

**Hi everyone**, our year is starting later with no High Country or Tasmanian trips to fill the summer months, but that might also mean you won't have to wade through eight pages of ramble any more. (Yes you will!) Being semi-retired (no more truck driving for Tony) means we spend the early months looking after the garden, bike riding, visiting, or doing things to the pie cart. Cindy turned 40 this year so I had a week making miniature things for her high tea, then dressed as a maid to serve them. Tony's back problems were almost cured by a dose of four injections that are still working well so far. Went from retiring this year to not until after 2016, all going well. That will be 25 years doing what we love with people we love. \*m/t (morning tea) a/t (afternoon tea).

## **Goog's Track**

May 6th

*John, Suzanne & Rhonda, David & Anne, Diana, Chris & Liz, Deb & Fiona, Neil & Stephen, Alan & Leon.*

\*Our first tour for the year left from Port Augusta on May 6th. The weather wasn't looking too good, but improved as the day progressed. The country north of Iron Knob was lush and green after recent rains, and there was as much water around the dams as there was in them. The shearing had finished at Mt Ive the day we arrived, and the team's gun shearer was a young lady. I cooked our dinner the first night, while the shearers had a big meal of hamburgers. The people looking after the station had a freezer that stopped working and there were heaps of meat to be eaten. We were given a leg and shoulder of lamb that I roasted for all our crew the following night. Delicious! Morning saw the tents wet from heavy dew, and there had been a meteorite shower overnight but it was too cloudy to see anything. I would love to have taken some pictures but didn't want to get up at 4 am to do it even if the sky had been clear.



Out to Pete's Pillars for morning tea, back to camp for lunch, then to the embankment that was holding back a large amount of water (last trip there it was bone dry), a very wet Lake Gairdner, and

emu bushes that were in flower. While the crew went to the top of Mt Ive for sunset, the roast was prepared. There were high wispy clouds and a big ring around the sun as we left the station heading south through the Gawler Ranges NP. Visited Paney Station shearing shed (now part of the NP) and



had lunch at old Paney. Set up camp at the back of Pidalpa Rock to try and get out of a swirly cold wind (worked a little bit) and we managed to have a fire, cook tea and celebrate Anne's birthday before we headed to bed, just in time to beat the rain. Blew, and rained on and off all night, so Tony had a hard time getting the fire going for breakfast. Packed up between showers, then took all sorts of wet muddy tracks to Wallala hill for lunch. The clouds were breaking up then, so it was quite hot in the sun and the flies were very friendly. Eight very muddy cars arrived in Ceduna for a night in a motel and dinner at the hotel. Cars were put through the wash and tents and assorted wet things out in the sun to dry. A very pleasant night. Woke to a fine morning, and a tour of a local oyster farm. For some it was oysters for morning tea, (and dinner, & dinner, and dinner again further up the track). There is a trail of oyster shells all the way up Goog's track, but not all ours I must add! Lunch was at the park boundary; the rock hole was full of water, and camp was at Goog's Lake. Either S.A. Parks or Friends of The Track have been very busy. An over abundance of pine poles restricting camp areas, small things planted in plastic surrounds, (many were dead) and tables and chairs but still no toilet. There was one other vehicle near us but they weren't at all talkative; and there was water in the lake, very pretty with the moon coming up. In the morning our dry tents were wet again from a thick fog and heavy dew.

Climbed the small peak in front of Mt Finke, found several big flowers on the stunted eucalypts and set up camp in black oaks on Malbooma Station. The track hadn't been too bad, some of the south sides of the dunes were chopped out, but the top end is getting like the Anne Beadell, very corrugated! With tyres back to dirt road pressures we were back on the main dirt road to Kingoonya. Passed a train derailment that happened three weeks earlier. They were still cleaning up the last half

dozen or so carriages, with everything going into a big hole in the ground. Lunch was in Kingoonya, mostly chips and toasted sandwiches at the pub out of the cold wind. Visited the cemetery at Woomera where Len Beadell is buried, and into Roxby Downs for the night. Some to the hotel for dinner and some stayed in the camp. We couldn't have a tour of BHP's mine so we watched a video, then shopped and headed to Andamooka for lunch; and a display of opal cutting. One lucky lady is now wearing Andamooka opals. Headed to Mulgaria the scenic route (ie wrong turn) set up camp and went up to the highest hill for sunset. Diana started the next day with a flat tyre (totalled) we had lunch at Farina, and explored the town ruins where a group of volunteers had the underground oven working making egg and bacon pies and finger buns. They were nearly sold out after our group went through. Fuel and a new tyre for Diana at Copley before we turned into the Gammon ranges. We had lunch at the Wheal Turner Mine with a group of camel walkers who were waiting for their lift back to camp. Spent the next day at Arkaroola on Jacob's Track, found some Sturt's desert pea, and took several vehicles to the top of the station lookout. Late in the afternoon Suzanne took a heli-flight over the ranges. After dinner Tony had the oven a bit hot for Suzanne's damper, but apart from the burnt base, it was quite tasty. Turning south, we tested out Echo Wall, had lunch in Chamber's Gorge and set up camp on Angorichina Station. Spent the next day on station tracks, with the odd wrong turn, and an uh oh or two, but the weather was perfect and the views magnificent. Finished the day with coffee at Blinman and dinner at the pub for some. Deb tried her hand at cooking scones and even with Tony's help turned out some perfect specimens! She was very pleased. The next morning it was off to Willow Springs to set up an early camp, then Wilpena Pound for morning tea.

