

Hi everyone, sorry this is a bit late. One year has finished (very quickly) another year begins and off we go again.

Tony started 2016 with an hay run to Ilfracombe with our son Dale in a second truck. They both enjoyed the time so much Tony did it again in February (and again this February), but even the casual truck-driving job has stopped. March saw us camping in the high country with friends, followed by an attempted trial run of the Darling River tour. Stayed in motels which was good because it rained, then rained some more and we had to do some detouring. Back to do a second run shortly. Looking at the long range weather forecast I warned Tony it was going to be a wet 2016.

Simpson Desert

Late April we were packed up and off to start the Simpson Desert trip with *Brian & Annie, David & Anne, John & Judy, (NZ) Duncan & Jan, Gail, Cheryl & Sally, Kevin, Alan & Mercedes, Eddie & Heather, Kerry & David.*

We We left Broken Hill on a cool, clear morning. The road north through Mt Westwood had been recently graded and was dusty but in great condition. Passed two big emu families with dads looking after 19-20 healthy chicks. The old timers say a big emu family means a good season coming up. Some of the country was very green, other areas quite dry and the further north we went the smaller the families became. Camped at Milparinka with a great meal at the pub then woke to an overcast morning, and very smelly gidgee. Fuelled at Tibooburra, then back on the dirt and more road works. Lunch was at Cameron's Corner with a front blowing through, windy and plenty of flies, then on to Innamincka before dark. There were not many other camps so plenty of room to spread out. Days drive out to Coongie Lakes that were full of water but not a lot of bird- life. The following day David was not well, so while we did a day drive to the Dig Tree via Burkes Grave, he and Anne visited the doctor at Moomba .We came back to camp via Innamincka Nos 1 & 2 bores on an interesting track with lots of flowers, but Eddie and Heather put a rock through a back tyre. Replaced it then back to camp for tea. Leaving Innamincka we called in to Will's grave while David & Anne headed south via Moomba. (David spent several days in hospital in Melbourne where the problem was treated and he is back to good health again). Eddie and Heather's car was not looking too level, and a check revealed a broken back spring, so they too were heading south instead of northwest. There was still some water in Gidgealpa waterhole where we had lunch with the flies, then out through Walkers crossing. Set up an early camp, with clouds coming in and the ever-present friendly little flies. They appear very quickly after rain. Kevin locked the keys in his jeep and he definitely didn't like the idea of cutting a hole in the roof to get said keys. After lots of other suggestions he eventually worked the hinges out of the driver's door and managed to open it enough to reach the keys sitting on the front seat. Luckily it was a vehicle with the hinges on the outside instead of inside. Clifton Hills station was starting their muster and the track had been graded so it was a pleasant drive into Birdsville for a late lunch. We also passed a group of bike riders on the track heading north to the Gulf. Morning brought an over- cast sky and

