

# Flinders Ranges and Oodnadatta Track May 2015

**May 2015**

This trip report covers some outback and isolated regions, our very favourite type of travelling. It gets cold in the Barossa in Autumn and that is when we try to go North. This year we planned a trip to the NT and WA which would encompass some of our old stomping grounds of the Flinders Ranges and the Oodnadatta Track, before travelling on the Gary Junction Road from Alice Springs over to Marble Bar in Northern WA. This first stage of the trip was in the company of previous fellow travellers, Erich and Leslie, and for a shorter period of time, Kay and Bruce.



The Barossa - the rig ready to roll

## Special points of interest:

- The wonderful Flinders Ranges
- Algebuckina Waterhole
- The Outback

## Flinders Ranges - Aroona

### The First Few Days

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As we were to meet up with Erich and Leslie at Aroona Ruins we headed out from home very early. So many of the towns we passed through quickly are worthy of a longer stop and we keep promising ourselves that we will include them in future itineraries. Places like Terowie and Orroroo deserve a longer visit.

Our friends were driving from closer to Port Augusta and it was agreed we would meet up at the Flinders Ranges camp site. As it happens we both arrived at exactly the same time! We unpacked, had a cup of tea and then met for a first night's celebratory drink. It was cold this first night and the diesel heater was very welcome indeed. We ended up spending five days here just to make sure we had really and truly unwound. One of the days was spent driving through the lovely Brachina Gorge to Parachilna's Prairie Hotel for lunch and to access the internet. Their internet signal is not too flash but our respective modems connected and allowed us to send emails and to make a couple of phone calls.



### **Oodnadatta Track**

On a crystal clear (and cold) morning we filled up the water tanks from the campground taps and headed off. We have a pump and filter to keep water in our tanks clean when we take it from sources like this, but the water at Aroona is clean and clear. So we had full water tanks and full batteries from the previous day's sunny day when we headed out.

It was our plan to head out to the highway via Parachilna Gorge and then North to Leigh Creek for grocery shopping and for our friends to pick up a new door handle they had posted to them care the post office.

### **Camp North of Marree**

We made good time, arriving at Leigh Creek in time for shopping, filling up with fuel and having lunch at the Tavern. Then we headed North toward Farina and Marree. The road was dry and dusty and such a contrast with the last time we had been here, when the area had enjoyed good rains and it was wet and slushy on the track. After Leigh Creek we let our tyres down and kept heading North. Late in the afternoon we found a nice wide space off the road, and on nice clean little pebbles. This was about 10 kms or so North of Marree. So we pulled up, had a drink or two sitting outside the vans and retired for an early night.



In the morning we were joined by our third set of travelling companions, Bruce and Kay. They would be going up to Oodnadatta with us then peeling off in a different direction until we all met up in Alice Springs a week later. They were not keen on the rough track in to Dalhousie.

### **Camp North of William Creek**

On our last trip up this way in 2013 we had camped beside the William Creek Hotel, and had a drink and dinner to repay the hosts. But this time (although we had not planned a stay here anyway) it was made clear to us that there had been redevelopments to the town caravan park and so free camping at the hotel was no longer an option. This is the owner's prerogative but we did wonder if they may lose potential customers this way. If there is free camping people will have dinner and drinks at the hotel, and most likely spend more than they would have done at a caravan park!

It is worth noting that William Creek now has a dump point and a tap to clean the cassette. We could have filled up the vans with water here but were not sure of the quality of the water.

We had intended finding a camp for the night somewhere on the side of the road and initially thought the old official freecamp site of Lake Eyre South would suffice as it has in the past. There is a whole heap of nothing there except a nice view but it was a welcome spot to rest. However there is now a sign directing you 39 kms further on to the commercial camp site at Coward Springs! Coward Springs now charge \$12 a head for an unpowered and unwatered site.... Here is the sign at the Lake Eyre rest stop; see if you agree that there has been collusion with Coward Springs.



But we found a nice spot near an empty dam and pulled all three vans in for a night's peaceful stop over. We had another camp fire as the night was cool (OK, it was freezing). The Oodnadatta Track is blessed with so many spots to pull over and stop for a night. That is one of the best features of the Track. We don't need Coward Springs!

### **Algebuckina Waterhole**

Solidly travelling North we pulled into the waterhole on the Eastern side of Algebuckina Bridge and made camp here for the night. As there were three vans in our convoy we could not all have water views so we put the vans a bit further back in our usual semi-circle. Our habit now was to pull in, retire to our own vans for a rest, write up our travel journals, and get together at about 4.00pm for a drink together, mostly around a fire.

The waterhole is absolutely gorgeous. We had known about it previously but not known how to find the way in. Well, now we know! There was a geocache right at the water's edge but alas it was missing. The Description of this cache gave explicit instructions on how to get into the waterhole.



A flock of corellas screeched over at dusk and added to the outback atmosphere.

Drinks around the fire were again enjoyed and dinner was cooked in the coals by a couple of us.

### **Hamilton Station Campground**

Next morning we all packed up and again headed North to the Oodnadatta Roadhouse (otherwise known as the Pink Roadhouse). The facility has now changed hands after the untimely death of the last owner, Adam Plant. But it is still the usual welcoming oasis of fuel, groceries (limited) and cappuccinos. We bought some bread and milk, checked on the road status further North and all had a nice coffee.

