

Lorraine's July Blog

From Port Augusta to Alice and beyond...

We left Port Augusta, finally, after spending up big time on batteries and tyres, towards the end of June. Not really looking forward to a drive up the bitumen, but with the Oodnadatta Track closed or only just opened, it was our only option.

There are plenty of choices for freedom camping along the Stuart, so we decided to make the most of them.



Island Lake Lookout Camp

One that we had previously used a few years ago was at Lake Hart, which is normally a dry salt lake. Last time we visited, we were able to walk on the lake, Brodie rolled in the salt, and we watched some children make a salt-man, carrot for nose and sticks for hands. This time, as there has been so much rain, there was water on the lake; I fully expected to see paddle boarders or wind surfers – or a cruise ship!



Lake Hart Camp

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We stayed at Lake Hart for a couple of nights, before heading on via Glendambo to Kingoonya, about 40 k off the highway on a gravel road.

The old town now has a population of around 10, a pub and a primitive caravan park. Only \$10.00 for a site (with power) a decent, interesting walk around the old town, which was a railway town in its heyday (that took another 10 minutes). The ladies toilets and shower were closed, so with John guarding the Gents door I had a beautiful hot shower.



Some sites are pretty shitty!



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Others are spectacular.



The camp 13k south of Coober Pedy

Our next camp was about 13k south of Coober Pedy, where we found a rest area, with acres and acres of bush land camp sites. We had met two caravan couples (Dianne and Steve, Bryan and Sandra) at the dump point in CP earlier that day, so we joined their camp site, as security.

We were lucky enough to have camp fires each night, and between the six of us, managed to find enough fire wood to keep the fire ablaze

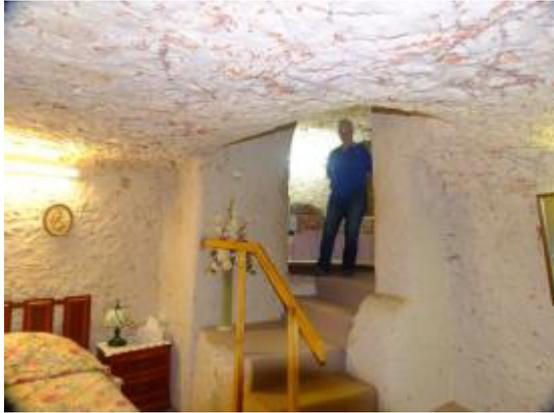


We left van there with them, while we explored the beautiful Painted Desert and the opal town of Coober Pedy. It was sad to go to the Painted Desert again, I have a beautiful photo of me and Brodie on one of the hills there, this time, we was not with us.

In Coober Pedy, we visited Faye's Dugout House, we did not see it the last time we were there.

We were amazed to find a beautifully laid out home, including a pool! All underground. She dug it on her own, including an opal mine, and lived in the home for many years, before passing away in the Brisbane suburb of Chelmer, not that long ago.

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Election Day came and went. Fortunately, we had voted early in Port Augusta, and most of our trip along the Stuart, we did not bother to put our VAST dish up to follow the results. Finally another



camp at Agnes Creek, we found a beautiful level camp in the bush, beside a dry creek. Plenty of wood for fire, in fact, a nearby camper told us where there was plenty to find. Buck and his red cattle dog Aisha were very friendly, we shared morning tea on day two (I had made a cheese and bacon scone loaf). Morning tea lasted until around 2.00pm in the afternoon.

People are so friendly on the road.

Plenty of fire wood here at Agnes Creek Camp

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Even in Marla, where the road house had run out of fuel, (quite a common occurrence we found out) travellers were sitting outside their vans having lunch while waiting for the fuel tanker to arrive to fill the tanks again. Sort of an impromptu party.

With my 60th birthday looming, we settled into the primitive caravan park at Kulgera after crossing the border into Northern Territory. Not too many places along the highway for dinner, so this was the next best thing - Dinner in the first and last pub in the Northern Territory and a bottle of single

malt whiskey from John. Kulgera is a small location on the highway with a population of 0, which is 0.00% of Australia population and 0.00% of 211,945 Northern Territory State population plus various backpackers doing their visa requirement work. We were camped in by two vans, the ladies (Heather and Jeannie) took me to the road house for iced coffee (their shout) and we joined them all at the pub that night for my birthday dinner.



