

F

rom the WA Wheatfields to Karijini NP, May/June 2016

June 2016

The trip so far had been leisurely and that relaxed travel style continued this stage. We stayed for a bit in the wheatfields and then moved on to Kalgoorlie and then headed North.



Sandford Rocks (WA)

Special points of interest:

- More granite rocks and dams
- Rain and more rain
- Karijini NP

WA Wheatfields

Granite Rocks

This stage started on 26 May.

We left Westonia on a crisp sunny day and knew that our destination at Karalee Rocks was a lovely spot and also had good phone reception. A bonus as I was going to be rostered on call for the week. The weather was mostly sunny during this next section of travel (up to Niagara Dam, anyway).

Karalee Rocks

S31 15 1 E 119 50 29

Just off the Great Eastern Highway between Perth and Kalgoorlie, this peaceful spot is a treasure. It has a flushing toilet, a dump point, a water tap and not least, mobile phone and internet. Karalee Dam is located off the Great Eastern Highway 34 km east of Southern Cross, heading towards

Kalgoorlie, (18 km past Yellowdine Roadhouse). Turn left and continue on gravel for 4.2 kms. Karalee Dam was constructed to provide water for slow steam trains en route to Kalgoorlie. The site was chosen mainly because of the granite outcrop; With rain the outcrop becomes a natural catchment area. Construction occurred between 1896-1897, its capacity is 10.6 million gallons, it is 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. To reflect upon the unbelievable manual labour and horsepower involved in this construction, is well worth the journey.

The phone did need an aerial to work reliably (as I was working) but it meant we could happily stay put for a while and relax. What I did not anticipate was the midges. I had been stung a little over at Beringbooding Rock but here they descended on me in clouds. My face swelled up so much my eye closed and I had blisters in various parts of my body. Application of a cream from Southern Cross chemist, and some antihistamines did help. An ice pack helped to reduce the swelling too. But I became wary of venturing outside the caravan... So we decided to move to another camp site a bit closer to Kalgoorlie, our next destination, and it had no midges.

Yerdani Well

S31 8 22 E 120 37 40

Mercifully, Yerdani Well had no midges or mosquitoes or flies either for that matter. It was simply a lovely bush setting with little tracks leading off down the back to a wide range of spots to choose from. We had a lovely stay there and found in fact it had good phone and internet reception. It was also the coldest night we have experienced in a long time, with a block of ice falling out of the waste water hose!

The Acclaim Prospector Caravan Park

Cnr Ochiltree St and Great Eastern Hwy. Site 90

We needed to be here for family reasons primarily and to stock up on food, mail and medications. An earlier decision had been made to travel this direction (up North from Westonia) rather than West and then North. We became aware in Kalgoorlie that more rain was coming in and made our plans accordingly. With heavy falls predicted the 300km stretch of gravel between Menzies and Sandstone was out of the question. It turned out that later tracks were to be similarly affected also by the rain. We had experienced the same issues last year; and this is an arid region! Perhaps it only rains when we visit...

While in Kalgoorlie we went out to dinner (just about every night!) and did our shopping. Memorably we spent a day with Charlie out at Kambalda, the small mining town near Kalgoorlie. Kathryn and Charlie used to live there and Charlie had a few old haunts to show us. And we took him Geocaching as well! This is a first as he hates geocaching! There was a cache up on Red Hill Lookout which overlooks Lake Lefroy; the view from up here was spectacular. We also visited the Super Pit, which I am embarrassed to admit I had not been to before, despite many trips to Kalgoorlie.

Niagara Dam

S 29°24'26.0"S - E 121°16'33.0"E (At highway turnoff)

Niagara Dam is near the "Living 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. The other reason we chose this upper level was the forecast rain. Being on the rock area meant we could camp in clean surroundings with good rain run off. And the rain did arrive...for two of our three days here..



By this time I was starting to feel I had had enough of the rain which seemed to be dogging us on and off all the way from SA. It is easy enough to be sanguine for a day or two but wet weather which extends for weeks is definitely irritating. Still, it is what it is and we just had to make the most of it.

To fill in time during the wet weather we went over to the Grand Hotel at Kookynie and had lunch on Saturday. The last time we were there they had a nice woodfire burning in the fireplace but this day it was cold and a little dismal and the fire had definitely gone out.

There was no phone or internet reception although there was patchy reception on the hill driving out of the Dam. It wasn't good enough to download emails though.

Peter Denny Lookout

S 27 56 15 E 119 38 0

This is a magic camp spot, just off the highway between Leinster and Sandstone. It's main claim to fame is the superb lookout and view from the camp sites. There is a rim along which you can camp with a view down into the ochres and creams of a fairly extensive breakaway formation. It also has the great advantage of being on relatively rocky (flat) ground so that in rain (sigh) campers can keep relatively clean. This was a great boon to us as it rained for the almost three days we were there. And the wind blew. It was pretty cold after a day or two of this weather. As we had no internet we could not check the weather forecasts, but our previous download on our weather app was accurate; on the third morning the clouds disappeared (and a frost arrived) so we picked up the skirts and fled on toward Sandstone.