red sunrise with a warning of lots of rain on the way. There were more bike riders in town, and a group who had just walked across the Simpson, as well as the local station folk for a bronco branding weekend. Some of our group enjoyed an evening of horsy activities, and one bronco rider had to be taken to the clinic after coming off the horse. The wind blew in around 11pm followed by a light shower of rain. Elders Weather showed a lot more around Alice Springs. Next morning we packed up dry tents and headed out via the rodeo ground, with a backdrop of heavy black clouds and a light shower as we left. Morning tea and tyres down at Big Red but not much practice after looking at the western sky. The rain started as we took off, a group of seven or so earth cruisers (campers on Iveco bodies) behind us. Rain, rain and more rain. It stopped long enough for us to have a quick lunch, then back into it again; deep gutters and huge puddles. Brian & Annie's Prado stopped for no reason around afternoon tea time, then started again for the same reason. Set up camp on a dune in the drizzle, put the tarp up, got the fire going and had tea. Some set up tents or campers, others decided to sleep in their cars, a very tight fit for Gail's crew. I waited until after tea when the rain stopped to put ours up. Another shower later on, but the rain did stop during the night and we woke to a clear morning with high cloud. The Birdsville track had been closed, so there was no turning back. Drove through lakes all morning until Brian's car stopped again. One battery was well down so Tony made up longer metal brackets so they could be swapped over; and the Ivecos went past still heading west. We took off again around midday and got 10km further on before Brian's car got the death rattles. Set up an early camp and contacted Peter in Birdsville to come out and pick them up. Annie's blood pressure rose when they were told by the lady on the phone that they did not have RACT roadside recovery, even though they were sure they did. A day in camp saw six vehicles heading west. They had come down from the Hay River and were plastered in mud, and not very talkative. Another six heading east also covered in mud, including one of our old tray backs still going strong. We wouldn't leave Brian and Annie out there on their own until we knew that Peter was on his way. No more rain but very heavy dew so the tents were very wet to pack up. Passed another two vehicles covered in mud, ours were very clean in comparison, and heard from Peter to say he was just into the desert but had blown an airline in the truck. He was going back to Birdsville to get the tray back and would come out to pick up Brian and Annie. They drove the Prado up into the sand dunes, hidden well from the track to collect later. Annie said it was worth breaking down just to have the very quick trip back into Birdsville with Peter. We took all day and some, Peter took three hours! After more phone calls in Birdsville it was finally decided that yes they were covered for the recovery. Peter and his son in another tray back, came out the next day to tow the Prado back in. 6 weeks later it was finally fixed in Adelaide. First the Birdsville track was closed, then the truck carrying their car broke down on the track, then it was closed again, and finally a new motor had to be taken from Brisbane to Adelaide to be fitted. Many, many dollars later! The weather was warming up as we crossed the border and out onto the lakebeds, following the tracks of the Ivecos. They had pushed out a lot of the slop on top but it was still greasy. Met a group of four at Poeppels Corner, one towing another so they were in for an interesting time, then two more after the corner. The desert was now officially closed so there would be no more traffic. Tony tried to go through a particularly wet patch and sunk to the diffs. Snatch

strap out, recovery by Gail, then a detour around the waterhole and back onto dry? land. It was good following the Ivecos except up the dunes, (that even with the wet conditions they managed to dig up) but it saved us having to find our way around the boggy patches. Even though the days were clear and dry there was heavy dew each night. We swam our way right across the desert, had lunch and another swim at Dalhousie, (no one at all in the area) then ploughed our way along Abminga Creek and into Mt Dare. Tony had to turn around to pull Alan out of the bog before everyone covered in mud, especially Kevin who had a lovely time playing in it, arrived in camp. Some out for tea at Mt Dare, hot showers and a calm night. The next morning as we left through another lake, we passed two men in a Prado bogged at the edge of Mt Dare. We couldn't stop for any reason so rang the hotel and they pulled them out. As we pulled up for lunch the vehicle went flying past heading to who knows where. The road from Mt Dare to Finke was closed so we went into Alice via New Crown, Finke and the old Ghan line. It was a full on learning experience for everyone. Kevin's wife Rhonda flew into Alice and joined us for our last night dinner at the golf club. We had a few days to wash; vehicle, us, and clothes in that order and it took Kevin quite a while to get all the mud off his pride and joy, but what photos! We had to replace our brake pads and rotors, because they were so worn down from all the sand in the water. Gail's crew had a run in with the hire company when they charged them an extra \$6000 to replace the brakes, which they claimed still had 5000kms left on them when the vehicle was hired out. We don't know what the end result was.

Canning

The Canning was next on the calendar with *Jamie & Anita, Brian & Narelle, Graham & Steve, Gayle & Kris, Chris & Yvonne, Bill & Walter, Michael & Raewyn, Gerard & Jan.*

Up the Tanami to Tilmouth well for lunch and fuel, passing lots of fuel trucks for the mines, both full and empty, and more asphalt extending the distance covered with tar. It may eventually get all the way to the border, to the mines anyway. It was a pretty sunset, once the dust from the steady stream of trucks settled. The road continued to be excellent and we made good time to Sturt Creek to set up camp and into Billiluna to fuel before the sun went down. Well nearly anyway. Steve and Graham made an excellent damper in their camp oven.