Heather Jeannie and Lorraine outside the Kulgera hotel



Birthday dinner and a bottle of Grey Nomads Chardonnay



Janelle and Steve from Beerwah shouted me a whisky

Later that night, another couple we met - Janelle and Steve from Beerwah on the Sunshine Coast, shouted me a whisky. Nice day in all

We had had issues with our brake fluid when in Melbourne, and this came to a head while we were in Kulgera, resulting with a call to Alice Springs to a brake specialist, and a call to RACQ, our roadside assistance. Short story long is that we got a cheap ride into Alice.... Nothing like four hours in a cab

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of a tow truck, the Nissan on the flat top, with Dunmowin under tow.



At least we were there in time for my birthday present, a balloon flight, which we thought was going to be over the MacDonnell Ranges. We were disappointed when drove south to the balloon flight



take off point, about 20 or 30k south of Alice, boarded and 40 minutes later, were dropped off in a clay plain between the Alice Springs Prison and Pine Gap (hush hush place). Not the flight I had imagined, a lot of money wasted. At least we did get a partial refund because we did not travel the full hour!

Big surprise for me when on the Monday after my birthday, I was summoned to the reception of the caravan park in Alice, to find that one of my lovely sons had sent me a bunch of flowers. They travelled with us for almost two weeks, before they started to wilt.



While our brakes were being repaired, we had to hoof it around town, so spent some time at the Alice Springs Reptile Centre, where for the first time, I saw a Thorny Devil and held a bearded dragon, and John got to hold a beautiful HUGE python. (Did I say beautiful???)

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During our stay in Alice, brakes sorted, we headed out for a drive into the East MacDonnells, visiting various gorges, indigenous and historical sites. Arltunga Historical Reserve gives an insight to the remoteness of a gold mine, back in the 1880s. Officially, central Australia's first town, now it is a derelict site of ruins, maintained by National Parks.

Pretty Trepina Gorge was our stop over for lunch and a walk through the currently dry river which caused the gorge to form many million years ago. Lots of families were there enjoying the sun, sunbaking on the sand.



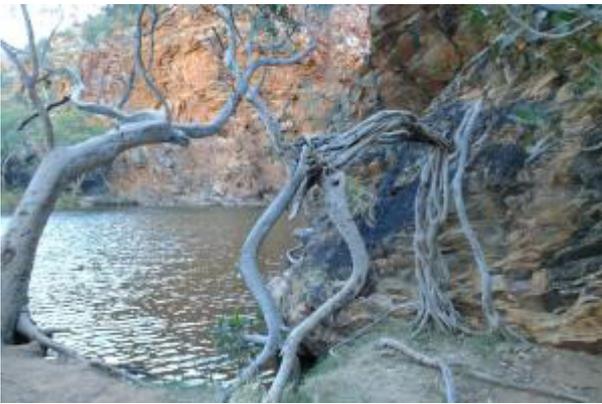
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Finally we walked around Corrobboree Rock – a sacred site for the storage of ceremonial objects by the local Aboriginal people. It is doubtful that it was every used as a corroboree site, as there is no water in the area.



Into the West MacDonnells, we called in at all the gorges and natural attractions: Standley Chasm, Ellery Creek Big Hole, Serpentine Gorge, Ochre Pits and Ormiston Gorge.

Each different from the previous, none any more or less attractive than the other. At each we walked along well formed tracks to either lookouts or waterholes – or both in the case of Ormiston and Serpentine.



Ellery Creek Big Hole



Ormiston Gorge

Finally, we got a call to say the part for our suspension had now arrived in Alice, so the drive that took us into the MacDonnells over five days, we returned along the same road in one! As we moved along Lasseter's Highway, several times, we came across the same people. Janelle and Pat were amongst these, several overnight stops – later to find them at Yulara. But that is what happens when you are driving around these areas.

