

Queensland and South Australian Outback

July to August 2012



"Welcome to SA" - road from Thargomindah to Innamincka

Special points of interest:

- Texas (QLD)
- Camping at Cullyamurra
- Kangaroo fights Kedron; Kedron wins
- The Gammon Ranges

Regional QLD and SA

In this leg of the mid 2012 trip we head the nose of the van for home in SA, and travel through the Western reaches of Queensland and then to Northern South Australia and back home in the Barossa Valley. Some of the most delightful camp sites we enjoyed were at Cullyamurra (near Innamincka) and in the Flinders Ranges.

Wivenhoe Dam

For our first night out of Brisbane we stayed a night at Wivenhoe Dam. It's appeal is multi-factorial; it is a beautiful spot of course, but it has so much to see and do around there, and it is only an hour or so from the Kedron factory, where our van had some new modifications done.

The work done included replacing the damaged faring to the van over one side which occurred back at the Coorong in February this year. We also had the overhead lights replaced with new LED ones which have a nice clear but soft light, and by some wizardry of technology, a little blue light can be turned on for night dim lighting. Thanks to friends Lea and Rick for this idea!

We topped up our water tanks at Wivenhoe and did a load of washing, and the next morning we were ready to start heading home.

Girraween National Park

We are truly creatures of habit, aren't we? The campground at Girraween NP, near Stanthorpe, is another of our favourites. There is a variety of tent and caravan camping available (without power or water) at Bald Rock or Castle Rock camp sites, but the only spot with room for vans is Castle Rock.

Girraween is situated approximately 260 km by road south-west of Brisbane. To reach the park, turn off the New England Highway 26 km south of Stanthorpe or 30 km north of Tenterfield. The winding bitumen road continues a further 9 km east through the Wyberba Valley to the park information centre. The alternative road from Stanthorpe to Girraween via Eukey and Storm King Dam has some gravel sections, but it is good gravel.

Girraween National Park boasts massive granite outcrops, balancing boulders, clear running streams and spectacular wildflowers in spring.

The official website tells me that golden wattles, yellow, red and purple pea flowers, orchids and flannel flowers grow amid forests of red-gum, stringybark and blackbutt. I can vouch for the fact that frogs, lizards and snakes rustle among the leaf litter as I have seen them! Brilliant turquoise parrots, yellow-tufted honeyeaters and superb fairy-wrens splash the granite-strewn countryside with colour, while red-necked wallabies, brush-tailed possums and spiny echidnas co-exist in the woodland. One of the most spectacular birds we have seen here is the satin bowerbird. I think it is the juveniles and the females which are a glossy blue-black.

We spent an enjoyable couple of days re-visiting places like the Castleglen distillery and winery (they have a phenomenal amount of spirits and liqueurs, all made from local produce, and with no artificial flavouring or essences. Their orange liqueur is made from real oranges. Their chocolate port is made with real chocolate). Alas, the chocolate shop near the national park was closed for winter.

Texas

S 28 52 03 E 151 09 51

Our route home was planned to be roughly the way we had come (through to Thargomindah, Innamincka, the Strzelecki, and the Flinders Ranges) but with staying in slightly different locations to the trip up to Queensland and deviating slightly from the previous path.

So we first headed North West to Texas, which is about 100 kms South East of Goondiwindi. What a lovely little town and a delightful free camping area they have there! The camp site is only a couple of kms South of the town, on the Dumaresq River, overlooking the river and spread over a wide area of grassy flat areas. A sign advised us that only self contained vehicles were welcome to stay and that grey (and black) water was to be emptied at the dump point back in town. Very sensible requests.



The town is located just 2 kilometres from Queensland's southern border with New South Wales, and close to Bonshaw in New South Wales. Texas is also an RV Friendly town. We found a great spot on a level area near some other Caravaners Forum members and happily wiled away an afternoon talking and drinking cups of tea (and later red wine). What a life!

Although we had initially only called in for a quick lunch, making sandwiches and topping up the car coffee mugs, we ended up staying two nights. And I was sorry to leave after only two nights! This is a lovely free camp.

