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rom Carawine Gorge to Alice Springs June/July 2016

June and July 2016

In this stage of the trip we left Carawine and launched off onto the Gary Junction Road. There were a couple of issues which caused us to stumble slightly; a destroyed tyre and a

forgetting of my camera and turning back for it! On the positive side, we met up with a lovely couple of fellow travellers. The Gary Junction Road is officially from just off the Mereenie Loop (NT) to the Gary Highway junction, but many people consider the GJR experience continues on to the intersection of the Telfer Road with the Woody Woody-Marble Bar Road in the West. It is 1200kms of fairly remote dirt tracks going through Aboriginal communities and requiring two separate permits.



Special points of interest:

- Desert Tracks
- Minor technical issues
- Gary Junction Road

Gary Junction Road

The gorge at Carawine was shimmering under a brassy blue sky when we left early as we wanted to get along the Gary Junction Road and find our camp site in good time. It was a wrench leaving such a beautiful spot but we knew other interesting adventures awaited.

We turned right at the Telfer Road- Woody Woody Road junction and took the obligatory start of the track photo. Onwards across the Gibson and Great Sandy Deserts...

We made good time on this leg of the trip, as not only was the road wide and in good condition, there was also a 20km stretch of bitumen (between the 70 and 90km mark). That helped.



Then Val noticed we had a flat tyre. In fact it was an utterly destroyed flat tyre. And that was all in the space of about 20 mins after our last stop for a tyre check! So Val changed it over for a fresh tyre and we were on our way again. At this stage we still had three more spares. Where we had the flat tyre was very rocky and it was a large sharp rock which had penetrated the tyre.

The road started out at the Western end as a large and smooth track, used by a variety of trucks and other vehicles. The conditions were dry and dusty but other than the one small section which was a bit rocky, it was good. We were able to do between 60 and 80kms an hour on this first day.

About lunchtime we arrived at the small Aboriginal community of Punmu and found John (the fuel bloke) by driving down Third Street to the town community centre (it stands out as it has the nation's flag outside). The fuel was \$3 a litre and we put \$325 worth of fuel in the car. John said we were welcome to fill up the water tanks too, so we did that and then visited their small general store. They had just had a truck in with a delivery of foodstuffs - which happens about every six months. The bloke who served us said it was a huge job unpacking it all... And we got fresh bread here! Real, dinkum, fresh sliced bread. I hugged it to my chest! For dinner that night we had ham and pickle sandwiches; luxury.

The road at this stage was still wide and well used, so there were patches of corrugations which shook the van and car a bit.

Lake Auld

S22 7 16 E 123 45 36

I had heard about this camp site but could not recall seeing it last time but this time around we decided to stay here instead of Lake Dora further West. I think we got in about 2.30pm and quickly set up camp. On an overnighiter like this, setting up only involves putting out the chairs for an afternoon drink, and connecting the greywater tank up so we don't leave water on the ground. We were the only people here and revelled in the peace and quiet.

Just as we had finished our showers and were getting ready for bed I could hear dingoes howling in the distance. Although I have grown up with dingoes and am familiar with them, their cries are unsettling. On this night, there was a pack of at least several dogs and they came right outside the van, with a strange yipping and crying, a very aggressive behavioural display. "Don't go outside!" I said to Val, and we went to bed and left them to it. They must have disappeared at some point and there was nothing but silence for the rest of the night.



Altogether we counted that we had passed 7 vehicles in our day's travels.

The next day was eventful. Not all for the right reasons.

We left early from Lake Auld (no sign of dingoes..) after a breakfast of coffee and toast, and headed further West. The countryside was looking fresh and with thick vegetation. Bushes with yellow blossoms were prevalent, and against the red sands and they looked quite striking. At times the soil was a salmon pink and the whole landscape was a pastel picture.

We filled up with fuel at Kunawarritji, a small Aboriginal community with a BIG shed over the fuel bowsers. We had to find the man who dispenses fuel by going to the general store around the corner. It does help that now we know where everything is located. At the general



store I bought some apples, some frozen croissants (oh joy!), a cucumber, margarine, and two cheeses. All this came to \$45! Ah well.

We arrived at the Gary Highway junction mid morning, and stopped to sign the visitors book (welded to a 44 gallon drum), take photos and made fresh travelling mugs of coffee. We set off again for Jupiter Well some 143 km East, our night's destination.

After nearly 70kms of travel we stopped so I could take a photo. The camera was not in its bag! It dawned on me that I had left it back on the drum at the Gary Highway junction, 70kms back. We turned around quickly and retraced our steps, with me cursing my stupidity all the way back. I had put the dratted thing down while signing the travel book and completely forgot to retrieve it when we left. An hour or so later we pulled back up at the junction, and there was the camera, sitting where I had left it. It helped that there



had been no traffic at all that day. We passed not a single car all day. So we decided to stay at the junction for the night and continue on the next day. Val once again fixed the microwave mounting which had come loose (it broke on this track last year too). But after an hour here we noticed clouds forming on the Western horizon and realised rain was most likely coming in. So we stopped unpacking and setting up, hastily threw everything back in the car

and again headed off back to the East, and our next camp site, Jupiter Well. Our thinking was that the better spot to spend time waiting for roads to dry out (if that is what was needed) was Jupiter Well. I am guessing it was 3.30pm when we started out again on this leg, and we initially made good time. After an hour or so it started to get dark and driving at dusk is hard on the eyes and a bit risky for camels and kangaroos. By now it had started to rain, a soft drizzle, and with it being pitch black and the track quite narrow and with lots of turns, it made for tiring driving. Eventually we got into Jupiter Well at 5.30pm (7pm in the NT time zone) and fell out of the car with relief. It was pitch black and raining....

