

A Shortened Travelogue of our trip after leaving Flinders Ranges in April 2013.

After Flinders Ranges we headed down around the Eyre peninsula coast using free camps on beaches until Port Lincoln where we stayed in a Lions campground [\$12] about 5 KM out of Port Lincoln at North Shields, we have stayed there before and it is handy as a base with good facilities. Then around the coast toward Smoky Bay which is a favourite of ours, beach, jetty, or rock fishing within 100 metre of the caravan park and you can buy big oysters for \$6/dozen. I actually fluked a bloke who had just delivered a heap of oysters to people and had ½ a box of misshapen ones that are a bit difficult to open. I bought the lot for \$15 and there were 13 dozen in there so the whole group had a big seafood night. The last 3 stops had been in parks so the girls could catch up on washing and we could stock up on enough food to get to the WA border which is well into WA.



We took 3 days going across the Nullabor using free camps, I have heard people say it is boring. If they find it is boring it is because they are going too fast or too far, there is plenty to see. From the Museum at Balladonia with the Skylab bits to blowholes and cliffs. One of our stops 4 years ago was Bunda Cliffs and we camped just back from the cliffs, there was a large parking area and an unfenced track to the cliff tops. This time the Dept of Treated Pine posts as I call them or the Dept of Name changes [I see here they have changed their name again; they have had more name changes than the Labor party has had leadership changes] anyway they must have decided people were enjoying themselves too much so they reduced the parking area and put in fenced walkways. At the end of the path they had a circular viewing area, unfortunately the clowns had put it 20 metres back and you could not see the cliffs or the water in close. There were signs saying beware of falling off the cliffs but if you check it out there has been virtually no one ACCIDENTLY fall off the great Aust Bight in the last 100 years. All that now happens is people step over the fence anyway which we did or go up the road and drive in another track, the area is so remote that there is no way they can police it.

After Norseman we headed south to Esperance, which is really the start of the mine boom towns, they were spending \$350 million upgrading the road into the wharf for grain and ore trucks so they [and public] were not held up by the ore trains up to 2 km long. After Esperance we headed through the wheat belt area where there are large rocks sticking out of the ground up to ½ km across and the local farmers or Shires have put graded stone walls directing the water that falls on the rock to tanks or dams. We free camped at several of them and as soon as it started raining the water starts to run. I find this type of thing far more interesting than another gorge or mountain. In fact the famous Wave Rock is the water supply for the town of Hyden using the same principle. It is nice to cut through the country areas where we travelled on good roads, near Wave Rock we drove for 3 hours and passed 2 vehicles. Often checked out the small towns, especially if there was a country fair on. We are a bit partial to real country bacon and often check out the small town butchers and buy it by the piece, that way I can cut it ¼ " thick when I want it and it does not dry out.

A week in Perth before heading up the coast towards Geraldton, again stopping at free and cheap camps on the coast. Stayed 3 nights about 40 km out of Geraldton at Ellendale pool \$5/nite as people travelling with us had friends another 50 km further out, we did some sightseeing from there and shopped in Geraldton. From here on was all new to us so we



headed to Kalbarri and toured some more gorges on the roughest roads I have been on, the old Scout needs to be doing about 65km to cope with the corrugations! Any slower and it will shake out your fillings in your teeth. Any faster and you can't be sure where you will end up. I dropped the tyres to 25 lb but felt sorry for those in little cars as their wheels were falling into the corrugations and the whole car was bouncing up and down. Low profile tyres are no good on corrugations; need high pressures or you damage the rims. More free camps and on to Shark Bay - from now on the free camps were getting busy so we used national parks and caravan parks to tour Shark bay area.

