



*Gunbower Creek, near Koondrook on the Murray River*

*December 2015*

*Gday...*

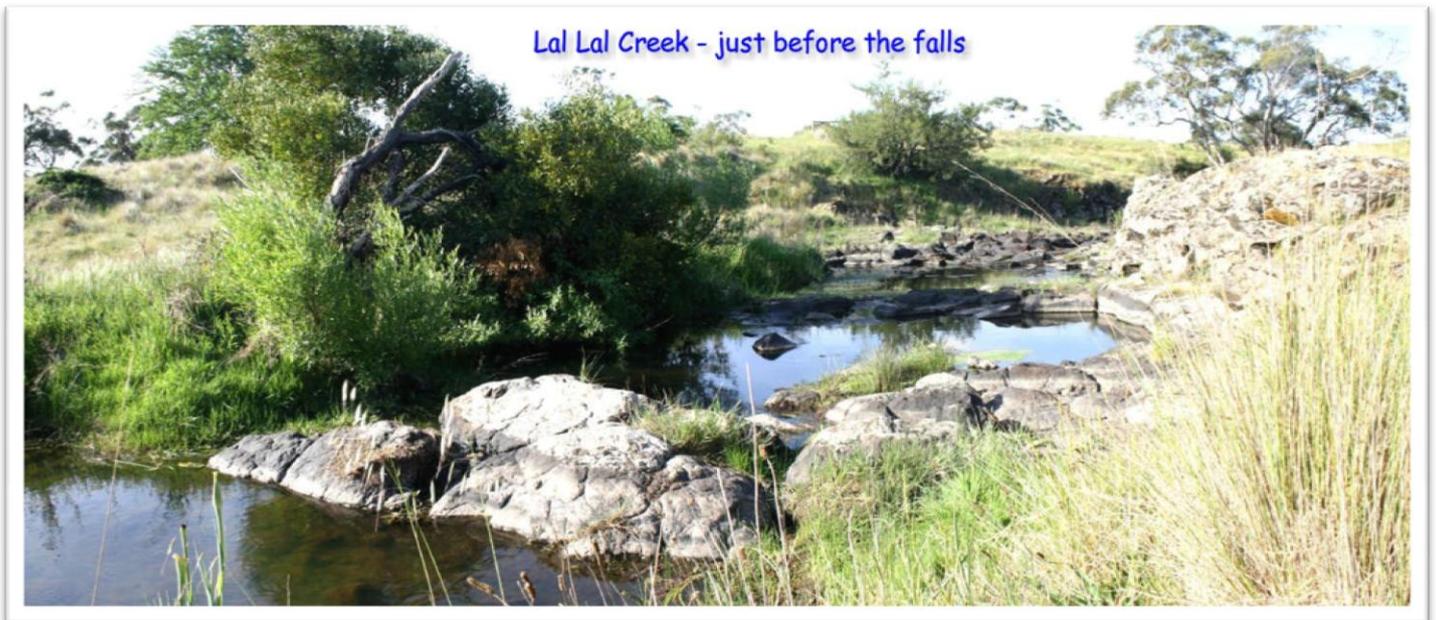
*After my daughter Jem & Alex's wedding in October, I decided to head off for a few weeks, wandering and camping. I really needed to spend at least some time on the road for 2015 and there were a couple of places I had heard of that I wanted to see, and hopefully camp at, but apart from that, I had no firm plan.*

*My first stop was at Lal Lal, south of Ballarat. I had hoped to camp at a place called the Blast Furnace Camp which is near the remains of an old blast furnace used during mining in the late 1800s. The access road did not appear too well-suited for a caravan so I walked the final 2Km in to check the road. The road in was a little bit steep and had a couple of switch-back corners but I initially felt it was probably OK for my big van. I considered using low-range to get in, and out, but the thought of 2.6tonne of caravan pushing the Landy from behind on the way in, and then pulling it back on the way out seemed just too much to chance. After all, the van is my home.*

