

# Trip Report -Western Australia 2013 (Stage 3)

In this trip report we detail our travelling in the remoter parts of WA. We found the most amazing and delightful places to see and stay, and truly lovely free camps in the North East of WA.

## Special points of interest:

- Niagara Dam
- Of Rocks and Dams
- Cape Le Grande



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We stayed on at Malcolm Dam for a couple of days after the other vans which had travelled with us across the *Great Central Road* had departed for differing destinations. This was mostly to allow me to seek medical help for cracked ribs, sustained while foolishly pulling myself over rocks back at the *Finke River camp* and on the *Larapinta Trail*. The ribs gave me a hard time on the *Great Central Road* and were not healing, no doubt due to that travel. I saw some great medical staff at the *Leonora Hospital* of whom I cannot speak too highly. I was given pain killers and medication for the shingles which had by now emerged to add to my woes. Properly diagnosed and medicated, I was ready to travel on, albeit slowly.

## Niagara Dam

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

Located off the Goldfields Highway 60k North East of Menzies via Kookynie Road, is Niagara Dam Camping Area. Firstly, the road to the dam is sealed for the whole trip and is easily accessed by any vehicle. We meandered South to Niagara Dam, a lovely free camp near the "Living Ghost town" of Kookynie. We were joining our Great Central Road companions Kay

and Bruce here, and their friends Chuckie and Catriana.

The area is divided into three different sections. On the top level is an un-shaded area that overlooks



the dam, is suitable for up to 4 or 5 rigs with some separation. Below the dam wall is another level and shaded camping area that would suit small gatherings of caravans. Further away from the dam is another level, shaded and open area suitable for larger groups of tents and caravans. There is one composting toilet (above Dam) and one dual flush toilet and a dump point (below Dam).

Kay and Bruce were there already and they had bagged a site above the dam with a lovely view of the dam itself and with access to the water for washing and cleaning. So of course we did some laundry and Val finished washing the van of some of the red dust from the GCR. I can honestly say we got no dust in the van, and this was in part due to the pushing in of plugs into the kitchen sink and bathroom floor. In the past we would have a slight gathering of dust around the sink and I could never work out how it was getting there. And this tip was one which I am embarrassed to say in nine years of caravanning I had not realised.

Kalgoorlie was our next destination, to pick up groceries and Val wanted some stuff from a hardware shop. He loves hardware shops like I love shoe shops.... Fortunately we were able to stay at a pleasant free camp out of town a short distance, called **Lake Douglas Recreation Reserve**. **GPS: 30°49'01.0"S - 121°22'56.0"E - (At the Highway turnoff)**

This campsite is located about 12k South West of Kalgoorlie and 26k North East of Coolgardie. The signed turnoff leads to a mine and the campsite is about a further kilometer along a reasonable dirt road. The main camping area is a large, open, level site with tables, bins and wood fire places. There are two long drop toilets which are a bit rough. The area is popular as travellers leave their caravans at the site and explore

Kalgoorlie and surrounds using this as a base

The camp site at Lake Douglas was nice but we had been told on weekends the area was used by motorbike and quad riders and could become noisy. So we packed up after two nights there and were on our way West towards Coolgardie. A pleasant cup of coffee at Charleez's café in Coolgardie was a nice break. Coolgardie's main street was so wide we could do a u-turn with the van despite cars parked on both sides!

### **Karalee Dam & Rock Site**

52 kms East of Southern Cross

**S 31 15 03 E 119 50 24**

We stopped for the night at a lovely camp site just three kms in from the highway, at Karalee Rocks and Dam. 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 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. To reflect upon the unbelievable manual labour and horsepower involved in this construction, is well worth the journey.

However the camp site also has a dump point, flushing toilet and a tap to recommend it! So we stayed for two nights, enabling us to do a full wash in the machine and with perfect sunny weather we got everything dry before mid afternoon.

We then headed South to Merredin, a lovely neat and pleasant town, where we picked up a heap of brochures on the region (including the Granite belt) at the Information office and they kindly lent us the tap attachment so we could get some water for the van. Then we headed for the first of the 'Rocks' on our list, Eaglestone Rock, a campground at the base of a rock formation and near Lake Brown (a salt lake). We chose a lovely secluded spot just before the larger campground, and had a night of peace and quiet.

Then we headed North to Beringbooding Rock, another significant and interesting site. Beringbooding Rock has the largest rock water catchment tank in Australia, built in 1937

and holding two and a quarter million gallons. "Sustenance Labour" was used to build the tank at a cost of 10,000 pounds. Beringbooding has an amazing balance boulder, a huge gnamma hole and some of the Kalamaia tribes paintings of hands in a cave at the rear of the rock. Two early pioneer wells are nearby. That the tank is still intact and the catchment channels are in good order.



*You can see the channels around "The Kangaroo Pool"*

The camp ground here is limited and I gather that is a recent development from previous days when you could camp further around the base of the rock. Nevertheless, there was a tap with water, a flushing toilet and limited mobile phone reception of one bar. (We managed to get the internet by using the van's external booster aerial). And we found a nice spot for the van on neat gravel and with native vegetation all around us.

On a day trip we visited nearby Elachbutting Rock (which had a lovely campground) and then we headed over to the small town of Mukinbudin where we did some food shopping and had lunch at the nearby café. There was a great butcher in the town so we bought some meat here and then wended our weary way back to the van for an afternoon nap. All this fun does get tiring.