'On the road' times: Up until then we were having a leisurely breakfast and leaving by 9 am and travelling until about 3pm, but we ended up having to leave closer to 8am because the Road Side Stops were getting that busy that if you wanted a good camp spot you had to be there by about 1.30pm. At one stop there were 40 camped for the night and we were told there had been about 100 at the next one we were heading for. After leaving the stop Elaine and I decided to count the vehicles that were obviously campers/ travellers with caravans, trailers or camping gear on the roof etc. Over the 4 hours travelling we counted 156 camping vehicles, when we got to the camp spot about 1.00pm [Mary River] there were about 40 already there. It was an old WW2 army camp so at 2.30 I went exploring. As I walked back through the camp area there were 76 there and they kept coming. The last one I heard stop near us arrived at midnight and he went just after 4 in the morning. Had a look Carnarvon and Coral bay then on to Exmouth and stayed 20 km out, near the lighthouse. You could

get a lot of different fish off the beach but the boat blokes were getting big stuff in a couple of hours. To give an idea of how many fish are there, at Turquoise Bay you can drift in this bay, the current runs one way all day and you walk in and just lay in the water with goggles and snorkel drifting about 400 metres to the end and then walk back along the beach to do it again. I sat down to put the goggles on and stuck my head under water and there were fish feeding on the stuff in the sand that I was disturbing. No Fishing allowed there though,



From now on "Nature based camping" as much as possible in \$7/day beach camps set up right on the beach. Used it as a base to sightsee and we were getting into the 5-6 metre tide areas. It was interesting being able to walk around where 6 hours earlier there was 20 foot of water. All the major towns were mining towns, all the way up the coast there were gas plants or mines, especially around Karratha. Karratha is like a new town, units being built everywhere, big airport for FiFo workers. New shopping complex, Coles, Woolies etc. Everyone was younger, I have never seen so many young people. If you were on the main road at shift changes there was a continual stream of mine Spec vehicles [flouro stripes, flags and lights] going one way or the other. A lot of FiFo worker have their own company ute and when they finish their roster they drive to the airport, park the ute in the area set aside and leave it there until they come back in a week or two depending on roster. We camped 20 km out at Cleaverville as the cheapest park (in Karratha) was \$45/nite and it was full, the others were up to \$60/nite. As we were staying around the area for a week and reckoned we were better at a \$7/nite camp and spending the money touring instead of paying \$400/week for a patch of ground the size of our kitchen.

The beach/bush camps like this are only open from May to September and max stay 3 months. This one was along about 6 km of the coast and there were areas set for camping, you could take your pick. There were about 60 camps in there but you were not crowded. A lot of them were from down south, really well set up and were using it like a lot of people in Victoria do by heading to QLD, getting away from the cold in a nice cheap camp where they can catch a fish. The area with the most camps, about 20, was called Honda hill as that was where most of the generators were.

At this stage we had spent 19 days without going into a caravan park for power or water. We picked up water from Info centres, servos or town parks, a lot of places have areas set aside where you can fill up with water and/or dump points/toilets. I have a brass tap key you can buy that fits town anti vandal taps, you just have to watch out for recycled water but the info centre can tell you if it is, although they usually have a sign up.



The only things in the van that are 240volt is the A/C and a micro wave, all the rest will work on 12 volt or gas. I have a 120 watt solar panel which kept the battery up. The battery is also charged by the car when travelling, it has a cut out that stops it discharging the battery when stopped. The 12 Volt system charged phones, computer, kept lights going and gave us TV to watch footy when we had signal or watch a DVD if we wanted to.

On through Broome, Bungle Bungles, Kununurra and did various tours then through Katherine to Darwin. There is a huge amount of construction going on around Darwin as there is going to be something like 6000 American soldiers stationed there soon. There is also some big joint Chinese project in the pipeline so they expect a big influx of people to service the projects, plenty of work for those who want it. After seeing my sister and her family in Darwin we basically had completed what we wanted and as we have been up there before we intended to head fairly straight home.

I reckon there are generally 4 types of travellers.

1/ -The backpackers, they are usually young overseas people doing it on the cheap and with limited time although quite a few do work in short stints. Mostly travel using a normal vehicle or campervan with at least 2 people sharing costs There is a fair chance the vehicle was bought from another backpacker leaving the country and I sometimes doubt if they have any insurance or whether the car would have even been registered. We have met some nice people backpacking but they are usually in the better class of vehicle or a small Britz campervan. Unfortunately they seem to be in the minority and quite simply no one trusts them as a group.