At great expense to our bank account, we finally left Alice, back tracking to visit THE ROCK, previously known as Ayres Rock, now referred to as Uluru. I don't think either of us was quite prepared for the grandeur of this rock, the spectacle almost hurting my eyes! We had been given a couple of passes that had not expired, so were able to drive straight into the National Park and around the base of Uluru, both clock wise, and then anti clockwise, before taking a spot in the overflow at Camping Grounds in Yulara. We were gobsmacked at its sheer size – 348 metres high (higher than the Eiffel Tower) – to put it into perspective, the Sydney Harbour Bridge is only 134 metres. You can walk around the base – 9.4 km, or drive around it – approximately 15km. Despite what you might think, Uluru is not a long narrow rock, rather a three side rock, shaped somewhat like a misshapen strawberry.

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Our first vision of Uluru



Even though you are requested not to climb, many tourists still do

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There are three definite faces, the two we all see in the sunrise/sun set photo, and another with markings, which the Anangu people call 'the brain'. The Anangu are the traditional owners, and work with Parks Australia to maintain the National Park.

They ask that you do not climb Uluru, rather, will take you on a guided tour along a pathway, as they explain the significance of various areas. We chose not to climb, respecting their wishes.

Many still climb, especially overseas tourists, who don't seem to recognise the significance of the

Anangu's request. To put that into perspective, if you visited the

Vatican I believe ladies are requested to cover their heads, if you visit a Buddhist temple, you are asked to remove your shoes, so, when you visit Uluru, you are asked not to climb.

Sunrise is a popular time to visit, along with coach after coach of tourists, the camp site awakes around 5.00 am each day, with campers preparing themselves for the drive out before the sun wakes up. Pretty spectacular view from the viewing decks set up on the red sand dunes.



James was our guide on the Indigenous guided tour



My view of the rock at sunrise!

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Changing colours of Uluru at Sunset

The township of Yulara is nearby, a resort town offering various forms of accommodation from resort style villas down to basic camping. There is a shopping precinct, including an IGA, post office, newsagent, and many resort styled clothe shops, cafes and eateries. Quite a modern little community. Depending on what brochure you read, there are between 1000 and 3000 people living in Yulara. Yulara is the 4th biggest city/town in Northern Territory (which would not be hard). Once again, in Yulara, we bumped into travellers we had met earlier, Bryan and Sandra and their beautiful dog Rusty, who we had spent time with near Coober Pedy, and had coffee in Alice Springs, we also met up with Janell and Pat again.

About 50 k from Yulara, in the same National Park is The Olgas, now known as Kata Tjuta (meaning *many heads*), a conglomerate of 36 domes rising to 546 metres, so even higher than Uluru. You can see them from Uluru.



Kata Tjuta - you can see it from Uluru

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A pleasant walk through the domes takes you to a lookout, or you can hike the entire "Valley of the winds" hike, 7.4km.



Valley of the Winds Walk to the first lookout



We met these guys from Germany, who carry this beer fridge with them everywhere they go, even to lookouts! The fridge is called Pooh Fridge.

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After four days in the area, we moved on to Kings Canyon, bumping again into Bryan and Sandra on the way.

I didn't think I would be able to attempt the Kings Canyon Rim walk, a 6k loop – that sounds easy enough, across a plateau – still sounding easy, BUT you have to start with an ascent of 500 rock steps, nothing to hang on to, some you actually climb. Eventually the view from the top is amazing. The beehive “lost city” is amazing, the canyon is amazing. The 6 k took us 5 ½ hours (I go slow), we answered geological questions to three earthcaches on the plateau, and found one traditional cache. It was well worth the effort.



Now that is the end of our MacDonnell Ranges tour, we are now back in Alice waiting for an alternator for the Nissan to be delivered from Darwin.

We have now celebrated 5 years on the road, in that time we have covered all states of the nation (but not ACT), visited three of four extreme points (east, south and west), travelled 118,535 km and spent \$34,300 in fuel!

Having looked back over random photos, I think I will re-name my blog to “Eating our way around Australia”

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Eating our way round Australia – July