After a frosty start to the day, the next morning found us packed up and headed South to another significant Rock; this time it was Kokerbin Rock we targeted.

**Kokerbin Rock**

***S31 53 12 E117 42 34***

When we arrived, we fully expected it to be full of school holiday groups from Perth but

there was only one other caravan there and we quickly nabbed the best site for us (in terms of sunlight on the solar panels and level ground).

Kokerbin Rock, also known as Kokerbin Hill, is the third largest monolith in Australia. We had a look at the fascinating well, which is more than 20 metres deep and three metres in diameter. It was constructed by hand in the 1920s to 1930s and rocks were levered into the soil to line the well walls. There are also a number of other features including the Wave Wall, Dog Rock and Devil's Marbles and a range of other interesting rock formations in the region. Kokerbin Rock is a half an hour drive from Bruce Rock, which is approximately four hours drive east of Perth, and that is why it has been popular with weekenders from the city. However, it remained quiet while we were there and the last two days we were the only people there.

All good things come to an end, and we found we needed to leave the sun and the land of free camping in tranquillity, and head for the city. It was clear bad weather was coming in, and the further South we headed the worse it was likely to be. However, we needed to travel through the more built up areas to get to our destinations of Margaret River and Cape Le Grande.

So we booked into a caravan park at Fremantle (Woodman Point Tourist Park) to wait out the cold and wet weather. It was also school holidays but the hordes were nowhere to be seen; probably tucked up in their warm houses with a heater blazing at home. The wet and stormy weather arrived but it wasn't too bad, and so we travelled around and did touristy things, and did a large wash which we were able to dry in the park dryer. This was the most efficient dryer I have ever encountered; \$1 seemed to last forever and dried a large wash of towels and sheets. Amazing.

The wet weather continued and we then felt that Margaret River would be as good a place as any to sit out more bad weather which was predicted. There are lots of wineries and other interesting places to visit in the area, which are not weather dependent. Alas though, my dream of going back out to the lovely campground at Canebroke Pool, on the Margaret River, was not to be contemplated given the weather. Next time....

Instead we took the advice of a friend (thanks Kay) and booked into Big Valley Camp and Farm Stay, a short distance South of Margaret River, and enjoyed a few lovely days in a scenic spot. This camp has all the usual features of a caravan park, including power and water, toilets and showers and a basic laundry, set overlooking a nice green valley. It was rustic but appealing and we enjoyed our stay there. The van in the photo is not on the angle the shot suggests....



One of our visits was to the Vasse Felix Winery and we booked in for lunch as well, which is an enjoyable and delightful experience. It is important to save up for this treat though....expensive!

After Margaret River, drained in pockets, we wended our way through some beautiful country over to Bridgetown and arrived at the lovely Council owned caravan park right on the Blackwood River. The park is basic, but has clean amenities and nice sites overlooking

the river. It would be a lovely park in Summer. As it was Winter, we were able to take advantage of their pay two night and stay three nights. This meant we were able to scamper around and see some of the countryside as well as go out to dinner at the Bridgetown Hotel, a great meal and very popular with locals. Bridgetown has cottoned onto the importance of attracting visitors and has created a niche market advertising itself as the Winter Capital. They had little blue fair lights on most buildings in the main street, all twinkling in a fairy wonderland after dark. Magic.

While in Bridgetown we visited a friend and enjoyed cups of coffee and chatted until the better part of an afternoon was gone, but this was a great day and good to take time out from travelling.

The calendar told us we needed to get moving and we packed up again and headed through changing forest and mallee country toward Esperance. After a solid day's driving, we overnighted at a great rest stop on the Fitzgerald River near Jerramungup, among trees and flowering bushes, and had a good night's sleep before continuing on the next day.

Our destination was the camp site at Cape Le Grande NP, right on the beach.

### **Cape Le Grande NP**

***S 38 58 42 E 122 07 11***

The last time we camped here was eight years ago, just before the Christmas holidays, and it was relatively busy. But on this occasion (Winter, remember!) we had the pick of the sites. The weather was fine and sunny and the park was so close to the beach we could hear the waves crashing just behind the dunes. We quickly set up in site no 11, near the camp kitchen, which had hot water, and a gas hotplate and barbeque.



I have to say the solar hot water showers were not too hot, but were passable.

A couple of other groups did arrive later in the day and we found that it was a nice quiet spot with congenial company in the camp kitchen at night.

This area is blessed with

beautiful bays and beaches and stunning views from viewing platforms and parks. On a previous trip we did the walk across from Hellfire Bay to Cape Le Grande Beach and had found that a worthwhile trek, and one which I would highly recommend. It took the better



part of the day (5 hours perhaps) with photos and lunch and afternoon tea breaks).



Of course, there are geocaches to be found but they are all rated quite hard terrain. There is one near the beach near our camp and it was soon bagged. And we got one on a delightful walk from Lucky Bay to Thistle Cove. What a great walk that was. I have put an arrow pointer into the photo to show the location of the geocache.

Our six days at Cape Le Grande were all blessed with sunny clear days and although the nights were cold, we were tucked into our beds by then so did not take any notice of the weather at night. It is wonderful when a spot you have previously had a great camp at is revisited and is just as good as your memories. On this occasion it surpassed our past visit, possibly due to better weather this trip. Last time we had visited in early December, just before the Christmas and school holidays, but the weather had been damp and cool. This time, the Winter days were cool and sunny.