

NORM AND GLENDA'S BIG TRIP NEWSLETTER #11

Cheers to everyone!

Well, I guess we can officially say we are 'on the way home' as we are now travelling east. We expect to be in Canberra towards the end of June for about a week, before we turn north to escape the cold weather until around September 2012. While we are in Canberra for the short period in June we will be staying in the caravan at EPIC.

Whyalla

Whyalla is one of the largest regional centres in South Australia. Having said that we were surprised as it was not as big as we thought it would be. There are some lovely old buildings and the Maritime Museum is an excellent tourist attraction. The museum is home to the HMAS Whyalla named for the city of Whyalla SA and was one of 60 Bathurst class corvettes constructed during World War II.



The museum is also home to one of the largest HO scale model railways in Australia. Norm and I are not usually model railway enthusiasts but we really enjoyed this and could have stood around all day looking at them.



Whyalla is an iron ore town so, like other mining towns it does not matter what colour the building started as, it will end up red.

We went to have a look at the stick figures at the Freycinet/Flinders lookout:



And, the views from Hummock Hill were pretty good:



Our original plan was to travel from Whyalla to Port Pirie to catch up with friends and then travel up to the Flinders Ranges. However, it turns out our friends were expected at their daughter's to help celebrate their grandson's first birthday and, were leaving Pt Pirie the day after we were arriving. Not to be deterred and, ever the flexible caravanners, we turned left instead of right (or was it right instead of left? I am directionally challenged!) and travelled up to the Flinders Ranges for a few days. We stayed at the Rawnsley Park Station just on the edge of Wilpena Pound. On our first day we toured around Wilpena Pound in our own car but, for the second day we booked a full day 4X4 tour which turned out to be an excellent option. We travelled through gorges and to lookouts with spectacular views. We decided we had made a good choice for this tour as, on our way back, we saw our neighbours from the caravan park at the side of the road – with one shredded tyre where the spare used to be and, the left rear wheel sitting on the road – with all six wheel studs sheared off!

Our driver got in touch with the road service people when we reached a spot where there was a signal and had them send out a tow truck – our neighbours did not get back to the caravan park until about 9pm that night.

Flinders Ranges



Our tour also included lunch at the Prairie Hotel – another person on the tour checked on the prices for accommodation and told us the upmarket rooms at the hotel are about \$200+ a night!



It was suggested to us on our way into Wilpena Pound that we should not miss visiting the Jeff Morgan gallery at Hawker, to view his Panoramic painting of Wilpena Pound. It was terrific and I am so glad we did stop – photographs were allowed and I also took a video of the panorama – it is just stunning:



The property next to Rawnsley Park Station has an interesting mailbox – someone told us the owner of the property was the previous manager of Wilpena Pound and, he also drives a pink Landrover:



Clare Valley

From the Flinders we travelled to the Clare Valley which, in my view, is a wine growing area stuck in the middle of nowhere! We travelled through kms of grazing and crop fields and just when you think there must be a mistake in the brochures, you drop into the wine growing area – the first grape vines were spotted just 8kms out of Clare on the R M Williams Highway! Apparently most of the wines are located to the south of Clare. Clare is a pretty little place but since it is mostly a Riesling area we did not visit the wineries, as I do not drink wine and Norm only drinks reds. We were expecting more of a gourmet food type place but the best we could do while we were there was a Thai lunch – we had the best Pad Thai and Nasi Goreng that we have had for a long time. We were lucky (or unlucky?) to be in Clare on the weekend

of the rodeo which was held at the showgrounds across the road – the party finished about 1.30am – Norm slept through it and I read through it!

Clare has some lovely old buildings that have been restored beautifully:



Port Pirie and we finally met up with Graham and Beverly. Port Pirie is a nice place and the caravan park on the foreshore is lovely – despite the fact that the person in the office needs an attitude adjustment! I think she might have been in the army at some stage because all the instructions were given in a sergeant-major tone – we made sure we did not get on her wrong side.

Norm was in his element when Beverly provided scones for morning tea which then progressed to a lovely BBQ lunch – they have a beautiful garden with lots of birdlife and Beverly and I sat and chatted about knitting etc while the boys discussed cars, caravans etc. The following night Beverly cooked a delicious lamb roast dinner so we were truly spoiled. Graham and Beverly took us out and around Pt Pirie for a day and we had lunch at the pie shop in Wirrabara (don't ask me to say it) – great pies and pasties. Everything is so green around the area and there are some great photo spots.



We also met up with Norm's youngest brother, Darren, who was doing some work in Port Pirie/Port Augusta for a couple of days. We managed a couple of short visits but his timetable was pretty full so we were unable to go out for dinner together.

