

Our Grey Nomad Journey

KEITH & FRANCES

“No Mortgage, No Mowing”

www.keithandfrances.com

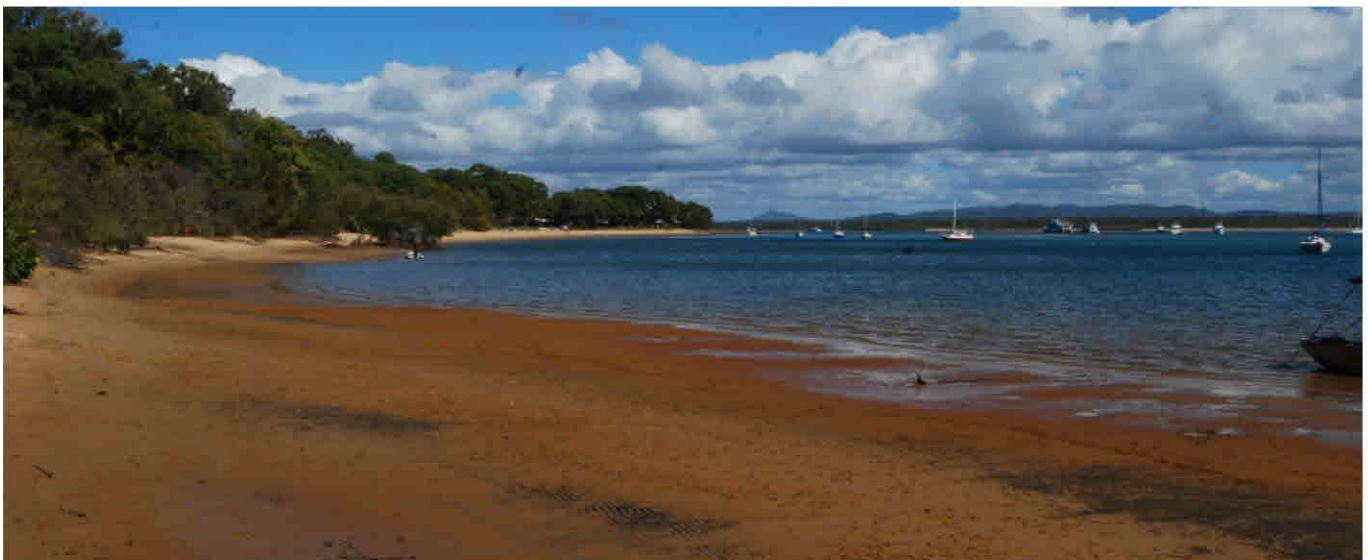


The First 2 Years - 2014-2015





**From Outback
Camps, Sunsets
on the
Tablelands,
to Beaches and
the ocean**



PREFACE

This book chronicles our decision to join the growing ranks of the *Genuine* “Grey Nomads” and sell up in order to hit the road full time for as long as we want or are able.

It summarises our decision making and the first two years of our travels including our unplanned 7 months at the Road Transport Hall of Fame in Alice Springs. We said from the start that we would stay anywhere that we came across for longer periods if it felt right.

During this first 2 years Thomas came “home” for an unexpected visit from China (July 2014) and Laura gave birth to Harley (June 2015) followed by Zoe giving birth to Amber (December 2015) to finish our 2 years; all these events changing our plans on the fly. I guess that is what being a true Grey Nomad is all about!

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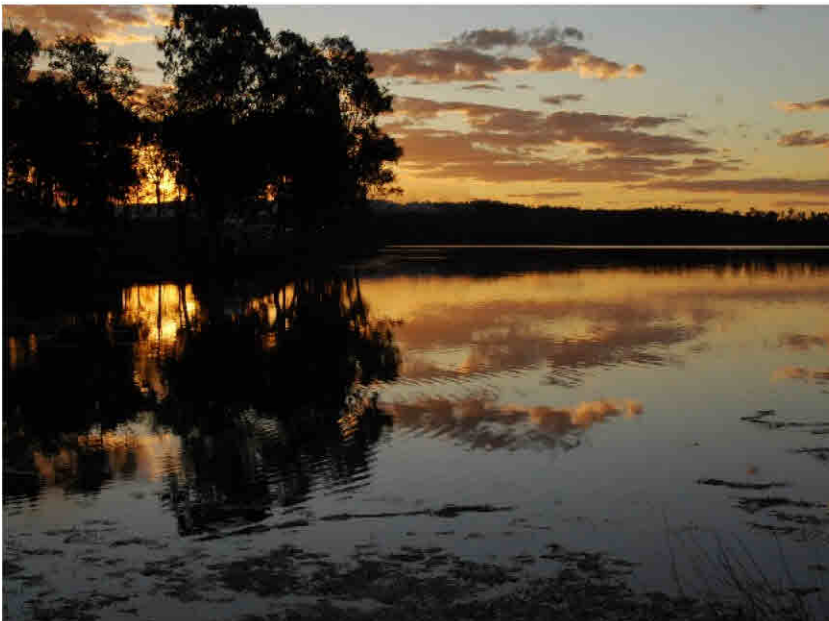
First loop as far as Hervey Bay, returning via Kingaroy, Bunya Mountains and Darling Downs. Ipswich Showgrounds and then to Laura's before heading North again.



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Heading North (Again!)

Back up the coast as far as Townsville then across to the NT culminating in spending 7 months in Alice Springs before returning to Brisbane for Laura's delivery of baby Harley.



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Qld and NSW Loop

Back into the Burnett then over the border via Goondiwindi and South through Dubbo (visit Melissa and Luke) to Bob's at Gunning and back to Brisbane for Christmas.

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Retirement? When and what next?

Having caravanned in the late 80s and early 90s and with a love of seeing the country, (Keith having done much more travelling due to various jobs and businesses) we both wanted to see much more of both the coasts and the bush, and to have the opportunity to take Frances to many areas and WA which she had never been to, and where Keith had lived for almost 10 years in the 70s. The idea came to fruition in 2012 and the planning started, although in a very vague sort of way.

2012 - Planning :

The main questions are really when, how and what with? Think about what to do with the house and belongings, what sort of van, what to use for a tow vehicle? It was obvious the only real solution was to sell up and use the house money as more of a cash earning investment, using our very limited super to buy the rig as only Keith could get the age pension (from March 2012 at age 65) and Frances was not eligible for pension until Feb 2019 (at age 65 1/2).

We had thoughts about new van vs. secondhand as well as a suitable newer vs. older "tug". In the end we bought a 2001 Holden Jackaroo from a local Brisbane seller and picked it up on Christmas Eve of 2012.

Next stage was to get the house ready to sell and we had a wild idea of being ready by Easter 2013! It soon became clear that the house needed a total redecorate inside and out and that was not going to happen in 3 or 4 months!

In the end the whole place was painted including the roof, and took until November including remodelling most of the bathroom!



The finished house with new guttering and freshly painted, including the roof which was spray painted to give a colorbond finish.

Finding and buying a van took a little longer than finding the Jackaroo and a lot more deliberation; this is what we have to live in every day for who knows how many years? The Windsor caravan chosen we found at a dealer in Hervey Bay just before selling the house in November 2013 and picked it up a week before moving out.

Having moved into Olivia's to get ready we spent some time fitting out the rear of the Jackaroo to hold all the tools, parts, 12 volt Cooler, and side storage for chairs, awning sides, floor mat and all those "other" things you end up with (or maybe really need to have?)



We also fitted a tool box and Jerry Can (for water) on the rear bar of the van, plus front storage tube for the anti-flap kit and a tray for levelling ramps and jockey wheel on the a frame.

The Jackaroo gained a Jerry can for Diesel on the rear door and a full basket for the roof rack.



After spending 2 months at Olivia's we moved to the Laidley Caravan Park for our first experience of fully living in the caravan and finishing off the main items we wanted to change or add including a diesel heater for the colder weather when free camping.

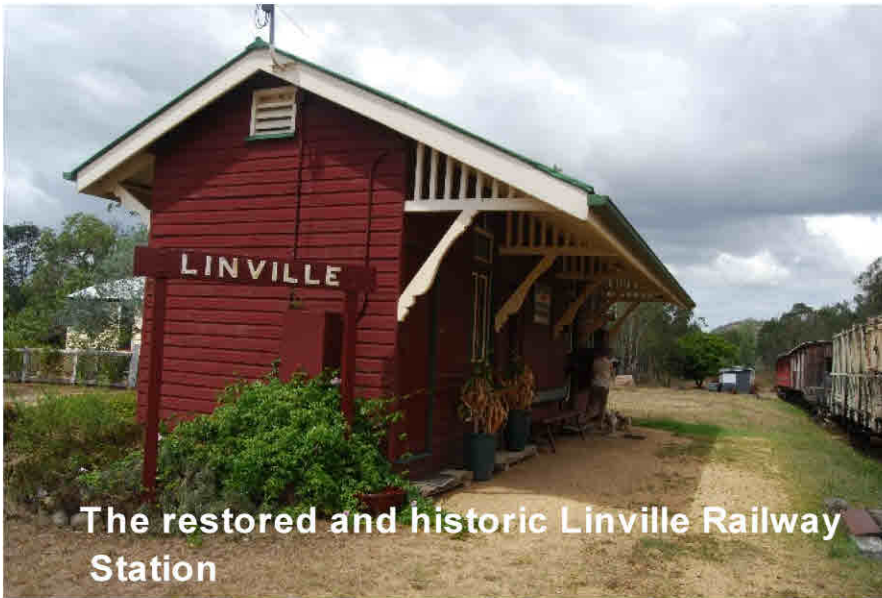
Laidley Caravan Park

We intended to be here for about 2 weeks but in the end it turned into a whole month before we were ready enough to hit the road.

Toogoolawah Rest Area



Our first day/night "on the road" and our first free camping experience at Toogoolawah, only a short drive and with the whole rest area to ourselves overnight. A little noise from passing trucks but otherwise very relaxing and pleasant. Everything seemed to be functioning with the battery system operating lights, TV etc, and toilet all OK.



The restored and historic Linville Railway Station

Our second night was also spent free camping at the delightful Linville historic Station Reserve. This is a small detour (about 17km) from the highway but what a lovely spot!