Plan A was to stay in this little prospecting town, which has a truly lovely little Shire owned caravan park, and then drive up the dirt road to Meekatharra or Cue. As it happened, the caravan park was

completely full and the track North was closed due to all that pesky rain. So we adopted Plan B which was to drive the bitumen route to Mt Magnet which is further to the West and then further North to Cue. It was further kms and a route we have driven before so not of much interest. But we arrived safe and sound in Cue mid afternoon (after a hamburger and chips at Mt Magnet at lunchtime).

Cue

This little town is a goldfields town with great appeal to prospectors and the caravan park here was busy with folk who come North in Winter to try their hand with their metal detectors. Generally they have little success as far as I can see but they are all obsessed with the game and the lack of gold does not seem to deter them. Anyway they add much needed money to the town.

We went out to dinner while here, patronising the local pub. Gosh the pub food is expensive here in WA. My schnitzel was \$28. At home in SA a pub schnitzel is about \$17 with a free wine thrown in on Schnitty Night.

We took a drive out to Garden Rock and thought it was a nice spot to camp and maybe in future we will spend a couple of nights there. About 15 kms out it is a granite outcrop about a km in perimeter and with a track around the rock.

Lake Nallan Nature Reserve

S27 15 25 E117.59 6

Just 19.6kms North of Cue is this pleasant Nature Reserve with its Freecamp. There are lots of signs saying you are welcome to camp but the limit is 48 hours - and there are to be no open fires. Naturally there are fireplace rings everywhere. But I digress. We drove out after our morning showers at Cue caravan park, and broke our previous record for the shortest day's trip. It did not take long to cover 19.6 kms.... And our intent had been to go further, much further but this lovely camp overlooking the remnants of Lake Nallan were hard to resist. So we set up camp and sat outside with a cup of tea fairly early in the piece.



Val did his usual whinge about having to put out the awning (he prefers to leave it furled as that is less work for him. But that is a patently selfish attitude so the awning was deployed and we sat comfortably in the shade watching the ducks on the lake. ☺ Lunch was crackers and cheese with pears, and a bottle of Forbes and Forbes

Riesling. All from the terrace seating. Life does not get much better than this.

Later in the afternoon some other folk who were camped back down on the flat area below walked past and we all agreed to catch up for Happy Hour on the terrace next to our van. A lovely end to a nice day.

Gascoyne River (Middle Branch)

S 25 12 7 E 119 20 7

This is a special place indeed. Right on the river with a view from our awning of water, trees and birds. The spot is one we first visited at the same time of year ten years ago in 2006, on our way up to Karijini. By simply turning off the Great Northern Highway and following the track along the river, quite a few lovely spots can be found. I was so happy that our favourite spot was unoccupied,



as it is one of the best sites and with the best view. We arrived reasonably early and had the awning out pretty smartly, then did what we do best relax...relax.

We did make some bread and cook it over the fire the second night, and on our third day we stirred ourselves enough to do the washing. Eventually we run out of knickers if we don't do the washing regularly! The water from the creek was clean and fine for washing clothes.

The weather was absolutely beautiful while here and for the first time since leaving home we were able to sit outside after dark while wearing short sleeves and no jumpers. But we were still using the diesel heater at night as the evening temperatures were about four or five degrees.

There was one bar of phone reception (not reliable enough for phone calls) but good internet with the external aerial.

Oh, and while here I took a photo of Val sitting reading his digital version of The Advertiser newsletter, sitting next to the river. What technology! I am really glad I organised a digital subscription before leaving home.



Karijini NP

Ahh, beautiful Karijini. This was our third visit here (the first time was June 2006, exactly ten years ago) and we have a special affinity for the place. The park has spectacular gorges and scenery, and with the contrasting reds of the soil, green of the foliage and the deep, deep blue of the sky, it is a magical place.

I am reluctant to put too many photos in this trip report so will choose only two which show our experiences from this trip. Those of you with good memories will remember the pile of photos from last year's visit anyway!

This year we asked for a sunny site to ensure the batteries stayed topped up nicely and we were given a great spot with some nearby small trees and shrubs and good sun (site 91). Well separated from other vans we enjoyed five lovely days here. The weather was superb with crisp sunny days and cold nights. This was our site's view.



Among the activities we forced ourselves to undertake between relaxing, we spent a day visiting Mt Meharry (pronounced Merry) which is officially the highest mountain in WA. It was a full day trip over remote tracks and we went down a couple of false leads before finally coming on the sign post pointing to the mountain. It is less a mountain than a gradual rise to a high elevation. The easiest way to get there is to take the track in from the Great Northern Highway (unsignposted) at S22 55 13.47 E118 49.73.



Travel along that gravel road until the signpost at S22 53 49.54 E118 40 42.63. The photo shows the rise which is the mount in the background, which is clearly unremarkable from this vantage point. Up until about 1967 nearby Mount Bruce was thought to be the highest WA

mountain, but later checks found in fact Mt Meharry was 18 metres taller at some particular point.

The next day we visited Mt Bruce and let me tell you that was a whole different ballgame in respect to access. You can in fact get right up to the base of the mountain with your vehicle, but then there is a steepish climb for a long, long time. We only went up to the first ridge and lookout and that had me puffing. Spectacular views! And a geocache reward.

