

The Hamer Newsletter



Hello to One and All,

Our first newsletter had us at Brooms Head Beach (NSW) and contemplating the drive to Coffs Harbour so Frans could fly to Brisbane for a board meeting. It was hard to leave beautiful Brooms Head, but it had to be done so off we went with Bev driving (yes, Frans actually let Bev take the wheel with Stopalot behind) and made it safely to Split Solitary Beach caravan park on the outskirts of Coffs Harbour. Believe it or not, this place was even better than Brooms Head beach, and we enjoyed a stay of 6 nights with some very good company – a couple from New Zealand who also have an F250 and a 5th wheeler and who spend several months each year in Australia, and several other people with whom we enjoyed “happy hours”.

Whilst at Coffs Harbour we celebrated Frans’ 63rd birthday on 21st February – not too long before we can really call him a “Senior”. We went on a round trip drive to Sawtell, Bellingen, Dorrigo, Corumba and back to Coffs. Fang handles dirt tracks really well but boy, does he get really dirty, and with water restrictions everywhere it is impossible to keep him clean. The next trip was along the Waterfall Way to Guyra via Dorrigo. Fang performs well going up the mountains hauling Stopalot, but the fuel consumption is rather high. We stayed at Mother of Ducks Lagoon at Guyra, initially for 1 night. It was wet and windy and rather cold – our first taste of cold weather since we started this journey. The next morning as we were getting ready to go, the news reports about the share market “correction” originating in China were concerning Frans, so we stayed for the day so he could stay tuned to the stock market. We woke up the next morning after a very wet and windy night to water on the kitchen floor. After much crawling around we found we had a leak at one of the external hatch doors, and water had seeped in, ran under the fridge, into the pantry and across the floor. It was only a minor leak but with the extreme weather, enough water seeped in to cause a problem. Frans solved the problem by resealing around the offending hatch.

On Thursday 1st March we drove to Armidale, and camped at a beautiful free-camp at Dumaresq Dam, outside Armidale past the University of New England, amongst farm land. There was only 1 other camper most of the time we were there, a single lady in a caravan with her cat.

We had Fang booked in at the Armidale Ford dealer on the Monday for his 2nd service, and spent a quiet few days at the dam inside Stopalot as it was still very wet and windy.



There was no mobile phone reception, or wireless internet, so Frans drove out each day to the top of the nearest hill to connect to the internet and download emails and ASX data and get our emails.

We did have some sunny times and enjoyed a walk around the lake, and watching all the birds – lots of Rosellas and various water birds including black swans. We also went into Armidale a couple of times – lovely town and very friendly and helpful people – and toured around the surrounding area. It was all very green and lovely and the cattle and sheep are fat and healthy looking. We even found some “wild” apple trees on the side of the road (Jonathons we think) which made up a nice apple crumble.

After Dumaresq we travelled to Walcha and stayed in a lovely little caravan park with the best amenities (showers and loos) we have encountered so far. They have won awards for their park which is really good to see in a small country town. From here we went on drives around the surrounding areas and saw some magnificent sights. Apsley Gorge and Tia Falls are superb examples of National Parks which are well maintained and people friendly, with very well defined walking trails leading to lookouts over the falls. The history in some of these places is so interesting and what the pioneers achieved is remarkable.

Then on to Clarence Town, another lovely little town with heaps of history and a lovely caravan park (Council park) and a huge camping reserve right on the river. The road in went over a single lane wooden bridge with high railings on either side, only 3 metres wide – that was a tight fit for Stopalot. No water restrictions here and we were able to give Fang and Stopalot a much needed wash. Unfortunately, no amount of washing will get rid of the scratch marks on Fang's duco and Stopalot's windows, caused by getting into and out of tight spots with trees scraping along the sides. We asked the camp ground operators what there was to do in Clarence Town, and were invited to a Lion's Club prawn and chicken fund raiser with a bush band and a bush poet and that was a lot of fun.