30% chance of rain as we ate ice cream and watered up before setting out on the stock route. A light shower of rain at morning tea then Jan and Gerard had to turn back from Well 51 after they found they were losing water from their radiator. Lots of water at Culvida Soak, where we had to take our shoes off so we could get into the rock cleft. Lunch was under the trees at well 50 and camp at 49. Time for showers, and Bill made a damper on his cooker powered with heat-beads; we were being spoilt. We walked into Breaden Pool then across the top of the ridge to Godfrey's tank. Yvonne suffered a few scrapes and bruises and was a little shaken when she took a tumble, but was checked out OK by Bill. The luxury of another

shower, and clothes washed at well 46. Rain had left a big puddle of water and the full moon reflected on the surface was gorgeous. To experience dune driving Anita drove our car while Tony went with Jamie. We all had very few backwards moments (just the occasional chewed up tricky one) and we passed several vehicles. It was 35 degrees, big clouds started rolling in and there were showers to the north and east. The first front went through, the second came in around 8:00pm, and the rain started at midnight. Packed up a wet camp and the showers continued most of the day. Passed three earth cruisers (different ones to the Simpson) and a young man riding a bike (assisted by a motor) pulling a trailer down the Canning. He was walking and pushing at that time and absolutely drenched. Well 41 was surrounded by water so it was a quick look then into the Teatree for lunch where the rain started to ease. The surrounding area had been burnt out and was just starting to grow back. Tony made sure everyone stayed on the very wet track across Lake Tobin, we weren't risking being bogged to the diff! Well 39 was wet and we continued onto just before well 38 to camp under the gums. Ground was damp but the clouds were clearing and it was a pretty sunset. Clear night, and another heavy dew. The next day was warm and clammy and the waterhole at 38 was full. Heard from Jan and Gerard to say they had been picked up at Billiluna, taken to Broome on the back of a truck for repairs, and they would meet us again at Well 33. Passed a few more vehicles, shuddered our way into well 34 and down to 33 for lunch, a welcome shower, and water refill. Tony also had a phone call to say his mother had just died, she was 93. Left Kunawarritji at 3:00pm, food and fuelled up and with Gerard and Jan. Had a tight campsite at well 31, with cherry ripe pancakes for desert, and a nice mild night. Saw a few camels and we were passed by a group of three vehicles, one towing another with a broken chassis. They set up camp at Thring rock, while we had an extended lunch climbing and exploring. A few repairs that evening, mended Brian's wiring, replaced a circuit breaker, and Gayle's shocker rubbers. Came across a large mob of camels and had a chat to Outback Spirit with their five vehicles. Well 26 for morning tea, the big claypans before 25 were full of water, then in to join the flies at 24 for lunch, very friendly little critters. Stopped at Georgia Bore for water only to discover Jamie's fuel tank was leaking. It was an early camp while the fuel was saved into jerry cans. Very red sunset and a mild night. Onto the track again with another long morning tea to fix Graham's roof-rack, Gayle and Kris got hung up in Savoury Creek (display of snatch strap recovery by Gerard and Jan) and more showers to the south and north, just what we needed. The dunes were getting soft, and the tyres were building up so a couple of the cars (including us three times!) had trouble getting over one dune. Had to be coaxed to use a bit extra oomph, unlike the normal direction of steady as she goes! Set up camp near Onegunyah where we hoped the ground would be flat and dry. Had some showers before dawn but it had cleared by 8:00am. Raewyn and Michael were packed up before the sun was up! There were 31 other vehicles in Durba but we were able to get an area big enough for us to spread out, Bill made some bread, Narelle made a savoury damper and I made vanilla slices. Most went for a walk either up the gorge or around the top, and no more came into camp. All were heading out the next day mainly north. At well 15 we refilled with water, washed hair and

