

Stage 17 Mildura to Moree

This period of travel has introduced a whole new element in our vanning way of life: dealing with the cold. As I have lived all my life (well just about all my life) in the tropics, I don't seem to have the right mental attitude to cope with cold weather. The Webasto Diesel Heater has helped hugely. But it can only help so much and no further. Getting washing done and dried is "interesting" while vanning and in cold wet weather. So we changed our plans to spend some time in Victoria and NSW on the way up north. Instead we headed north much more quickly, and vowed to spend more time in the southern states on the way back down in the warmer weather.

And the champagne bottles remained under the bed in storage, while we switched to red wines, quite automatically.

Narrandera

Newell Hwy

3 June 2007

We had planned to stay at a camp site called Five Mile Camp out of town, but as it was getting late in the day, it was raining and freezing cold, we thought we would instead stay at the recommended Oz Parks caravan park on the outskirts of town. It is a pretty park, and the facilities are wonderfully clean and neat. However, sites are squeezey and much, much too close for comfort. We couldn't even put out our awning, as it would have conflicted with the little pop top next door. We could extend it slightly, as it protected us from the rain, but not much given the situation. Being in a pop top, our neighbours must have been very uncomfortable, as they would have heard every noise from our van, including the door being opened. I complimented the owner on the well maintained grounds and facilities but had to be honest and tell him that due to the tight positioning of the sites, we would have been more comfortable camped in a roadside gravel pit. Due to the rain, we really needed the awning out.

Forbes

Lachlan View CP (Big4)

4 to 10 June 2007

What a nice little park! We booked in for 2 nights and ended up staying for 7. The park is neat and sites are well spaced. The gardens are a credit to the managers. Forbes is a delightful town, and had not only a great coffee shop, but also a pretty good RSL for meals. The town itself reminds me of many we have seen in France; it is picturesque and has many historical buildings.

At Narrandera (junction of the Newell and Sturt Highways) we tried to decide which direction to take; Wagga Wagga and Canberra; or nip up the Newell, heading north. North won out, as the weather map made it look warmer up that way. So far it seems to be working. It is drier, but colder perhaps, especially at night. When we got up this morning, the windscreen was covered in ice. Now that's different for folks from the tropics!

While in the area we looked at some local national parks, went to Parkes, visited Cowra's Japanese garden and had wonderful pub meals. We also visited the little town of Eugowra and found it to be a fascinating place. There is a great patchworking and quilting shop, and a very good coffee shop (The Lady Bushranger). Just out of town is Escort Rock, the site at which Ben Hall's bushranger gang held up the gold carrying coach and injured two escorting police officers. It is atmospheric there and it doesn't take much imagination to conjure up the image of the attack.

We had a wonderful time here, as the area is rich in scenery, national parks and towns with real history. Driving along one day we saw in a small town called Gooloogong (the town consisted of a pub and a grocery store) a gathering of folk with old horse-drawn carriages, complete with horses, all camping overnight in the paddock near the pub. They said it was an annual event where they travel a couple of hundred kms to a town for a parade. We plan to go to the parade this Saturday. You should have seen the carriages! A real work of art.

11 to 15 June 2007

Weddin Mountains National Park

(Near Grenfell, NSW)

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What wonderful spot this turned out to be. When we arrived there were lots of other campers there, as it was a Monday of a long weekend. But they mostly disappeared early, and we remained with only one other couple, who were about 200 metres away. This area is allegedly where Ben Hall, the bushranger, had a hideout cave and spent some time eluding the authorities in the late 1800's. There is a walk up to the cave, which was easy enough, although a bit of shale made footing a little tricky.

We loved being here, and enjoyed a few red wines or ports around the fireplace. The rangers visited and told us to use the chopped wood, which we were happy to oblige. The park is beautifully maintained by the rangers.

Two of the four days spent here were nice and sunny, but the other two were a bit damp or misty. The fireplace consoled us on the damper days and so we smelt strongly of woodsmoke. The smell was in our hair and all our clothes. I had to have my jumper dry cleaned to restore it for fit society.

While we were here in the park, we day tripped over to Grenfell and took part in the annual Henry Lawson art festival. This is a big deal indeed, and they close off the main street for all sorts of stalls and activities, as well as a parade in the afternoon. There was a quilting exhibition too, which I slipped into as fast as greased lightning.

16 to 22 June

Orange, Colour City Caravan Park

I can't adequately describe how lovely this city is, and how scenic its countryside. Wineries abound, as well as teahouses and quaint little old villages in the nearby vicinity. We went out to Mount Canobolas one day to see the view across the plains below; and another day to see the snowfalls there. I had my haircut, and a pedicure and manicure just to restore the vision splendid.