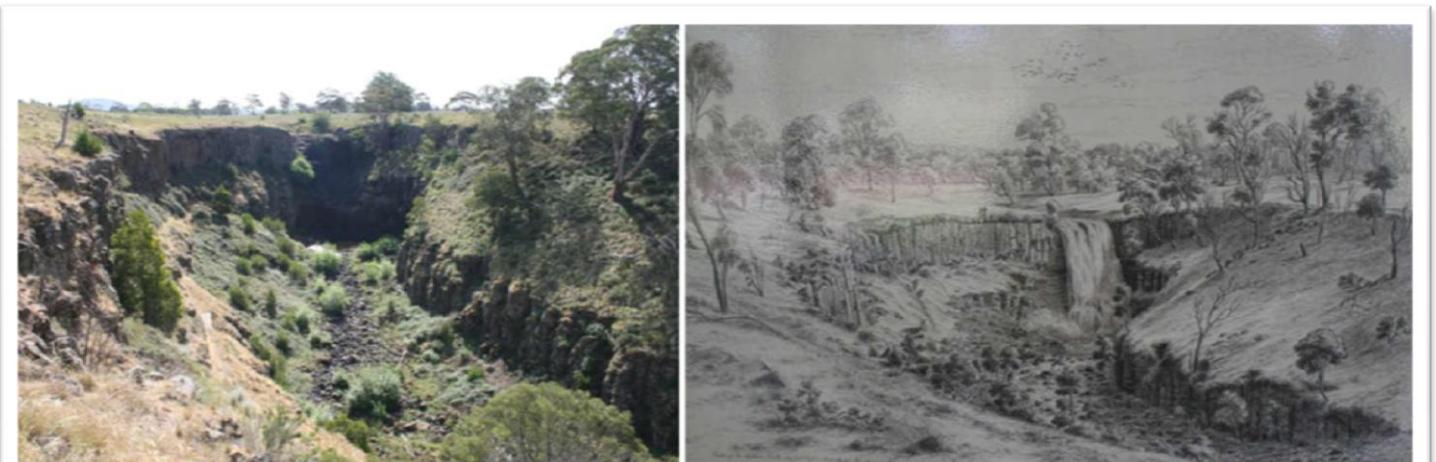
*So I moved on to the Lal Lal Falls Reserve nearby. Unfortunately, it was not the sort of camp for anything more than the night but the falls area was attractive so I took a few photos. Unfortunately, the creek had insufficient water to get all the way to the falls, so the actual falls were disappointing.*



*Lal Lal Gorge - from the top of the falls*



Lal Lal Creek - just before the falls



Lal Lal Falls 29 Oct 2015

Lal Lal Falls – late 1800s

The following morning, I headed off from Lal Lal through Maldon and on to a place I had found in the Camps book, called Waanyarra, between Dunolly and Tarnagulla. Waanyarra had been a goldmining area in the late 1800s. The original name chosen for Waanyarra was Beverly and despite this, the area was known locally as Jones' creek, after a well-known prospector. The area was officially named Waanyarra in 1861 after the aboriginal name meaning 'running water'.

The discovery of gold led to rushes to the area between 1852 and 1858. The gold in this area was considered the purest in the world and by 1859 it had attracted large mining companies to the area. The larger mining techniques and introduction of steam-driven machinery, together with a railway network expanded the area and developed a timber industry for sleeper and firewood production.

Depression hit the area in 1889 and the mines began to close, with prospectors returning to fossicking. However, the area never returned to its more prosperous days. A short-term solution was the production of eucalyptus oil but this also proved to be uneconomical and ceased around the 1920s. From the 1930s to recent times, the area continues to attract a steady stream of fossickers using modern metal detectors hoping to find their fortune.



Camped at Waanyarra, near Dunnolly VIC

As well as quite a lot of birdlife, this bloke kept wandering through my camp from time to time. I wondered just how he lost the end of this tail. I thought Stumpy was a good name for him.



I named this bloke Stumpy

Up the road a bit from my camp was the remains of the 'Welcome Inn', which was built in 1850 by convict Micheal Morton as a replica of his home in Ireland. The stone masonry building served as a home for his family of eight as well as a provisioning store and a public bar for the miners.