talked to some people who weren't sure where they were going, and had not long left when Graham called to say he had major problems. Front wheels weren't facing the way they should; oh no, a broken tie-rod end. 41 degrees in the sun and we were blocking the whole track. Walked out a detour for those we knew were coming behind and set up a tarp to do some welding. Not a job Tony was looking forward to with one wonky eye. The group behind was the one with the broken chassis that they had welded and were now following us south. Their very experienced welder was asked if he would show his skills and proceeded to weld a tent peg to said end and fixed it. They took off in front of us and we continued on our way. It was a boggy camp at well 13 and another damp tent to pack up. Graeme and Steve left us at well 9 to go straight to Wiluna for a new tie-rod end, and from well 7 the country and the weather dried out, digging the toilet became quite a chore. Climbed the Ingebong Hills, had lunch at well 6 and onto 5. Brian and Narelle broke a clip on their camper so it was roped up to travel and Graeme rang to say no luck in Wiluna or Leinster, so they were going onto Leonora where we would meet them. Trouble was, there was a festival in town and the place was booked out! Great. They did manage to find a mechanic who ordered in a new part and fitted it for them, holiday or no holiday. Gayle replaced a flat tyre, and it was on into Wiluna. The caravan park was not ideal so we stayed at Gunbarrel Grapes, with five other vehicles that were heading north. Some decided to take cabins while the rest tented. We were able to do some washing and dry it. Chris and Yvonne headed off to Meekatharra and we turned south to Leinster for morning tea and groceries. Sorry, cafe now closed and supermarket shut due to power outage! No luck for Gayle's tyre either. Eventually the grocery store opened before we continued to Leonora for a late lunch. We were able to set up camp around the sports oval, with toilets and hot showers, and of course it rained again. Dinner at the hotel and back to a wet camp, except for Jan and Gerard who got a unit in the caravan park. The town had a fireworks show which we could see quite clearly from camp even with the clouds and drizzle and a band played until midnight. Overcast and cool, we left town with nearly dry tents. Headed out on the Great Central oad before turning south to Pt Sunday, lots of flowers and more light drizzle. Passed seven vehicles, afternoon tea at Yeo (more drizzle) and set up camp along the Anne Beadell amongst the puddles. Battling a windy storm front we got the tarp up, then tents and a fire going in between light showers. Dinner then bed. Rain came in around 9:30 and it drizzled until 6:30am but stopping while we had breakfast and packed up. Lunch was at Neale Junction with a car and caravan that had come up from Rawlinna, out to have a look at the plane wreck, then we sent everyone in to Ilkurlka while we got wood. It was dark when we got there, fuelled up and joined the rest of the group. The camp ground was full so we were allowed to camp in their community site. Had trouble getting the fires going because the wood was wet, and the donkey heater for the shower really took some coaxing, but it was well worth the effort. No rain until 9:00pm, then a light sprinkle sent everyone to bed. More drizzle until 3:00am then dry & windy to pack up. We had an extended lunch when we had to go back to fix Gayle's fuel tank. We had planned to go to Maralinga for a tour and to camp, and applied for permits 12 months ago to use the Oak Valley road to Maralinga. We

were knocked back the first time, so thought that was it. Sent a note out to say we weren't going. We were told to apply again so did that, but still no answer until a week before we were due to leave home. We were okay to use it, so then it was another letter to say yes we would be going. We turned south through Voke's Hill corner and onto a beautiful wide road down past the community to Maralinga for two nights. Loads of washing, hot showers, a movie on Maralinga and another sprinkle of rain before bed. The next day was a tour of the site including the airport and strip, where the atom bombs were exploded, (and those that were planned) and the clean up area. Back to camp for cold showers (solar heated), nibbles and a big fire. We finished the tour with a most welcomed night and dinner at the hotel in Ceduna. We could not have our usual formal ball on the Canning because it had just been too damp, so we all dressed up in our finery to go out for dinner and Narelle was crowned lady Queen of the desert for 2016.

Madigans

Tour no 3 was Madigans with *Bob & Celia, Peter & Gai, Gayle & Kris, Deb & Fiona, Brian & Deb, Jamie & Anita, & Graham.*

