51 .150**

**(Note: when following the GPS's directions here, we found it kept trying to take us north of the river, rather than south. This gave us a couple of interesting moments until we realised what it was doing. Instead, follow the directions to take the (unmarked) road northwards at exactly 23 kms from Waikerie)**

What a great spot this was. It is right on a bend of the river, and not too far from the large(ish) town of Waikerie. We put the van on a flat stretch near the river, surrounded by little trees and river grasses. Then we sat back and enjoyed the view; egrets, waterhens and a pelican. Every morning and evening we sat under the awning of the van and watched the display of birds and the shimmer of water. This is a lovely spot indeed. But it is marred largely by the fact that, as it is not a reserve or national park, people can bring their trail bikes with them, and roar and whine up and down the road all day long. Initially we consoled ourselves with the fact that once the weekend had finished, people would go home and take their bikes with them. Unfortunately, a family (with four bikes!) arrived the same day as us and told us they were staying five days. Oh woe. I find myself watching these morons riding up and down the road, then up and down the road again all day long, and wishing they could find a life. Still, I guess they are doing the best they can with the intellectual resources they have available...

Memo to self: prefer to stay in national parks or reserves.

### **Moorook Reserve Park, on the Murray River.**

**S 34 15 .983 E 140 22 .167**

Consistent with mental note to self regarding not staying at spots where trail bikes are present, we moved on to a Nature Reserve called Moorook, which is between Barmera and Loxton. It was a truly lovely spot, with a peaceful setting right on the banks of the river. We found it using Camps Australia Wide 3, and simply having a poke around the area. Initially we thought we would stay there for a day or two, but ended up staying for three days. The weather was nice, sunny days but coldish nights (about 5 degrees minimum to 19 or 20 max).

While here, we visited the neighbouring towns of Loxton and Barmera, and went to the Banrock Station winery. This is truly spectacular, with a verandah overlooking what is normally a wetland. You can have meals or just coffee out there and we had arrived too late in the day to be eating, so just had coffee. It was a lovely spot to while away some time in the late afternoon sunlight.

### **Mildura.**

We scampered over to Mildura, with a smooth run there, arriving mid afternoon. From what I could tell on the internet, there were a number of parks; we personally checked several, and they were each as bad as each other. Even the Big\$, usually a very high standard establishment, was cramped, with sites wedged between cabins. We chose the Apex Family Park affiliated park, right on the river. Well, the park is situated across a road from the river, but you could see the river traffic from our site. The park is run down and tired looking, with very few cement slab sites. As most of the park is sandy (very patchy grassy) and it was wet while we were there, this meant sand got into the van if you weren't very careful indeed. There was no dump point, which meant Val had to take the cassette for a little drive. And the toilet block was a bit run down.

However, the town itself made up for this deficiency. Mildura is a lovely town, with real civic pride. There are lovely wide streets and green parks and flower beds in the centre of the streets. The winery at Trentham Estate had to be seen to be believed! Right on the river, with a delightful restaurant that won my heart so much we returned for lunch the next day as well. And their wines were great, as well as a reasonable price. Their in-house balsamic vinegar was the best I have ever tasted. (It's made with brown sugar, and the flavour explodes in the mouth).

Consistent with the food theme, we had dinner at the famous Stefano's restaurant. This was a treat, and an experience I would recommend to anyone. Yes, it was expensive but when one considers it is fine dining, with attentive service, in my opinion it was cheap. (Five courses for \$80 a head).

One of the most enjoyable things about Mildura was the opportunity to catch up with our dear friends Karen and Peter, from Val's teaching days at Jabiru, in Kakadu NP. They generously fed us (three times!) and shared their hospitality with us in a number of different ways. When you are travelling in a van, a home cooked meal is a treasure.