Nindigully Pub

S 28 21 17 E 148 49 15

It was only lunch time when we arrived at the following camp site. The Nindigully Hotel is an icon and on everyone's bucket list for outback travel. The hotel is located near the Moonie River and rigs are free to pull up either on the banks of the river or near the hotel itself, and use the hotel facilities. All that is asked in return is that travellers buy a drink or meal. Happy hour was at 4.30pm, and for the hour all drinks (well beer and wines, anyway) were \$2.50 each. A bargain.

We had a lovely spot near the river but well away from any gum trees. It can be tricky to find a good spot which has a view, is level and also has sun for the solar panels. But we had a perfect spot with a great view of the river from our van window. Given how cold it was in the morning, it was just lovely to sit inside in the warmth with a cup of coffee and watch the river birds from our dining table. I absolutely LOVE that diesel heater.... Nights were getting well below zero and we often had ice on the car bonnet and windscreen, so the heater was well used. We decided to have lunch the hotel and then had drinks there at happy hour, which suited us just fine!



On the Carnarvon Highway, North of Nindigully, a large kangaroo jumped out from the side of the road and into the side of the van, ricocheting off the stone guard and along the side of the van. Thank goodness we had the chequerplate, because it saved the van from any real damage. The only casualty (apart from the poor animal, which was killed outright) was the stone guard, knocked clean backwards toward the van, loosening the sizable bolts, and damaging the gas bottle fuel line. Val re-positioned the guard, re-bolted it into place, and we were set to continue travelling. In Mitchell we found a lovely tradesman who came out and fixed the gas line for all of \$40! We gave him \$50 and told him to keep the change.

Mitchell

We had decided to give Mitchell another go! The last time we were here, eight weeks ago now, it poured with rain the whole three days we were there. But this time we had beautiful clear and sunny days in which to relax, sitting outside with a direct view of the Maranoa river. We stayed out at the Neil Turner Weir, a lovely free camp which is well patronised. Each night we were here I reckon there would have been about thirty or more rigs of all shapes and sizes. That is a lot of money being poured into the community by travellers who would otherwise move on elsewhere.

And the artesian pools were open again, after repairs to flood damage a year ago. I do love those hot pools.

Our first night at the Weir was nice and peaceful but the second night an enormous rig pulled in right next to us. It was a new looking bus with expandable sides, towing a trailer with a boat and small car. All up it would be worth about \$800k, conservative estimate. Probably much more. At first, they pulled right close to us, blocking out ability to leave in the morning. (There was plenty of space in which they could park...) but Val had a quiet word with them and they shifted slightly, a little further away. Then they pulled out their chain saw and proceeded to cut up their evening's wood pile. Sigh.

At Mitchell we needed to exchange a gas bottle and it cost \$42 - we have never experienced a price like that before!

Lake Houdraman near Quilpie

S 26 35 07 e 144 18 22

There was a beautiful, brassy blue sky and clear weather when we pulled out of Mitchell, first thing in the morning after three lovely days at the weir, and headed West towards Charleville, and then on to Quilpie. Our destination was the free camp at Lake Houdraman, which we had to leave precipitately eight or so weeks earlier, due to threatened rain. This time, the weather could not have been nicer. The days were clear and sunny (wonderful for the solar panels) and cold at night.



The camp site is only 7 kms from the township, on a good gravel road. But note that the road out there is blacksoil and when wet can get you bogged very quickly indeed. There are no facilities other than rubbish bins which are regularly emptied.

The diesel heater deals with the cold nights and mornings, and allowed us to sit warmly inside with an early tea and coffee while looking at the sunrise over the water. And it was warm enough that we could sit with evening drinks outside without jumpers until about 6.00pm! Then the cold would steal in and bite.

In the photo, Val is reading a caravan magazine, so he can find out about even more places to visit!



