

# Leonora(WA) to Porongurup July & August 2015

(This stage commenced on 11 July 2015)

And the trip continues. As we travelled Southward, the weather predictably became cooler. Australia's early July cold snap did not help matters. But our trip continued in lovely cool, sunny days. We had a few frosty mornings though.

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In this stage of the 2015 trip we move on from our lazy week at Sandstone and head down through the Murchison to the goldfields North of Kalgoorlie and on to Kalgoorlie itself.



*Truck at Gwalia*

Highlights include:

- Gwalia ghost town
- Leonora township
- Porongurup

## Malcolm Dam

The town of Sandstone was a welcome spot to have spent a week but it was time to move on. A leisurely start to the day saw us drive further East to the town of Leinster and turn down South to Leonora. Leonora is the town where you turn East onto the Great Central Road, and after we had traversed the GCR two years ago we had spent a few days at this nice free camp at Malcolm Dam. Only 14 kms from Leonora, it has no facilities other than rubbish bins and (when the lake is full) a nice view. As the water levels were very low indeed the view was of the hills in the background and the healthy vegetation after recent rains.

We set up camp in a nice area with some bushes and shrubs all around us and celebrated having a nice little garden area to sit outside with a cup of tea or cold drink in the evenings. Although there were other campers around us none were close enough to see or hear and it felt very tranquil. So we spent four days here while we relaxed or did drives around the countryside.

While here we enjoyed quite good internet, with the aerial deployed, but phone coverage was much more patchy - one or two bars at most.

## Gwalia Ghost Town

While camped out at nearby Malcolm Dam we did a day trip to the nearby town of Gwalia. Although it is a ghost town, there are still occupied houses there (admittedly not many) alongside historic homes and a

hotel from the gold rush days, a Museum and an operating mine is right next door. What was once a thriving if small settlement grew up around the Sons of Gwalia Mine in the late 1890s thrived until the final whistle blew on 28 December 1963, closing the mine and putting 250 men out of work. Gwalia's 1200-strong population fell to just 40 in less than three weeks. Today, the abandoned homes and businesses of Gwalia provide a valuable snapshot of a past way of life.

We were able to step inside the homes and see exactly how families and occupants lived. I can imagine how cold it would be in Winter and baking hot in Summer in those little corrugated iron-sheeted houses, with hessian ceilings.



The adjoining mine is held by St Barbara Ltd. The mine saw a resurgence in the late 2000s, with St Barbara Limited developing a deeper mine decline. Targets are currently around 2,000 m underground, with gold production beginning when they reach 1,100 m. As of April 2008 the decline is at around 1,000 vertical metres below the surface, with a portal from the old pit. This is a continuation of where Sons of Gwalia left off, at

around 375 vertical metres down. You can stand at the lookout and see way down into the open cut mine!

And the Museum was equally fascinating with a chance to look through Hoover House. The mine manager's house designed by the original mine manager and which bears his name stands on the summit of "Staff Hill" in the Museum Complex. We were able to sit on the verandah and have a delicious morning tea of coffee and cake. What a great experience.

Well, I had cake but Val had hot chips and gravy....



There is now freecamping allowed in a space near the Museum, but vans are required to be self contained, and CMCA compliant to demonstrate their compliance. Apparently there has been friction between museum staff and potential campers over the definition of compliant. The notice at the campsite is quite clear that it means Leave No Trace (LNT) accreditation but that means you can have a sealed external unit to catch your waste water. Apparently the staff interpret it as meaning internally captured. Quite a bit of hostility over the issue.

Anyway it didn't affect us as we were out at nearby lovely Malcolm Dam.

### Niagara Dam

On our last trip through these parts we had trekked down to Niagara Dam after we had stayed at Malcolm Dam, and we decided to retrace our steps again this time. Weather was predicted to be cloudy with sun (as if the BOM ever gets the weather even partly right) and we could use the generator if needing to recharge the batteries. It remained overcast for our stay at Niagara but with enough sun for me to watch the evening news each night and for my favourite Masterchef, which was now into the final weeks of the challenge.

Niagara Dam is near the ghost town of Kookynie (although there is an operating hotel and a handful of residents still) and is a nature reserve which allows camping. They provide rubbish bins and toilets as well as a tap and dump



point for van toilet cassettes disposal, in quite pleasant surroundings. There are two camping areas; on the rocks overlooking the dam (nearly empty this trip) or down below the dam wall in a huge area where you can get away in total peace and quiet. We chose to be up above and enjoyed a superb view.