Our night at Linville did show up however that we had a major battery system problem as we ran out of 12 volt power for the TV by late evening. Later investigations back in Brisbane proved that we had an incorrect, and very poor condition, battery.

Blackbutt gave us our first taste of Showground camping which is mostly far cheaper than Caravan Parks, here costing only \$20 per night and has power, water and amenities block



From here we ventured as far as Kingaroy in the car for shopping, and visited Laura's in-laws in Yarraman. As this was a shakedown short trip to discover any problems (like the battery system), we headed back to Brisbane via Woodford and over the hills of Mount Mee. This surfaced another issue ; our Jackaroo needed a transmission cooler - we went into "limp mode" up the steepest part of the hill!



Staying at the Pine Rivers Showgrounds at Lawnton (above) gave us the opportunity to have our battery tested, and when it proved to be no good replaced it with 2 brand new 105 AH deep cycle versions with new connectors, and revamped the mounting arrangement in the front boot. Later we tidied up the wiring onto busbars.

The journey proper begins:

A short stay at the Ipswich Showgrounds allowed us to see the other girls on this side of town before heading off Northwards for what we thought was going to be for the rest of 2014 at least but with no firm plans for a return date.

First stop was at Kenilworth in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland, not far from the well known town of Maleny. This was another Showgrounds stay at only \$15 a night dropping to \$13.50 a night for a week or longer. We decided to stay a week but as Easter was approaching negotiated to stay over Easter, despite the grounds being fully booked due to the local Easter Cheese and Wine festival.



Kenilworth holds this festival each Easter alongside its famous cheese factory. This was held in beautiful April weather and we purchased some LED strip lighting from a stall holder there; this vastly improved our awning illumination, you can now see your dinner when eating outside! Behind the Showgrounds is a short path to the Mary River (below).

Kenilworth Easter Cheese Festival

Our new LED awning lighting



We finally moved on from Kenilworth after the School Holiday (Easter) traffic was gone and headed further North to Inskip Point on a very showery day, arriving in steady light rain.



The beach here (looking towards Rainbow Beach) stretches for several kms and has five campground areas, 2 suitable for caravans and managed by Qld National Parks.



Tess and Lolli became regulars in the edge of the surf! After the first day of rain and then a day of wind the weather finally calmed and the sand flies came out in earnest; so small you hardly see them and only feel the effects later! From here we moved around the estuary to our West and moved to Tin Can Bay, staying at the TCB Tourist Park. This is a member park of Top Tourist group so we joined up for discounts now and later.



Part of Tin Can Bay: Lots of foreshore areas, water and boats!

There is a Dolphin feeding area at the end of the township where you can stand in the water with them.

While we were here Lolli became sick and a trip to the Gympie Vet determined she needed surgery to remove a mouth cancer so we stayed a second week to sort this out. After that we moved away from the coast for a little while and tried out our first Forestry campground at Glastonbury Creek, just West of Gympie, what a great little spot!

Lots of space, only 4 or 5 vans/trailers here with us, new composting toilets and treated creek water, drinkable if you want to. We were carrying enough but used it for washing clothes.



On the way through Gympie to here we bought a small (300watt) inverter so we could run our washing machine from the battery system and this proved to work very well. We had previously added a pair of folding solar panels to our roof panel and had up to 9 amps of charge available on full sun days so power was no problem.



Bauple RV Stop
Bauple Museum



After a single night at the Chatsworth Rest Area and shopping in Gympie we spent a couple of nights at Bauple, the home of the Macadamia (The “Bopple Nut”). This small community has long been bypassed by the Bruce Highway and has no shops but does have a great local museum which caters for the history of the whole district.

They even have the original Cabinet table of Joe Bjelke–Petersen’s government (see above).

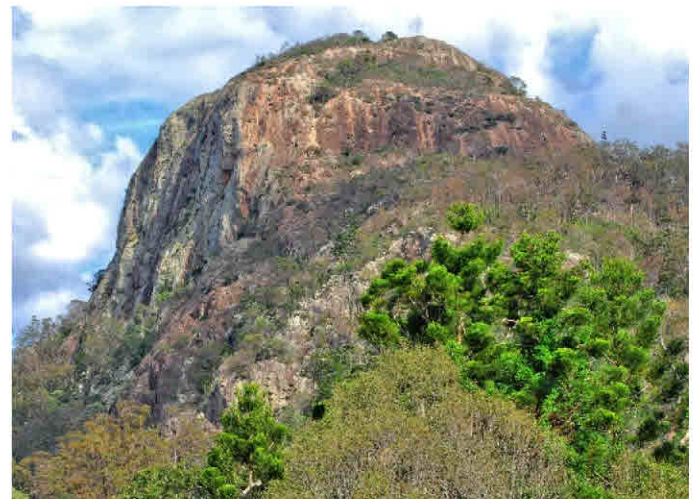
After Bauple we moved a little further inland to Biggenden and stayed for a week at the Council owned Mountain View Caravan Park, named for it’s view of Mt. Walsh which gives it’s name to a large National Park. The local area has a lot to explore with the famous Chowey Bridge (the first arched rail bridge of concrete construction), Coongarra Rock, a wonderfully scenic area with 4WD access only; and the Coulston Lakes volcanic crater which is easily climbed to view the crater’s permanent lake.



Biggenden is another country town which is slowly declining; once a rail centre and thriving agricultural town all that seems to be left is a local engineering works and the fertilizer depot/silos. The caravan park caretaker acknowledged that the town owes a lot of it's continuation to the tourists that stay here. It is a popular stopover for the southerners going north for Winter (and back).

Chowey Bridge with it's unique concrete arch

Coongarra Rock (below)



Coulston Lakes crater from the lookout area at the summit; this is about a 500m climb which is reasonably steep but our 2 dogs managed to make it as well as us. The views are worth it when you get there.



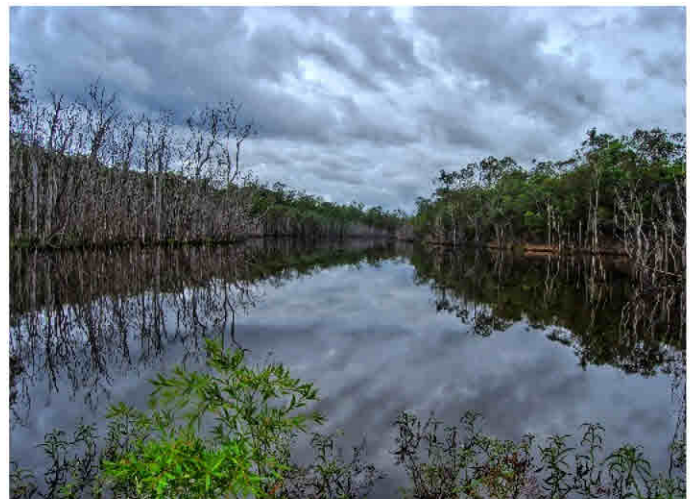
Heading back towards the coast we booked 4 nights at the Wongi State Forest Campground. This is a fairly large area with plenty of shade trees and toilets but only tank water.

Plenty of places to walk the dogs with waterholes all around the immediate area.

We had a lot of cloudy weather here so our solar system was really tested!

Wongi State Forest Camping Area
(above)

Wongi Waterholes (below)



From Wongi we decided that we had to visit Hervey Bay (because everyone does!) And found the Windmill Caravan Park had a vacancy and is one of the few that takes dogs.

The weather had improved and being only about 100 metres from the beach there are lots of walking opportunities, for us and the dogs.



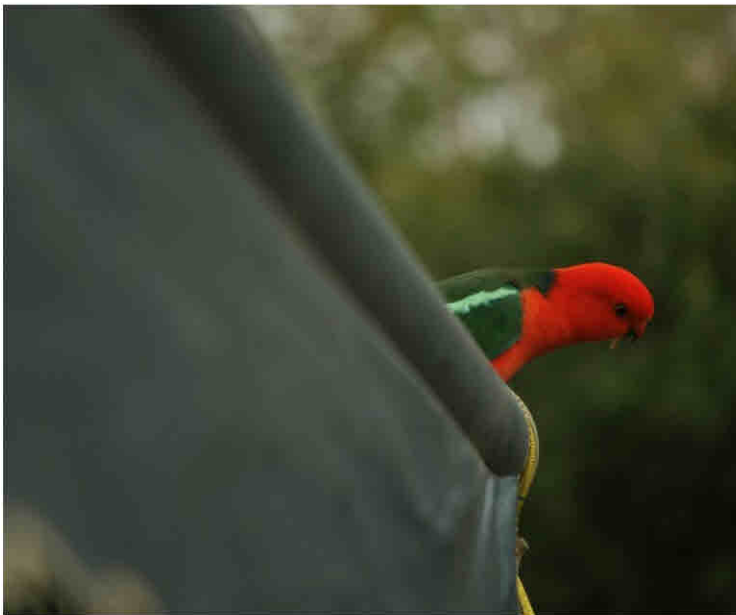
The Urangan Pier is the longest in Queensland at 1km but we didn't make the whole distance this time, maybe next visit? Unfortunately while we were here Lolli got very sick with the cancer spreading into her left eye and glands so we had to make the sad decision to have her put to sleep.

Frances made up a last memorial to Lolli with some coral on the beach where she last had a walk (Right)

About this time we found out that Thomas was coming home from China for a 10 day visit in July so from Hervey Bay we moved back inland to Kilkivan via an overnight stop at Tiaro.



Lolli and Tess in better times on Inskip Beach (Below)



Kilkivan Bush Camp was recommended by a fellow traveller at Gympie. With a rate of \$25 per night and every 4th night free we decided we would stay the 4 nights. However when we drove in and saw the lovely bush setting with creek frontage we decided that “pay for 6, stay for 8” was the way to go!

A few other campers came and went while we were here as there are also some small cabins and a camp kitchen. Birdlife is prolific around here including the King Parrot (above) perched on our awning. Plenty of walks around with gravel roads heading in 2 different directions from the entrance and a lot of ground just within the property. The abandoned Copper Smelter at Mount Clara is a short drive up the valley; this is also part of the Centenary Trail and it is possible to drive over the range to emerge south of Kilkivan village.

