

The Hamer Newsletter



21 June 2007

Hello to One and All,

Well, here we are back in Cairns. We were hoping for the typical Cairns winter weather, but the wet and windy conditions are still with us and we can only console ourselves with the knowledge that it is a whole lot worse down south!

Since our last newsletter we have seen and done so much it has all become a blur, so the photo library really comes into its own as we retrace our movements through the pictures we took. We ended our last letter heading to Craigieburn (near Melbourne airport) so Frans could fly to Brisbane. We had 3 stays at Craigieburn over 3 weeks, and 3 Brisbane trips for Frans.

During that time we went to a 5th Wheeler Network rally at Elmore, not far from Bendigo. We stayed several days and met a great bunch of people (ten 5th wheelers all up) and will no doubt meet up with some or all of them again in the future. It was interesting to see other designs and layouts and

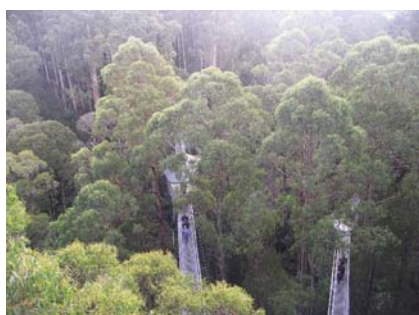


compare travel notes with other people.

After Elmore we went to Melville Caves for 2 days and checked out the



caves where "Captain Melville" the highway robber used to hole up. They are not really caves, just huge jumbled boulders but very rugged and interesting country with some great lookouts. It was cold



enough for a campfire at night and the stars were amazing as it was completely dark.

The next whistle-stop trip was along the Great Ocean Road.

We took Stopalot to Aireys Inlet at the start of “the road” and stayed the night, then went in Fang on a fast trip taking in the Otway Fly tree top walk and ending up at Port Fairy where we stayed the night in a delightful “old” cottage. It is only 6 years old but has been built in the style of the old timber cottages of yesteryear.

With a lovely fire in a combustion stove and a soak in a claw-foot bath we were very warm and cosy that night, although the day had been cold, wet and windy. The scenery was fantastic though and well worth the trip.



The following morning we had breakfast and a stroll around Port Fairy which has some beautiful old bluestone buildings, many of them heritage listed, then headed back to Aireys Inlet. It was the best day we could have asked for. Clear blue sky, sunshine, calm sea and the views were incredible. We decided to take a helicopter trip over the most scenic part, the 12 Apostles and surrounding areas. Of course, there are less than 12 Apostles now because one collapsed recently, and it may not be too long before some of the others go too. We

could have stayed up there all day, but the trip ended all too soon and we were back on the ground and continuing our journey. We had to stop taking photos – although each new view was stunning, it all starts to look the same after a while.



One place we just had to stop and look at was the Cape Otway lighthouse. Although the lighthouse itself no longer operates, and has been replaced by a solar powered light, all the workings are still there and it is amazing to see how it worked and the conditions the poor old lighthouse keepers had to contend with. We went inside and up to the “balcony” which runs around the outside of the light. It was a fine day but even so the wind was terrific and just hanging on to clothes and spectacles was an effort. It must have been deadly when they had to contend with the storms.

The next stop was Carrum Downs near Frankston to meet up with Kym and Karyn and their partners. It was really great to catch up with them again and hear all their news. Karyn raced in the Easter races at Phillip Island and is now the National Champion in the under 2000 cc time trials. She managed to roll the car (after she had won and while trying to improve her time again) so it was an expensive exercise but she is now busy rebuilding the car for the next time.

Frans reckons that Karyn is the only person he knows who would go to all the trouble of rolling a car to win a \$40 trophy.

While here, we offloaded another box of stuff we have not used or needed since starting our travels, and will collect from Karyn & Sean again one day when we settle down.

On leaving Carrum Downs we headed due north to Seymour and stayed there for a couple of days. We had thunderstorms and rain on leaving Melbourne, and thunderstorms and rain on arriving at Seymour – are we jinxed or what?? Seymour looked quite green but we were assured it was due to the first rains they had seen in 2 years, and the water supply was still critical. In fact, Seymour was providing tankers of water to the town of Euroa which had completely run out of water. (We heard on the radio a couple of weeks later that Euroa had some isolated showers with enough rain to fill their weir, so they are out of trouble for a while).

