

### **Stage 3 Finke Two-Mile Camp to Kings Canyon**

**Alice Springs** (for the second time).

It feels strange to come back to town after a few days in solitude and peace in the bush. But we do enjoy the amenities offered by the towns too; good coffees; cinema, daily newspapers....

The weather had been nice and balmy (cool days and cooler nights) out at the Finke River, but the wind's direction has changed, and now is coming from the South. It's cold again, and the wind can cut. We sleep well at night all snuggled up, thankful for air conditioners in the morning.

While in the Alice we like to eat at Kellers Restaurant, a fusion of Swiss and Indian dishes (yes, it is different...). It's popular and we go early to be sure of a table.

I had our mail forwarded to the Post Office at Alice Springs, and so was able to do some paperwork and bank some work cheques, very welcome indeed.

The MacDonnell Ranges caravan park is in our opinion the best in town, and is popular. With the attendees to the Transport Hall of Fame 10 year reunion happening in a week (24 to 29 August) the place is full and getting even more packed by the day. A good time to leave and seek the quiet of the bush again.

### **Rainbow Valley**

A short twenty or so kilometres off the Stuart Highway to the East, is the pretty speccy Rainbow Valley. Although the book said (one of MANY books we carry) there is a campground there, a learned and wise acquaintance (thanks Ken Johnson) told us it is small and the road narrow, so we left the van and drove in. Ken was right; the campground is only suitable for tents and campers – I don't think a bigger van could comfortably fit. And the road is OK for 99% of the time, suitable for all vehicles really, but there is one narrow section that might make it tight for a full van.

The colours and the nature of the rocks' erosion at the site are fascinating, and we got some good shots. This is a place where the wider lenses are useful and capture the vivid blue sky and cloud formations.

We spent the night at the park at Stuarts Well (otherwise known as Jim's Place) and had a reasonable night. An interesting additional feature of the park is the regular strident and clear sound of the external bell which rings every time there is a phone call in the main building. We really valued the 6am call in particular. This park has a field nearby in which they allow free camping; it can be gathered that these campers will use the bar and restaurant, and so a profit is made. We noticed wryly that although we had paid for a powered site (\$17) the additional feature of the telephone bell would not have been heard by the free-campers as they were too far away.

### **Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon).**

The drive out to Kings Canyon from Stuarts Well took about five hours; the roads are all sealed but a little narrow. It is better to sit on a slightly slower speed when you're not in a hurry. We tend to travel at about 95kms an hour on the highway, and according to conditions on other

roads. There was a lovely overnight camp site along the Luritja Highway, and we stopped there for lunch; lots of space, shaded by desert oaks.

I should note that the desert was blooming with wild flowers, after recent rains in the interior. Lovely little yellowheads covered the ground in carpets of yellow, sometimes as far as the eye could see. There are poached egg daisies too, and numerous other varieties of pink and purple flowers. Just lovely. I noticed with amusement the juvenile versions of the desert ok trees look just like Banksia men, hunched into a sullen stance. I also think they look like very depressed and dispirited people.

Taking the advice of one of the books, we chose to camp at Kings Creek Station Park, and thought it was quite nice. The sites are spaced well apart, with native bush separating each site. More of a bush setting than the resort, which is larger (certainly more amenities) and places vans on a traditional block of green(ish) grass.

We chose not to do the rim walk (a fit of laziness) but did the ghost gum walk, and a walk into nearby Kathleen Springs, both delightful and refreshing places to visit.

And on a whim, we succumbed to the lure of a helicopter ride over the nearby pound and ranges, an exhilarating experience, and one I am glad we had.

### **Redbank Gorge**

After a few days back in Alice Springs (to do the washing, pick up mail etc) we were off back to the solitude of the bush. We had heard some time ago from a neighbour at the CP – who had a camper trailer- that Redbank Gorge was nice. We referred to the handy book of Jan Holland's called "Priceless Campsites of the NT" and found that there were two camping areas which could be accessed. On our previous trip out that way we had called in to check it out. The road from Glen Helen to Redbank turnoff is 20 ks of good dirt road, and there is a further 5 ks of slightly more rough road, but nothing an average sedan couldn't cope with. Our offroad van had no problems whatsoever.

The two camping areas are very different; Woodlands is on the valley floor, and has separated sites with trees and scrub for privacy. Quite lovely. And the ridge top camping area is more exposed, with only five or so sites, all fairly close to each other. But the views from the ridge can't be described. Breathtaking. So we banked –correctly as it happens – that there would not be too many people there, and went with the 'site with a view' option. A couple of other groups with tent or trailer were there for one of the three nights we stayed, and they were far enough away for it to be fine. Besides they were great company. Five o'clock drinks sitting on a ridge facing a mountain range right there in front of your face....

And the walk into the gorge on one day was pretty special too.