Cruised through Bunyerroo Valley and photographed a big group of yellow-footed rock wallabies in Brachina gorge. It's the first time we had seen them so close. Our last day was on Willow Springs' Skytrek, great weather, exhilarating driving and fabulous scenery. It was late in the afternoon when we arrived back at camp for our last night's party. The lady drivers, Suzanne, Deb and Diana handled everything we threw at them with gritted teeth; no, they all did beautifully, not a wrong foot anywhere. Not forgetting their offsidiers, Rhonda, Fiona and Liz, who gave them an occasional break in the driving.



## Canning

May 26th

*John (Kiwi) & Judy, John (farmer) & Elizabeth, John (the pom) & Jeanette, John & Linda, Alan & Cheryl, David & Lee, Cameron & Jessica, Alan & Linda, Neville & Liz, Bob & Margaret. You might notice there was John, and John and John and John, hence the alt. names. (Also 2 Lindas & 2 Alans) Really kept Tony on his toes knowing who was on the other end of the microphone.*

The Tanami was in great condition so driving was easy, but dusty. Four vehicles (one with a caravan) flew past us in the dust. The back three might have been in radio contact but the first one would have had no idea what was coming towards him. Collected a card in Billiluna to fuel first thing in the morning and set up camp on the edge of Sturt Creek. Plenty of water and native couch grass to put the tents on a very pleasant campsite. \$2500+ and several hours later we were all full of fuel ready for the track. Lunch was beside a dry part of Lake Gregory, but 2km later there was water and lots of broilgas. We finished the day celebrating Jeanette's birthday at Well 50. It was fairly early in the season; the grass was high, there was plenty of water in Breaden Pool and the track was already corrugated. We saw our first camel and the first small dunes caught some drivers out. There was one vehicle in camp, and our tea was late by the time everything was up. We set up the shower using water straight from the well, brisk but refreshing. Hair washed and clothes were hung up to dry. A late start on Linda's birthday. Bob and Margaret got stuck on a dune, so Alan and Cheryl pulled them backward to have another go. Tyre pressures were down but not enough for most, they kept going backwards. More air out and try again until the message finally got through. A warm 39 degrees in the sun, and another burnt out vehicle just north of Well 45; (you bought a what?) Passed sixteen camels, two men, one dog and five dingoes. By day 6 it was much better travelling, a rare backwards, but the dunes were well chopped up and had to be ironed to make them easier. One dog, two vehicles, fifteen camels and two dingoes.



The spinifex was thick and high, making it hard to find a good campsite. Getting late we camped in a small swale with the toilet built in an underground termite mound so it didn't collapse in the soft sand. There was very little water at Water 38, just enough for the finches and budgies for a while, and Alan staked a tyre. Tony plugged it later down the track. Had an early start to Well 33 for water and showers, only to find both tanks empty. Hooked up the hose straight to the windmill then had to wait