The tour started in Coober Pedy so we had an extra two nights there first. Overnight we had thunder, lightning, more rain and the fire alarm went off at 3:30am. Roads were closed and we were lucky we had booked in early because a bash came in as well. They had been rained out of the desert and came in for some respite from the weather, the town was fairly jumping. Had dinner at John's Pizza, a good night tucked up in a dry room and it rained again from 3:00am. Chased all over trying to get a road report and the only road open was from Cadney Park to Ackaringa via the Stuart highway. Ackaringa was the way we were going anyway so off we went. First part of the dirt road was good and dry but when we hit the recent road works with soft soil it became very greasy. As we stopped for lunch six or so vehicles heading out from Ackaringa passed us. The road east to Oodnadatta was closed so we set up camp at the homestead, then went out to the Painted Desert for afternoon tea and wood. It was a breezy, dry night until 3:00am; and still overcast to the north in the morning, but the road east was officially open. It was wet but not too bad until we started to pass traffic heading west to the highway. Some were straight, some side ways with trailers swinging (us waiting for the crunch) but ploughing through the puddles and all plastered in mud. Compared to them we were spotless. What a mess was left behind. Fuel and ice creams at Oodnadatta, and lunch on Mt Sarah fighting the mossies, not the flies. Afternoon tea was at a very full Eringa waterhole, gave Dalhousie a miss because it was closed, and into Mt Dare with headlights blazing. Three other campers in, six of our group went out for tea at the hotel, while the rest stayed around the fire. More spots in the morning and still heavy to the north. Up through Mayfield's swamp for morning tea and wood, and more rain spots. The grass through there was a brilliant iridescent green, and Indinda swamp was covered in lush grass. Lunch at Old

Andado then out to Mac Clark Reserve and back into the puddle dodging. The track to the Twins was covered with water so instead of digging it up we turned off into the bush. Uh Uh, bad move. We got through but Brian and Deb bogged down. More snatch strap lessons by UHF and back to the track, for a while anyway. Some puddles were just too widespread so we sorted out big detours. We gave camp 2A a miss because of the wet ground and set up in the trees at the Twins. Our very damp firewood from last year was still there, so with some extra we had our usual campfire. After a cold night we climbed to the top of the twins, one to look at the cairns, the other to see how far the flooding extended. Back out the way we came in, this time staying on the track and up over Marshall Bluff. The track across was often slow and bouncy, with the odd patches of flowers and puddles of water. We passed little traffic and the flowers disappeared east of camp 7. Camped just over the border on a large claypan, flowers on the dunes and showers of rain to the north. Kept our fingers crossed it wouldn't come over us or it would have been very interesting trying to get off the wet clay surface. Just a light shower in the early morning. Annandale water hole was full, showing why the early settlers built their homestead there, but it can be bone dry and very isolated more years than not. It was very green down along Eyre Creek with masses of white and purple wild stocks and yellow-tops that went all the way to big red. Just beautiful. More rain spots, the dunes were damp and there had been a lot of traffic through. Camped along a claypan between Eyre Creek and Big Red, with fingers crossed again, but the wind swung around and the clouds blew through. Up in the morning to the sound of Peter's big recovery truck working its way out into the desert to pick up another breakdown. Over Big Red after more than a few tries and into Birdsville to join a caravan park full of marathon runners and groups heading out into the desert. Due to the persistent rain over the last month, all roads in and out of Innamincka were closed so instead of going south to Broken Hill for our final night it was out on the asphalt to Windorah. Problem there, the Cooper was over the road in several places and roads south were closed as well. Longreach was the next choice but we happened to meet the roads' lady who was taking the flood readings and she thought the road south would be open in the morning. The caravan park was full of caravans so she offered us the sports ground, toilets and hot showers, and two fire bins (with wood) left over from a group the night before, and just us. Lovely, thank you. We all went to the hotel for dinner and back to camp. In the morning the river was down just that little bit, and the locals had been back and forth through there so off we went. Looked at the dirt road we had intended to turn off onto, the very black sky that way and took the best option; stay on the asphalt to Quilpie for lunch (where nearly everything was shut anyway), and more drizzle. On the phone and booked everyone into a motel in Charleville for the night and our last dinner together. Home for a few days, (root canal work, which fell out the day before we were due to leave again) and the usual washing and restocking.

Goog's Track

John & Sandy, Kate & Karen, Bob & Margaret, Paul & Helen, Chris & Kim, Stuart & Pauline, David & Lee, Mat, Elissa, Mitchell & Anna were on Goog's Track that departed from Port Augusta.