There was no one else at the camp site, it was eerily deserted. And then, after unlocking the caravan, we discovered a jar of sour cream had spilt all through the bloody fridge. Sigh. But do you know, I was so glad to be here safe and sound that the spilt cream did not really faze me...

Jupiter Well

S22 52 33 E 126 35 46

After a good night's sleep, we felt recovered and able to look around the campsite to see if it had changed since last year. Nope. Just the same; a lovely green oasis with flowering shrubs and stands of desert oaks.

Right in the middle of the camp is a hand pump which can be used to deliver water, nice clean, clear water. The spot is popular with travellers not only because it is so pleasant but also because of the water.

About lunchtime another van came in, and a couple (Fay and Nev) nipped out of their car and approached us. "You must be Chris" Fay said as she put out her hand to shake mine. I looked puzzled. "We have been following your travels on Caravaners Forum" she said with a big smile, "and we saw you would be on the Gary Junction Road right now, so we have been looking out for you". And to cap it off, we discovered they both come from Gladstone QLD and know members of my family there! Additionally they are fellow-geocachers!! What's more they were great company.

It was clear that as we had arrived here on a Thursday, unless we stayed only the one night, we would need to stay for four in order to refuel at the next community of Kirikurra, as they are not open Saturday afternoons or Sundays. This was no hardship as it is such a lovely spot we knew we would be happy to stay the four nights.



On Saturday 2 July it was election day and so we had made sure we had the satellite TV in perfect order and had everything ready for our traditional pizza night. For many years we have had friends to our house on election nights and organise pizzas and wine. In the city the pizzas were ordered from a franchise but when out in a remote area we have always made our own. So this election night we got the ingredients ready quite early. We cut corners by using bought pizza bases (from Tom Price) and they were eaten while we watched the election coverage, mesmerised by it unfolding.

Election night notwithstanding, we pressed on from Jupiter Well to Kiwikurra, a small Aboriginal community with a reasonable store (it had fruit and vegetables as well as bread). We badly needed diesel here due to my camera-related excursion which added 150kms to our trip. We do carry two jerry cans of extra fuel but Val preferred to see if we could make the fuel stop. The fuel red light came on about 12 kms from Kiwikurra.... The community was hosting a week long footy festival and it was hopping with activity. The community had graded a fresh scraped area just out of the community for folk to camp in and there were tents and vehicles all clustered around the makeshift camp.

We filled up with fuel at \$3 a litre (sigh) before moving on to Mount Tietkens at Bucks Hill. In order to get fuel (which is dispensed from a gaily painted small shed near the general store), you have to go into the store and tell them you need diesel.

Bucks Hill/Mount Tietkens

S23 9 19 E 128 53 58

This rocky outcrop is where we stayed last year with our group of three vans and it was exactly as we had left it - a beautiful, serene site with the imposing presence of the mountain overlooking the camp. It is very near the NT/WA border and about 50 kms to the West of Kintore. Due to our early leaving at Jupiter Well, we got in here at an early hour about lunchtime and were able to relax for the rest of the day.



Late in the day a vehicle came in from a nearby community (Kintore) with a flat tyre. They saw us camped here and came to see if we had a compressor pump to reinflate the tyre for them. Being Aboriginal, they of

course had no compressor themselves. They had been out hunting (traditional way, with a Landcruiser and rifle) and with a vehicle of kids and adults on board, had taken no water or food. So Val filled an empty 2 litre bottle of water and gave it to them for the children, who were thirsty. In such cases there seems to be a limited ability to think ahead....

Redbank Gorge

Very early the next day we headed on Eastwards to Papunya, where we refueled and Val snaffled hot chips and hamburgers at the general store. Oh ohhhh bliss. So we had lunch in the van, while downloading our emails from the local internet there, and got in touch with the outside world once again.

The track from our campsite to Papunya was in very good shape and we had made good time. It also helped that we had not stopped in at Kintore for fuel, having enough to make Glen Helen Resort in the West MacDonnells if we needed to.

A short distance out of Papunya we turned off the main track which heads out to the Stuart Highway and we took the road South, past Haasts Bluff. This track was much narrower but was in reasonable shape and very scenic heading in this direction. The Haasts Bluff West Face was a dominant feature and it was good to see it again. The track goes right up against it at the point where there is a sharp Eastwards turn.



While traveling the GJR this trip I had created a series of nine earthcaches, a type of geocache which is sited at a geological feature and requires the cacher to answer questions about the feature. The earthcache gives geological information about the feature so it is educational and informative. My series included Haasts Bluff

About 3.00pm we arrived at one of our favourite spots, **Redbank Gorge**, and set up in probably the best site there, overlooking the valley. So the Gary Junction Road trip had come to a conclusion!

The next morning we had breakfast and set about defrosting the fridge which needed it badly by now. It is just as well we did open the freezer door as we discovered the fridge had defrosted itself overnight. Food was still frozen (just) but the fridge was definitely not working. Val found the culprit immediately - a broken capillary line. This meant that all the gas had escaped. Oh dear. But we were close enough to Alice Springs (150 km away) that it was not a major issue.

So we quickly packed up and headed into town - and the land of repair agents. The fridge was fixed in Alice Springs - but that is another story entirely.