Onwards to Innamincka

Back in Brisbane we had made a decision to return home following our footprints from the way up; that is, back through the Channel Country to Innamincka and down the Strzelecki and Flinders Ranges. Our decision was influenced by the colder and damper weather in our originally planned route down the New England Highway. Although there was a degree of recovering old ground, we felt it would be interesting to do it in a slightly different way to the previous trip up North. To vary the route we travelled down from Quilpie through Eromanga rather than through Thargomindah; we stayed at Cullyamurra Waterhole in the Innamincka Reserve rather than at our first camp site; and we camped at different sites in the Flinders. So we were able to revise our itinerary in the light of our first leg of the trip and see places we didn't have a chance to visit the first time around. Back in May, for example, we could not visit the Gammon Ranges due to a feral eradication

program which was in full swing and the park was closed.

And the weather for the trip back South was superb - sunny, blue skies and warm days and cold nights.

On the way down from Quilpie to Noccundra we filled up with fuel at Eromanga, apparently the cheapest place in QLD to fill up due to the oil refinery there. It was cheap...\$1.49 a litre of diesel. So I have to ask why it is so dear to buy fuel at nearby Quilpie or Innamincka?

We stayed the night at Noccundra Waterhole, on the Wilson River. As the last time we stayed here the nearby hotel was not very hospitable, we gave it a miss and instead made a curried mince dinner and enjoyed the meal sitting watching a large number of pelicans bedding down for the night on the opposite bank of the river. I do hope the hotel gets its act together and finds a manager who actually wants to serve people and hires a cook. The condition of the place is the talk of nearby towns who mourn the loss of a great watering hole.

We noticed there were many potential spots on the road across from Noccundra to Innamincka, where we could have pulled over for the night. There were gravel scrapes, and any number of places where you could just pull off the road onto the surrounding countryside and park, sometimes overlooking nice valleys. At morning tea we stopped at a nice spot on clean gravel overlooking a valley, and enjoyed the view of wide open spaces while we sat and relaxed over a cup of tea.



Cullyamurra Waterhole (Innamincka Regional Reserve)

S 27 42 07 E 140 50 19

There is a variety of different camping in the Innamincka Regional Reserve, including the town Common (for which a \$5 fee is asked) or camping out along the Cooper Creek at either the several spots to the South of the town community or to the North out at Cullyamurra Waterhole (which is in fact on the Cooper). These alternative spots require the SA Government's Desert Parks Pass (which cost us \$125 back in Adelaide, but you can buy it at the Innamincka General Store). On this trip we chose the Cullyamurra camping area and picked one of many spots along the Cooper Creek. There are so many different camp sites, all serviced by drop toilets (with nice soft toilet paper!)



that rigs of just about any size would fit in. Many of these sites could accommodate two or three caravans together.

The camp site we had chosen was near to a large white gum tree which had been taken over by families

of corellas for nesting. It was absorbing to watch the birds feed their young, fend off crows menacing the chicks and generally play around. We saw such a variety of different bird life it was truly amazing. They included budgerigars, tree martins, galahs, pelicans, cormorants, brown tree creepers, darters, doves and red rumped parrots. Val recorded them all as finds. There was a lot of nesting going on and a mass of wildflowers too. On our second night at Cullyamurra we made a loaf of bread in the camp oven and then cooked a roast in the same pot using the left over coals. The bread could have done with higher heat to start with but was nice nevertheless.



I felt Cullyamurra was a particularly special camp site and look forward to the next time we can come and stay next to this grand waterway.

Nights were cold here, very cold, and again we used the diesel heater morning and evening, but noticed that the days were getting warmer now. It was the first week of August and it was anticipated that it would get cooler as we headed back down to the Flinders Ranges. In fact we found the opposite - the Arkaroola region and the Gammon Ranges were lovely and warm with cool nights.

Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges/Arkaroola

It was a long, long day driving from Innamincka to the Gammon Ranges. We left the waterhole camp site at 7.30am and got into the Balcanoona Ranger station at about 4.00pm, with only short stops for morning tea and lunch, and several photo stops. After a quick stop at Montecollina Bore for morning tea (and a few photos!) we headed back down the Strzelecki Track a further 30kms and took a right turn onto the Mount Hopeless to Arkaroola track. This road is signed clearly as a Four Wheel Drive track and it is indeed not designed for vehicles or rigs with other than high



Montecollina Bore

It was apparent that since our last time on the track, there had been rain and vehicles had churned the road up badly in parts, especially in the North. Whereas on our past traversing of this track we encountered no other vehicles on its 150 kms length, this time we saw a couple of small trucks, two four wheel drives, a home-made offroad motorhome and a Qantum van.



There was an astounding amount of flora, no doubt due to the recent rains. There were prolific patches of Sturt's Desert Peas, and they were a bright splash on the side of the road.

Fortunately the day was sunny and dry, as all travel advice for this

road is to avoid it if there is any chance of rain - and we saw the reason for that advice in the damaged track! Although it is signed as a four wheel track it is normally good gravel travelling, although there is a lot of dips and creeks to cross for which good clearance is needed.

We called in to the Balcanoona Ranger Headquarters station and spoke to a knowledgeable Aboriginal Ranger who gave advice on good camp sites and drives to take. He also pointed out that the ranger station has provision for water to top up our tanks; it was good bore water and they didn't care how much we used! So we had nicely full tanks again. A luxury.

Weetootla Gorge Camp Site, Gammon Ranges

S 30 29 49 E 139 15 33

We made our base at the gorge camp site, only 7 or 8 kms from the Balcanoona ranger station (5.3 kms



in from the Arkaroola road) and found a lovely spot a bit further on from the general camp ground. The Ranger had said to look at the sites a bit further in than the main camping area and close to the head of walking trail, and he was right- they were much nicer. These sites were not only less dusty, they had lovely foliage and outlook, being close to the creek (dry except for some springs upstream) and there was no one else there. It beats me why everyone else stayed at the main campground, except there was a toilet back there and we had to rely on our own. But that is why we have an

onboard toilet and shower - to use them. It was peaceful here, as we were the only people camped in the second area, so we had our late afternoon drinks in splendid solitude.

Aroona Ruins Campsite, Flinders Ranges

S 31 16 45 and E 138 34 45

We found a great spot to camp at a designated camping area called "Aroona Ruins Camp Ground" about 40 kms South West of Blinman, and pulled in for a late lunch after driving down from Balcanoona on a road which had an endless number of dips and was corrugated much of the way. The drive was uneventful but as we came further South, the Flinders Ranges became more pronounced and finally, closer to Blinman and then our destination, the views were outstanding. Each time we come back here we forget how wonderful and uplifting the scenery can be.

I do have to admit to having enjoyed another morning tea of scones and tea back at the café at Blinman. We find ourselves back in civilization indeed. Damn those scones are good!

At Aroona not only is there a glorious view of the ranges and the surrounding countryside from the van, but there are water taps spread all around the camp grounds. Luxury! With heaps of water I knew I could have a longer than usual shower at night. I think we had the nicest site in the campground, which was very quiet; there was only one other couple camped in the area. They expressed amazement that a caravan would make it in through the washed out creek crossings and dips. However, the only issue was good clearance which the van luckily boasts.



If I had to identify the top camp spot of this trip, I reckon Aroona Ruins would probably be my choice, followed closely by Boondooma Dam

(QLD) and Cullyamurra Waterhole at Innamincka.

Again it was cold each night, with the morning temperature on each night's camp registering -4 degrees. Ouch!

On our first night we sat inside with a baked chicken dinner and a bottle of champagne from the South Burnett region. We also had some left over curry sauce in a container, so on our second night we made some boiled eggs which we heated in the curry and had a lovely curried egg on rice dish, sitting outside overlooking the ranges. We certainly weren't roughing it.

This camp site was only a five or six hour drive from home and so, after three lovely days, all the usual things at home were calling and we reluctantly packed up and headed South back to the Barossa Valley.

This had been an exceptional trip and in the last eleven weeks we have seen some wonderful places. We are privileged to live in and travel such a great country.