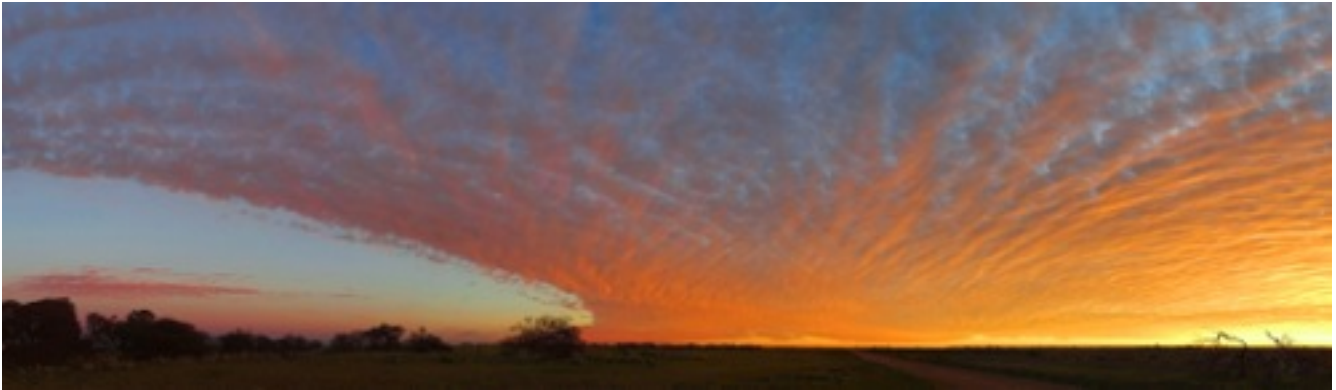
for the wind to blow. Took us until 11.30 to do everyone, would have been much quicker to water up at the community. Fuelled and repaired Kiwi John's exhaust and Alan and Cheryl's brake brackets. Their fuel isn't cheap but the vegies were, and very fresh. Thirteen camels, and two cars and trailers. It was burnt out around Thring Rock making firewood collection hard, but it was a great sunset. Started the next day replacing Neville's blown, brand new shocker, and met five vehicles from Perth at Well 28. The area was very dry and the animals had dug deeply to get water from the soak. Alan and Linda ran over a rock and totalled another tyre, so Tony had to repair their first one. It was normal corrugations to Georgia Bore for a late m/t to wash hair and top up the water. Passed a camper trailer on edge of track, still there from last year, with a note to say they would be back to collect it. Still intact (possible wheel bearing) but don't know for how much longer! five vehicles were setting up an early camp above Lake Disappointment, and there was quite a lot of water in Savoury Creek. Passed one more as we headed to a campsite we knew, with fingers crossed it would be empty as it was getting late in the afternoon. It hadn't been used since our last visit, and our firewood was still there. It was an extended m/t at Well 19 while Tony plated farmer John's two broken back main spring leaves. A late lunch and then the track turned towards a large plume of smoke in front of us. It had been right up to the track as we turned into Durba Springs to join another twelve vehicles camped there; but we still managed a large area. The camps included ten or so aboriginal rangers from Jigalong who checked out our permits, and were lighting the fires. They also set cat traps but without success. We put up camp, most had showers and then settled in for the night. The following morning everyone else left, it was lovely all on our own. Some washed clothes, others went exploring, or made bread while I made scones for morning tea, and prepared slices for the ball. A single vehicle turned up later in the afternoon. The young man from Perth joined us around the fire, and showed us some great time-lapse photography. No one was left as we departed Durba Down through the burnt out area. The Calvert Range is still inaccessible so it was down to Well 16 for m/t, met vehicles from the Wangaratta 4WD Club, then to fifteen for lunch, top up water and wash hair. Two more vehicles passed as we set up camp on Lake Aerodrome for a night of frivolity. Lovely clear night, and the surface was still quite damp so there was no dust, just tacky shoes. Linda was Queen of the Desert for 2014. Out of the dunes we put some air in the tyres at Well 11, passed eight camels, and John and Elizabeth left the stock route at Well 9 to get new springs. We met Global Gypsy's group of nine there, and had lunch. Camped early at Well 7 and fixed John's fuel filter. Two motor bikers were going round in circles trying to find their way north. Headed them in the right direction, but with no backup crew we didn't know how they were going to go for fuel further up. With a pretty sunset and sunrise as well, the weather wasn't quite sure what it was going to do. Climbed the Ingebong Hills, and there was still a lot of surface salt around Well 6. Two more vehicles. Our campsite was a flat stony surface, dry and rock hard, bent pegs and a shallow toilet. Some had showers and Alan put a mulga stick into the back of his leg while collecting firewood. Dressed by Linda it healed nicely. Passed one more vehicle before we left the stock route; then camped in the mulga just out of Wiluna after visiting Well 1. There was a light shower of rain overnight. Fuel for some at Wiluna, then lunch and groceries at Leinster. Set up at Leonora, did the washing, fuelled and all went to the pub for dinner. It was a cold night. Still foggy, overcast and cold, (8c) as we left and John and Linda headed back home to Perth. Topped up with fuel

at Laverton and ran the info centre out of milk for coffees, even the lactose free. Lunch at Yamarna, visited Lake Yeo hut and camped near the Moreton Craig Range in the mulga, still cold and windy. We had a light shower while we were packing up; passed one vehicle, and two dingos before lunch at Neale Junction. Alan and Linda's rear diff cracked and was leaking oil, so topped it up, and again at the rocks. Tony sent them into Ilkurlka, while everyone else went out to the downed plane. Burnt out in '13 the area was growing back healthily. Arrived into Ilkurlka with driving lights on, and only Alan in camp. Steaming hot showers were lovely.



