

Hi all - newsletter #3

We left the Yorke Peninsula and travelled thru to Port Augusta, with what we thought was going to be a short coffee stop on the way at our new friends, Graham and Beverley in Port Pirie, to pick up the wool I had delivered there. Graham kindly provided some tools and knowhow and helped Norm fix our 'D' handle on the caravan which had come lose. Coffee turned into a roast leg of lamb lunch which Beverley had prepared complete with the baked vegies and gravy! It was just lovely and Beverley and Graham were very disappointed that we were not staying in the area for a few days, because they were all geared up to take us around to some of the sights! We made a promise that we would return next year and we would stay a few days then.

Port Augusta - talk about the 'crossroads of the country'. The Big 4 Caravan Park at Port Augusta is like Grand Central Station at rush hour, with a majority of the vans pulling in for a quick overnight stop before moving on to all points, some only staying about 8-10 hours - long enough for a sleep and, they don't unhook. You would not believe that we would run into anybody we know but there were Peter and Sue from the Canberra Caravan Club - on an overnight stop on their way to the west. What an excellent reason for a good chin wag and catch up and of course, a couple of drinks to keep the tonsils lubricated. So far on this trip Norm has met three or four people that he has either worked with, in the same building as or, was involved in the 2003 bush fires with him or, who he has lived very close to at some time. It is a very big country but a very small world. The weather is finally improving but I still have my new bests friends operating as required. I have finally pulled out my 3/4 pants and T shirts though because the days have been warmer and sunny. Whilst in Port Augusta we visited the Wadlata Outback Centre which was brilliant and well worth the time and money to see it. It tells the history of the outback, how the land was formed and the Aboriginal stories associated with the land, flora and fauna. A must see and the cafe there makes excellent coffee and kangaroo burgers. We also went on a Gulf cruise that took us about 10 kms up the top end of the Gulf to where the Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas meet. It was a two hour trip and we were accompanied by a variety of bird life and a pod of dolphins that have remained in the area for so long they all have names.



Just up the road from Port Augusta is Quorn where the Pichi Richi train is and we took a two and a half hour ride from Quorn to Woolshed Flat with a typical railway lunch (pies, sausage rolls, tea and coffee) and then return to Quorn. It was a great day and we had to stop a couple of times for some sheep to get off the track. There is also a dog named Doug that waits on the track for the train to come and then races along beside the train barking like mad until it reaches the end of their property. There were also some runaway camels - still with the saddles on, they had got away from their riders!

Woomera - oh dear! Very interesting place but unfortunately it is a dying town. In fact there were people there at the same time as us, from Defence, assessing the continued viability of the bases there. We had a look at the now closed Immigration Detention Centre which did not look at all as bad as some people made out. Still, I am glad I did not have to go there to work when I was working for Immigration. There is next to nothing in the town apart from the bowling alley provided by the Americans when the base was in full operation. We did a day trip to Roxby Downs which turned out to be quite the opposite to Woomera. Of course, the town receives an enormous amount of support from BHP and now has one of the biggest Woolies I have ever seen. Nice shops and cafes, movie theatre, clubs, hardware, clothing etc. The town is very clean and the homes look to be very well maintained. We were unable to do the tour of Olympic Dam as there was not one running while we were there but there were a couple of places where we were able to get a good view of the operation. I (Glenda) managed to find a hole and fall in it - thank God it was only as deep as my waist! I was told I would not be allowed out on the opal fields when we got to Coober Pedy - why not?



As we left the coffee stop at Glendambo we noticed a terrible smell coming through the air con in the car. Norm contacted Nissan Road Service who said we could drive the car safely without the air con and we could either continue our trip north and get it fixed in Alice Springs or return to Port Augusta - we chose to continue to Coober Pedy and Uluru and booked the car into Alice Springs.

Coober Pedy - been there, done that and don't need to do it again. Nice park but there was no hook up to water and you have to pay for your water to fill your tanks (20 cents for 40 litres) and showers (20

cents for 4 minutes). I did some washing here in the park washing machines but had to redo it at Uluru because it all smelled - I think it was probably bore water - ugh! Cold nights here but beautiful during the day. We did the bus tour around Coober Pedy and despite the previous order I received I did get out of the bus at the opal fields - but someone was a very close minder! Apparently, they tried to make it law in Coober Pedy that all diggings had to be back filled when mining was abandoned or completed, including

all the test holes. However, they worked out that they would have to go back and backfill tens of thousands of holes that have been left, including open cut sites, so they gave it away - all the holes are still there - good job I don't sleepwalk.

We also did our flight over Lake Eyre from here. We were gone about 4 hours with a stop of 45 mins at William Creek (OMG!). Those round things are the men's and ladies toilets - previously they were 50,000 water tanks! Surprisingly clean but then I did not have to spend much time there.



The flight over the Lake (80 per cent full) and the Painted Desert was spectacular and we arrived at William Creek where the remnants of some rodeo/gymkhana something or other on the weekend were still hanging around, some who from their appearance appeared to be nursing hangovers and were indulging in 'hair of the dog' activities. Would you believe it but out in the middle of nowhere - I (Glenda) was speaking to a lady who turned out to be the sister of my neighbour when I lived in Kaleen ACT! Our flight was two days after the helicopter accident that killed two ABC reporters and the pilot so I (Glenda) was a bit nervous about the flight but all was well. In Coober Pedy Norm took me to see Yani at Umoona Opals and purchased two



opal charms for my Pandora bracelet. Yani also gave Norm a very good discount for old times sake, as Norm used to take bus tours there when he was a coach driver about 20 years ago. The Stuart Range Caravan Park in Coober Pedy is a bit basic but it does have a licensed pizza restaurant that serves absolutely beautiful pizzas and little bottles of champagne. The indigenous population in Coober Pedy is a bit of a problem in that most of them just seem to sit (or lay) all along the main street all day - they seem to start at the top and work their way down to the bottom by the end of the day. There are a couple of very nice underground hotels/motels, one has a very nice coffee shop and gift shop.

