

Stage 2 Davenport Ranges to Finke River near Glen Helen Gorge

Ti-Tree

We packed up and left Police Station Waterhole nice and early, with a last regretful look at the waterhole as we set out. The road was rough but not impossible; there were patches of corrugations, and some dips that needed a little care. Luckily the van is constructed so as to prevent dust ingress, so we were confident that although the van was red and dusty on external surfaces, but dust-free inside.

After 5 or 6 hours of travel we were glad to arrive at the nice little park at Ti-Tree. The park is neat and clean and sites are grassed and on cement slabs. They have a nice restaurant too. The evening was very cold, and got down to about 3 or 4 degrees. I was pretty glad to have the reverse cycle air conditioner. Ti-Tree has CDMA coverage so I could check emails and do some banking on the laptop. Prior to departing from Darwin we organised broadband access to the internet for the laptop through a Sierra Airwave card. Expensive, but very effective.

Alice Springs

Another early (and chilly) start, and we got on the road to Alice Springs. We notice many people are on the road early, to ensure they have a berth at their chosen parks. We did book ahead at the MacDonnell ranges CP, a place we have stayed at a couple of times previously. It is a great park, and most likely the largest in the Alice. Winners of awards, they deserve the accolades. This trip, we were placed on a site along a back fence overlooking bush and trees (site 43), so were more than happy.

I was delighted to find they have a separate bathroom in the amenities block; what bliss after a week or so in the bush, to soak in a bath of lavender scented foam! Most likely useful for parents with smaller children, too. An extra highlight of this park is the free pancakes with tea or coffee on Sunday mornings. It is certainly popular, and is intended (I am sure) to be a way for people to meet and mingle with others. And the pancakes were seriously good!

As dwellers in the tropics for many years, we were puzzled to awaken one morning to find the water hose had frozen overnight; the temperature had been below zero. The Alice is cold at night at this time of year, but what beautiful cool sunny days. Each day is a burnished jewel, with a wonderful clarity of light.

We spent our time here stocking up on groceries, washing down the van, having cappuccinos, poring over the daily newspapers, and doing the banking and other necessary chores. The top priority was to re-visit the Desert Wildlife Park, a stunning attraction.

The annual Old Timers fete was held while we were here, and it is worth attending. Set on green lawns under shady trees, in crisp and cool weather, there were a variety of stalls

selling crafts, cakes and biscuits, hot foods and produce. We bought a couple of hand-made teddy bears for the grandchildren and had a Devonshire tea with neighbours from the park who also attended the fete.

Another highlight was driving out of town to the old Telegraph Station (four or five kilometers from the town area), and taking a bottle of chilled champagne and some glasses. We drank the bottle sitting on the lawns under a gum tree in the late afternoon light, watching the wide variety of parrots and other birds.

In Alice Springs last night it was extremely cold; the ice on the car bonnet didn't melt until about 8.30am!

Two Mile Camp Site (near Glen Helen Gorge)

On the advice of a friend, we chose to spend a few days at the bushcamping site called Two Mile Camp, which is located very near Glen Helen Gorge, out of Alice Springs.

This free-camping site is along the Finke River and the camp individual sites all along the river bed. The sites have spectacular views of Mount Sonder and the Macdonnell Ranges. It is hard to imagine a more special place, with the range all around, and the gum trees framing the views. And it is free-camping! What a fantastic camp site! Words fail me when trying to describe it; we had the most delightful camp site, near a big gum tree, shaded for the table and chairs, and the most astounding views. And to top it all off, the deep pools in front of our camp had teeming birdlife, with pelicans and cootes, cormorants, egrets and grebes. The turn off is unmarked, and is about 100 metres past the turn off to Glen Helen Gorge. We spent a few days revelling in the peace and tranquillity of this spot, and used it as a base to travel into Palm Valley, Redbank Gorge and a few other local gorges. There were a few other people camped here along the river, but sufficiently far away that we could not hear each other.

Redbank Gorge looked lovely, and is suitable for offroad vans or trailers. It seemed very peaceful; there was no-one else when we visited.

The weather was cool during the day (mid-August now) and cold at night, just perfect.