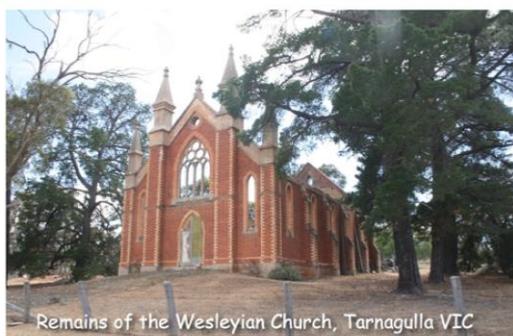
Morton's Old Hotel, Waanyarra VIC

There was no internet or mobile coverage at the camp at Waanyarra, so one day I drove into Dunolly to see the town and check email. There are many lovely old buildings but I particularly loved the old courthouse.



The old Dunolly Courthouse

A couple of days later I went into Tarnagulla to check email. There were equally old historic buildings there as well. But the remains of the Wesleyan Church was the most impressive.



Remains of the Wesleyan Church, Tarnagulla VIC

After nearly a week in the tranquillity of the Waanyarra forest, I thought I should head to somewhere with far more water – at Lake Meran about 20Km south of Kerang.



Unfortunately, while it was a relaxing and pretty place to visit, it rained for each of the three days I was there. However, I did enjoy some good walks around the lake between the persistent showers – and of course I took far too many photos.



I needed to restock my pantry so headed off through Kerang to Swan Hill, camped at Nyah Trotting track for a couple of nights and then onto Lake Benanee which is in NSW just over the border from Robinvale. Another pleasant area but the camping area was not much more than a carpark – not my favourite sort of camping.



However, because of rain and strong, gusty winds, I spent two nights here before packing up the van and heading to Mamanga Camp on the Murrumbidgee River, in the Yanga National Park near Balranald. This camp turned out to be much more suited to what I like. Right on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, trees, lots of birdlife and no-one else to disturb the peace. I stayed here for a week and thoroughly enjoyed my time here.

Yanga National Park forms part of the Lower Murrumbidgee Floodplain and includes 160 kilometres of Murrumbidgee River frontage, wetlands, lakes and breeding grounds for waterbirds. Yanga has a rich history as a working pastoral, cropping and irrigation property for over 160 years.

It has important Aboriginal and historic heritage values such as scar trees, middens and other artefacts, and historic buildings. The NSW Government purchased Yanga for its natural and cultural heritage values in November 2005.





Murrumbidgee River, Mamanga Camp

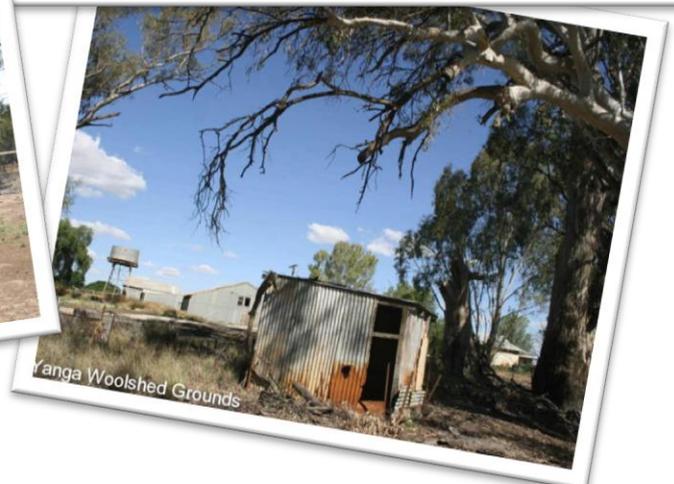
The century old Yanga Woolshed was built to accommodate 3,000 sheep and provide work for up to 40 shearers. After Yanga Woolshed was constructed it was often described as the largest and most modern in the district. Now the Yanga Woolshed houses an interpretive display describing historical aspects of Yanga Station. Well worth the visit.