Renmark

We were only going to stay in Renmark for a few days and then move on to Mildura for Easter. It turned out that the parks we contacted in Mildura were booked out so we decided to stay in Renmark as there was one spot available (a cancellation). Renmark Riverfront Holiday Park is one of the nicest parks we have stayed in on this trip. It is beautifully maintained, green and clean. The Murray River is full and flowing fast. Some reports say there may be some flooding towards the end of April because of the waters moving down from QLD – we will have already left the area by then! Our new front yard looks like this at sunset:



There is a local identity at Renmark – 'Chook man' – he has a homemade river boat and travels up and down the river playing country and western music. He apparently sometimes stops in the caravan park and gives a musical performance and he sells his CDs. He is quite eccentric and the river boat is something else – there is a sign hanging up on it hat is interesting - 'Wilitsinkorwon'tit':





There is more information about Frank, the Chook Man, on the internet if anyone is interested.

During the Easter/school holidays the Loxton Historical Village was open. The village has over 30 fully furnished buildings and exhibits and, for some (not me of course, I am too young!) would bring back memories of a past era. I don't know about teaching the children about 'the old days' as they do not appear to be interested in it unless it can be carried in your hand and manipulated with your thumbs! One of the buildings is a 1920s style garage organised and built with the help of the Riverland Vintage and Classic Car Club. There is also a fully equipped blacksmith's shop, the Pioneer Memorial Chapel, a bank, a general store, a school and a railway station. The general store is also a bakery and there is the smell of freshly baked bread when you arrive. It was a great day and we enjoyed a lovely morning tea and lunch prepared by the local ladies – yummy pasties and cakes.



People were dressed in period costume and were more than happy to pose for photos.



We also took a lovely cruise up and down the Murray River on the PS Industry – a paddle steamer. What a wonderful way to spend a couple of hours doing absolutely nothing but look at the scenery. The PS Industry appeared as the Lady Mabel in the television series 'The River Kings':



Mildura

We have been to Mildura a couple of times before so we did not feel the need to do a lot of the touristy things – we generally had a very restful time. We did do another cruise up and down the Murray River – this time on the PV Rothbury – the scenery along the Murray is ever changing and never gets boring. On this cruise we went through Lock 11 which added additional interest. There are some lovely houseboats on the Murray River and if anyone is looking for a fantastic holiday, this would be it. There are various sizes, sleeping from 4 up to 12 and there are a couple that are 5 star – complete with spa on the top level.



We met up with family friends here and we were treated to another baked dinner – we could get quite used to this sort of spoiling!

Swan Hill

I have said previously that we have discovered we are coastal people but, there is something about life on the river or, more particularly, the Murray River. The river is full, fast flowing and it is pretty spectacular. The surrounding land is fertile and green, the birdlife abundant and, the mozzies have been on steroids! After having bathed in insect repellent it is wonderful to sit by the river and just watch it flow by. There are geese, ducks etc in this park that have obviously been here for a long time and are quite used to people – as soon as you sit down they also come to sit and visit awhile:



Again, we have just relaxed and we are staying an extra day so that I can put my body in for a service – they have an Ella Bache salon here so I took the opportunity to book in for a super moisturising session!

There is another paddle steamer here, the PYAP but we did not bother with another boat ride here as our next stop will be Echuca and, hopefully we will be able to go for lunch or dinner on our favourite paddle steamer – the Emmy Lou.



We will probably stop for a few days at Ballarat and then on to Geelong. We are due in Geelong at Norm's mother's place on 28 April and the caravan is booked in with Concept in Melbourne on 1 June to have a new front piece put on – no, we did not have an accident – the front has developed a slight 'bow' at the top and a couple of small cracks. We let Concept know about it last year and they are replacing it under warranty – they knew there was a problem with the design. A plug here for Concept – we cannot fault them – they are fantastic to work with. So much so, that we will be talking to them about building another caravan, when we take this one in. Yes, I think I have almost convinced Norm we could do it again! So, I have already started a document called 'The Nelson' by Concept – I have about four pages so far of what I want and what I don't want. Hopefully, our financial adviser, will give the go ahead!

We will be in Geelong for about two weeks and then on towards Lakes Entrance where we will be meeting up with our neighbours, Mark and Jenny. After Lakes Entrance we will travel up the coast, arriving in Merimbula for the long weekend in June, for the Jazz Festival. We will meet up with Joe and Maureen (Canberra Caravan Club) for a great weekend of music, food and, happy hours! After the jazz we will travel to Bateman's Bay for a rest week and then on to Canberra. We have almost perfected the art of pacing ourselves with our current 'busy' lifestyle and make sure we have adequate rest breaks!

Could you please make sure the heat is on for our arrival at the end of June!

Cheers to all

Glenda and Norm