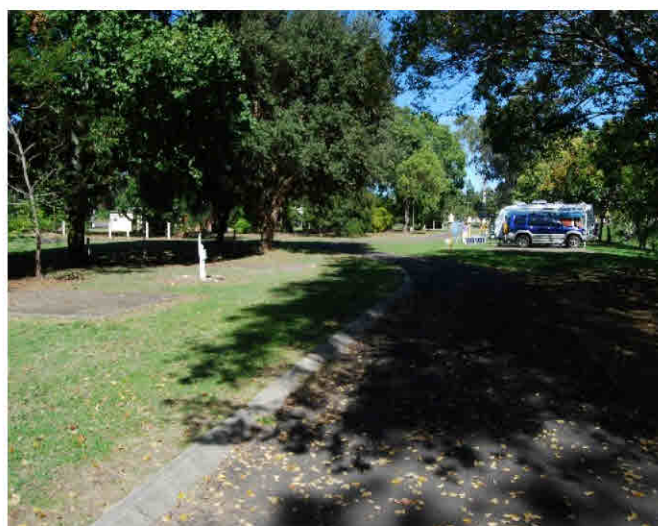


South of Kilkivan is another well known free camping spot at Kinbombi Falls. A lightly wooded area this had plenty of spots and we had up to 5 other vans there during our 4 night stay. There is a small toilet block here with some water if you want to carry it uphill!

Several walks allow you to look at the falls from the top (right), via 2 lookouts along the gorge, or to descend to the very bottom. Kilkivan village is only a 10 minute drive to pick up basic supplies (bread etc.) or visit the award winning butcher.



Moving on from the falls we stopped over in Murgon to discover that the local (Council) caravan park had become a 48 hour free RV stop - an empty caravan park with water and toilets but no site power!





Kingaroy's famous Peanut Silos dominate the town from any angle. Here we stayed again in the local Showgrounds where we stayed for a week and did a little local exploring. Having had lovely high 20s temp on the coast we now had overnight lows of -3 Ouch!

From here we travelled south to head into the Bunya Mountains, undeterred by the "Road not suitable for Caravans" sign we went over the top of Mount Mowbullan to the Bushland Park caravan park which is on the Eastern side. This has a small number of terraced sites and lots of trees; power, water and amenities block, all at \$25 per night.



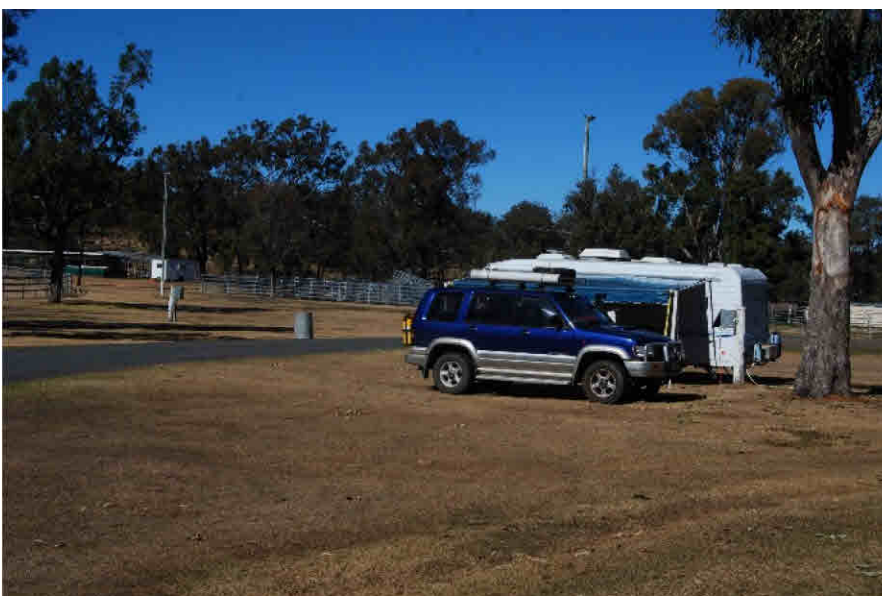


The Bunyas have several walks, from a couple of Km up to about 18km for the longest loop. We managed about four of the shorter (up to 4km) trails which all give spectacular views such as the one to the north West (opposite page)



The forest canopy ranges through the Bunya Pines (above), and huge ferns, to native Figs.

Descending from Bushland Park we stopped at the Yamsion Rest Area (left), our shortest day so far at 11Km



From here on to the Darling Downs and a 3 night stay at the Goombungee Showgrounds (left) before heading back into Ipswich and the local Showgrounds.

Part 3

The journey proper

begins (Again!):

Heading North



After Thomas' visit home from China and catching up with all the girls we finished the stay by camping in Laura's driveway for a week (above) and then headed North again with an idea of going up to at least Townsville and from there going

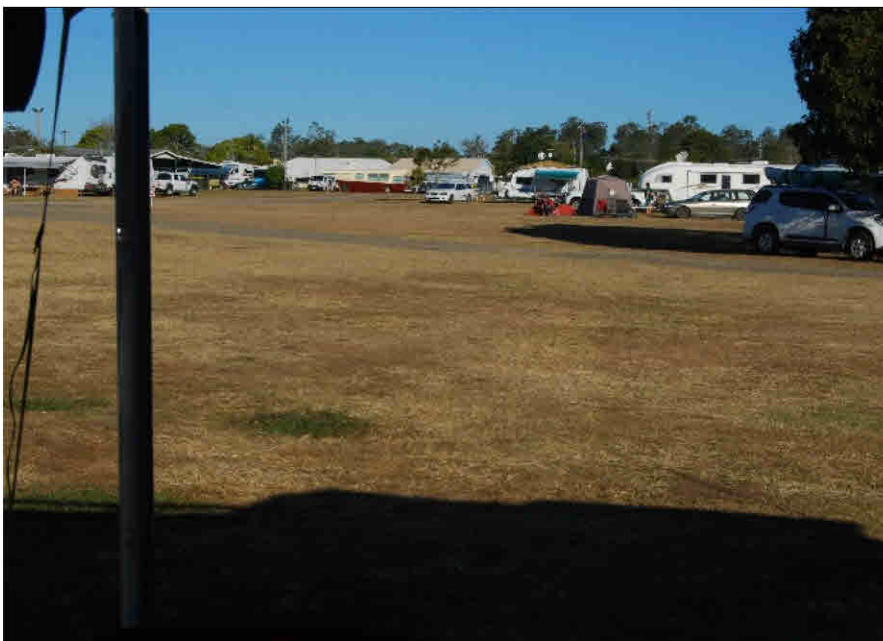
up to the Gulf before heading to the centre to catch up with Renee and see the sights.



Having gone as far as Hervey Bay last time we headed straight up the Bruce Highway and stopped for the first night at the rest area at Gunalda (left - north of Gympie) before moving on to Gin Gin (below) which is directly west of Bundaberg and

has local Showgrounds offering low cost (\$18/night) camping compared with all the Bundaberg area caravan parks at \$30+ as a minimum. This was the first time since heading South through Kingaroy that we didn't need any heating in the evenings and mornings; nice to get back to the sunshine and warmth and back

into wearing shorts.



We stayed a few days here and visited Bundaberg and the coast nearby before moving further North and onto the coast at the "twin towns" of Agnes Water and 1770.

The Captain Cook Holiday Park was about the only available where we could take the dog but was a great little spot with access to a virtually private beach (below centre) about 1km (driveable almost to the end in 4wd).the towns have different aspects and beaches with 1770 being a sheltered bay and Agnes Waters a surfing beach open to the ocean.



We were here for Frances' birthday and enjoyed some great local fish and had another couple of lunches on the foreshore.



We continued north with an overnight at Boyne River and then a couple of nights at a great free camp at Calliope River.

This is a very popular spot overlooking the river and a little sheltered from highway noise, Lots of space and shade trees with easy walking to the river and the old low level bridge which used to be the Bruce Highway (right)



Heading for the beach once more we travelled up through Rockhampton and out to the small locality of Keppel Sands.

This is very much a holiday home centre with a pub, small store and a coastguard station.

Being only 40km from Rockhampton it is easy to go and collect supplies if needed.

The caravan park here is one of the few remaining old style council owned parks with a caretaker and all the basics - and no fencing. It is a short stroll to the inland side of the estuary and a

little further to the ocean beach. A small park with a devoted group of regulars from Victoria who come up here every winter.

Keppel Sands ocean beach (right):

The time at Keppel Sands also saw the weather warming considerably and we were now staying in shorts for the first time in several weeks.

Moving north again we spent 4 days in the Byfield State Forest, topping up with supplies in Yeppoon on the way. Byfield has several campgrounds but only 2 that are suitable for caravans and pets. Red Rock campground (right) is a great spot with allowance for only 10 sites, every one with a picnic table and fire pit. A modern toilet block and treated creek water make it easy to stay.

There are plenty of roads and trails to walk and exercise ourselves and the dog and a local store 10 minutes drive away in the village of Byfield itself.

Back out of the forest and up the highway via overnight at Yaamba to another great free camp at St. Lawrence. This





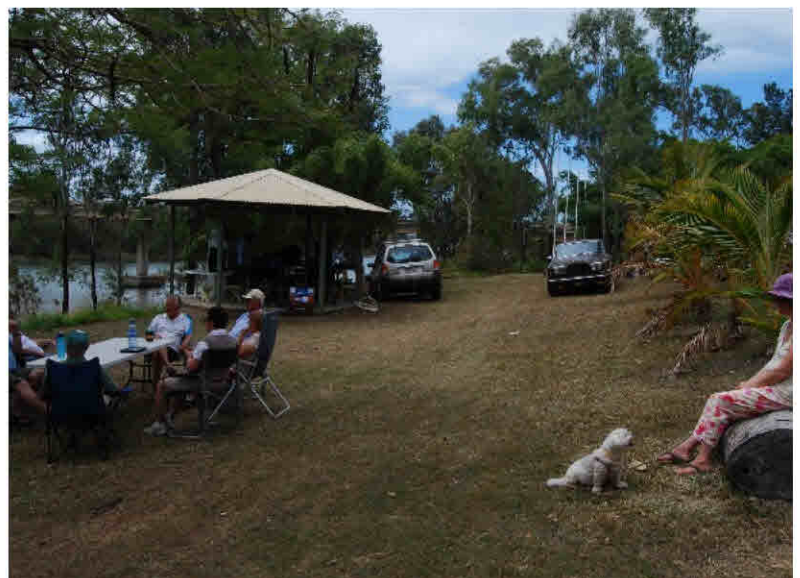
is community run and overlooks the wetlands (above) having an amenities block and water available; a small donation of around \$5 per night is requested to help with the upkeep. The wetlands have a multitude of birdlife, and kangaroos come down every evening from all directions.