Foggy and a late start so bacon and eggs for breakfast. Welded Alan's diff and dried the washing. Departed at 12.30, and followed camels into camp. The next day Neville's rear diff split, so it was an extended m/t to weld it up, and top up. Alan's was still leaking and with two now we were going through everyone's' dwindling supply of oil. Camped west of Voke's Hill Corner. It was a cold night so cooked a big sticky date pudding for dessert, sticky all right, needed a bit more cooking in the middle. (2+ hours). Woke to a clear -2.5c but it clouded in again. Met four vehicles heading west and we received a lecture for not being on channel 40! The other group couldn't get a permit to come up through Maralinga, and wanted to know how come we could head south on the same track. Told them we had no problem getting the permit, just didn't tell them it was a different one (not through Maralinga). Turned south on the Cook-Vokes Hill road. There had been no traffic for quite a while, so it was very overgrown at the start, and lots of camel tracks. Checked the diffs at lunchtime, Alan's ok, Neville's still leaking, but he should have enough oil to get him to Ceduna, we hoped! Met five South Aussies with trailers heading north before we arrived at Cook. No water in the toilets and no trains passed through while we were there, but plenty of flies. Knew there would also be no wood where we wanted to camp so carried wood from north of Cook. There had been quite a bit of rain and the road south had lots of big puddles. Cameron had a lovely time ploughing through them with dirty red water going all over his car. Margaret & Bob decided to follow and had a play as well. I'm glad I didn't have to wash their cars. Cameron had also had trouble with the lock on the body on his Nissan, so it had to be

tied up to travel. For a 19-year-old he did a great job, heeding all the driving pointers given to him, but the old Toyota/Nissan thing was happening. Neville had the only other Nissan on the trip to back him up. Set up camp just before sundown, a hard layer of limestone just below the surface, so hard for the tent pegs & the toilet digger.



Lovely sunrise but a very cold windy morning. Down to the highway and east to Ceduna for a night in the motel and dinner. Celebrated Lee's 50th birthday early with balloons and a cake. Very hard to cut a 60cm diameter x 13cm high (or so) sponge cake with marshmallow in the layers into 20 pieces evenly, but a good night was had by all. At the end of the trip everyone headed in their own direction, or stayed an extra day, while we turned north up through the lakes to Coober Pedy via Kingoonya. Good road. Stayed in the pub rooms for the night, and had dinner (we didn't think anyone could stuff up chicken parmi, but they did). (Nissan replaced Neville's diff under warranty).

## **Madigan's No 1**

June 23rd

*Peter & Karen, Jan & Gerard, John & Denise, Graham, Alan & Linda, Kate & Karen, John & Elizabeth. It was a very full trip but we lost a few before we started. John (another one!) was close to having his hip replaced after waiting over 12 months, now recovered beautifully. Col & Deb have put it back two years and Kerry has to wait a bit longer for his grandson to grow bigger.*

Cold, overcast and windy still, but the Moon Plains were coated in green from big February rains. Our inside fuel tank had a small leak, and we couldn't find the hole. Lovely greasy diesel everywhere. Fuelled at Oodnadatta and camped behind Fogerty's claypan where the wind settled overnight. In though Pedirka Siding to Dalhousie for a swim and lunch, then camp and refuel at Mt Dare. Lunch was at Old Andado surrounded by lush greenery but lots of flies as well. Visited the Mac Clarke reserve, searched for Camp 1 unsuccessfully, then continued on and camped behind the Twins. Tony changed Alan's not so good tyre and a blown shocker (with a new one). -.9c overnight. Awoke to a beautiful sunny day at long last. The track was easy to follow, and the countryside was a picture. Down to -.4c again overnight. Heading east there were more flowers and the one and only camel we saw on the whole trip. Further on the flowers finished and we were into thick spinifex.

An early camp at Madigan's Claypan meant we could do some washing, and enjoyed hot showers thanks to Peter and Karen who set theirs up; (Bob decided he was going without for the whole trip!) A big fire had gone through the desert last year so there were huge areas of no spinifex and lots of flowers. The track went from smooth cruising, to up and down and side to side where the track went through lumpy spinifex mounds. Averaged 11 km an hour! The western sides of the dunes were a long low climb, then over the top, and usually a sharp drop off, but with great views. The wind picked up and at m/t there was grit in anything that remained open. Passed two vehicles on the Hay River Track before we crossed over and headed further east. Camped on a huge flat. The wind dropped and Karen cooked some great scones for afters. Track was still easy with the swales getting bigger and lots more gidgee trees; some burnt in the fires. Kuddaree Waterhole was empty except for a small soak where the birds could still get water, and there were quite a few dead cow bodies in the dry mud. Turned right up the creek instead of left, but finally found our way out and headed south down Eyre Creek. The QAA line was reasonable travelling considering what it can be like. Everyone over Big Red, (some with an extra couple of tries) and into Birdsville. Ian (who had the caravan park for many years) called in and offered us Diamantina barra for tea, so that is what everyone had, and thoroughly enjoyed. There was even some more to take with us for the next night. Most had lunch at the bakery and we had a late start, but the Birdsville Track was in excellent condition. Called into the Page family graves, and onto Walker's Crossing track to camp in the coolabahs. A new bridge has been put over the creek at Walker's Crossing, even though you still have to drive through the creek bed because the bridge is closed to all traffic. (Until it floods, and then only the field workers can use the roads getting there). Set up camp on the Innamincka common with lots of caravans and other campers. Out to Coongie Lakes for the day. Country was very dry and lots of work was being done on a section of the track that goes out to a new gas and oil field. The water level in the lakes was quite low and there were a lot of brolgas in the exposed grass. Hard to get close to them, the closer you got the further away they walked. Back to camp for nibble night, not so many in for the night either. Cool night 7.5c at 8.30am. Down the Bore Track, through Toona Gate and Sturt National Park home to lots of kangaroos and emus. Alan's repaired diff started leaking again. After fuel and m/t at Tibooburra, Alan did another tyre just south of Milparinka. We travelled to Broken Hill via Mt Shannon, well off the main road. The country changed constantly and I think I opened about 30 gates before we started running out of time and turned back to the Silver City Highway. All the ladies had turns at shutting them again. Booked everyone into caravan park cabins and it was well after dark by the time we got in. Quick shower and down to the tavern for dinner. Rather slow service and because we were late also it was nearly 9pm by the time we ate. Very nice anyway. (Alan has fitted a new rear diff since the trip).

