

Stage 5 Finke (Aputula to Flinders Ranges) including Oodnadatta Track

1 October 2005

A calamity-filled day!

Another early start saw us bidding farewell to our friends at Finke and moving on. We aimed to be at Eringa Waterhole for morning tea, and we arrived at the cattle waterhole right on time. Bugger – realised we had lost the securing padlock on one of the pole holders, and lost the awning arm and legs! We retraced our steps for a few kms but no luck. Sigh.

We had a few stops at remote sidings and poked around, took photos, as one does.

A few kms on, about 11am, we had a puncture on the drivers rear tyre, which caused the car and van to immediately slew into the road verge and then back onto the other verge wildly bucketing the van and car. It was a very close thing indeed, and only Val's good driving saved us. Val fixed the flat tyre on the side of the road, and after I stopped shaking we went on.

We drove through Oodnadatta, after stopping for drinks and a couple of groceries. I may well upset some people, but I must admit that I thought Oodnadatta was the most untidy heap of rubbish I have ever encountered. It looked like a mad dog's breakfast of rubble, old cars and other assorted items, all strewn willy-nilly. It would take a lot to persuade me to stay there overnight. The only person we encountered in the Pink Roadhouse (the local and infamous watering house/info centre/grocery store) was a foreign backpacker working behind the counter. He had been nowhere in the vicinity and knew little of the local area.

We looked forward to Algebuckina Bridge (everyone described it as a lovely free camp site) and indeed it was pleasant. Met a nice couple there who come from Clare, but apart from them, we were the only people there; it is getting warmer and the tourists numbers are dwindling.

Bugger again (to quote Lionel and Margaret) – three flat tyres as soon as we pulled up at the site. There must be something on the road between Oodnadatta and Algebuckina, as we have met and heard of several people who have all had flats in this area. Luckily Val could repair them, and that we had three spare wheels. We were running on a reduced pressure of van 34 psi, car 34 front/36 rear in case anyone is interested.

2 October

Next morning we left after a leisurely start to the day (we checked – there were no more flats overnight) and mused on the nature of sharp stones and other items on the road. There were so many fascinating ruins and relics of bygone years to stop and check, that the day went reasonably quickly. Had lunch at the lovely town of Williams Creek (now

there is a smart town – they are equipped to fix tyres, with big signs advertising their services!).

Pressed on to Beresford Siding and had a look at the bore. Lots of cattle and flies there, so decided against staying overnight, but to go instead to Coward Springs. The camp site at Coward Springs is indeed lovely; \$14 for an unpowered site, but it's shady and they do have nice facilities. And the spa spring is quite lovely! Immediately we found a nice spot with the awning backing into an umbrella of pine trees, and made a very comfortable stop. Think we will stay another night, just to make sure we don't get too tired of all this roving life. Had a nice five o'clock sundowners with lovely couple from the night before at Algebuckina Bridge (Don and Mary).

4 October.

It was a wrench, but we left Coward Springs and moved on. We were keen to get to the Flinders Ranges and then on to Adelaide. We were to have a quick stop at the mining town of Leigh Creek for groceries, but another flat tyre became apparent while parked outside the supermarket. So we stayed the night at the Leigh Creek caravan park, a very basic park, but comfortable. We consoled ourselves with dinner at the local Tavern, and enjoyed a lovely meal in agreeable surroundings. I am well over flat tyres! (Only one flat was on the van and the rest were on the car).

Leigh Creek is a mining community and has the well kept appearance of such towns. The facilities are good, and the information bureau informed us that the local dam no longer allows camping. Drat!

5 October.

On again, and this time it was to Brachina Gorge in the Flinders. A nicer camp site could not be found in a long time! We camped in a gorge, along side a deepish body of water, in which we were able to swim in the following days. There had been some recent rains, which showed in green hills and carpets of wildflowers. Our little stream was fringed with green and some blue flowers much like bluebells. All this, and no neighbours within sight or sound! We remained in this idyllic spot for three days, enjoying one day of warm weather, then two days of increasingly cooler days. On the final day (Friday) a strong wind blew up at about 2pm and by 10pm it had turned into a gale. Earlier weather reports (Satellite tv is a wonderful thing) warned of a deepening low coming in from WA and so it was not a complete surprise. But the ferocity of the wind was indeed a shock. The van is heavy and with its 300 litres of water even better weighed down; but even so we were badly buffeted. Had we had a smaller or lighter van I think we would have been in strife. It was a nervous night.

8 October

Leaving the northern Flinders we drove through patchy sunny/overcast weather south to the little town of Quorn, and booked into the caravan park for 3 days. It is the school holidays so we expected it to be busy, and had booked ahead, using the satellite phone. It was busier than usual but still reasonably relaxed. A lovely little park, with none of the amenities which we resent paying for and do not use. A laundry and the usual

shower/toilet block is all that we need. As we have a shower and toilet on board we do not always use even those facilities. While here we did the Pitchie Ritchie steam train ride and thoroughly enjoyed it. Went out to dinner at a local pub (the Austral) and it was not only a nice meal but the dining room was like a period piece from a film – quite lovely). The weather was so cool at night we needed the airconditioner set to heater, and it kept us toasty warm while close to freezing outside.

No more flat tyres!