On Monday 12th March it was time to head to Woy Woy to stay with our great friends Helen & Don Young. We both know Helen from our days working for Rocla Concrete Products and it was good to catch up with such old friends again. Bev drove, the first hurdle being that very narrow bridge, and Frans insisted on doing the scenic route into Woy Woy which involved a very narrow, steep and winding road. We made it without any disasters but Bev's nerves were rather frayed. Frans parked Stopalot in their driveway, quite a tight fit and took much shuffling backwards and forwards – it was much easier driving out than backing in!

We spent several days with the Youngs before heading off to Gerringong (south of Wollongong) to stay with Bev's former brother & sister-in-law, Mick & Linda Knowles, who run the Gerringong Conference Centre for the Uniting Church.

Getting there was a bit interesting, as we chose the Illawarra Highway to take us into Gerringong, and it traverses the Macquarie Pass.

We were intrigued with a sign at the top of the range which said “Caution: Trucks Reversing” - we soon discovered it also applies to 5th wheelers on the back of Ford F250 utes – we couldn't make a very sharp and steep left hand hairpin bend with one turn, so with Stopalot's wheels perched on the edge of the road which dropped off sharply on the inside of the bend, and Fang's nose almost touching the railing on the other side of the bend, Frans did a bit of backing and shuffling, with a truck patiently waiting behind us, and we made it through.

Luckily, while all this intricate manoeuvring was going on, nothing came up the road towards us, but everybody travelling this road knows to be patient while trucks and wayward 5th wheelers negotiate the bends.

Shortly afterwards we came across a semi-trailer coming towards us on a very narrow section of road. We were hard up against the cliff on our side, so the semi stopped and we inched past with only a whisker between us. It would be really nice if warning signs were posted well before the point of no return on these kinds of roads!!

We arrived in Gerringong in one piece. As it happened, Mick & Linda's latest grandson was being baptised at the church on the Sunday, so we were right on the spot to take part in the family reunion. As Mick & Linda live in the old manse behind the church, they parked us on a patch of grass next to the church. The Minister was told this was his new extension! It was great (for Bev) to catch up with many members of the Knowles family, including Mum (former Mum-in-law) and all the kids, grandkids etc.

It was a pity the weather was mostly wet and windy, but there were some clear periods and it was so lovely and green.



The reception was held in the hall directly behind Stopalot. We had an "open home" that afternoon and many inspections by the family and their friends.

On 21st March we drove to Sutton, just north of Canberra. Frans had another board meeting to attend in Brisbane, and Canberra was the only location within a reasonable distance that he could get a direct flight to Brisbane. We stayed in a van park on an ensuite site – what luxury! We only planned a few days there, but Frans had to do a 2nd unexpected trip to Brisbane so we ended up staying there over a week. We visited the usual tourist attractions, (Old parliament house, Questacon science museum, the Telstra tower, War Memorial, Cockington Green Miniature Village). The best part about the Questacon visit was the age 2 to 6 area, where we had a great time watching the littlies having great fun interacting with all sorts of hands-on stuff.



Canberra was very green and looking good. It was fairly cold there on some days and poor Fin the fighting fish was suffering as the temperature of his water fell. We managed to find a small heater pad to put under his tank, and we are now able to keep him warm enough. We are quite amazed that he has survived all this travel, and now the cold weather, and is still looking lovely.

On 29th March we left Canberra and headed to Mystery Bay, south of Narooma NSW. On the way we went through Bateman's Bay which was looking gorgeous.

The Mystery Bay Primitive Campground is a council operated bush camping ground. It has long-drop loos and water taps here and there, and lots of beautiful camping spots dotted around the area amongst the trees.

It was a great spot to be, sheltered by trees but within cooee of the beach and the sound of the ocean. We stayed 2 nights there, had a fire to warm our toes and enjoyed the birdlife. As usual, there was no mobile phone or internet access, so we had to drive into Narooma and sit in a coffee shop to do our internetting. Life can be so hard sometimes.....



From Mystery Bay, we went via Bega to Mallacoota, Victoria, then to Marlo, and camped on the banks of the Snowy River. That was a cold night! We awoke to a thick fog, combined with smoke from a burn-off. It reminded Bev of the old fashioned smogs in England.