\*Back home via Mildura to pick up the caravan and head to Broken Hill to start the Gulf Caravan Tour.



## **Gulf Caravan Tour**

July 18

*Gayle & Kris, Bob & Pam, Russell & Carol, Rob & Shirley, Jim & Pat, Rod & Judy, Colin & Vickie, Peter & Judy.*

It was sunny but cold as we left Broken Hill, then camped on Evelyn Creek behind the hotel, and had dinner with the new lessee at Milparinka. The one lady chef did a great job of getting everything out together. Colin picked up something in his front tyre that Tony successfully plugged. When we were had m/t in Tibooburra, Peter found a large bolt in his tyre, it had been there long enough to nearly wear the head off, so he bought a second hand tyre as a spare. It was the start of a busy day. A window in Russell and Carol's new van kept popping open, Colin lost his D-shackles so the chains were hanging, and Rod's gas strut fell to pieces (all fixed). Out via Cameron's Corner, where Russell opened his van door to find the microwave on the floor, (and the avocados inside) and Rod's spare tyre and its bracket fell off. Luckily Rob picked it up. Had m/t and climbed the big dune on Merty Merty Station while Peter fixed the caravan cupboard and door that had come apart. Travelled up the old Strez. track that was in good condition, and set up camp at Innamincka for three nights. Finished the day by fixing Russell's water pump in the van, and put the fishing lines in. Caught one fish; and more repairs, this time to Rob and Shirley's fridge connection then out to Coongie Lakes for the day. The country was dry and Innamincka Station was de-stocking. Only two camps at the lakes, but plenty of brolgas and ducks. The last day in the area was out to King's then Cullyamurra for lunch and a walk to the choke and petroglyphs for most. Very warm and lots of sticky flies. It was overcast, the waterhole at the Dig Tree was low and the fish weren't biting. Ten spots of rain cleared to a pink sunset, followed by a properly cooked sticky date pudding for dessert. Headed to Eromanga, where we filled the small caravan park (one other trailer and one camper). Plenty of hot water, but it was hard to watch the water pouring out of a permanently turned on tap (that keeps the hot water coming up out of the ground) and not want to turn it off. All to the pub for dinner for the night's special of pizzas, or fish and chips. Met up with Bill and Ruth who were waiting for us at Jundah. .