From Seymour we continued north via an overnight freecamp at Bundure, to Forbes which is another lovely town with a very interesting history. We stayed at a van park on the river and cycled the 2.5 k into town and did the “heritage walk” around the lovely old buildings. There is also a bushranger museum in the basement under the Albion Hotel, which used to be used as a gold store in the old days when escorts took out the gold in wagons. It is really good to see these country towns retaining their heritage and fighting the trend to modern concrete and glass.

An interesting town we passed along the way is Gunnedah. The public toilets in the town are very well maintained and clean, and they have a sound system which plays Banjo Patterson poetry while you sit and contemplate the universe. Bev quite enjoyed listening to “Clancy of the Overflow”.



Next stop was Dubbo with a visit to the Parkes CSIRO “dish” on the way. What an interesting place that is, and they very obligingly tilted the dish from its “normal” position pointing to the sky right down to its lowest position, while we stood and watched. It was quite a sight – such a huge piece of equipment moving so quietly and smoothly.

At Dubbo we stayed at a large van park on the

south side, only 2 k from the Western Plains Zoo. We cycled to the zoo and spent a whole day roaming around looking at all of the gorgeous creatures on display in very natural surroundings.





From Dubbo we headed to the Warrumbungles National Park, via Gilgandra. On the way we stopped for a coffee and watched yet more rain headed our way. It looked quite spectacular so we had to take a photo. The Warrumbungles area is beautiful and we enjoyed 2 days there. The wildlife is used to humans, but not tame, so although they tolerate us you can't get too close to them. It is lovely to see them in the wild and we saw many emus, kangaroos and wallabies and of



course heaps of birds. While staying there we went to Siding Spring observatory which is the main observatory linked to Canberra National University. The observatory in Canberra is badly affected by the night light we humans generate, so Siding Spring is used now as it has the darkest skies around.



From Warrumbungle, we headed east through Coonabarabran, Tamworth and Manilla to an overnight stop at Split Rock Dam. As usual, not very much water in the dam, but it was a lovely spot all the same.

Then to Goondiwindi via Bingara and Boggabri. This is cotton country and the sides of the road were covered in cotton balls which had blown away during the harvest or the transporting of the crop to the gins. We stopped for a look and the only difference between the raw cotton and the cotton balls you buy at the supermarket is the little black

seed and a bit of dirt! The roads around here are very bumpy and we suffered our first breakages on this trip. We stayed at Goondiwindi for a few days and reorganised the cupboards yet again, and offloaded some more stuff we don't need.

Next stop was Leslie Dam just outside Warwick. Another lovely spot but again not much water, although it rained a bit while we were there. We caught up with old friends in Warwick, and they took us on a long drive around the area including to that cold place, Stanthorpe. True to type, Stanthorpe was wet and windy and most definitely very chilly.



Then on to Crow's Nest (outside Toowoomba) for a visit with Frans' sister & her husband. Once again we camped on their property and believe it or not, it rained. Of course, Benny & Peter were very happy about that as it topped up their water tanks and as they are always desperately short of water in that area any rain is very welcome. On a visit to Toowoomba we traded in our old mobile phones for new NextG phones and a car kit for Fang. We have visited the Telstra Shop in almost every town we have been through, and Toowoomba was the only one to have a car kit in stock.

On 23 May we headed into Brisbane and 3 nights in the Sofitel hotel. Frans attended his board meetings and Bev just relaxed and enjoyed the shopping and the hotel suite – the bathroom alone was about the size of Stopalot! Stopalot went back to the factory for a couple of modifications – we think we have now finished making changes, except for putting in some curtains, which will be done in Cairns.



26 May saw us leaving Brisbane and beginning the journey north. First stop was Tin Can Bay where we had a very good site in a caravan park almost next door to old friends (Bob and Coral) from Chillagoe, who live permanently in a house they had built in the van park. After a couple of days there we



could understand why they chose that area to retire. It really is a beautiful place and the climate is mild. Of course, we had storms and lots of rain, but Frans did manage a round of golf and we had a good long bike ride along the waterfront.