Uluru/Ayers Rock - we drove straight through to here as we did not want to stay overnight at Eildunda. What a lovely oasis in the desert - the caravan park is very nice but needs some work if they want to keep up their reputation. Norm was talking to the head gardener who said they have been given a large sum of money to spend on the property to bring it up to its previous standard. We had to prove our age when we

checked in so that we could have an alcohol permit which would allow us to buy drinks at the resort - and I thought looks told all! It is a lovely place but unfortunately it is probably one of those places that once you have seen it there is really no need to go back. We went out to the rock and I was staggered by its size and might - pictures really do not do it justice. I was also very surprised though at the people attempting to climb it (some succeeded) and their ages. Some were quite young but as we know they know no fear and some were quite 'mature' and who apparently also knew no fear! It was never my intention to the climb the rock and once I saw it I could not for the life of me, work out what possesses other people to try it. We also went out with all the gear and the did the sunset happy hour - very nice and the colours are spectacular.



As you can see Norm has not yet mastered the art of smiling - this is a work in progress and hopefully by the end of the trip he will have improved somewhat.

We decided to do the helicopter flight over the rock and the Olgas, despite the previous helicopter accident and the news that a sightseeing plan over Lake Eyre had to make an emergency landing out in the middle of nowhere. It was absolutely wonderful and I needn't have worried and, I am so glad we did it.

We ended up staying an extra day at Uluru because Norm developed a 'not well' feeling which turned out to be severe indigestion due to ?????? (not from my cooking!) - given that he has had heart problems in the past we decided to get him checked out. We attended the medical centre where they took him in as an emergency patient on the referral from the 1 800 telephone medical advice people. Within minutes he was hooked up for an ECG, had blood tests taken and medication for pain administered. We were pretty impressed with the service which, for all Australian permanent residents/citizens, is covered by Medicare, even the medication. One



interesting thing though is, there is no chemist at Uluru and given its location, which is literally in the middle of nowhere and attracts a lot of overseas and Australian visitors, you can only buy what is available at the local IGA - basic only. So, if you are coming here, remember to stock up on your needs for what ails you, beforehand. The doctor advised Norm to take it easy for a couple of days until he had finished the medication so we decided to go straight thru to Alice Springs and not go to Kings Canyon on the way. We had some local folk sharing our campsite at the rock that we nicknamed Harry and Harriet (desert mice of some sort) and George (rabbit). The rabbits are apparently eating anything that is green and newly planted and they look extremely healthy. We suggested rabbit stew to the gardener - he would have been happy to accommodate this but said he would lose his job as they are protected in the park.



Alice Springs - what a lovely place and the Macdonnell Ranges are spectacular. The first two nights we were there they were doing a controlled burn across the top of the Range which is just behind the caravan park.

The Big 4 Caravan Park is beautiful, spotless and, has something going on all the time. Every Sunday morning is a free pancake breakfast. We have also had a Didgeridoo demonstration/performance and a Star Spotting night with an astronomer, a country and western night etc. The car has now been repaired - the problem was the heater core split and was leaking coolant onto the exhaust which then sent fumes through the air conditioning. Luckily Nissan had the part but it did require them to practically dismantle the car to fix it. Nissan provided us with a hire car so we were okay for transport. We have looked around town, done some shopping (Yes, I purchased a kit for another quilt - more stuff to send to Norm's mother) and we have done a couple of sight seeing things. We are booked in here until 12 September and we have met up with friends from Canberra, Pam and Jeff, after they travelled down to Alice Springs on the Ghan. They are staying in a cabin at the same caravan park - more happy hours and gab fests. Pam and Jeff reboard the Ghan on 11 September to go to Adelaide. We all went out to Stanley Chasm and waited for the sun to move to the right spot for some pictures



Extending our stay here in Alice Springs has allowed us some much needed down time - this caravanning/touristy thing is quite tiring you know. And of course, there has been more time for shopping!

Before Pam and Jeff arrived Norm thought he would try out some four wheel driving out to Palm Valley. After we had traversed through a dirt road, a gravel road, three creeks I had almost reached the level of my endurance. We managed to get to two kms short of Palm Valley and Norm decided that discretion got the better part of valor and we turned around - I think it was at the same point that I decided the car was not equipped to walk up rocks vertically! Note the word 'Severe' on the sign - that tells me that possibly you need a Bushmaster to make the trip?



However, the scenery was beautiful - the second picture below is the 'road' into the valley.



Pam and Jeff have gone off to Ayers Rock for a couple of days and we are visiting a couple of galleries in town. We have also outfitted ourselves with new walking boots, walking sticks etc with intentions of improving our hiking skills over the next few months.

Well, that is all for now. We hope everyone is well and enjoying some nice weather now that Spring is in the air. I am pleased to report that the weather for us has improved a lot and I have now parted company with my NBFs (electric blanket and heated car seat) and the shorts have come out!

TTFN

Norm and Glenda