Fuelled in town, then joined a lot of other caravans along the banks of the Thompson River for the night. We found a large area at the end of the track and settled in. A very pleasant evening, great sunset, lots of chatter, but no fish. Some started the day with a free hot shower in the town's new facilities or coffee, and Rod had a flat tyre. Camped on a nice waterhole on the Mayne River, where Tony repaired Russell's rear axle. It was panic time for quite a while when the removed bearing couldn't be found. (In the glove box for safe keeping and forgotten!) We had an early tour of Lark Quarry and into Winton for three nights where Tony fitted a new hub onto Russell's Toyota. There was shopping, washing, touring and dinner at the Hotel, where we had a great night and delicious meal. Our host was excited to show us an actual photo of a night parrot (no longer considered extinct!) Heading southwest, it was down the channels of the Diamantina to Old Cork on the banks of a large waterhole, with lots of birds, a large flock of corellas, whistling kites, pelicans and black faced cuckoo shrike. Had a visit from Rob, a worker on the station, and did some fishing. Seven bream and two perch plus Pam and Gayle lost one each. It was hard work getting up and down the steep bank without sliding down. Through the scenic Cawnpore hills, with an long lunch at Hamilton hotel ruins to bypass the thermo fan on Rod and Judy's Kia, not knowing it was just the start of much more to come. Into Boulia in time for coffee, fuel and showers before we set up camp just out of town. It was Rob and Shirley's wedding anniversary, and very windy. Visited the Min Min centre and fossil display, and had coffee before heading north to Mt Isa. The caravan park was full, but we had adjoining sites; pre booked for three nights. Rod had more problems with the Kia looked at but he couldn't get it fixed until Monday. Everyone to the Frog & Toad Bistro at the local hotel for Judy's 70th birthday. Appropriate place because that is what is written on the back of their caravan! Visited the underground hospital and had a bbq lunch at Lake Moondarra. Tony tightened up the unscrewing screws in Russell's van, but couldn't find the cause of Rob's fuel leak. Cold night 3c at the airport, sunny day but windy. Jim and Pat found the shower in their motor home flooded. It was not draining out, so it had to be fixed before we left. We also had to leave Rod and Judy behind for their repairs. Out through Riversleigh to Lawn Hill NP for three nights. Started moving in to find someone else on one of our sites. Peter & Judy had to go onto another site, then move the next morning. Still windy and dusty but managed to have a dinner fire (outside the park) and sat around until 9.30pm. Nice breeze in the morning, good for walking around to the falls and back for lunch. Drive to Lawn Hill Creek for a/t and an ice cream at Adele's Grove. Rod was still having trouble getting his repairs done (lack of parts in the town) so he was hoping to meet us at Gregory on our way out. Lovely mild night and out for our campfire again. Warm muggy day, so a walk around the stack and to the cascades that didn't have any water flowing through them. The area had 500mm of rain in February that washed the creek out causing quite a bit of damage. Some took a boat cruise up the creek, some did it the manual way in canoes; and we all had vanilla slices for a/t. Off to Burketown, the road was very dusty but in good condition. Passed a vehicle that had run into the back of a caravan, being slowly towed. It would be a long run into town. Pulled into the Gregory River for lunch, along with dozens of caravans camped there already. You should have seen their lips curl when they thought we were all there to stay! Rod still having trouble, got as far as Cloncurry and needed a new fuel filter. There were none available so he had to wait until Monday, and planned to meet us in Normanton. A/t from the

Burketown Bakery, a visit to the town bore and out to camp on the Albert River. There were quite a lot of other vans near the wharf so we turned out across the mudflats into a nice area bordered by mangroves. Travelled the Great Top Road to Burke and Wills northern camp, then into Normanton. country was very dry but the road was in excellent condition. Warm enough evening to do the washing. Groceries and fuel and warm enough for a swim. Everyone out to the Central hotel for a baked barra dinner. Rod and Judy wouldn't be joining us; their mechanical problems were growing, so it was straight back home for them. Out to Critters Camp on the Gulflander for billy tea and damper. There was so much to eat I bought the rest back to camp, and made into a huge bread and butter custard in Karumba. Had a light lunch on the Normanton wharf and headed to Karumba to set up for two nights. Lots of vans in the park, but nowhere near as many as we have seen in past years. Had a tour of the barra farm, fuelled, shopped and it was all aboard for a cruise up the river then out to the river mouth for sunset. Plenty of kites, a Jabiru, (and us) all fed with prawns, but crocodiles were very scarce. Didn't need much for dinner so finished with baked custard. Up through Van Rook to camp on the Mitchell River. Lovely wide sandy river with a low crossing, but where we camped was fine powdery bulldust. Would have been quite nice except for the four three-trailer road-works tippers that came through. Or tried to. First one got through but chewed up the sand on the other side. Second one got bogged and Tony disappeared with the third driver to help get it out. Had to get the grader from the works camp further up to pull it out. Third driver (boss) then showed them how to do it properly, but instead buried it and then the fourth one as well. There were station vehicles (small & large) all stirring up the dust, some very slowly, and one very ignorant one. Dinner was a bit gritty. Colin and Vickie went for a quick dip, and Tony and I washed off the dust watching very carefully for crocodiles known to reside in the area. East through Gamboola and Wrotham Park on the Burke Development Road to Chillagoe. Visited the old copper smelter (now totally fenced off), hanging rock and some aboriginal art. Overcast and heavy.



Back for lunch then a climb through the Royal Arch for everyone except Shirley who doesn't like dark enclosed spaces. Most headed back to camp, while three visited one of the local marble quarries, some more caves and the old cemetery. Had a light shower of rain while we were collecting wood, but

held off to have our campfire. Showers overnight and still heavy with light drizzle, but it didn't stop the ladies from walking out of town. M/t at Lappa Lappa, a small, now nearly deserted railway siding. One man lives in the house next door and he has built up a little museum in the old L.L. Hotel. Lunch was in Dimbulah and camp at Granite Gorge out of Mareeba. Only a couple of back packers when we arrived, but the site filled up quickly as the afternoon went on. Lots of nibbles finished off a great trip, even it Tony did have words with a noisy neighbour, while Pam convinced the man we were all retired policemen. That worked well! Lots of little buses (with tourists aboard) drove in around 8 o'clock to see the rock wallabies that live around the park. Then off they went again. For us it was off south again, via Belyando Crossing, Emerald, Roma, St George, Gilgandra, Dubbo and home to garage the van, pack the tent and be off again six days later. Rod and Judy now own an Isuzu D-Max.