2/ -The people who still work full time, they have limited time as they are on annual leave or long service leave. They travel long distances often with kids and are heading for a particular place. They will spend a couple of weeks there and then drive straight home again. Usually fairly mobile in a 4WD with a camper trailer, small off road van or tents.

3/- People like us, often referred to as "Grey Nomads", most likely retired but have a home or a base somewhere. While they might have a vague timetable they are generally fairly flexible and will stop in a place they like for days. Some we met just stay in one place until the pension cheque comes through and then they move on. Usually they are travelling with a caravan, mobile home or campervan, reasonably comfortable and well set up. May occasionally work but mostly think it is a four letter word not to be mentioned. Did meet some who were younger and have just left work for 12 months to travel. Their reason was to see Australia before they settle down to have families and/or continue with careers.



4/- Full time travellers. These ones usually have the biggest rigs, fully set up buses/ mobile homes with a car behind either on an "A" frame or trailer. Maybe a truck with a caravan built on it with a car and boat on a trailer behind although there are many who do it on the cheap with older vans and vehicles. Often their only base is a spare block beside a relative somewhere. Usually don't have a timetable but may work for months if the job suits them. We have met people who are working in quarries, offices, workshops, caravan parks and factories. No ties, just move on when they want to or the weather changes, there does not seem to be any defined age group although usually younger than the grey nomads.

We Left Darwin on 22nd July and headed for Gorrie Airbase, an old WW2 air strip about 68 km south of Mataranka. We



wanted to do some exploring, it is back off the road and the strip is still here. There are a few small shrubs/grass that have come up through the sealed pavement but a light plane could still use it. These are the sort of places I can spend a lot of time. You can still drive around although the scrub is slowly reclaiming it. The concrete slabs where workshops, mess halls and other structures have been are still there. There are even still sections of old planes [complete with bullet holes] and other old army gear laying around. One slab was obviously a vehicle workshop and the frame of a Bren gun carrier is there, all the mechanicals have been stripped as they would have fitted the trucks of local farms after the war.

After Alice Springs we have headed basically straight for home, Free camps at Finke River, Pootnoura, Lake Hart then through Port Augusta to Burra Gorge. Lake Hart was interesting as there is the remains of a commercial salt works on the lakes edge, you could even get large lumps of fine salt from the heap remaining on-site. Stopped at Murrayville and then Bendigo before continuing home.

We did just on 20,000km, I expected our fuel costs to be higher than some other trips due to the remoter areas we would be travelling and they were. We paid 1.67/litre LPG in Timber Creek and Diesel was \$2.05, petrol was about the same. We used \$6000 of fuel, my average fuel costs were 30cent/km and our travelling companions in a Land Cruiser were 29cents/km so it cost me a couple hundred more for fuel but I catch up on service costs. The old Scout uses a \$7 oil filter, 5 litres cheap oil \$26, every 40,000km a \$15 air filter and 8 spark plugs at \$32 THE LOT, probably less than 1/3 of what a Toyota service costs. I spoke with quite a few travellers and our costs were fairly consistent with a lot of other vehicles.

I am often asked what was the best place which really is a difficult question as we enjoyed it all to varying degrees and we are all different. The question probably should be what didn't you like and the only place I would not bother going back to was the Flinders Ranges. It was interesting to visit but I thought it was over rated and overpriced. The sheer size of the country is staggering. We all know it is a big country but you realise how big when you get to Port Hedland after travelling for 3 months and you are only ½ way around the intended trip. Also one other thing that has amazed us is the huge number of people travelling, every time you stopped in a servo there was a line of cars/vans there. It seemed every second road train was carting fuel and if you take the number of vehicles travelling and they are all fuelling up every day or so it is a lot of fuel. We did not see everything and I doubt you ever could because things change, even if you travelled full time the country is so vast it is likely to be different the week after you visited something.

If you have been there, done that, I suggest you go again, if you have not left yet, go soon, as the word is that there will be many more people travelling over the next few years and I am not sure how some areas will cope.
Fred.