

Barossa to Brisbane

Stage 1 May 2017

This year we were later than usual in leaving home, and so Autumn was coming in and we had been lighting the fireplaces for almost two months by the time we were ready to leave. This report details the first stage of the 2017 trip.



Aroona Camp, Flinders Ranges

SA Camps

The First Few Days

This stage started on 21 May.

Orroroo

S32 44 4 E138 32 15

It was mid morning by the time we left home, and a lovely cold, sunny day. We waved goodbye to our daughter Kathryn and our friend Anna, and steadily headed North. In contrast with earlier years, the countryside was green and showing signs of the Autumn rains. The route we took went through small towns like Eudunda, Robertstown, Terowie, Peterborough and Mt Bryan. We stopped for lunch at Mt Bryan, a small hamlet with pretty much nothing but a hotel and a great rest stop next to the highway. We often say we will stay here on a trip sometime, and walk across the road to the pub for dinner. But this year it was too early to stop.

We arrived at the rest stop 8kms North West of Orroroo early in the afternoon, pulled into a spot overlooking the valley, and quickly put our chairs out in the sunshine. A celebratory bottle of bubbles from home capped off a lovely first day. It was a quiet night with little passing traffic, and only a couple of other vans in this lovely site.

Hancock Lookout

S32 42 20 W138 1 38

This was the first time we had stayed here, with this iconic site having been closed to camping for some years. It has been re-opened to overnight camping on a six month trial basis, and we hope the Wilmington Council decides to keep it available to camping. This will depend on campers doing the right thing and leaving it in a clean state. The views over the Spencer Gulf are outstanding and we could see why the camp site is so popular. Perhaps the seven kms of gravel road up to the ridge may put some folk off, but the condition of the track was good overall and we had no problems negotiating the way in.

There was a stiff (and cold) wind all day up until late afternoon and that meant we could not sit outside and enjoy the view other than from our lounge inside the van. But in the afternoon the clouds swept away and we were bathed in brilliant and warm sunshine. This was a gift.

Aroona Ruins

S31 16 44 W138 34 49

Regular readers will know we love Aroona, a national park camp in the Flinders Ranges, North of Wilpena Pound. It has several attractive features which draw us here; a panoramic view of the ABC Ranges, lovely vegetation in and around the sites and taps with spring water near each site.

Because we love this place we stayed five nights, and revelled in the absolutely brilliant weather. The days were cool and sunny, and the nights pretty nippy. There was a light frost one morning and I was glad we were not camped in a tent! There was a bonus in having some great neighbours who arrived not long after us and stayed four nights. We shared happy hour drinks with Vicky and Alex each afternoon, and found we had much in common.

We did day trips over to Parachilna (driving through Parachilna Gorge) and over to Wilpena for a few groceries and to check emails on the internet there. Bunyerroo Gorge is mind-blowingly beautiful and every time we go that way I am struck with the beauty of the area.

One evening we had a lovely beef roast in the camp oven, and enjoyed cold meat sandwiches for the next couple of days.

As we had fresh spring water here we did our washing, and topped up our water tanks before continuing.

Weetootla Gorge, Gammon ranges

S30 29 49 E 139 15 33)

We drove past Blinman and up North toward Arkaroola, stopping only for photos and tyre checks. The day was overcast until about lunchtime and when we arrived at the campground about 1.30pm. A quick unhitch of the van and we were on our way again, driving the 20 or so kms of gravel up to Arkaroola Village. The purpose of the dash up there was to fill up with fuel so we could head off

again first thing the next morning. The camp site and village are in off the main road North and so we were not able to just nip in and fuel up quickly. The camp we usually stay at closer in to the trail head has been closed off so we camped in the main area, a large flat site close to the creek. The only facility here is a toilet (and fireplaces), and quite unappealing so it is really only suitable for an overnigher. We had a meal of leftover curry and were ready for bed after watching a program on TV.

The next morning saw us head up the track to Mt Hopeless, the junction of this track with the Strzelecki Track. This stretch of road (about 160 kms) was in relatively poor shape compared with previous trips through here. There had been rain a week or so ago and some vehicles had churned



up the track in patches. But although there were patches of corrugations, some sandy patches and numerous dips and cattle grids, it was generally OK. We had to avoid so many kangaroos that it became monotonous, and there were many roving families of emus. There was very little traffic apart from the camels we saw in the Northern end.

About 20 kms from the intersection at Mt Hopeless we came across a most intriguing sight; a wagon pulled by two camels. A family from Germany with children were travelling along the route and making a video of their adventure. What an experience this would be for them! We had been following their tracks for many kms and wondered what had caused the meandering course of those tyres, guessing (wrongly) that it was a local stationhand who had been under the weather and doing wheelies.