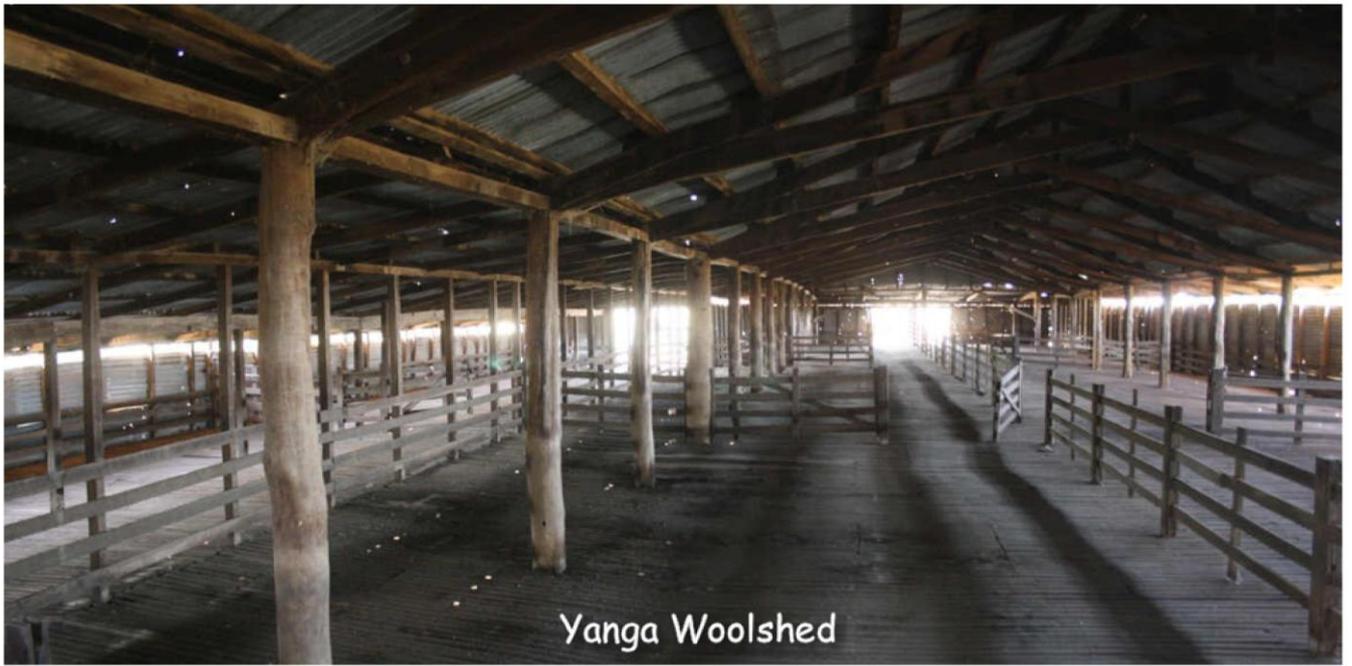
Old homestead, Yanga Woolshed



Yanga Woolshed



Yanga Woolshed Grounds



Yanga Woolshed

*Feeling quite pleased with myself after a week tucked in the bush on the Murrumbidgee River I thought I should continue seeking other good river camping spots. I had heard that the camps along the Gunbower Creek near Koondrook on the Murray River were well worth the trip. That pantry needed restocking with perishables again so I headed back through Swan Hill and Kerang and up to the Gunbower Creek.*

*I must agree with those who had been to Gunbower before me. It is a really excellent camping spot although I doubt I would like it as much in school holidays etc as it would definitely be very popular. However, it wasn't school holidays while I was there and I had the place all to myself. I looked forward to another pleasant week – and thankfully it turned out to be so.*



