

Bob & Sue Dal Santo

We spent a little over 5 weeks in WA. When we left Kununurra in late July we headed for Fitzroy Crossing with scenery changing all the time. We booked ourselves on a Geikie Gorge boat and town tour for the next day. The gorge was spectacular, but not much we can say about the Town. On the way we passed through Warmun (Turkey Creek), where we paid \$1.20 for gas, and Derby where we visited the usual sights (e.g., old goal and the Boab prison tree associated with the shameful treatment of the Aborigines in times past). In Broome we experienced our first FOG, yes FOG. As in Canberra it quickly cleared up and it turned out a beautiful hot day. We went to Gauthaume Point near Broome and words cannot explain the colours and rock formation. Other fun times included watching the sunset at Cable Beach while eating fish and chips, visiting the Willie Creek Pearl Farm where the tour guide explained how they grow and collect the pearls and a Cape Leveque 4WD tour which had us getting up at 6am to be picked up at 7am for the all day tour. What a great day, the weather could not have been any better. We visited a couple of Aboriginal reserves, which were very clean - they were Beagle Bay and Lombadina. At Beagle Bay we visited a Catholic Mission with a very old Church with the Alter made out of Mother of Pearl Shells. We went for a swim in crystal clear water on a very white beach and then watched the sunset. We got back to our vans at 9.30pm very tired but we enjoyed ourselves.

We left Broome for 80 Mile Beach for a couple of days. While walking around the park we bumped into a couple of fellow CCC members, Sue & Chris Kay. Here we also sat on the beach for happy hour, watching the sunset. On 1 August we were at Pt Hedland so we could see the full moon phenomenon the Stairway to the Moon, however our pictures did not turn out well but we saw it. The next day we headed to Marble Bar to see the beautiful colours of the Bar and we were not disappointed. This nice little town is supposed to be the hottest town in Aus, but it was only 26 deg C that day. Next stop Tom Price in the Pilbara. Not much of a town but the nearby Karijini National Park was well worth a visit because of the spectacular gorges and falls (will visit here again because there is so much to see). Sue had a close encounter with a King Brown snake on one of our walks. This NP has such spectacular scenery. From Tom Price we headed to Exmouth, Carnarvon for three days for shopping and to have some rest time, Hamelin Pool, Kalbarri and arriving in Geraldton in mid-August. We visited Kalbarri National Park along the coast and the loops and gorges of the Murchison River. This is also a unique area worthy of a longer visit.

Most caravan parks along the WA coast are fully booked at this time of year. However, we managed to get sites either by arriving early after staying at a free camp the night before or being prepared to stay in a holding area without power until powered sites became available.

Leaving Geraldton, we headed in an easterly direction to Mullewa and stopped to look at the Catholic Church built by Fr Hawes who designed and half built the Cathedral in Geraldton. We got to see the mysterious wreath flower near Pindar on the way to the Goldfields. The wild flowers out this way are far between due to not much rain having fallen in this area. Stopping at Mt Magnet overnight, we then drove around the area before moving on to Sandstone and Leonora via Leinster which are also mining towns dotting the desert. We visited Gwalia, a Ghost town near Leonora, which was abandoned when the mine closed down and the people just walked away leaving their bungalows and much of what they owned - a must see area, very eerie. On the way to Kalgoorlie we drove into Lake Ballard near Menzies to see "Inside Aust. Exhibition" by Anthony Gromley, consisting of metal sculptures on the dry salt lake. These were most unusual. The caravan parks at these little mining towns were good value for money. At Kalgoorlie we mainly rested and stocked up on supplies as we have done tours of this area before.

We started heading across the Nullarbor in late August via Kambalda, Noresman and Balladonia. We had a good free camp at Baxter, which is between Balladonia and Caiguna. Next overnight stop was Eucla, which has seen some minor changes since we were last there. On reaching Ceduna we started heading for Adelaide via the Eyre Peninsula. We visited many beautiful seaside towns including Venus Bay via Smoky Bay, Streaky Bay, Port Kenny, stopping at Murphy's Haystacks (large granite boulders) for lunch, and took in the great scenery at each stop. From Venus Bay we moved on to Elliston and then to Port Lincoln on to catch our breath and get our cars serviced. This whole area is well worth another visit as there are many places we didn't visit. While at Port Lincoln, we went for a drive down to Coffin Bay - another beautiful little secret area. Leaving Port Lincoln, we travelled up the eastern side of the Eyre Peninsula through Tumby Bay and Port Neill, stopping at Cowell for morning tea, as the winds were very strong by this time. We had a long walk around town hoping the winds would drop. Sue forgot to tell Bob that she left the fridge running on the car battery and we got a flat battery temporarily (it had revived itself by the time the on-call RAA mechanic had turned up to fix the problem). This turned out to be a good thing and we decided to stay there overnight, as it was too dangerous to go on. Next day, we travelled on via Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Germain, the infamous Snowtown and Port Wakefield, reaching Adelaide on 1 Sept. We spent Father's Day at Glenelg and Adelaide's north shore before leaving for our 3 day tour of Kangaroo Is. While KI was an interesting place to visit, it brought us from quite warm weather to very cool conditions so that 3 of us caught colds and flu.

