

The Hamer Newsletter



27 June 2010

Hello to One and All,

Back in travel mode again and enjoying seeing new places. The immensity of the W.A. wheatbelt is a real eye opener, but the lack of substantial widespread rain for the winter crop makes it a very uncertain time for the farmers. As much as we prefer sunny skies, it would be good to see some worthwhile rain for these essential primary producers who provide so much of our food and exports.

22 May 2010

We packed up in wet and windy conditions at Caversham (Perth) and headed towards York in pouring rain. Just a few klms away in a downpour on a 4 lane highway, the (new, fitted by Ford) windscreen wiper blades came off their arms. We were able to pull into a lay-by and Frans spent the next 15 minutes trying to figure out how to reattach them without getting completely soaked in the process. Finally when Bev pulled out the F250 owners manual and looked up "Wipers" he was able to successfully complete the task and we were on our way again.

York proved to be a lovely historic town with many old commercial buildings and stone & brick cottages. We stayed there for 2 days and had a good look around the town and surrounding



countryside – sheep and wheat being the predominant activities.

24 May 2010

Leaving York we detoured to another historic town called *BEVERLEY* – well, we just had to go there and take a look and found some more well preserved old buildings, and of course had to do the photo of Beverley at Beverley.

After passing through more farming country and small towns we arrived at Shackleton which boasts the smallest bank in Australia – sadly not operating any more. We stayed the night at



nearby Kokerbin Rock, supposedly the 3rd largest monolith in Australia. We were the only people there and the silence overnight was total and it was good to be back in the bush again, especially with a bright moon.

25 May 2010

We walked most of the trail around Kokerbin and over the top to the lookout, with fabulous views across the wheat farms. The rock has some very interesting jumbles of boulders and eroded formations.

Leaving there after lunch we drove to a tiny place called Karlgarin, near Hyden and stayed at Tressie's Museum and Caravan Park.



Tressie (Merv Trestrail) is a retired wheat and sheep farmer who now runs this little van park and potters in his museum of things he has collected over the last 60 or so years, including a collection of phonographs dating from 1905 playing wax cylinders, through to gramophone players playing all sizes of records.



We did a trip to Wave Rock, Hippo's Yawn and Mulka's Cave with its indigenous art (hand prints) on the cave roof.

The weather turned really squally and wet so we decided to stay put for a couple of days and wait until conditions improved before continuing the journey. Unfortunately for the farmers, the rain was patchy and not enough to guarantee a good season.

28 May 2010

To Kalgoorlie via Hyden, Southern Cross and Coolgardie. These goldfields highways should be renamed "Crystal Highways" due to the huge quantities of beer bottles, plastic bottles and



cans glinting along both sides of the road over hundreds of kilometres. It really is a disgrace

We stayed in a van park in Boulder. The Boulder CBD still had plenty of scaffolding around the old buildings damaged in the recent earthquake. The van park also had one ablutions block shut down due to the

earthquake.

Kalgoorlie still has lots of old, historic buildings alongside the newer developments. One old place, The York Hotel, has a beautiful grand old staircase leading to the upper floor – a reminder of the wealth and opulence of days gone by.

The Super Pit open cut mine which is literally on the edge of Kalgoorlie-Boulder town is mind boggling in its size. Watching the huge haul trucks



looking like dinky toys crawling up and down the haul roads was fascinating but very uncomfortable with the cold wind on top of the lookout.

3 June 2010

To Credo Homestead, 100 K north west of Kalgoorlie, via Ora Banda – the pub at Ora Banda has had a chequered past but still stands and serves travellers and campers who stay there – mainly gold prospectors out looking for that elusive nugget.



Credo Homestead is an old sheep farm now owned by Dept Environment & Conservation and looked after by volunteer caretakers Alan and Sharron, who made us very welcome. The



“International Airport” there was a real eye-opener. A planned 3 night stay extended to almost 3 weeks during which many games of RummyO, Sequence and Tri-Onimos were played. We experienced clear sunny days, pouring rain, and on the last morning a thick blanket of fog.

While we were there one of our van batteries failed and we had to order a new one from Perth, so another trip into Kalgoorlie to pick it up and do some shopping. A 200 K round trip to get the groceries is a regular event for Alan and Sharron, who expect to stay at Credo for a couple of years.

22 June 2010

Packed up in the thick fog with everything dripping wet, but the sun starting to burn through. When we finally left it was a slow trip on a very wet and muddy road and the car and van were plastered with red mud by the time we made it to the Goldfields Highway.



We travelled to Menzies, a tiny town with some historic buildings, and parked to download emails and get phone messages. Then it was off to Lake Ballard (a huge dry lake) for the night. Although there had been rain, the gravel road was mostly dry and in very good condition. Lake Ballard itself was very muddy though, and our new welly boots came in very handy. Lake Ballard has 51 metal sculptures of people, but we only managed to get to 4 of them before giving up and watching the sunset

instead.