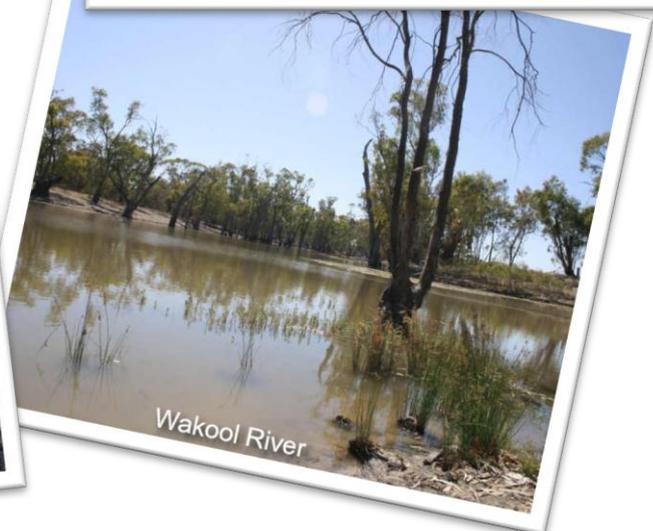
Camp on Gunbower Creek



My appetite for rivers was now whetted and I wondered which river should next be graced by my camping company. I did some research and found that there was a camping spot on the Wakool River not far south of the town of Wakool. I decided I had nothing to lose and slowly and reluctantly packed up the van and drove the long distance of 80km to Wakool.

Wakool is a small town with a population of 213. The Wakool Post Office opened on 1 January 1870 and closed in 1874. However, it reopened in 1926.

Close settlement of the Wakool area commenced in the 1890s and the town grew around a railway station established on the line between Echuca and Balranald. In 1942, rice growing was established in the area and the area also has wool and cattle industries.





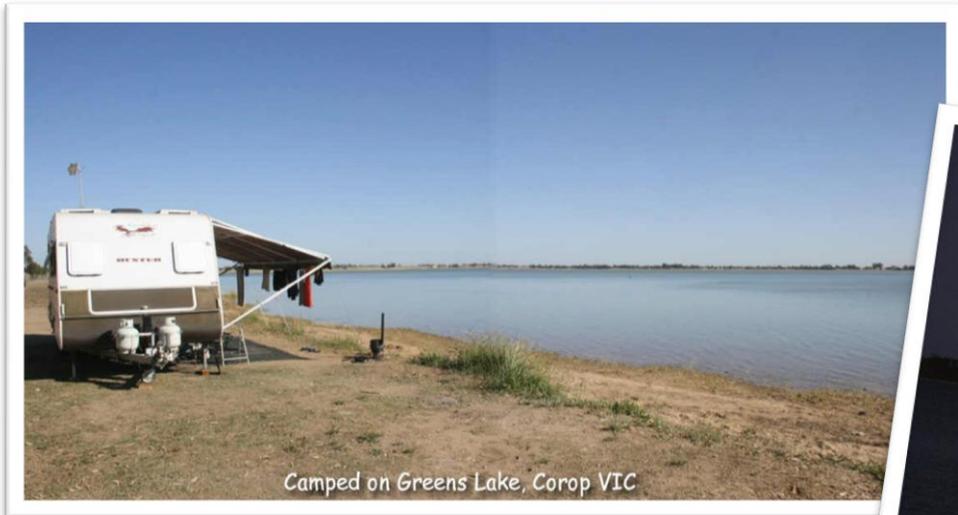
*The weather for the previous two weeks had been fantastic – I couldn't have had better weather if I had ordered it especially – just for me. There is nothing more relaxing I think than travelling slowly from one beautiful camping spot to another and then spending quiet times absorbing the atmosphere, environment and birdlife. Of course, I mainly enjoy taking photos of creeks to be quite honest.*

*It was approaching the time I needed to head back to Sale for a doctor's appointment in mid-December so I thought I had better focus on where I could wander as I began the return journey.*

*I thought I might as well call in and see my brother near at Malmsbury on the way but I still had more time that I could spend camped beside some good water before I committed myself to the homeward journey.*

*I had to call into Greens Lake, near Rochester in VIC, to meet up with some of those forum friends and acquaintances and what better way to while away some time before pointing the Landy southward to Sale.*

*The usual crew were there, well established around the boat ramp – Dave (Glenelg), Doug (Dougwe), John (Yeoeleven), Brandt (Kiwias) & Lorraine (Kiwi Rainbow). There were a whole line of GNs and a fairly constant coming and going of various GNs.*



