

Stage 11 Pilbara to Kununurra (including Gibb River Road)

30 to 3 June

Karratha

We enjoyed having those days in Karratha to wash the van, and to have a haircut, catch up on newspapers etc. Had a look out at Cleaverville (a camp site on the coast near Karratha, council owned, lovely but busy as!) and Point Samson. There is a new and very nice park out at Point Samson which we may stay at next time...

4 June

De Grey River Rest Stop

82 kms NE of Port Hedland 20 18 30 S 119 14 57 E

What a lovely spot this is! Green grassy sites spread along the De Grey River (which had lots of water when we were there). There must be room for well spaced 20 or so sites. But on this night, there would have been about 30 or more sets of vans and vehicles. A feature of the spot was all the pumpkin vines with maturing pumpkins. After dark a large truck came down the hill into one of the sites along the river, and the driver asked the van owner to unhitch his vehicle so the truck could access the river to pump water...the van owner told him to get lost! With a bit of arguing backwards and forwards, the defeated truck driver had to back out of a curved road in the pitch black and up a hill to retreat. Cheeky bugger.

5 to 8 June

Broome

Advice from many people was to stay at the Cable Beach CP, and it was good advice. Not far from the beach (a 10 minute walk) and nice shady cool sites were a pleasant relaxing stay. It was a big park though and there were many folk who had just settled in for their annual 3 month stay. Some even had potplants, furniture and carpets under their annexe roofs. We did all the usual things people do in Broome, including having a nice meal at the wharf/jetty. The garlic prawns were absolutely delicious. Took lots of photos of the beach.

9 and 10 June

Derby

Kimberley Entrance CP.

While in Derby we prepared for the Gibb River Road (GRR), and enjoyed a cappuccino and lovely lunch (at the Boab Inn – an unprepossessing looking place, but nice inside) and a sunset meal at the restaurant on the wharf. A delightful setting and quite nice meal. A large number of folk were all seated along the jetty at sunset, with bottles of wine and glasses, enjoying the fading

sunset's spectacle. They looked very relaxed and happy. Wish I had thought of it too.

Gibb River Road

11 and 12 June

Windjana Gorge, 145 kms East of Derby

A relatively early departure from Derby allowed us to take a leisurely approach to the first leg of the GRR. We had taken all the precautions of packing anything fragile, and securing items like the microwave and DVD, as well as keeping tyre pressures at sensibly low levels. It was a crisp and cool day with bright blue skies when we left and there was definitely an air of eager anticipation. We arrived at the turnoff to Windjana Gorge (20kms in from the GRR proper) by about 11am and arrived at our first night's camp by lunch time.

The cliffs next to Windjana Gorge loom over the CALM-managed campgrounds; there are separate areas for generators and for those preferring "quiet" camping. Cold water showers and toilets are provided. The Gorge is only 5 to 10 minutes walk from the camping areas and is a pleasant shaded walk. I have never seen so many estuarine (freshies) crocodiles in my life! Swimming could be a problem as although they are normally shy these crocs have been known to nip. But it was too cold for me to even think about swimming.

On our second day here we took a quick trip over to Tunnel Creek, which is a spectacular tunnel through the Range, which can be walked in the knee-high cold water in about 15 minutes. Take a good torch!

13 and 14 June

Bell Gorge and Falls

A 25 kms detour, Bell Gorge was the highlight of the trip for me. It is spectacular creekside camping (get in early!). As the secluded sites are popular, get in before 11 am or camp in the main group campground with the hordes of others 11 kms back at Silent Grove campground. We enjoyed the quiet and peacefulness of our own little camp site (we had 'Wattle Glen', a large and even site) right on the river, with a flushing toilet catering for ourselves and our neighbouring site.

The walk into the gorge is not too difficult (15 minutes?) although others who are fitter and more intrepid crossed the river at the top of the falls – mostly by swimming- and continued down the gorge proper. I got some lovely photos at the top of the falls and gorge so was more than happy.

15 June

Mount Barnett and Manning Gorge

The camping area is 7 kms in off the GRR and along the Manning Creek. There is a walk into a lovely gorge and the camp ground was well spaced out near the river ensuring peaceful camping if that is the aim. By this time I was well over dust (several weeks of it in one form or another) so found it a bit dusty, but it was a pleasant enough spot. You can put a canoe into the river near the camp areas, although you can't travel very far. We took a cold bottle of champagne down to the river's edge at sunset and drank it there as dusk fell, quietly talking and watching the birds.

16 June

Gibb River Reststop

3 kms along the Kalumburu Road (intersection GPS reading 16° 07 08 S, 126°, 31 12 E)

We had read in Jan Holland's book ([Priceless Campsites and Rest Areas in North of WA](#)) of a nice campsite on the banks of the usually flowing Gibb River, and aimed to be there for that evening. Three kms in from the GRR on the road to Kalumburu, the road crosses the Gibb River, and there are lovely riverside sites for a quiet night's rest. We met another Kedron couple there (Ron and Ruth) who had stayed two nights as it was so pleasant. At dusk a Bushtracker turned up near us and we met another lovely couple (Wendy and Richard) to have red wine with in the evening.

17 June

Home Valley Homestead

This is a privately owned and run station which has a nice little camp ground providing power and water or unpowered sites. The restaurant was definitely appealing, especially the capuccinos! And they had broadband internet available for me to access with my own computer, to check emails etc. Contact with the outside world! I thought the staff were a tad unfriendly and Wendy (from Gibb River camp site, remember?) agreed after one of the staff was rude to her. They may have had a hard day...

18-20 June

El Questro station

Definitely pricey, but a lovely spot and I would definitely go back. In the three days here we didn't even scratch the surface of all the things we could have seen. We had a nice riverside campsite to ourselves and it was great to sit beside the Pentecost River at sunset with a red wine. Wendy and Richard were in the adjoining site so we had company for the wine feasts. Ron and Ruth stayed too for one night.

I loved Zebedee Springs, a shaded thermal set of pools to relax and unwind in.

And we put the portabote into Chamberlain Gorge and used the silent electric Motor to take a look up the gorge.

21 -24 June

Kununurra

Arriving at Kununurra signaled the end of the GRR, and it felt sad to be finishing what was a special trip but I was definitely tired of the dust. Have I mentioned that already? Was the road difficult? Not really. The corrugations were bad but no worse than many roads I have been on. The Pentecost was no problem for us to cross (we have a snorkel on the car and the van has great clearance) and there were few washouts or any significant problems to deal with. We had no damage to the van, or the contents. Well, that is apart from a vicious little jar of chutney which shed its lid and its contents in the pantry over the shelf below itself!). Even the eggs were intact.

We stayed at Ivanhoe Caravan Park in Kununurra and found it a lovely spot. That said there are many pleasant parks and it is a matter of choosing the one you like. Some folk like Kona CP, right on the waters edge and I admit it did look nice too.

While here we did a lot of touristy things, including a sunset dinner cruise and a flight over the Bungle Bungles. Oh, and I loved the two bottles of rum we bought from the Hoochery, and its "tasting" of five different rums.