On one of our days here we drove out to see the geological feature called Hanging Rock. It had quite a spiritual feel to it and there was a very real presence.

We also visited the nearby Kookynie Pub and had lunch there. It was a cool day and they had a welcome fire burning in the fireplace, which made the visit cosy. The owner is a mad keen East Coast Eagles fan and has posters and memorabilia all over the bar. He also is very anti-Halal, and refused to sell Coopers beer, citing that company's decision to be certified as Halal. Apparently Coopers have only certified their malt products (which are indeed used in a variety of other products) but the notion of Halal beer, which is alcoholic and thus off limits to Muslims, is interesting.

### **Kalgoorlie (Prospector CP)**

After four peaceful days at Niagara we moved on again, heading further South to Kalgoorlie. I needed to be in phone reception for work purposes for that coming week and we also needed to do a little shopping. Kalgoorlie is an interesting place and we have never given it sufficient attention. This trip was no different. We only had a couple of days there and filled that successfully with catching up with family for dinner at a hotel one night. It rained while we were here and that did not help with sightseeing.... We really must stay for longer next time!

### **Karalee Rocks**

**S31 15 1 E 119 50 29**

I was ready for a more peaceful spot after being in a caravan park fairly close to other vans for a few days and so we headed out South down the Great Eastern Highway toward Perth. We had picked Karalee Rocks as a potential spot to stay, as long as it had mobile phone reception (for work purposes) and so we turned in the three kms off the highway to check it out. We stayed here two years ago too and knew it was lovely.

In the Yilgarn Shire, Karalee Dam was constructed to provide water for slow steam trains en route to Kalgoorlie. The site was chosen mainly because of the nearby granite outcrop; with rain the outcrop becomes a natural catchment area. Construction between 1896-1897, its capacity

10.6 million gallons, 1487 feet above sea level and 25 feet in depth. Retaining walls of granite slab, all cut from the top of the rock and laid by hand, surround the enormous rock catchment.

This enables the water to flow off the rock into the dam via a large semi-circular aqueduct of steel, hand riveted at each joint, which is still in very good condition considering its age and the natural harsh elements. This was an incredible feat of labour and tenacity, in the days before Page | 4 technology made such construction much quicker.



This picture shows one of the sections of rock slab channels which direct rainfall off the rocks, down the metal chute and into the dam. It is easily visited as part of a couple of guided walks provided thoughtfully by the Heritage Society.

This spot was a lovely place to stay for the remainder of my week's work and with a flushing toilet, lovely walks, a fireplace and a dump point what more could you

want.

Now, something really strange happened during our stay at Karalee Rocks. We were sitting having an afternoon cup of tea when a bloke pulled in to camp, with a caravan. He came over and said with a laugh "You must be brave to camp on this particular spot!". He then elaborated by telling us that on a previous occasion, when he was camped right where our van was sitting, he could not start his car when getting ready to leave. He said there were three other cars all camped nearby which had the same problem. They had overcome the problem by pushing the vehicles down to another part of the campground, where they all started! His theory was that there is a magnetic rock running underneath this particular part of the camp and which affects the batteries. Privately we thought he no doubt had clapped out batteries... Until the next morning when our car would not start - from flat batteries! Bear in mind however, that we had experienced problems with the batteries back on the Gary Junction Road, and they are six years old.

We bought new batteries in the next big town we came to (Merredin).

## Westonia

I had read about the small town of Westonia on WikiCamps and the Shire owned and run caravan park had a great write up. As it is sited in the granite belt part of the WA Wheatbelt, an area we wanted to explore, it seemed a good a place as any to head toward. We new bad weather was coming in so a caravan park was the ideal place to stay for a few days to wait that out, and to sight see while we were there.

Located in Western Australia's Wheatbelt, 316 kilometres east of Perth, 306 kilometres west of Kalgoorlie and 55 kilometres east of Merredin the Shire of Westonia is renowned for its stunning natural woodlands, breathtaking granite outcrops, beautiful wildflowers and vast open skies.

The weather forecasts got it right; the rains set in a day after our arrival and it bucketed down for days. Usually I feel most aggrieved at wet weather while we are travelling (I know, it doesn't change anything but it is easy to be disgruntled at poor weather) but on this occasion I could not be unhappy. The farmers in the region were desperate for rain and were said to be "joyous" at the heavy falls. Also, this was the first encounter we had had with wet weather in two and a half months of travel. So it was a case of suck it up.

