

Gascoyne River to Sandstone (WA) June to July 2015

Lovely as the northern reaches of WA's Pilbara might be, we wanted to see more of the state. So far we had been taking a fairly leisurely approach to the travel. That did not change during this stage of the trip. Page | 1



Cue WA

Special points of interest:

- Gascoyne River camping
- Cue and its historic buildings
- The goldfields of the Murchison

Gascoyne River's Middle Branch

S25 12 7 E119 20 7

(We arrived here on 25 June).

This would have to be the camp site everyone dreams about but rarely finds. The river has seasonally high levels of water and the spot we pulled the van into overlooked a nice deep hole with foliage in blossom all around us, birds of so many types all babbling and screeching all day it felt as though we were in an aviary, and beautiful weather. Bliss.



The spot is listed in WikiCamps and in Camps Australia Wide but has no facilities whatsoever. This suits us as where there are facilities there will be hordes of other travellers. And we value our peace and tranquillity. The actual spot we stayed at nine years ago has been so badly scoured out by recent floods that it was impossible to even drive in there. But we found our recent spot by simply driving down the track along the river until we found a spot we liked.

There was a family of budgerigars nesting in a hollow branch right in front of us and that was fun to watch. It was so much fun we stayed there four days. As a bonus, there was telephone and internet coverage so we were set for a comfortable stay.



Lake Nallan

S27 15 25 E117.59 6

Wow, another great camp! We had driven further South about 200 kms to arrive at Lake Nallan, which is 20 kms from the small town of Cue, and read in the WikiCamps ap that this was a lovely place to stay. It is in fact a Nature Reserve and I am sure it would be popular with locals from the region. There are signs saying it is a 48 hour limit for camping and so, as always, we respected that. The spot we chose was right beside the water but there are other sites on a small rise overlooking the lake.

Nallan Lake is a nature reserve and although it may dry up in drier periods, is a haven for a huge array of plant and birdlife including black swans. During periods of heavy winter rains Lake Nallan is said to be a popular picnic spot for locals. The surrounds will become covered with carpets of colourful everlasting and other flowers. The lake is easily found at a signpost about 20km north of the Cue townsite.

At the lakes edge we saw another red capped robin, one of our favourites.

There was a nice walk to an old railway bridge, from the 1900's, in a very decrepit state but so interesting and among beautiful foliage.

By this time, our sheets and towels all needed a good wash, as well as our clothes generally. We had washed everything in the machine back at Carawine Gorge (Val pumps the river water through a fine filter and straight into the van's washing machine) but that was 15 days ago! We had done the towels by hand in between but they needed a proper soak and wash. I would like to have done them here but the lake water was just too murky. So we just had to rest and relax instead!

While having Happy Hour with the neighbours in a Regal caravan we captured the most amazing sunset. I normally avoid sunset photos as they are done to death by so many folk but this was spectacular. And all paraded for us as we sat having a nice bottle of riesling from home.



Cue

After two nights here, we moved on to the nearby township of Cue, and stayed at their small Council owned and run caravan park. Cue is a small Mid-West region of WA town, about 620 kms North of Perth. It has a population of less

than 400 people but they all seemed very friendly and welcoming during our stay. Once it had a

population of 10,000 during its hey day in 1900.

The town was the terminus for the Northern Railway in 1898 until the route was extended to Meekatharra, North of Cue, almost ten years later, and was also the junction for the branch line to the community of Big Bell, some 25 kms or so away.



Cue Buildings

Cue has a gold mining and prospecting history, like the rest of the region, and still attracts many prospectors or 'fossickers' in search of that elusive nugget. The lure for us was that our daughter had lived here in the 1990's, and has some interesting photos to prove it. I suspect the local hotel still remembers her work farewell....Apparently it was memorable.

I was keen to capture images of those famous and well photographed buildings in the main street of Cue, but found the surrounding countryside was equally fascinating.