While here Tess developed a very sore eye and we decided to miss some of the other coastal free camps and head for the nearest vet at Sarina. Just as well we did as the culprit was a paralysis tick on her eyelid!

Sarina is a sugar mill town with the caravan parks both very shaded with lots of palms and tropical vegetation like the Tropical Palms Park here (right).



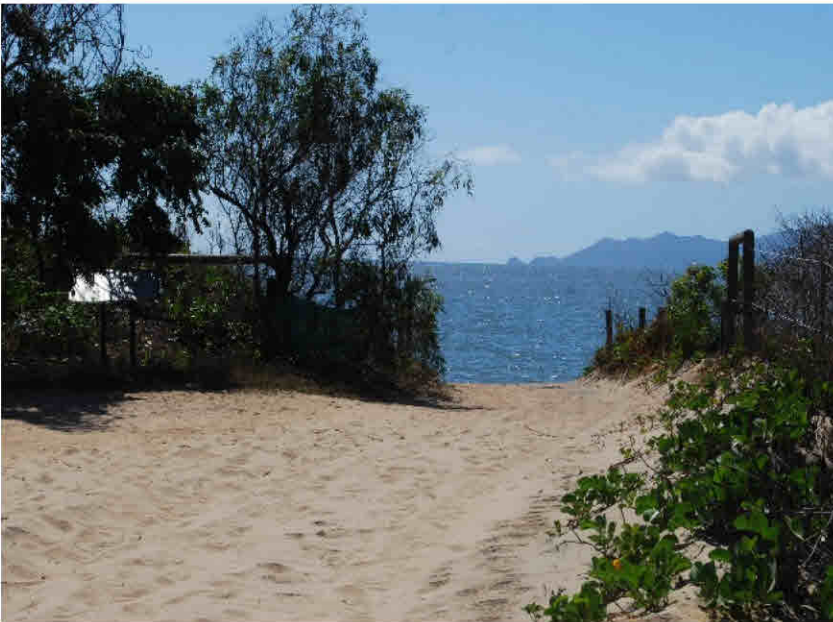
Still seeking the lower cost caravan parks we found a very pleasant one at O'Connell River a short distance off the Bruce highway. Roomy sites and not crowded this can be a popular spot for visiting nearby Airlie Beach without the higher site costs. The owner here has a collection of classic cars and hosted a free BBQ on the weekend with some fellow enthusiasts.





“Funny Dunny Park”

This is another little gem of a free camp near the small community of Wunjunga; about 30km south of Home Hill, and 17km from the Bruce Highway. So named because the council constructed a new eco toilet here some years ago and then the community decided to create a camp area here.



The entry track continues (left) through the camp ground to provide direct access to several kilometres of almost deserted beach in both directions with wonderful views out to Cape Upstart (below)

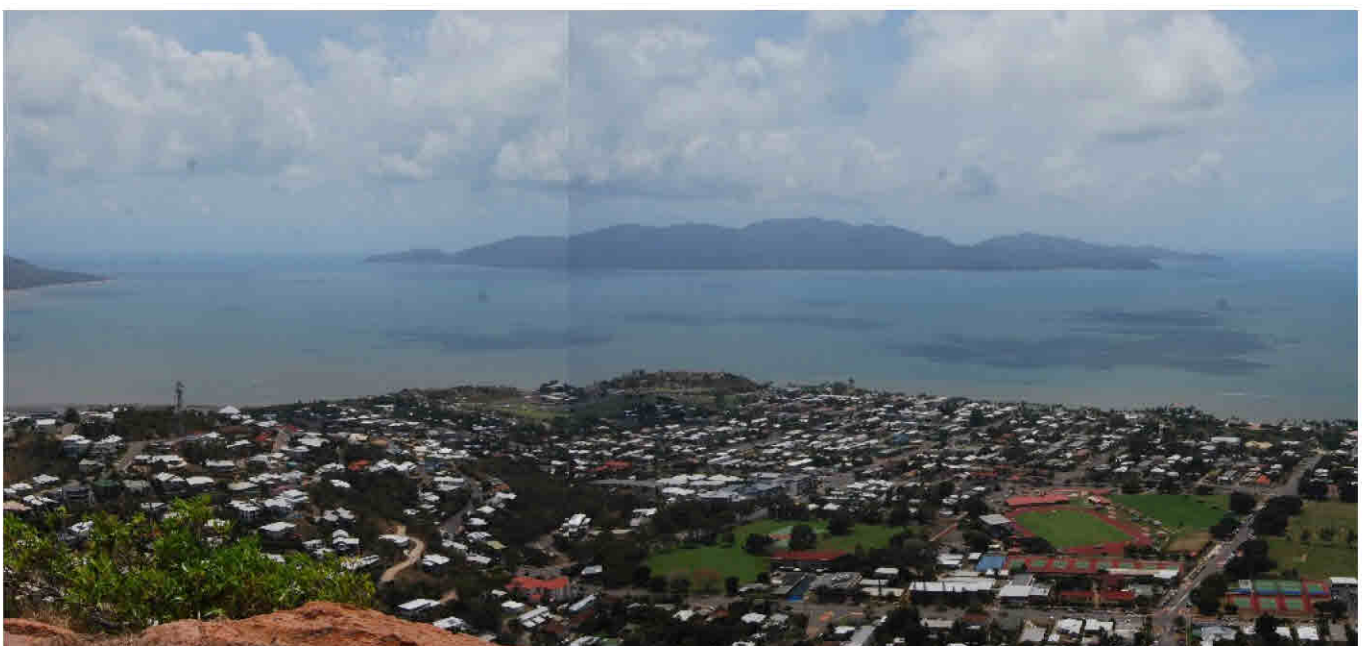


Townsville and some Expensive repairs!

On the way to Townsville we were gradually and rapidly losing power and the Jackaroo was sounding very sick! This turned out to be worn out injectors and so a repair bill of around \$3500 was the result!



We did take some time before leaving to look at Townsville's beach at The Strand, (top) the old Fort at the northern end and to drive up Castle Hill (right) for the magnificent views over the city and to Magnetic Island (below)





Moving West through Charters Towers brought us to Hughenden, one of several “Dinosaur Centres” in this part of Queensland. Here is a local Dinosaur museum which also houses other local history items such as that of the Sheep and Wool Industry.

A short drive to the North is Porcupine gorge seen on our cover photograph from the

main lookout. Further along the valley you can walk to the bottom and entrance of the main gorge at Pyramid Rock (below). We made it about three quarters of the way down but decided that was enough on a hot day! Maybe next time!

Also to the South of Hughenden is Mount Walker which offers 360 degree views of the surrounding area. (Below) This presents some stunning views including all the way back to Hughenden.



Continuing to head West towards the NT we finally hit the open tablelands and the magnificent sunsets that you get out here, this one at the Marathon Rest Area between Hughenden and Richmond.



Staying briefly in Richmond we moved on to Julia Creek and the free camp area at the Julia Creek billabong. This is maintained by the local Council who employ a “volunteer” camp host for the Winter season and the last of these hosts was just finishing up as we arrived.

Here we had our first experiences of seeing both Brolgas in the wild, and huge flocks of budgerigars.





Leaving Julia Creek after four days we passed through Cloncurry for a couple of nights and before Mount Isa stayed over at the old town site of Mary Kathleen.

This was Queensland's only Uranium mine until it was closed down in the mid 1980s and the whole town and mine site was auctioned in Australia's largest single

auction. Many of the houses from Mary Kathleen are now in Cloncurry and Mount Isa.

All that remains is most of the town streets although the access road is partly washed away. We camped beside the filled in Swimming Pool, just across from the old Caravan Park.



The night we were here was the Lunar Eclipse so we had a perfect clear sky to photograph the whole progression through to the Blood Moon that appears as the eclipse finishes.

Mount Isa



Mount Isa's townscape is instantly recognisable from the "stacks" of the town's mine which is the lifeblood of employment around here.

The caravan park we stayed at was also mostly converted to "Dongas" for miner's accommodation and is where Bevan

stayed for a while when working up here.

Nearby is Lake Moondarra, the town water supply and a popular day area for boating, ski-ing and fishing although no longer available for camping





Out of Mount Isa and westward the next stop was at the very popular free camp at Camooweal Billabong'

There is several hundred metres of the Southern side available here with a good supply of rubbish bins (but nothing else). At the Eastern edge of town there is a dump point with water and the roadhouse has standard

supplies if you run out of essentials.

Other than that a small caravan park at the hotel makes up the township of only 300+ people. There is also the Drover's Hall of Fame but we saved that for another time. We would have stayed longer but the Easterly wind was so strong you couldn't comfortably sit outside so we moved on after 2 nights.



We did get lots of photos of the abundant bird life here; Pelicans, Egrets, Brolgas and a pair of nesting Eagles (and many more)..



Finally we are in the Northern Territory, truly the land of Road Trains (although we had had them well and truly since around Hughenden but somehow here they get a little bigger!



We moved leisurely across the Barkly Highway, taking a couple of overnight stops at Avon Downs and 41 mile bore before turning South to Alice at the 3 Ways.

We spent 2 nights then at The Pebbles, (left) just North of Tennant Creek before spending a few days in the Tennant Creek caravan park. While here we visited the

Telegraph Station (below) (key from the Visitor Centre) and looked around the old mine workings at the visitor centre.

Topping up on shopping we hit the road South and stopped for 2 nights at the Ti Tree roadhouse caravan park before finishing the final leg to Alice.



Buying a local paper at the roadhouse proved to be a fateful move as we came across an advert offering free site for volunteer work at a

museum. This turned out to be the National Road Transport Hall of Fame where they wanted someone to stay for 3 months (Most summer volunteers only stay 2-



3 weeks) and get the gardens in order. This sounded good so we agreed, and after 3 nights at the Showgrounds took the van out to the museum. The site also incorporates the Kenworth Dealer Hall of Fame and the Ghan Heritage Rail



Museum.

