

Outback Way Trip: May 2024

We met up together at Laverton WA - Anne and Ian Voerman, Julie and John Reid, John Worthington, and Geoff Banbury - 4 vehicles, 2 Land Rover Disco 4, a Holden Colorado, and a Toyota Landcruiser.



We were pleased to stay in the Laverton Caravan Park as it was secure and had a good camp kitchen which was great as the weather turned on us; strong wind squalls and thunderstorms. Laverton is the starting point for the Outback Way but a challenging place to live. The Visitor Centre was great with good facilities, the BP fuel centre was excellent and there is a supermarket you can access via where you pay for fuel, it had good supplies when we were there.

We headed out towards Tjukayirla Roadhouse and managed to outrun the impending storm. We camped for the night at "Desert Surf Central" free campground which was enormous and very beautiful. After a beautiful sunset we sat around the campfire and admired the stars.

Next day we headed to Warburton and fuelled up at the Roadhouse. We were looking forward to seeing the Art Gallery but the caretakers were in a "meeting" and not inclined to open it so we peered through the windows instead and there were some very nice pieces of art on display.

We continued on to Warakurna Roadhouse and Camping Ground which was very welcoming with good but basic facilities including a camp kitchen that offered a good place to gather. We met a guy who was cycling across Australia! We went to the Giles Weather Station in the morning to see the daily launch of a weather balloon. There are three staff there on rotation and they provide a talk which was really interesting and behind the weather station is the Giles Museum which is free but super interesting showing how they built the weather station in the 1930s and lots of things from Len Beadell including the grader used to build the roads before it finally gave out.

Then we set out towards the NT border as our permit for WA was only two days. We stopped close to the border to take some photos and other travellers advised us of troubles in Docker River that had erupted in the last 24 hours and that had extended to the campsite so we back tracked and found a track close by to an old quarry that provided a delightful free camp for the night. We gathered wood for a fire and stayed up late to 9pm! There was a rather inquisitive dingo that wandered around us during the late afternoon. we heard him howl once during the night but he received no answers and there were no signs of night time visitation.

Next stop Yulara for two nights. Our first view of purple coloured Kata Tjuta in the distance reminded us of a Namatjira painting. Arriving at Yulara Campground was quite a shock after the quiet of our last few days and checking in at reception required much patience. The campground had great facilities but is busy. Of course, viewing Uluru is a must and was spectacular as always.

Next, we headed to Kings Canyon and stayed two nights at Kings Creek Station and arrived in the rain so to a soggy night but it improved the next day. We went to the Canyon the next day but stopped beforehand at the Kings Canyon Resort which had a good shop and fuel and picked up some cranberry and crocodile sausages and some kangaroo sausages which were really nice. A couple of road train drivers talked to us about the Mereenie Loop Road and were waiting to get permission from their boss to take the trucks on it after the bad weather. We decided to go 26km up to a lookout to check out the conditions and it was okay. Then, we all did the Canyon Rim walk 6km in about 2 hours and had great views then back to the campsite for a dinner in their cafe.

After hearing generators for a few nights, we were looking forward to getting back to bush camping and we found an idyllic campsite on the Finke River, 2 Mile Camp, where we stayed two nights. On the second day we drove to Palm Valley via Hermansberg and had an enjoyable look around there and had a break in their cafe which we can highly recommend. Palm Valley was quite busy which was a surprise and it was nice to get back to our camp by the river. We had a wood collection stop along the way so had a great fire that night.

Next, we headed along past the well-known gorges stopping for coffee at Ormiston Gorge and headed for Birthday Creek Waterhole. It is a little tricky to see the turn off but well worth the 14km 4wd access track that crosses the river a couple of times. We spent an enjoyable night around the fire and were sad to head back to civilisation and Alice Springs.

As Annie and Ian were leaving the trip at Alice Springs to return to Canberra for work purposes, we all had an interim end of trip dinner at Hanumans Restaurant. Very pleasant evening and more than pleasant food and wine.

In Alice, the remaining travellers visited the major attractions, the Desert Park and the Araluen Gallery. The Desert Park is wonderful, and the Araluen Gallery spectacular with its numerous Albert Namatjira originals on display.

Geoff had had a tyre problem that needed repairing so wasn't able to join Julie, John and John on an overnight trip down to Chambers Pillar to catch the light of the setting and the rising sun.

John W and the Reis' headed to Chambers Pillar with the two cars. It was the day after the Finke race had finished and there were incredible numbers heading north along the road. It was the busiest track we encountered on our trip, luckily in the opposite direction. The road was extremely chopped up after the Finke road turn off about 80 km from Alice.



The Plenty Highway was next but to minimise the amount of bitumen driving, we took The Garden Road which brought us out onto The Plenty east of Gemtree.

The Plenty is in good condition with a lot more bitumen than we had expected so travel times were good. After a wasted effort at finding a camp up a side road near a river, we ended up at the rest stop at Atitjere.

It was getting late as we returned to Atitjere. John and Julie spoke to the local Policewoman who said that the community had no special rites on and that we were welcome to stay near the disused water tanks and covered tables before you get into the community. She contacted the local Aboriginal Liaison officer who visited us assuring again that it was fine. If we had used the local racecourse a local woman would have charged us \$80 per night per vehicle to stay.



Onwards to the east, we checked out Jervois Station but chose to continue to Tobermorey Station on the NT/QLD border as the afternoon was still young. This proved to be a good decision, as Tobermorey is a real oasis in the desert. Very well set up, grass to camp on, and Julie bought a fuchsia station shirt but her John refused to entertain the thought of a matching one.



Onwards we went, thinking that we might stop in Boulia for the night but again the afternoon was young and we continued to The Hilton, or as is otherwise known, the Middleton Hotel. We met Russell 70km west of Boulia when he was heading West. We missed him at Tobermorey by one day. It's a small world.

In the middle of nowhere, we free camped across the road from the pub, behind The Hilton, and all had the only meal on the menu that night, rissoles and veg. Amongst a few others, there was a young couple camped there as well. They were Finke competitors with their buggy on the back of a truck and caravan in tow. He drives, she navigates. She also is a very accomplished country singer and provided some entertainment after dinner. The pub was a Cobb and Co station between Winton and Boulia.

From Middleton it was an easy run into Winton and the end of the trip. We headed off to Winton and saw lots of Brolgas. There were lots of blind crests on the drive into Winton on single lane bitumen, so we were always looking at where we could go off the road on a crest and scanning ahead when we could. John W said he would have driven off the road to cross those crests, but he doesn't know that the crumple zone for a Disco is the other vehicle; a sand flag would have helped. We arrived in Winton and perhaps spent too much time in town and then by the time we went to the Dinosaur museum we had only enough time to see two of the three tours. We enjoyed a final dinner in the Winton main street before John W, Geoff and ourselves went our separate ways.



A final end of trip dinner was held at the Australian Hotel. The next morning, we went our separate ways, John and Julie to Cairns, Geoff to Longreach, and John to Cairns also.

This was a wonderful trip - good company, good sights, good experiences and just generally a good time.