We found a good spot to camp right on the edge of the lake and had a completely silent night with clear skies, a half moon and lots of stars.



23 June 2010

Sunrise was a disappointment due to thick cloud on the eastern horizon. We packed up and drove to Snake Hill Lookout where the information board states that the last time the Lake was filled with water was 1995 and a huge colony of Banded Stilts nested there. How do many thousands of coastal birds know that 1,000 kilometres inland a lake has suddenly appeared? Apparently the brine shrimp larvae lie dormant for all those years and spring into life when the waters finally flow, and become food for the birds.

Back to Menzies to refuel and then we headed north. We had planned to stay at Niagara Dam which has a huge free camping area, but the access road is clay and rain was threatening, so after a look around we headed to the ghost town of Kookynie. The pub is about the only building still standing, plus a couple of ramshackle houses.

We then headed back out to the highway and called in at a place called Morapoi Station which turned out to be an Aboriginal family tourism venture in its infancy. They have a basic caravan park with power, water and ablutions all for \$10 per night, and they run bush tucker tours (honey

ants, witchetty grubs etc) and gold prospecting tours. It was a friendly place so we stayed the night there and washed some of the red mud off the back of the van where it always accumulates – must be a design fault there!

24 June 2010

Very cold and windy, cloudy and bleak – it's usually sunny out here and in the summer is unbearably hot, but in winter it can be very miserable.

First stop was the ghost town of Gwalia, established to service the Sons of Gwalia gold mine in the late 1800's. We went to

the museum which included a look around Hoover House B&B. This house was built by Herbert Hoover, the first mine manager at the mine, and later the 31st President of USA. No expense was spared, and they even sent a sample of the pressed metal interior lining to England to have some linoleum made in the same pattern. Pressed metal was a feature of substantial buildings of that era.



In Hoover's day it was an underground mine with a deep shaft, but later became an open-cut pit. The view from Hoover House is directly into the pit – wonder what he would have thought of that.



The old miners' cottages which still exist in the town show how people lived in those days – and it was not very comfortable. Tiny houses built of corrugated iron, with hessian sacks for inside walls and lining the ceiling, some with dirt floors and some with bare wood planks. The mine is still operating but only a few houses are still occupied in Gwalia.

We then went to Leonora and picked up the mail which had been waiting for us for 2 weeks, refuelled and left.

There was no sign of the asylum-

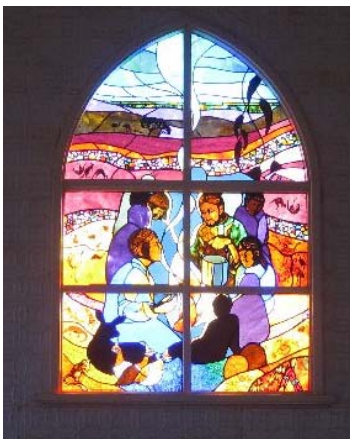
seekers who have recently been taken there to await processing by immigration.

There are few places out here to stay, so after a quick look at the little mining town of Leinster, we went out to the Agnew Hotel for the night. A good dinner in the pub was enjoyed and we camped in the car park for the night. Agnew is another ghost town, a very bleak place, but the mine still operates and the pub still does enough business to stay afloat.

25 June 2010

Leaving Agnew on another very cold windy morning we travelled to Sandstone and will stay here for a few days before moving towards Geraldton.

Sandstone is another old gold mining centre which is now reduced to a very small population. It has one "shop cum post office cum fuel depot", the Shire Offices, a Visitor Centre, a caravan park run by the Shire and of course the pub. The population of the shire is 119 people, 60 of whom live in and around the town. The shire employs 16 people (13% of the population) and they are responsible for 1,000 kilometres of gravel road. You have to wonder how such a small shire can be viable, and they rely heavily on government subsidies for the road maintenance.



There is an old church here built in 1908 which was restored in 1995 and a beautiful stained glass

window installed. The interior of the church is of very decorative pressed metal.



We did the Heritage Trail which includes London Bridge – a sandstone formation which used to be big and strong enough for a horse and carriage to drive over, but is now very eroded. One wonders how much longer it will last.

Well, that's it for now. We will hopefully see some of WA's famed wild flowers over the next few months, if we are lucky, and if the winter rains have been enough to start them growing. We seem to be coping with the cold weather alright, especially with our lovely diesel heater to keep us warm at night. Still, it will be nice to get back to the warmer weather once we start moving north again in a month or so.

Regards,

Bev & Frans



Pressed metal wall in old church in Sandstone