Looking at the state of the gardens we thought 3 months should easily sort it out but after 2 months we were nowhere near finished' although Keith was often diverted to doing other things such as plumbing repairs, forklift driving and shed building!



Not long after arriving Frances was also feeding the birds (Corellas) in the 2 small aviaries and the local Galahs which come down every morning. We were also trained to operate the Mini Ghan miniature train which gives rides to customers around the garden and Ghan museum area. Before Christmas Keith was also doing the opening of the premises every morning so all in all we were fairly occupied. We were really only expected to do about 20 hours a week between us but undoubtedly did at least 30-35 most weeks. When it was really hot we didn't do anything after 10.30 and only worked Mon-Fri unless there was a plumbing problem at the weekend. The bird feeding and opening were 7 days tasks but didn't take up much time and everyone gathered for coffee before opening time so it was always a social occasion.



The "everyone" was often only 6 or 7 of us as there was only one other couple, Mike

and Ann arrived 3 weeks after us, plus Liz (the CEO) and Sherrill (IT manager); before and after Christmas hols was also Dallas, Sherrill's son, who is the manager of the Ghan museum and tearooms in the Winter season; he is the only full time employee as Liz and Sherrill are also volunteers. The only couple who were there when we arrived (Alan and Diane) left in December and we had no others until February, then only sparsely until about mid March.

Christmas time saw only the six of us present (Dallas on holiday) plus David Kent from Port Pirie, Liz's partner' Ann and Keith cooked the meal and Frances made a Pavlova to supplement the usual fare for dessert. We had planned to eat in the tearoom with the aircon on but as it was only about 23 degrees we settled for the verandah for the pre-dinner and no aircon inside for dinner (right). Boxing Day was a BBQ at Liz's and NYE similar.



Our original intention had been to stay around Alice for about a month to catch up with Renee and to do the main areas (Uluru, Kings Canyon, Ross River etc.) as part of a loop through to South Australia. We did see a lot of Renee (visiting us - left) but didn't get to the other areas so we plan to do another stint out here, maybe next year - we will visit the other areas first before getting to the museum!

As the new year progressed our agreement to stay three months (which would



have been February 1) was rapidly extending and it became obvious that we were going to be there until we needed to return to Brisbane for Laura's pending birth in early June. Keith had some annoying hernia problems and on learning that you only had to live in the NT for 3 months to qualify for all medical service had the problem sorted out with Surgery in early May. Trying to get it done in Queensland on the public

waiting list would probably have taken 2-3 years, not less than 3 months!

Alice Springs Attractions:

During our time at the museum we did get to all the local attractions we were interested in. Renee took us to Standley Chasm (left), and out to Emily Gap (below) and Jessie Gap (bottom) to the East.

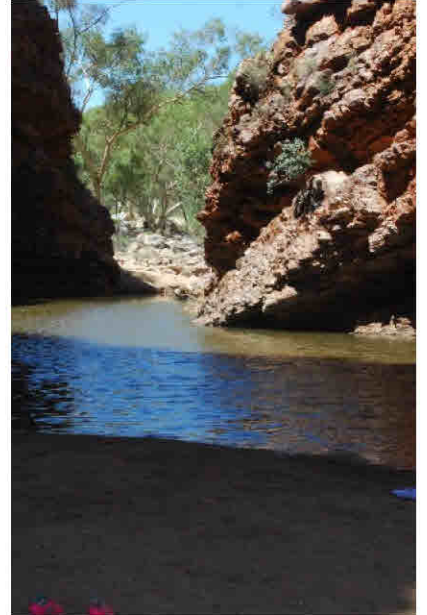


We also visited Simpsons Gap (opposite top right), the Telegraph Station (opposite upper centre), Alice Springs Desert Park (Opposite Centre) and up to the lookout on Anzac Hill. (Opposite bottom)



We were also lucky enough to see the Todd River with water flowing (for 4 days) after the heavy January rain, the best in 5 years (Opposite top left).





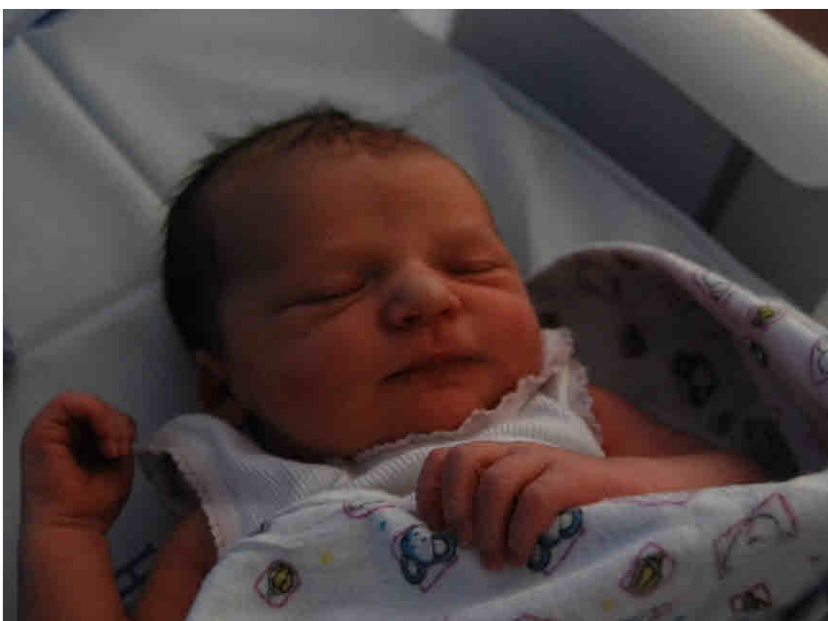
Leaving Alice Springs:



Finally, after recovering from the surgery and a few cold nights creeping in (-1 just before we left), we had to say farewell to our new friends at the transport Hall of Fame. A few evening campfires farewelled the stay perfectly.



The trip back to Brisbane was supposed to be a straight, quick run to be in time for Laura's pending birth on June 2, and with Frances doing some of the towing for the first time (left) we were making good time until fuel injector problems at Winton. This delayed us a week but we still made it in time for the birth of Harley on June 4th. (Below)



Harley Laurie Edward Bowman b. June 4, 2015, our 7th grandchild.

A New Journey Begins:

After spending over 2 months in Brisbane it was more than time to hit the road again. We needed to visit Bob (Frances' brother) at Gunning, near Canberra, as we had originally planned on returning from Alice in that direction. As it was way too cold to venture down there in August we decided on a loop going North about as far as inland from Gladstone, down through Queensland to cross into NSW at Goondiwindi, down to Gunning and back to Brisbane via another inland route in time for Christmas.

We had been at Olivia's for the last week and so headed off from there (Oxley) to the RV stop at Eumundi.

We hit 2 fairly rainy days but did get to stroll around the famous Saturday market between showers.

From there we decided to visit Maryborough which has some great historic buildings and which we had just passed through before to and from Hervey Bay.

A little research found the Cheery Nomad RV Park just 7km out of town and at a cheaper rate than the main caravan parks at \$24/night and 7th night free. We were both a little under the weather when we arrived, and being such a good place to stay, ended up here for 2 weeks.

This gave us plenty of time to look around

town and photograph all the beautiful old buildings, all restored and kept in pristine condition.. The old Post Office here is the oldest continuously operated PO in Queensland and the PO Hotel is almost as old both dating from the 1870s.





North from Maryborough we overnighted at the rest area north of Gin Gin and then turned West into the Kalpowar State Forest. This road from the Bruce Highway is signed as "Not suitable for Cars with Caravans" but is OK with 4WD due to the steep climbs on a loose stony surface. After about 50km of dirt road you arrive in the Campground (left) which has a large picnic shelter and a single drop toilet. There is a water tank but the contents were extremely brown!. A couple of other campers when we arrived but then another 2 days entirely to ourselves, very peaceful.



Out of here took us into Monto to top up on supplies and spend a couple of nights in the Caravan Park because we missed the free RV stop on the way through town. We took a drive out to the Hurdle Gully Lookout (left) and returned via hurdle Gully Road which is 4WD only. Great view from up here and quite unique vegetation we are told..



From Monto we moved on to Wuruma Dam, a free campground that seems to appear everywhere on favourite free camps - now we know why! This was our waterside



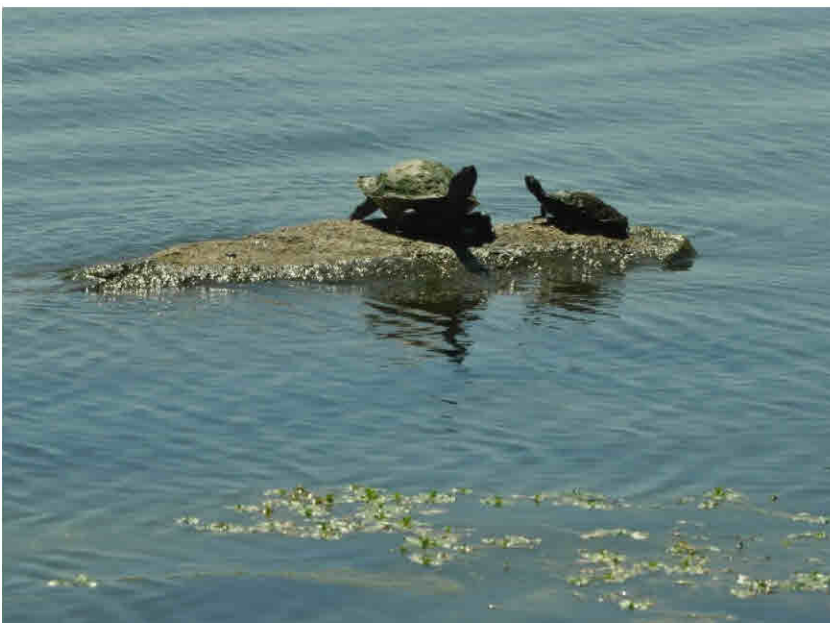
... and the view from our awning!