We pulled into Iron Knob for morning tea and a town tour, right in the middle of Army manoeuvres. They had come down from Brisbane by ship with all their gear, and were doing a spot of war practice in the Cultana training ground. We were able to talk to the enemies camped in town, and go under, over, and in their equipment. On to Mt Ive and up to the top of the hills for sunset, while I cooked our first night's dinner in the shearer's kitchen. It was a cold, windy and overcast day for our exploration of the station, including the drive out to Lake Gairdner and yes, more rain, and a blustery cold wind that hung around all night. We still managed to have a roaring fire to keep out the cold. Packed up damp tents, and while the sun was trying to shine, the day stayed cold and windy. Camped at Pildappa Rock, then showed the group what a wheat paddock looked like when we took a wrong turn, oh well! Toured an oyster shed in Smokey Bay with the obligatory purchases to take up the track, then into a motel for dinner and bed, wonderful because it rained all night. The morning was no better with it expected to be South Australia's coldest day with squalls off the ocean and cold enough to snow. Hoping to leave the showers behind we headed up the track with the odd bits of sun, rainbows and some flowers. Set up at Goog's Lake, with two other camps nearby. Parks have built a toilet there so it saves us having to do the normal long drop, almost civilized! The water in the lake was being blown to the east by the strong wind, but by morning after the wind had dropped it was back to normal. 0°C and clear. Heading north again, Matt and Elissa learnt how to back down with a trailer. The dunes were firm and very chopped up, but it didn't take them long to get the hang of it. Climbed the point in front of Mt Finke and watched the showers coming in from the west. We camped close enough to hear the freight trains going through and cold enough that in the morning the top of the tent was frozen. Had lunch at Kingoonya, under a clear sky, 19 degrees, and the flies had thawed out. On the way we disturbed three emus having a bath in a big puddle on the road. Roxby Downs was another very cold night, but we managed to do several loads of washing, dry it in the dryers and in between go to the local club for dinner. 0 degrees again, frost and a frozen tent, and the promise of a lovely day. The town's shopping centre is slowly closing down, but got groceries, watched a video on the mine (because they keep changing the day we could have a tour) fuelled up and then on to Andamooka. Had lunch, learnt how to cut and polish opal and off again. Collected wood, checked out the thrombolites, set up camp, and shivered through a -2°C morning and another frozen tent. In through Farina where the underground bakery was working again, but it was past lunch so there wasn't much left, Copley for fuel and in through Mt Serle for another cold night. Spent the day touring around Arkaroola, some oh oh's and umms and a beautiful warm day, then back to rain overnight. Had lunch in Chamber's gorge, then set up camp on Angorichina Station. Went to the top of the hill for a

gorgeous sunset then back to camp, and more light showers. Put the tarp up and the rain stopped, then another shower overnight. What comes after rain? why not just add a pea souper in as well. Fixed Bob's tyre before we left for a day run through the hills, lovely views with the layers of fog in the valleys. Margaret got hung up on a big rock but that was the only problem for the day. Early the next morning we could hear a vehicle coming in to camp, and thought it might be the owner, but it was Cameron, David and Lee's son who decided he would give every one a surprise and just turn up.(from Albury!) Another day drive through the Flinders and on to Willow Springs for a very noisy night. The wind just blew and blew, not gently in one direction, but it was trying to flatten the tent from the top. It would ease off then wham in from the other way, not much sleep that night. Eased off in the morning, with a pretty sunrise, so off to do the station drive. The wind picked up again after lunch, and even though we were down in a gully for afternoon tea, it made little difference. At the highest point of the drive we couldn't get out of the vehicles, we couldn't even open the door it was so strong. It was very nice to have the camp kitchen for party night, and a fire, but the wind stayed around not easing off until 3:00am, another noisy tent night. What could we expect it was the middle of winter. Back home, another visit to the dentist to finish the root canal, Dr visit, hairdresser, massage and pack up the caravan for the Trans trip. Headed off up the coast road, drizzle, drizzle and more drizzle.