When we pulled in behind them, slowly so as not to alarm the camels, the woman jumped down and held the reigns. She would have had a busy time of it when they reached the

Strzelecki Track, just ahead. There was a lot of traffic there!

We continued on, turning right and East on the Strzelecki, toward the night's campsite at **Montecollina Bore.**

S29 24 0 E139 59 12

Montecollina was just as lovely as we remembered. The waterhole



Montecollina Bore



was serene and alive with waterbirds. Well, that is until a couple of caravans ignored the bollarded off area near the pool and camped right on the waterhole....

Muppets! Clearly they do not know that animals need to drink there and will be deterred by people camped right on the edge of the water. To get to the water's edge they drove around the back and up that way, avoiding the bollards. We spent a nice quiet night here and slept under a blazing starlit sky.

The next morning we headed out fairly early as we were headed to Innamincka, and as they are introducing online booking here and all SA national park campgrounds we wanted to get to our favourite spot on the Cooper early. (We believe it is the height of madness to have online booking in a remote area with absolutely no phone or internet, and the only agent available is at the Innamincka Trading Post. If you are coming from the East, who is going to drive a 60km round trip to book and pay there for a site at Cullyamurra? They will simply camp wherever they see first without paying, in the absence of a self-registration fee box).

But we are prone to change our minds, as we did this time. At the junction of the Old Strzelecki Track we decided to head in a more due Easterly direction to Camerons Corner, which we have not visited before. So we stopped at Merty Merty (there is nothing there other than a sand dune and trees) for morning tea, checked the maps closely, and headed on to the Corner Country.

The road had numerous potholes on sand dune crests and some wet patches on a claypan section, close to the start of this stretch, but otherwise the road was good. It was unremarkable terrain and fairly flat overall. It took about two hours driving from the intersection with the Strzelecki to

Camerons Corner so it was pretty good going.

Camerons Corner

S28 59 56 E140 59 57

We reached Camerons Corner about midday and it was fairly busy with vehicles passing through to the Strzelecki and others heading either North to Noccundra or due East to Tibooburra. All travelers were having lunch on the verandah. Only the doors were flymeshed, and the other walls were open to the fresh air. I was told that the flies were stupid and only tried to come in through the doors... But the real story was that the resident horse put his head through the flywire and destroyed it.

We decided to stay overnight and have dinner at the pub, the only facility or building there. That is, unless you count the Golf Club House, a bit of a shed off to the side with a painted sign reading "Tri-state Gold Course" They have a three hole course with a hole in NSW, one in QLD and one in SA, all within about a half km radius.



We visited the pole which marks the point at which the three states come together, and marvelled at being in such a confused state.

Dinner was unremarkable but nice not to have to cook or clean up. We had a drink with some of the locals, noting that the large group of campers from Melbourne who were also camping there for the night had decided to cook their own dinners.

The camping facilities were limited, being just a large paddock over the road from the pub and quite dusty despite the recent rains. The toilets were clean and you could have a shower for \$5....

Noccundra Waterhole

S27 49 11 E142 35 24

The next morning we were off fairly early, not having unpacked much the night before. Our destination was the Noccundra Waterhole on the Wilson River, 242 kms to the North. The track we were taking was a minor road and we knew it might be rough. In fact it was fine, although there were pot holes and rough patches where the road had been churned up after rains. Other travellers who we spoke to on the UHF said they had found it to be easy going and so it was, largely. It took us about four hours of driving before we reached the waterhole, and we only had brief stops to stretch our legs or take



photos. There was remarkably little traffic on this road too, although we did pass a 4WD heading South. There were lots of kangaroos and they made driving a matter of fierce concentration.

It was just on lunchtime when we arrived at the waterhole and it was bristling with vans and campers. It is a big camping area along the river's banks, but we managed to get the last spot, right down one end by ourselves. It was dusty and dry and not an inviting spot to stay for more than the one night. However, we did take advantage of the nearby pub which had evening meals. As it was State of origin night, the place was

hopping with punters who wanted to barrack for one team or the other. Val put me under advisement that we supported the Maroons as we were in QLD. What would I know! Anyway, I became a fervent Maroons supporter for the night. (Sorry Ann...)

Bright and early the next morning, after our morning toast and coffee, we headed on to the East. This time our destination was a lovely camp on a range of hills overlooking the Grey range. We stopped here last time we came through, in 2014. I had lost the co-ordinates but we found the place fairly easily, just 55 kms West of Thargomindah.

And this proved to be a great spot to camp for two nights.