There is a small toilet block here (flush toilets, septic system) and bins plus a large skip for rubbish. There is no time limit on staying here and some stay for weeks on end. A local tourist operator (Jamie's 4WD Tagalong Tours) brings basic grocery supplies at least once a week and twice May to September and now also brings a 1000 litre water pod so you can refill your water tanks for \$10. It is about a 100km round trip to Monto (or Eidsvold) for groceries in full so we

ended up staying here for 10 days with a shopping (and Laundromat) trip in the middle.



The area in front of us was always populated with Pelicans and other water birds and small turtles come out to lay on the rocks.



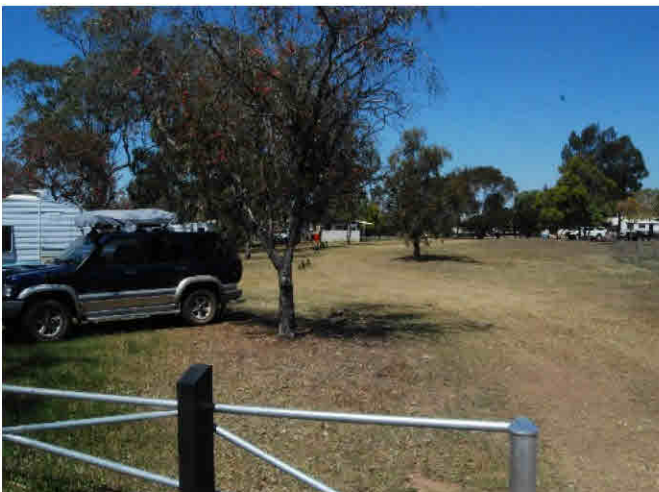
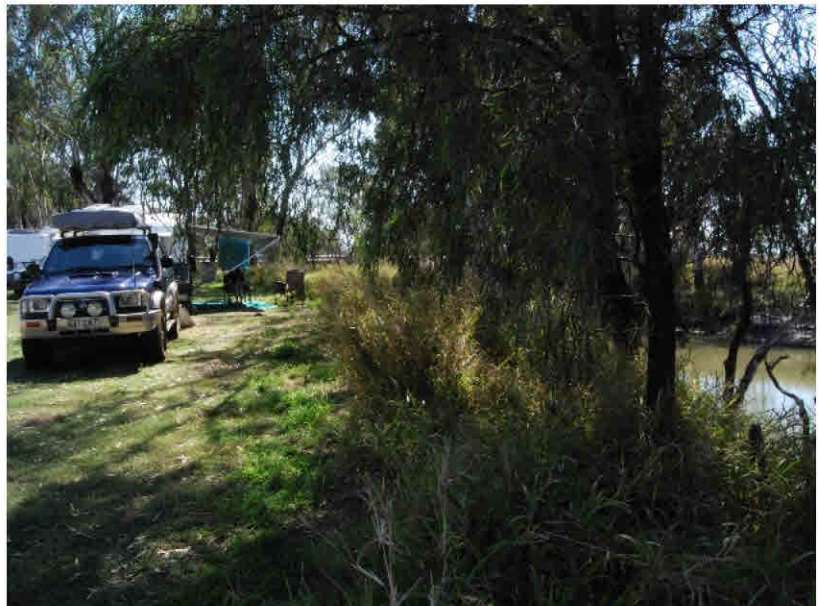


It is now early September and so we finally dragged ourselves away from Wuruma in order to keep a reasonable schedule for arriving in Gunning in early November (giving us plenty of time to return to Brisbane for Christmas).

From Wuruma we moved South through Munduburra (overnight at the rest area - Top Left) then via Jandowae

to Dalby for a few days in the caravan park.

Continuing South we moved through the free camps at Cecil Plains (right) and Millmerran, (below) staying at each for the 3 day maximum allowed. These are both great little spots arranged by Toowoomba Regional Council. Cecil Plains is a Picnic Area and has toilet block and fresh water; Millmerran is the conversion of a disused park with picnic table and rubbish bins but there is a dump point



Next overnight stop was at the RV area at Inglewood before travelling South towards the NSW border along the Dumaresq or McIntyre River system. As it was coming into the weekend of Australia's major motor race, the Bathurst 1000, Keith wanted a spot with good TV reception. We had discovered that there are several "fishing camps" along the river maintained by Goondiwindi Shire Council.

These are all no facilities but have some mowed areas and access roads (gravel). We ended up at Rainbow Reserve which is the closest of these to Goondiwindi at about 17km East. There was one other camper when we



arrived and after that, in 4 days we only had an odd one come in for an overnight stay so mostly we had our area to ourselves as there is a lot of room here. This stretch of water is not the McIntyre itself but a sort of Anabranch which flows only



in flood conditions but does serve as an irrigation feed to nearby farming.

Because of this you are not actually on the state border which is the river proper. The major problem here were the bush flies which made it impossible to watch TV outdoors and Frances had to wear her personal mossie net under her hat which Renee had given her in Alice; must get another one when we come across one! There was a lot of

bird life here, especially Sulphur Crested Cockatoos which make a lot of noise! Sunset over the river here wa very colourful.





Leaving the river camp behind we paused in Goondiwindi to empty toilet, fill water, and do shopping and Laundromat. Then after overnight at the North Star Road Rest Area (with a truck running his aircon right next to us!) moved down to Moree. Somewhere in the last few days Keith had strained his back and was in distinct need of a Chiropractor. We

therefore stayed at the Moree Showgrounds for 4 days so we could get everything back in shape and shop again before moving on. Like many towns Moree has certainly tidied up their town centre with street plantings and restored buildings.(Above)

Next destination was the Pilliga Forests, stopping first at a rest area and then going through the forest via two of the Picnic Areas, first a night at Schwager's Bore (right) and then one at The Aloes (below right.). The flies were still bad here or we may have stayed longer. On spending the next few nights in a community caravan park, "Camp Cypress", at Barradine (below) we were told by the locals that this was the worst fly problem in memory so it wasn't just us!





Aiming to visit our niece, Melissa, and family in Dubbo we found a great little rest area at Hickey's Falls in the shadow of the Warrumbungles. A little highway noise here but great spot with the waterfall (above) only a couple of hundred metres away and a walking track to the top which even the dog managed. - Coming back down - Right.



After spending three nights at Melissa's we continued South pulling in next at Bogan Weir, Peak Hill. This is a less well known area on the Bogan River, about 7km West of the Newell Highway and has several acres of riverfront land with a couple of picnic Shelters and a rubbish bin. Staying for four days we only ever had one other camper and until; it rained was very pleasant; at last we had got rid of the flies.





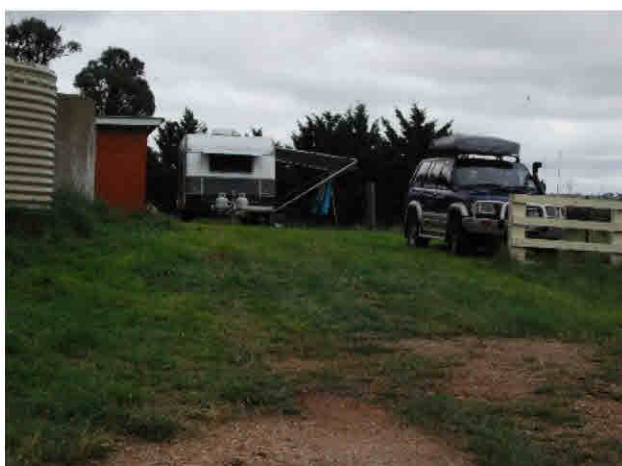
On leaving Peak Hill it was obvious the Jackaroo was having another engine issue; it had been idling rough for a short while which was not a good sign and as it turned out it was injector failures again (two) no doubt caused by the harness failure we had in Brisbane. Having to get this fixed we went to the Parkes Showgrounds (left) and ended up staying 9 days because of diagnosing the exact issue and

then waiting for parts which were supposed to be in Sydney but were in fact in Melbourne! Hopefully we have come to the end of the failures and can look forward to some trouble free motoring.

Another rest area at Ooma Creek, north of Grenfell (right) completed our run to Bob's at Gunning, arriving exactly a week after we predicted.



The driveway into Boureong (left) is several hundred metres to the house and we set up camp near the Shearing Shed where there is a small toilet, just before the final part of the drive turns down to the house and gardens.



This used to be mostly sheep country but now mostly runs cattle as Bob does on the 400 acres which now comprise the property. The original house was built in the 1830s and the railway came in the 1870s running right by the rear of the house.

Trains running regularly through here, which is the main Sydney-Melbourne line, include the daily XPT services to Melbourne and Canberra as well as freight services up to 1.8km long, drawn often by four locomotives.

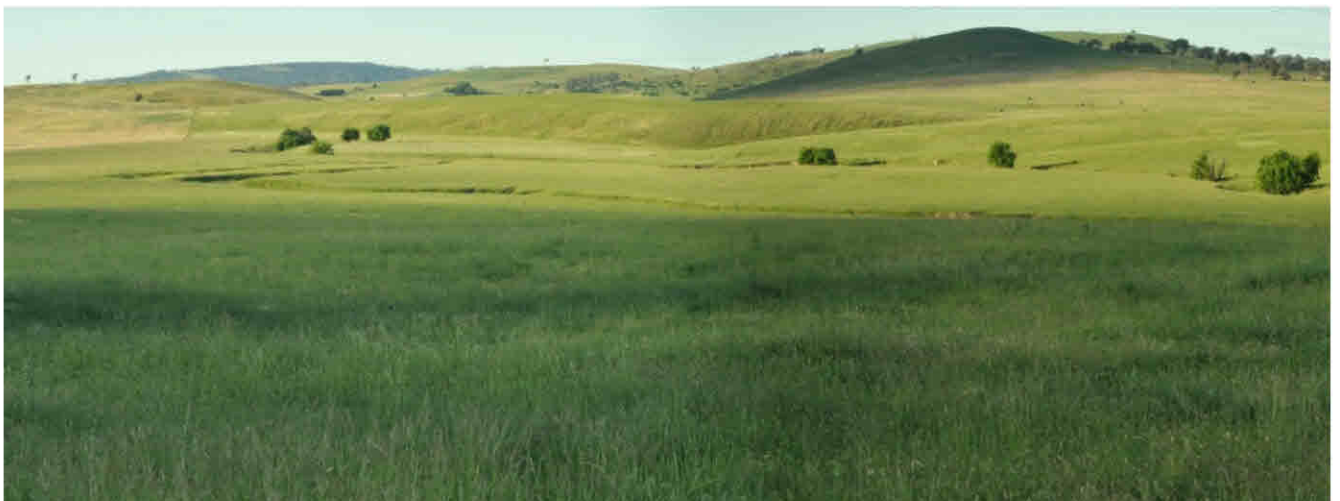


The house (above) is just to the right of the bridge here and the railway line is the property boundary along this side.