## **Madigans No2**

September 1st

*Gordon & Di, Jeff & Margaret, Bob & Margaret, Norman & Coral, Michael & Raewyn, Paul & Helen, Stuart & Pauline, Laurie & Robert, John & Judy*

Across via Mildura and Port Augusta on our way to Coober Pedy to start our second Madigans. Fully supplied, we had lunch at Glendambo and passed Bob and Margaret having lunch in the shade. Me driving on 102 cruise, Tony was relaxing with his head in the paper. As we crossed a grid 97km south of Coober Pedy there was a bang. Tony said we had blown a tyre so I took it off cruise to pull to the side to change the rear tyre. Next thing I really knew Tony was asking me if I was alright and there seemed to be less room in the cab which was still facing north but on the wrong side of the road after rolling three times. He pushed out his door, (mine wouldn't budge), we crawled out and said 'bugger'.



Fridge was out on the ground, as well as the chainsaw box, assorted tools and food stuff including two dozen eggs (all over everything) Roof rack was on the ground behind us and Tony had blood dripping from his hand. A man from Alice Springs stopped to see if we were ok, then Bob & Margaret, a policeman from Coober Pedy, on his way home from Glendambo, and Michael and Raewyn. They thought we were just stopped there to help whoever had the accident, until Michael saw Tony's hand and took a good look at the vehicle. The policeman rang the tow truck from Coober Pedy on our sat phone while we cleared up the mess. Vehicle loaded up we headed into town wondering what we were going to do. While waiting on the roadside for the tow-truck Tony rang Leon (who always said to ring him if we needed a hand, and he would go anywhere) and asked him to come from Albury and pick up the vehicle. Then we rang our son (also in Albury) to borrow his Nissan Patrol wagon. He serviced it, put in his fridge and spare tyres, loaded it on the tow truck and Leon left the next morning. Meanwhile the policeman took our battered but still working fridge into the station and put it on power for the night. We parked the poor piecart in front of the motel room and started to unload everything, while our crew was thinking where they could go instead of across the desert. Leon arrived, unloaded Dale's car, loaded ours with all the things that were broken or wouldn't fit in the Nissan, stayed the night, and came out for dinner with everyone. Tony ordered a new vehicle before we left Coober Pedy one day behind schedule and in a Nissan! Because our shovel was still jammed up under the bulbar, we used Norms, he also carried our crowbar and Laurie had the chainsaw. We repacked the Nissan thirteen different ways in the thirteen day trip but we got there. The day we left was cool but sunny; lunch was in the Painted Desert, fuelled at Oodnadatta and camp at Fogerty's. Last trips firewood was still there but we didn't need to use it, plenty was collected. In through Pedirka siding, watching every stone and feeling every corrugation, but the Nissan was comfortable, just not as high as we were used to. Stopped at Dalhousie ruins, then for a warm swim and lunch. On through Federal and Blood's Creek, stopped for wood (carried on the top of Michael & Stuart's vehicles) and into Mt Dare for fuel, camp and a shower. Up over the border and through all the bulldust in the Finke floodout for lunch at Old Andado. It was hot and windy with clouds coming in from the west. As we left the Waddi trees, John and Judy discovered a flat tyre, (changed it) and we passed three vehicles. Afternoon tea was at Camp 1A where the three roared past in each other's dust. We caught up to them again later in the day, but after they took off, we didn't see them again. Who knows where they went to, and according to chatter on the radio, they weren't quite sure where they were going either! The wind settled, the clouds blew through and it was a pleasant evening. Our toilet sank in the sand but it managed to survive the night, with some gentle sitting!

The ladies on their early morning walk thought they would do a bit of modelling on an old tractor resting by the side of the track. Laurie hit a bump somewhere along the track and his back was telling him it was not happy. Set up camp early and had nibbles before dinner. There were a few rain spots