One day, we retraced our footsteps by going over to Blayney (lovely little town) and Millthorpe. These are really delightful towns, quite historic. Millthorpe has a couple of outstanding restaurants, one of which we had lunch at.

There are a number of wineries around the city, which are all worth visiting. I won't recommend any particular ones, as it is a personal preference; the local Information Centre (in Byng Street).

Also, as I have had twinges of sciatica for the first time, I had a remedial massage, which was wonderful.

The first three days here were sunny (cold at night, though) but our last few days got progressively wetter and more miserable weather-wise. So we were glad to head northwards again...

23 to 26 June

Peak Hill Caravan Park.

Was it cold the last night at Orange! Minus 5, and when we got up the water in the hose had frozen. Val had happily anticipated this, and cunningly filled up our kettle before going to bed. When we got up all the grass outside had a thick cover of frost, and the car had icicles dripping from it. The windscreen was a solid sheet of ice. It was so pretty. We were moving on that morning to a little town called Peak Hill, south of Dubbo and so Val had packed everything up last night too (the outside table and chairs etc.)

The first day at Peak Hill was a lovely day weather wise; very sunny and almost warm. Bliss. But it quickly got cold outside again, as the sun had gone down. I noticed Val hadn't bothered to put out the table and chairs this time...why bother, we will probably not use them.

Peak Hill is in an ideal place for a trip to the Parkes Dish (to the south) and a trip to the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo (to the north). I thought the zoo was over-rated, especially for the admission price of \$32 per person. You can drive around the exhibits in your own car, hire bikes, or hire a little electric cart. We wanted a cart, but they were not available (due, I suspect, to not having had their batteries charged) so we drove in our own car.

Tip; take your own lunch and a thermos of coffee or cold drink – the prices at the kiosk are extortionate and limited in choice.

On another day we drove to nearby Narromine, a town with art deco shop fronts, and a truly lovely coffee shop (Buzzys?).

One of the features of this park is the friendly welcome from Pauline and Leighton, and the delicious scones with jam and cream which they deliver every evening to each van! We had booked in for two days and stayed four...

Gilgandra

27 and 28 June

Gilgandra (Newell Hwy)

A number of folk on the internet caravanning forum we belong to suggested the Rotary Park caravan park at Gilgandra, and it proved to be a top little park. It is spacious, and the gardens are quite attractive. Sites were a bit close together, but you get that...And the Newell Highway was too close, so you could hear the big trucks roaring through all hours of the day and night. However, it was winter and all our windows were tightly shut and we could hear very little noise inside the van. The town centre is a nice 15 minutes walk away and we wandered down for a coffee and lunch the day we arrived.

The Warrumbungle National Park is nearby, and we drove out there for a look the second day. What spectacular and pretty scenery! Lovely rocky outcrops and forested areas. We did a very quick walk up a track to a lookout and marvelled at the views. You can have powered sites out there, or simply camp in the area provided for tents and trailers. It is my opinion that vans would generally not fit into the well bollarded sites there.

Moree (Newell Hwy)

29 to 4 June

I LOVED Moree. We had heard about it on the Caravaners Forum (Oh thanks so much Cruiserman!) and the town and the park were just great places to be.

The park first; there are four separate artesian pools in the park, all of which can be accessed (free of charge) between 7am to 10pm, by park residents. Let me tell you, they are popular! We had a site with plenty of room and an ensuite, which was basic but welcome.

The town is a friendly place and quite attractive, especially due to the recent rains. Apparently there is a good RSL for meals, but we didn't make it there. We did have a hamburger bought from the park kiosk, and it was lovely.

And while we here at the park we caught up with Cruiserman (a member of the Forum) and had afternoon tea with him and his wife.

We went out to a nearby winery for a tasting on the Sunday, and had morning tea afterwards on the balcony.

Another day, we drove out to Mount Kaputar National Park and went up a very windy road to an altitude of 1400 metres, from memory. This is a very scenic

area and if you are travelling the Newell, make sure you stay somewhere nearby so you can visit this national park. There is a couple of camp grounds, but the road is not suitable for caravans and they are not allowed on this narrow and windy road. The drop down the side of the road is scary and not for the faint hearted. We took a picnic lunch and ate it up at Dawson Springs, a lovely picnic area.

I didn't want to leave those pools at Moree, but as we wanted to be at a Kedron gathering up at Ayr (North QLD) mid July, we had to leave...