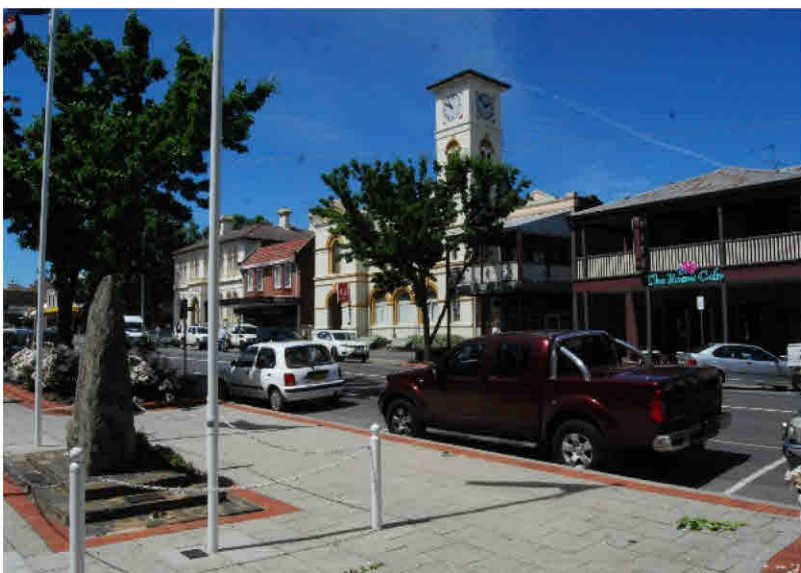
This is all fertile country with reliable rainfall so the whole of the surrounding pasture is very green and lush at present. Below is the view across the grazing land from our van.

We stayed here for almost 3 weeks and during the time had a couple of walks around Gunning which has some restored buildings as it becomes more desirable for Canberra commuters being only about 65km away.



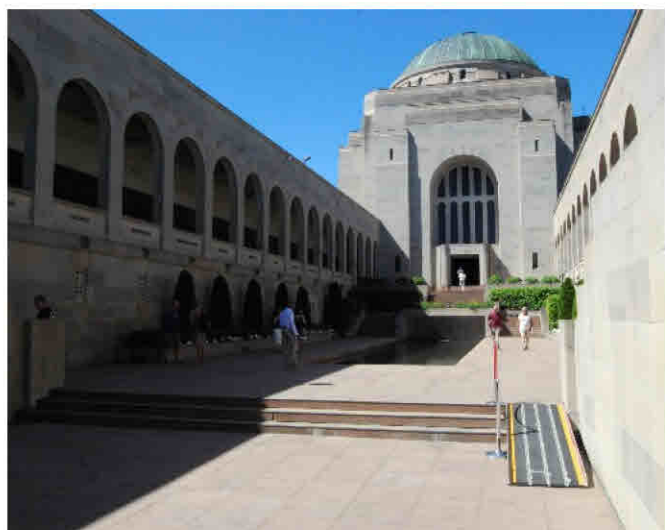


Gunning Post Office and the Railway Station (still in use) are both fully restored and kept in pristine condition. This was the end of the line when first constructed so was a major livestock loading point for the district South of Goulburn.



We also took time to visit Yass for shopping (and the Dentist for Frances!) And into Canberra for both sightseeing and visiting. Yass has also been bypassed for a few years and the main street is now very restored and attractive. (Left)

Our visits to Canberra took in the Australian War Memorial, (left) much changed since our last visit in the 1980s., And the National Gallery (right)



After almost 3 weeks we left Gunning to allow ourselves 3 weeks plus to get back to Ipswich in time for Christmas and to visit an old friend from Tasmania, Laura, at her new property in the Capertee Valley.



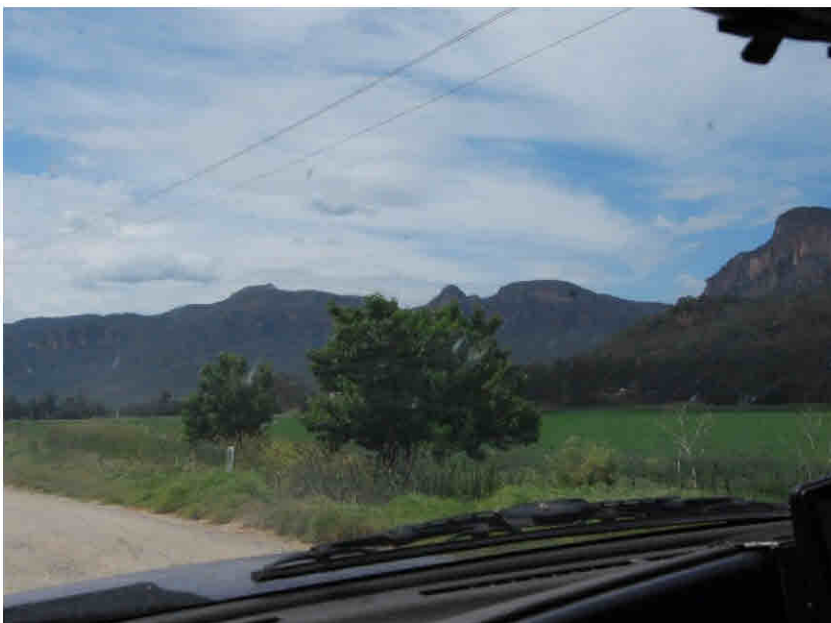
First stop was the free camping area at Abercrombie River (right) after a winding and sometimes hilly drive.

This camp has loads of space and has drop toilets and rubbish bins. We parked in the riverside area among the trees and were rewarded with lots of bird life including Friar birds which we have seen in other places from time to time.

From here we stopped off for an hour to shop in Bathurst and then moved on to Sunny Corner Recreation Ground, an old cricket ground in an old Forestry Village.



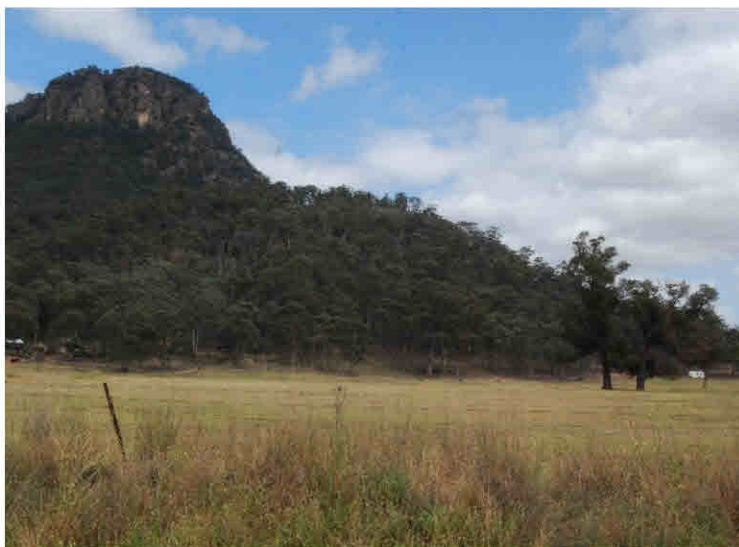
Heading onward to the Capertee Valley we crossed some beautiful country driving over the ranges from Capertee to Glen Davis.



To reach Laura's property we had to travel up the valley to Glen Davis and about 7km back down the other side to the mouth of the Capertee Gorge. The views of this area are spectacular with this being one of the major areas for artist's painting the cliffs and gorge views.



This is just part of the view from our caravan where we parked along the fence line.



In this view back towards the property our caravan is the tiny white shape at the far right on the edge of the tree line.

Glen Davis township was created in 1940 to support the recently completed Shale oil Refinery (don't let anyone tell you that Shale Oil is a new venture!) This refinery was producing petrol from 1940 to

the early 1950s and finally closed in 1956 when the government stopped subsidising the operations. At this time most of the town and all the refinery equipment was sold off and now only a few houses remain. There is a boutique hotel and a free camp ground due to the artists and birdwatchers.

There is also a large campground in the National Park just a few kilometres further up the gorge. On the way you can climb a track and see the remains of the refinery buildings which are in disrepair. (Opposite top) The petrol was pumped via pipeline into the neighbouring valley at Newnes where there was a



railway terminal to transport it to Sydney; some of these pipes lie alongside this access track.

This is definitely a place we will come back to and Laura and Glenn have told us we can come and stay anytime.

Time to keep moving towards Brisbane so we travelled North through Glen Alice and a little more dirt road before rejoining the highway at Rylstone.

An overnight stop at the Cassilis Rest Area (lots of space and new toilets) took us to the little town of Premer which has a Lions Club provided RV Park with some power and water available for a donation.

At Gunnedah we found a free camp area on the banks of the Namoi River just out of town to the north but it looks like the camp is closing.





Next stop along the way was Tamworth and surrounds and we decided to try the free camp ground at Cockburn River, about 30km to the East. This was a very quiet little spot, close to the small town of Limbri and right on the river bank except there was not much water close to the camp ground at present.



After three days here we ventured back into Tamworth for topup of water etc. and Christmas shopping. Having completed all that in record time we only moved up the nearby Moonbi Range to camp at the lookout area at the top of the First Moonbi Hill as it is called. This has spectacular views to the West and plenty of camping space with toilets and rubbish bins.