It was at Oodnadatta we temporarily parted company with one of our party of three vans. Kay and Bruce were heading to Alice Springs via Marla, and we, together with Erich and Lesley were heading further North and into Dalhousie Springs first. The track into Dalhousie from Hamilton Station (the Pedirka Track) had



been closed when I last enquired a week or so ago, due to road works there. But we got the news at Oodnadatta that the track was open again and so that gave us the green light for the Dalhousie excursion.

There is a campground at Hamilton Station (\$5 a head or \$10 a vehicle, at the junction of the Oodnadatta Track and the Pedirka Track.. Facilities are basic but include a huge cleared parking area (with some scattered fireplaces), pit toilets and a shade picnic area. I had my hopes set on a water tap but alas that was not to be. And given the location it is a bit unreasonable to expect a tap here. We had a quiet night here, although there was the howl of a dingo somewhere nearby in the morning. The night was strangely warm and for the first time on this trip we had no need of the diesel heater.

The next morning was another clear and sunny day and we set out on the Pedirka Track. Reports said it was "soft" in patches, but we were unsure what this meant. Newly graded, there were very few gibbers to bump over but there were indeed some soft patches where we were glad they were not longer or deeper. Overall, the road was OK and it took us about four hours to travel the 75 kms or so from Hamilton Station into Dalhousie,



but that was with several stops for photos and a walk around the old Dalhousie Ruins. We were glad that



we had no gibbers to drive over again on this trip and we found evidence of lots of them being graded out of the way.

Pedirka Siding Ruins were worth a quick look and an opportunity for Erich to take photos of this unique place.



The last time we came through this way we had camped here but it is now marked in our publications as a day use area only so there is no more camping. There probably never was camping allowed but we just didn't know.

The Dalhousie Ruins were worth exploring a second time and we marvelled at the tenacity of people having lived in such isolated conditions. The houses are testament to their hard work and determination to make a home in this harsh environment. Not much is left of these ruins....



And at about lunch time we arrived at Dalhousie Springs, which was empty of other travellers when we arrived but definitely abuzz with a heap of volunteers there to help maintain the park.

Unfortunately, the volunteers were busily putting in new steps to access the hot springs. Given they were not really familiar with the requirements of the task (including the safety and health risks attached to it) the temporary steps were a marvel of rigging up and cobbling together. They had simply used a household ladder, tied to a couple of star pickets! And as I am not as nimble as I used to be, the new steps meant I could not access the hot springs. (Although I had one quick swim when we first arrived, using the old steps).



We had travelled a long way and over rough roads to get here and the main purpose of the trip was the hot springs... Tasks like this (installation in a Government facility) should not be done by volunteers but by those who are qualified to do the work. And it certainly should not be done during the peak tourist season. It was being done during the popular and peak season because that is when the volunteers are able to do the work. There was a general commotion of bobcat and other associated disruption while the work was being undertaken.

However, the area is as lovely as ever and the camping ground is looking nice. The volunteers do a good job of maintaining the area.

### **3 O'Clock Creek**

We enjoyed two lovely days at Dalhousie before moving on over to 3 O'Clock Creek for another day's camping in a much quieter and more peaceful setting. This area (listed in both the Wikicamps and Camps Australia Wide publications) is free except for the one off permit entry fee of \$10 (which we had paid at arrival at Dalhousie) and has the added bonus of potable water from a holding tank. It is located about 12 kms from Dalhousie Springs so we had not driven far this day! We put both caravans on a ridge overlooking a dry creek bed and looking into native vegetation. A really nice place with a great view from the van awning..





Given the nice fresh allocation of water in our tanks, we washed the floors and caught up on a little housework.

The only hassle here was the thousands of little black ants which scurried over the ground around the caravan. Some even got into the kitchen but disappeared overnight, not to be seen again -I hope!

### **Stuart Highway**

It was a long, long day travelling from 3 O'Clock Creek out to the Stuart Highway. We headed out early enough, and after 20 kms of bone jolting gibber plains (fortunately the rest had been graded and was in great nick) we arrived at Mt Dare Hotel. This iconic hotel is the home of fuel, passably good coffee and great bacon and egg toasted sandwiches.

Refueled, we headed on to Finke, crossing the NT/SA border mid morning.

We passed Finke without going in (we have been there before, indeed, we have lived there) and turned West for 150kms of wide dirt road to the Highway Inn at Kulgera which is at the junction of the highway. It was 3pm when we arrived. Both rigs had their tyres re-pumped, diesel was bought and we all sat down to a 'Kulgera-burger'. Pretty massive, I could only eat half mine.



A further 23 kms North of Kulgera we pulled off to the back of a rest stop. As this was an official truck stop, we would not ever stop in a place reserved for trucks, as these spots are vital for drivers' rest. But there were tracks leading off down the back and we were able to get well down among the vegetation, away from the highway, and had a peaceful night. It was pretty cold that night and it was more like normal desert winter nights.

The next morning we stopped at Eraldunda, at the junction of the Stuart Highway and Lasseter Highway (which leads out to Uluru) and had a coffee and caught up on emails etc while we had the internet. Oh joy!

Then we only went a short distance up the highway to the official rest stop called 'Desert Oaks'. This is a pleasant enough spot and can get very busy at night. Set among the sand hills and desert oak trees it is very pretty, and made for a nice place to relax for a space.



The next morning we headed into Alice Springs, and the joys of internet, coffees and cafes. It also meant neighbours in a caravan park but that is how it is. This trip was a trip through great scenery and special camp sites. Apart from one day where a heap of dust got in the van through an open vent, all held up and seemed to work OK on arriving in town.