We drove out to see and explore the now ghost town of Big Bell and wandered through the small remains of what was once a thriving township. All that is left now is a small church, a windmill and the remains of the hotel. Built in 1937, the Big Bell Hotel is reputed to have had the world's longest bar. Mining ceased in 2003 and the plant was dismantled and transported to the Westonia minesite in 2007.



Big Bell Hotel



And while here we also went out to see the Aboriginal art work at Walga Rock, some 30 kms or so from Cue. A beautiful place, with a real presence, it was surrounded by lovely foliage and flowering plants. A famous "early contact" rock art painting is on an underhang of the rock and it was a special moment to see it before us in stunning detail. I hadn't even known it was at this location until preparing to go out to the rock.

And I got a geocache out there too - an "Earthcache" which requires you to answer some geological questions in order to have the find registered. Earthcaches are usually enormously rewarding due to their educative nature.

Bushcamp

S 28 9 50 E 118 10 14

When we left Cue it was a cool, clear day, typical of the Murchison region in Winter. We drove Southward to Mount Magnet, which seemed a nice town but we didn't stop. Turning East for the

first time in this trip, we headed toward the small town of Sandstone. However, we knew that it was a busy town at this time of year and as we wanted to stay there for a week we knew it would be wise to camp overnight in the bush and arrive in town nice and early to get a good site at the caravan park. In fact, the spot we chose was so nice I could have easily stayed for much longer than a night. It was peaceful and quite pretty with shrubs around us and the van was parked on nice clean pebbles.



There was plenty of firewood so we made a fire to sit around for Happy Hour.... It was a crystal clear night and the moon was full. What a lovely spot to spend some time. As a bonus it also had internet coverage, although phone reception was patchy.

Sandstone

The small town of Sandstone is a gem of a place. Once a thriving town of thousands it is now quite small (the 2011 Census registered 105 people) and has a handful of houses, a Hotel (continually operating since 1907) a small museum, a Post Office agency (in the old Post Office building, a substantial brick construction), a Shire office and a popular caravan park. People come to the park to stay while they fossick in the gold rich surroundings (well, they HOPE it will be gold rich) and those travelling through stay for a short stay to relax and wash out the red dust.

It can be very popular at the caravan park so on arrival early in the morning we were happy to get a powered site immediately, as someone had just left. The Shire has developed and maintained lovely gardens at the park, including a central area of lush green grass around the perimeter of which vans can park. They even had herbs in the gardens and lemons on small trees. We sat each day on the grass near our van and had cups of coffee or cold drinks at Happy Hour. They gave us a seniors rate for a week's stay so we took advantage of it and stayed the week.

The local hotel did great meals so we walked down and had dinner a couple of times, and admired the substantial building. It was the only Hotel in the town to be built of bricks (locally made at a brickworks nearby) and so is the only one of four pubs to remain, the others being made of wood and having burnt down. The current owner, "Scruffy" is a character and worth a yarn with.

Another happy find was the young Chinese gardener called William who brings produce to town for sale a few mornings a week, such as fruit and vegetables, home made breads and eggs. A woman who goes by the name of Lady Di makes pies at the stall alongside William, but we tried two and I was not all that keen on them. Val finished mine off, as he does.

One night at the caravan park, they had a musician and William made some Chinese food to sell to the crowd. So many people took advantage of the event that they ordered up big and by the time Val got to the counter alas, there was no more food. But all was well as I had made a nice Chicken Madras and we were well fed.

There is a nearby historical geological feature called London Bridge. I had seen photos of it



previously without knowing where it was located. Just a short drive of three kms out of town, this remarkable feature was once a popular picnic spot for locals, and allegedly could be driven across by a horse and buggy. I am sure people still scamper across it, although advised not to. You would not be getting me up there... And there was a geocache nearby!

It started to get quite cold at this town, with a heavy frost on the last two mornings there.

Val took his metal detector out a few times in the surrounding countryside but he only found his usual rubbish, like aluminium foil or bits of old metal.