Sunsets from here are pretty good too:

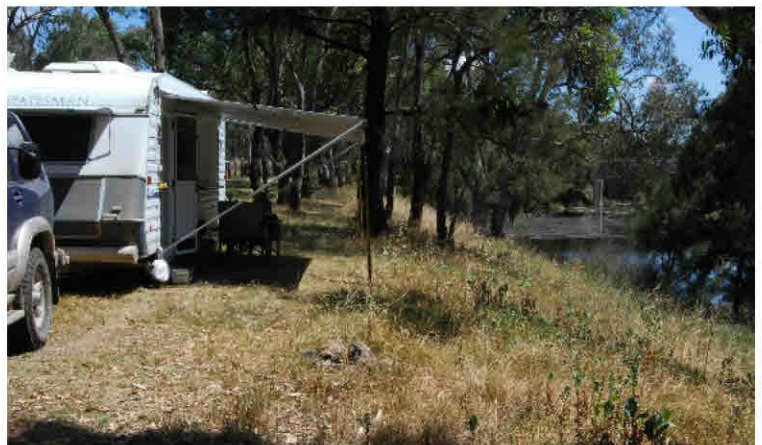


Leaving the Tamworth area you finally feel you are reaching the end of the journey as Brisbane is only about 500km away. Rather than simply following the New England highway we decided to divert inland and travel some roads we may not get to again for a while.

We intended to stop at the Rocky River area near Uralla but new signage made us think it was now a No Dogs area; we found later when we saw it again this was a new type of signage indicating No Dogs Off Leash - very confusing! Having moved on from here we failed to find the camp at Yarrowyck and continued on to another Lions Club park at Bundarra. This is a great little (well not so little) spot on the bank of the Gwydir River next both the old and new (2015) highway bridges.



Lots of room here with a toilet block, BBQ shelters and water (although the water pressure makes it a very slow process to fill anything!)



We decided to stay here for three days and the weather was really great, lots of bird life to watch and we were told there are Platypus in the river but we failed to spot them this time.

Passing through Inverell we topped up on water and groceries and headed to Bonshaw Weir on the Dumaresq River; another great little free camp with no facilities except Picnic tables but riverfront again. Definitely Platypus here as Keith scared one off the bank but could not get it to resurface for a photo!



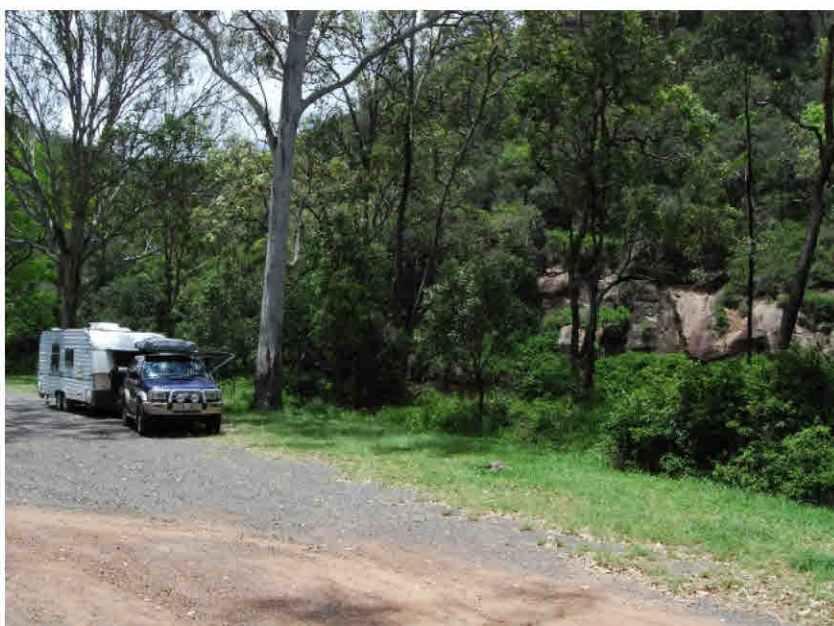


Bonshaw Weir itself, absolutely adjacent to the camp ground

Now only two steps from our destination of the Ipswich Showgrounds we stayed first in the small town of Leyburn, well known for it's annual car sprint meeting held in August. Here the Showgrounds provide a toilet and rubbish bins and L.O.T.S of s..p..a..c..e (Right)



Our final stop was a Rest Area at Heifer Creek on the way down the range from



Clifton to Gatton. This is the only range crossing between the Cunningham (Ipswich to Warwick) and Warrego (Ipswich to Toowoomba) Highways. It is a surprisingly easy descent and only a little narrow in a couple of spots if meeting a truck. Great little spot alongside the creek, nice rock walls and lots of shade. A great spot for the end of the loop.

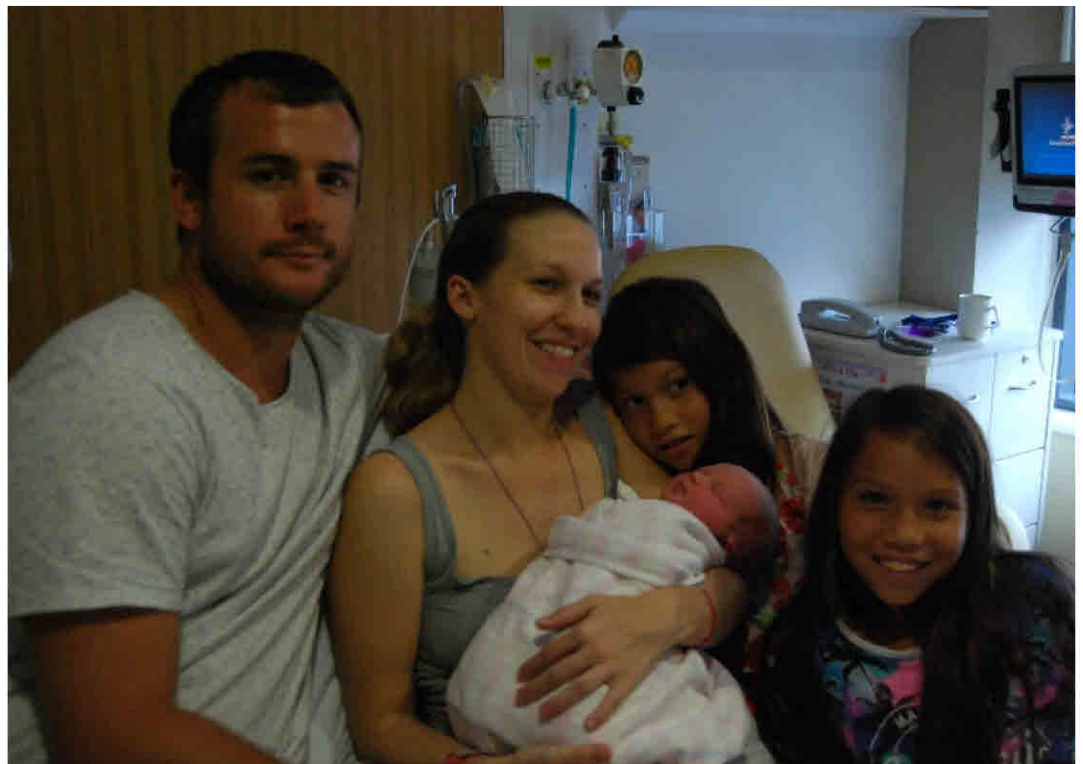
Back at the Ipswich Showgrounds for the fourth time (or is it fifth?) We just had time to settle in before the family Christmas gathering on Christmas Eve at Zoe's. To get into the spirit of the season we put up our fairy lights which we bought in Alice last Christmas as we intend to be here for a week at least.



Following a great Christmas gathering we were surprised by Zoe giving birth on the 27th, about a week early.



So we welcomed to the family Amber Evelyn Druce at 10.20 am December 27th 2015 - our 8th Grandchild!!



Some thoughts on 2 Years on the road:

Keith:

General:

Definitely the right choice to hit the road, we couldn't have done this while trying to keep the house as well so you just have to choose your priority and hope you get it right - I am sure we did. We have met many fellow travellers along the way who have been doing this for many years with no intention of stopping; and others who are not enjoying it as they thought (although not many!) You certainly have to both be on the same page as there are many challenges along the way, especially when you are still learning all the little tricks and nuances.

The caravanning experience:

Caravanning has come a long way since our previous experiences in the 80's and early 90's and we have learned a lot of small things along the way. We have learned, for instance, how to manage our limited water supply to the extent that we can make 140 litres last 6 days! We have also learned more about the battery system and solar charging systems and how to make more things charge and work from 12 volts.

The Travelling so far:

As for the travel experience and the places we have been there are some real "gems" out there and we have barely scratched the surface yet! There are over 900,000 km of public roads in Australia and we have towed over only a mere 13,000 of them - lots to go yet! There are some places that we will definitely go back to and maybe a few not so attractive. If I had to pick favourites I would put Wuruma Dam at the top of the list regardless of popularity. For a place where you can get some quiet solitude (or almost) spots like Bonshaw Weir, Bundarra Lions Park and some of the Queensland Forests (perhaps Byfield?) are a stand out.

The Future:

Down the Darling is our plan for the start of 2016 but then..? Maybe SA, maybe Alice again, maybe WA (South)? Who knows... more thoughts in another year or two.

Some Thoughts...

Frances:

After a good deal of thought, and planning (mostly on Keith's part, especially the practical side of things!) We did rather set off into the unknown into a lifestyle almost alien to our previous. Even with our previous experiences caravanning for holidays when the children were young. Finding ourselves accepting a nomadic existence but I know for me still wholly tied to our family in Brisbane.

That apart there seems to be a lot more to it than I expected, from the beginning when it seemed more like an existence of drifting along, to looking for a positively nice places to stay and actually finding real gems, and knocking back bad uns! And of course there is such a lot to see. Although the least pleasant thing is the actual driving (or in my case the travel bit) (failed to reverse a caravan two years in a row.)

We haven't really left all the basic niceties behind, I can't say I'm sorry we aren't roughing it. Am pleased to leave lots of housework behind but miss the garden. Even though we have a lend of plenty more of a better kind of garden.

Do expect to find places we'd want to stay for longer periods in the future and there are certainly places we will stop at again. So it will be on into what!! Meeting all sorts of people, and keep on planning how to make our place a bit more sophisticated and be more self contained, and do this thing better.

No hurry..



Some More Photographs:



Top: Hervey Bay Low Tide

Left: West from Bunya Mountains

Bottom: Sunset Barkly Tablelands





Top: The Pebbles (NT)

Below: Wuruma Dam, Queensland





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