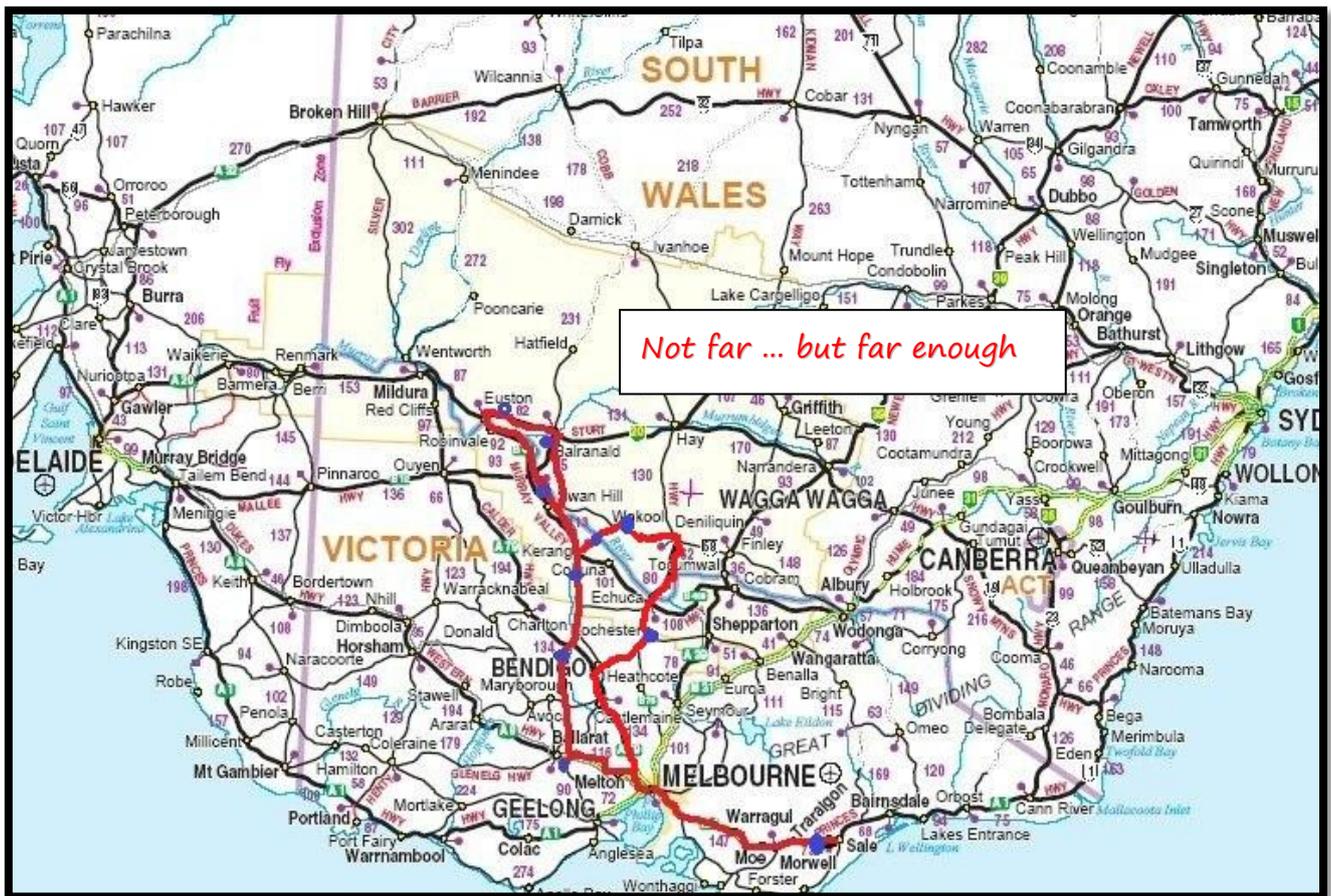
Another very enjoyable week had disappeared but time was now forcing me to head southward and return to Sale for that appointment.

I had teed up to call in to see my brother and he welcomed my quick visit. We had a good night chatting about the past, the future and having a good laugh.

So there you have it. 2015 has almost finished. Let's hope 2016 brings us all everything we want – including health, happiness and good fortune.

rockylizard (John)





My Journey