Next stop was another free-camp west of Yarrum, after going through Lakes Entrance. (This whole coastal area is really

beautiful and we will be back sometime to tour around more and see the things we missed on this whistle-stop tour).

Then we went to take a look at Wilsons Promontory, and ended up staying 2 nights and doing some of the walks there. We are slowly becoming fitter and are capable of doing quite a bit of hiking these days. We had to get out of there on Thursday 5th April as they were fully booked out for Easter. Poor Stopalot gained a few more scratches trying to manoeuvre around the narrow roads in the camp ground, before we were advised to move into the school camps area which was much more friendly to big rigs as it is designed to allow large buses full of school kids to get in and park. The birdlife there is quite tame and we had 2 gorgeous crimson rosellas eating seeds out of our hands.



Free-camp on the bank of the Snowy River, between Marlo and Orbost

After leaving the Prom on 5th April we headed via Traralgon to Walhalla Historic Mining Town in the hope that we could find somewhere there to camp for a couple of days. It is a very narrow forested valley with a lovely old mining town, or at least, the part of the town which is still left after multiple bush fires and the physical dismantling and removal of many of the town's buildings by the residents when the gold mines closed down in the late 1800's.

They actually took their houses with them when they left.

There are 12 permanent residents and a heap of tourists now and then and particularly at Easter, as we found when we arrived.

The only place we could find to park Stopalot was a grassy area in front of a small A-frame house. We found the next morning when the owners arrived that we were actually on their unfenced front garden, but they very kindly allowed us to stay for another night.

The photo on the right shows us parked on the grass outside one of the resident's weekender house. This photo was taken from a walking track on the hillside.

Whilst on the trail, we came across a young couple who told us they had just become engaged – they were so excited they had to tell someone! Frans took a photo of them and emailed to them to commemorate the event.

The history in the town is amazing and we inspected a cottage which is for sale, built circa 1865, extended circa 1895 and still has many of the original features including a split shingle roof over the original 2 rooms. There is an iron roof over it now, but in the kitchen/dining room the shingle roof is visible. It would be lovely to buy it and live in a place so steeped in history (it



has only had 5 owners in its lifetime) but we are not ready to buy anything just yet. It was very cool there and the sun was very late showing an appearance due to the fact that the valley is so narrow and the hillsides very steep. At least we could snuggle under our feather & down doona – we felt a bit sorry for the people in tents.

The next night was another free-camp at a rest area outside Powelltown, east of Melbourne. It is a tiny town, with a forestry department works, which

happened to be full of fire-fighters camping for the night ready to do a big burn-off in the morning. It was very cold, and again we felt sorry for all these people in little tents, but we were able to light a fire and toast our toes again. An old man came to talk with us – very nice old chap and we chattered on for a while. Then Frans spoke to another fellow across the road who told him the old man had not long been out of jail for murder! Seems he was associated with a Melbourne gangster type – ah well, appearances can be deceiving. We went for a 6 km hike the next morning to the site of a timber mill.

It was a beautiful walk, a bit strenuous but well worth the effort. Now, the mill site is totally overgrown again and there are masses of tree ferns alongside the creek which fed the mill. The only sign of the mill is a rusted circular saw blade and a couple of bits of rusted equipment.

Then back in the big smoke at Craigieburn just north of Melbourne and Frans has meetings in Brisbane in each of the next 3 weeks. We also have a 5th Wheeler Network rally to attend, and will spend some time with daughters Karyn & Kym and partners. We are also hoping to fit in a quick trip along the Great Ocean Road. The temperature has been reasonable and we have been in T-shirts occasionally. Mind you, it cools down rapidly in the afternoon and the doona is still very necessary at night.



Fang had a big wash at a car wash – first one for quite a while and he looks much better without the coating of dirt, although a good polish is now needed and hopefully that will eliminate some of the scratches. Stopalot also had a wash at a truck wash just up the road and also looks much better – pity they just get dirty again!

Well, that's it for now. We will continue on our merry way and catch up with you again sometime.

Cheers

Frans & Bev