over night, it was warm and the flies were sticky. There were wild parsnip flowers everywhere and the dunes claimed a few including us. The Nissan has a different wheelbase and drives differently to the Toyota, but no excuses, so we crossed the desert in third low nearly all the way. Laurie was feeling better, good thing too. There was a lot more backwards driving so he had to concentrate! No a/t and being a bit selective we were into camp a bit later than normal, but there was plenty of firewood and a bright moon helped. Sunday was Father's Day, and the presents had survived the rollover. Walking in the morning we nearly stepped on a small snake in camp, then after two big ones crossed the track in front of us, we watched the ground closely for quite a while afterwards. There was also a mother quail and three tiny ones that scattered in all directions as I disturbed them. Hopefully the snake didn't find them; they would have only been a tiny meal. After the fire across the desert, the vegetation was scarce in big areas, but several of the emu bushes were in flower, light or deep purple and very pretty. Rocking up and down through the spinifex humps there was a bang under Dale's car, but with nowhere to stop we continued with it making loud thumping, but intermittent noises. Tony said the front, possibly CV joint, I thought it came from the back. Oh dear, not out in the middle of the desert, Nissans are supposed to be bullet proof. While he checked the front, I looked under the back. Removed a broken anti sway bar jammed up into the back coil and presto, no more noise. Phew! A/t was at the base of a swale waiting for John who had another flat tyre. Camp was on the edge of the Hay River Track; fire had been through so there was plenty of firewood, but heaps of prickles as well. In the tin at Camp 16 we found a note from Peter and Karen who did the first Madigans with us. After

the trip they picked up their cousin in another vehicle and did the track east to west. Much harder because the east side of the dunes are short but very steep, so they had a very interesting drive. We had a/t on one particularly steep dune while Robert learnt the value of very low tyres. Days warming up 30-35c and the air conditioner decided to go on the blink. Pancakes with quandong sauce and cream for dessert. A very warm night, and a hot, windy and dusty morning. M/t at Kuddaree waterhole (still empty) but with several muddy holes made bigger by the cows and one high stepping horse. Also two dingoes and lots of corellas. Headed in over a big dune to the old Annandale homestead ruins, but that same dune caught two vehicles on the way out again. The QAA line was in great condition on the western side of the dunes, but oh my god, even with the wind blowing the eastern sides (going down) were atrocious. Everyone over Big Red, with the hot westerly blowing sand every where, not good for photos. Tyres up and into a nearly empty Birdsville. Some to the pub for tea, while Tony and Norm got wood for those cooking in the park. The wind finally dropped and it was a pleasant evening. Into bed until 11.30 when the wind belted in from the east. I had to dash out and collect my washing before it blew back to the desert, and zipped up the tent all round. There were extra tent pegs being banged in all over the camp. A day in town, lunch at the bakery, a screening of the Back of Beyond and the Birdsville mailman re-enactment, and dinner for every one at the pub. Laurie and Robert headed home early, morning tea was at the bakery, and we collect some more fish for tea from Ian. Paul and Helen had a flat battery, so jump started it from their second one, and off down the inside track. Road had just been graded and it was in excellent condition. A little bit of the Birdsville Track and on to Walker's Crossing where we camped on a clay flat in the coolabah. Passed a group of six vehicles before we took a short cut to Moomba for lunch at the lookout. Collected some wood before Innamincka, had a/t at King's Marker and set up on the common, along with a few other vans. Not as many in this time. Out over Burke and Wills Bridge for lunch at the Dig Tree. Turned onto a big new mining road south towards Omicron Station, lunch just over another grid with two resident eagles. Tony was tired so I drove, but I wasn't comfortable, the steering was all over the place and I complained constantly. Woman driver! so he took over. As soon as he could find a sandy bit of road, he stopped and went under the front of the Nissan. The nuts on the wheel alignment adjuster had worked loose and the wheels were facing each other instead of being straight. Out came the spanner, someone found a long tape measure and the adjustment was made. Much better thank you, I'm not so silly after all. Fuel and m/t at Tibooburra and back down through the same 30 or so gates, but this time we left earlier and travelled the full length of the road. The bottom third had no gates at all just grids, lush and green, lots of emus and kangaroos and very scenic. Into Broken Hill at 6pm, no lights on this time, but dinner was just as late, only one lady taking orders and serving, so they were very slow. They haven't changed, still an enjoyable meal but still slow. A big thank you to everyone who made this trip a lot easier carrying the things we couldn't, tools, shovel, crowbar, chainsaw, firewood, etc. Especially Norm who did a lot of work with the crowbar digging toilets ! It made Tony's job a lot easier.

Back home again to strip any thing salvageable out the wreck (shovel still there). Our old vehicle was a write off and went to auction in Melbourne. We collected the new one from Geelong after having the back axle extended and the GVM upgraded, then left it at Toyota while we had two weeks on the Gold Coast. The new body is being built and Tony has been very busy attaching all the things that are extras and keep the dollars going up and up! (Or down, down). Next comes all the wiring, and the inside of the body, hopefully the holes are in the right place in this one.

Well that rounds off another year. Next year is fully booked at the moment and 2016 is half booked. Tony's retirement day has been extended a bit further, so we'll see what happens after 2016 (25 years on the job).

We wish you all a happy, healthy 2015 and look forward to seeing you all sometime in the future.

*Brenda & Tony*