Reluctantly leaving Tin Can Bay, with promises to return and go fishing with Bob in his electric boat, we headed to Lake Monduran near Gin Gin. The Lake Monduran camping area is lovely, with big grassy areas and lots of trees.



We had a full moon there and thoroughly enjoyed 2 rain-free days. Unfortunately, when manoeuvring into our site, we managed to clip a post and ripped off 2 of the running lights and a reflector on the driver's side of Stopalot. We also found a broken awning strut when we pulled out the awning.

1 June – the first day of winter. We left Lake Monduran early amidst the mist, and headed to Rockhampton where a caravan repairer fixed the awning for us. Apparently we were the third repair of that particular break that week, so it is obviously a common problem, and they say it is definitely “operator error” so we will have to be more gentle with it in future. We continued on and stayed at a van park at Marlborough which was a bit noisy right on the highway but had good home cooked meals in the restaurant and more importantly a TV so Frans could watch the Friday night football. Normally he would watch it on our TV but the reception was terrible so he joined the rest of the park residents at the communal TV.

The next day we ended up at Seaforth north of Mackay, and knew for sure we were back in north Queensland with all the sugar cane and pineapple fields. Seaforth is another lovely camping reserve right on the beach. Again, it was wet and windy but we had enough dry periods to try our hand at fishing – no luck but it's fun trying. The Sunday market there was good – 4 large grapefruit for \$1 was a bargain.

We met a man there doing it tough in a small van with no awning, no cooking facilities, not even a fridge. He was from NSW and was about to do a bin-hauler course and try to get work on a cane farm for the harvest season.

4 June – heading further north, still raining, and a big hold up on the road north of Bloomsbury where a serious accident had blocked the road. A car and caravan was wrecked and a large furniture truck was on its side. Luckily nobody was hurt, but the material damage was extensive and the hold up was frustrating for lots of people in a hurry who could not get through – particularly the truckies whose living depends upon delivering their loads. We have learnt to respect the truckies on this journey and always try to make it easy for them to get past us when we are in their way and going a bit slower than they want to – the UHF radio is invaluable for talking to them.

We went to a place called Molongle Creek caravan park, south of Home Hill. This is one place we will never, ever, return to. The biting midges were so fierce that Bev ended up covered with welts, even being bitten in bed during the night on the face, hands and head, even while covered in repellent. It was very warm and humid so turned out to be a very uncomfortable night. We left early in the morning without breakfast, just to get a way from the midges.

First stop was Home Hill and a chemist who suggested anti-histamines to try and lessen the reaction to the bites. We stopped here for breakfast and discovered a large parking area for travellers with modern free showers and toilets and electric under cover BBQs, and an invitation to stay for up to 48 hours. Some towns are really friendly to travellers and those are the places we are more likely to go back to and patronise their businesses.

However, we continued on and reached Rollingstone north of Townsville and decided to stay there for 2 nights at a lovely van park on the beach. We could not get a beachfront site as it was fully booked coming up to the long weekend, but we were happy with a grassy site surrounded by coconut palms. We took a trip up to Paluma National Park, in the rain of course, and had coffee in the café in the mist. We had forgotten just how narrow and winding the road is to Paluma but it is a very scenic drive.

On 7 June, we headed up to Cardwell and stayed there until 12 June, and joy of joys, the weather was fine and sunny most of the time. It was cool though, so winter had definitely arrived. While there, we met some old acquaintances from Cairns and caught up on some of the news. We had a very relaxing time there, with long walks along the esplanade into Cardwell village, a few hours spent in the museum checking out the old bush telegraph and communications systems, and generally taking it easy.



And now, we are back in Cairns and catching up with old friends, sorting out issues for the end of the tax year and doing the rounds of the dentist, doctor and optometrist for the annual checkups. We are here for just over 3 weeks, which is the longest stay in one place since we started travelling in January, and it is nice to be settled for a little while. Once we leave here we will probably go to Cooktown for a week or so, then start heading south again, slowly, so we don't catch up to the cold winter weather. At least this time we will be able to take our time and stop as long as we like at good places.

Bye for now,

Bev & Frans