The caravan park at Westonia turned out to be a delight, with all facilities, immaculately clean and neat, nine separate concreted slab sites abutting a lawned area and all for \$15 a night. The park is a slight three minute walk to the town centre and there is a co-op general store, a Community Resource Centre, and a great hotel. We had dinner at the hotel one night and had drinks in the bar first, standing in front of the fireplace. Another night we ate at the mine mess, which is just behind the caravan park....not such a great meal. What was I thinking to eat at a mine mess? I have had my share of meals in such messes over the years and they are pretty similar regardless of where you are at the time.



Westonia has a fantastic museum which is well worth while to visit and a real credit to the town. And there are some really cute replica miniature buildings at the ton entrance and in the main street.

I felt the town had a real presence and there was a palpable pride in the town from everyone we met.

## Kwolyin Rest Area

After a week in a small caravan park it was time to head bush again, or as close to the bush setting as we could find this close to Perth. So we headed Southwards to Kwolyin. Between Quairading and Bruce Rock was this small rural town in Western Australia's central/eastern wheatbelt but which had faded into obscurity in the 1960s and 70s. It is now almost entirely returned to the natural bush. There are some small signs of the community including an old church building.



The three Shires of Bruce Rock, Kellerberrin and Quairading are jointly responsible for creating a beautiful, well equipped free camp site for travellers

to the region. It is part of their efforts to attract visitors to towns in their Shires and provides a good base while exploring the Granite Way.

We found a nice area to tuck our van into a fair way from the toilet block and camp kitchen as we have onboard facilities and prefer the privacy of being further away from the other campers.

This was a great place to base ourselves while doing some local sightseeing around all the local "Rocks" which seem to enjoy a fresh and damp micro-climate and so are lovely places to have picnics and do walks.

### **Margaret River**

From Kwolyin, we packed up and drove down to the Margaret River. It was a fair day's drive and so we found ourselves first stopping for lunch at York, at the fantastic Jude's café, and then rolling through increasingly greener fields until we reached an overnight stop just off the Great Easter Highway, called Kulyalling. (S 32 27 37 E 117 2 53). It was a pleasant spot, just far enough from the road to not be bothered by road noise but only a short distance in. We were the only people there for the night so it was peaceful!

The next morning we drove steadily on and arrived at Margaret River just after lunch. We stayed at Taunton Farm Family Park, a place we had enjoyed thoroughly when in this area nine years ago. We had a significant discount due to the off-season rates and it was such a lovely spot to stay. On one side of the park is a cheese/dairy/icecream factory and outlet, and there is a winery and restaurant on the other side. Both are a short walk...how good is that!?

Margaret River is renowned for its wineries and we have previously visited the Vasse Felix winery restaurant for a meal. Indeed we have had a meal there on every visit to the region. Not cheap but oh so worthwhile visiting.



*Vasse Felix Winery*

We also went on a quick trip out to Canebrake forest camp area and picnic area on the Margaret River and recalled what a magic place it is to camp. But not in the sort of wild and wet weather we were experiencing on this trip.



*Canebrake on the Margaret River*

### **Bridgetown**

Although we had enjoyed Margaret River, it is not really Val's cup of tea and so we only spent four days here and then moved on again. This time the destination was Bridgetown to stay for three days while visiting our friends from the forum, Motherhen and the Rooster. They do have real names but I won't reveal them here as it would identify them! It was wet and cold weather still while at Bridgetown but our welcome was warm and MH made fresh bread rolls for our lunch. How good was that! We did some geocaches there, including a nice series which took us to a cacher's favourite spots his grandmother had always enjoyed. I love this sort of series...

## Porongurup

Some other good friends were managing a caravan park at Proongurup, near Albany, and we had never been there so that was our next destination. By this time my other Facebook friends were commenting about all the coffee shop posts (mostly photos of Val at one café or another) and we realised that we were now well and truly in the urban landscape again. Our remoter stays was finished.

Deb and Glen are managing the most beautiful caravan park you can imagine, small but with excellent facilities and in an idyllic setting overlooking the Porongurup Ranges. This is a fresh and green part of the country no doubt due to the high rainfall they get. But we enjoyed lovely weather here for the first time in ages and we were able to dispense with jumpers for a few days. We tripped around a fair bit and saw all the local forest and national park, and had dinner at nearby Mount Barker's iconic pub as well as lunch at Ironstone Winery. This is a really lovely region and we were very envious of our friends being paid to stay here.