From Adelaide we travelled to Woomera and the opal-mining town of Coober Pedy. We did the tour of the underground buildings and, of course, the opal shops looking for presents. On the way to the NT/SA border we blew the roadside caravan tyre 5km from Cadney Homestead. Dennis and Jill had to take the spare, which was virtually flat to the fuel stop at the Homestead to have

it pumped up, and we were able to purchase a replacement tyre at a little place further on called Marla. That day we still travelled 400 km and stayed at the free camp at the Border, which was the best free camp we encountered on our trip in terms of layout and accessibility. Our next stop was the fairly basic caravan park at Curtin Springs (turn left off the Stuart Hwy at Eralunda), from which we travelled out to experience the awesome beauty and uniqueness of Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the Olgas. Bob had his own unique experience of climbing to the top of Uluru, while Sue and Jill did the 9.5 km walk around the base of the Rock. We all did the 4hr Valley of the Winds walk through the Olgas. We also took photos of Uluru at sunset.

Mid-Sept we headed for Alice Springs via Stuart Well, where we were entertained by the singing dingo. We stayed at the very comfortable Big 4 caravan park at Alice for 7 days, taking in the stunning gaps, chasms and gorges of the East and West MacDonnell Ranges. The weather was continuously very hot since we left Adelaide and Sue was unfortunate to come down with food poisoning on top of a chest infection as a result of the flu. This meant she was unable to accompany the rest of us on our paid 4WD bus tour to Hermannsburg Mission (home of Albert Namatjira) and Palm Valley in the Finke Gorge National Park. We enjoyed our stay in Alice and found it clean and friendly. We then headed north and back to Cloncurry, QLD stopping at Wycliffe Well (self-proclaimed UFO capital of Oz), the Devils Marbles and Tennant Creek, and then back on the Barkly Hwy through Mt Isa.

Sue drove everyone mad with her obsession for taking photos of wild flowers. She kept making Bob or Dennis stop so she could get out and take a close up of the flora. To her credit she has a very good collection of the flora, including good clear close-up shots.

At Cloncurry, we headed off another blowout by replacing the right side caravan tyre, which Dennis noticed had a considerable bulge (in fact it bulged on both sides). We travelled without our vans to Lawn Hill Nat Park from Cloncurry, north-west via Burke & Wills Roadhouse and Gregory Downs, staying in dongas (cabins) at Adel's Grove for 2 nights. Lawn Hill is not far from the Qld/NT border and can be described as an oasis in the desert. We went bathing and canoeing in Lawn Hill Creek, which is as wide as a river and is fed by an underground spring. We were very well looked after by the staff at the resort. Day and night time temperatures were quite high. While at Cloncurry we also visited the John Flynn Place Museum, which presented very good displays setting out the establishment of the flying doctor service.

We set off down the Matilda Hwy homeward bound on 1 Oct and travelled to Winton via McKinlay where we called in to the Crocodile Dundee Pub. We stayed at Winton for 2 nights and visited various attractions, including the Waltzing Matilda Centre, spending a couple of hours viewing the professionally presented displays, and went on a guided tour of the dinosaur tracks at Lark

Quarry. Our next stop was Longreach where we went on a sunset cruise on the Thomson River and visited the Stockman's Hall of Fame and the Qantas Museum - both well presented and very interesting and informative about outback activities and history. Next stop overnight at Tambo (via Barcaldine and Blackall), arriving at Charleville on 7 Oct. At Charleville we experienced some rain for the first time since crossing to the NT in late June. We were due to view the night sky at the Cosmos Observatory but were unable because of the clouds. From Charleville we travelled to Bourke (via Cunnamulla), where we stayed at the oasis-like Kidman's Camp, and then Dubbo, where we caught up with a couple of ladies we met on our Cape York tour. We were glad to reach Dubbo to get away from the high 30 deg temps and generally dry conditions we had experienced up north. We returned home mid-October via Cowra and a wet overnight stop at Boorowa.

On our trip we travelled a bit over 20,000 km towing the van and over 5,000 km touring with our car, a total of just over 25,700 km, and stopped overnight at 7 free camps. We also travelled another 5,000+ km with 'Wickies tours' because we took turns in taking our vehicles on the various self-drive tours. "

*The Wonderers, Sue & Bob Dal Santo
November 2007*