Transcontinental

Last tour for the year was the Trans Caravan with *Bruce & Mareea, Barry & Caroline, Graeme & Glenda, Stephen & Barbara, Henry & Julie, John & Linda, Colin & Vicki, Mark & Patricia, Laurie & Joy, Bob & Pam.*

A couple of extra days in town before the trip started, more drizzle but I managed to get the washing dry. Graeme & Glenda let us know they were in Port Macquarie with vehicle problems and were waiting to find out what was wrong, but still hoped to meet up with us. A good run out over the ranges even with all the road works and into Glenlyon dam by afternoon tea. They had missed the rain and the dam was very, very low. Brian had supplied quite a lot of wood so it was a lovely evening around the fire. In the morning it was a visit to see the cod spawning along the dam wall, then off to Texas for morning tea. Those country ladies sure know how to cook. Lunch and fuel in Goondiwindi and into St George as the sun was going down. Lots of lightning to the south, then the wind blew in around 10:00pm followed by the rain. We had an extra day in town to have the clutch replaced in our vehicle, (very pleased it was arranged and done so quickly) and Bob had his rear wheel carrier welded up. Graeme and Glenda were still having problems, got a new part put in, got 20km down the road and the same thing happened, back to where they started. The caravan park has a great camp kitchen with a pizza oven and a firebox. Pizzas were cooked watched some TV and enjoyed the warm of the fire before heading to bed. Foggy morning but eventually a beautiful sunny day. On through Bollon a very full creek but no koalas, and camp at

Thargomindah where Linda cooked apple and quince crumble for every one, delicious. Wandered around the hospital market, picked up an health sample bag and some cakes while the men fuelled up, then for a look at the display of Thargo's original thermal lighting. Tried for some yabbies in the Cooper while we had lunch, the water level was very high and no yabbies. On to the Dig Tree to camp along with sandflies from the recent floods. The following day was a drive into Innamincka via No 1 & No 2 bores, a very interesting washed out track with masses of wildflowers, photos and more photos. Passed one vehicle and the driver wanted to know how far to a decent road, we told him we were on one! Across a flooded causeway and into Innamincka for lunch at the pub, then Burke's grave and back to camp. Arrabury waterhole where we had lunch the next day was full of water, and the road was in excellent condition making for easy driving, but Stephen & Barbara were dreading the dirt roads. They had purchased a Jayco Outback, whose salesman told them it would be suitable for everywhere they had told him they were going. The van stood up to it but the large vent in the front door step opened straight underneath the chassis and sucked the dust in, in copious amounts, and with several two inch holes under the bed for one small wire, it had more leaks than a sieve. They had to put all their clothes in plastic bags, and cover the bed with a tarp, constantly sweeping up the piles of dust. Meanwhile all holes that could be found were stoppered up with silicone. The day we had in Birdsville included a drive out to Eyre Creek. The flowers were lovely just the other side of Big Red and the flies very friendly. A great day to celebrate Henry's birthday. Turning north it was into a hot headwind, and 42c in the sun. Carcoory ruins, then Bedourie for lunch. Had a very pleasant night on Bengaecca Creek, then into Boulia to fuel and the Min Min centre. Those who went in for an early coffee had to be content with a basic one from the local shop, the Min Min centre coffee shop was closed for the duration. The Hotel also now has a coffee machine and cakes to go with it. Onto the plenty highway in the afternoon, the nth/w wind still hot and blustery. The road was in great condition, the asphalt is spreading west and road works are being done to keep the holes full. Fuel and ice creams at Jervois Station then into Alice via the Gardens Track and Arltunga. A heavy black sky, rain (and lunch) at Arltunga, and more black clouds ahead. Excellent bit of road, but we did not do it any good. Road works were being done and the ground was soft, so it was a very slow run in to the asphalt. The vehicles and caravans were covered in mud that the odd showers could not wash off. Driving into Alice the convoy looked very impressive but it took many dollars to get them clean again. Barbara and Stephen spent most of their 3-day break cleaning out their van. They both had the patience of Job! We all went out for dinner at the hotel just down from the caravan park. A man from the reptile park bought in an assortment of critters and spoke about them, and Tony talked some very nervous ladies into nursing a large sleepy python. It was quite content to doze wrapped around Tony's warm body. Restocked and rested (some of us) we headed for places further west. Morning tea at Hermannsburg, lunch at Gosse Bluff, and on to set up camp with Mereenie Bluff in the background. (One day I hope to get real close) The road has improved over the years we have been travelling it, so we sailed along for fuel at Papunya, through patches of wildflowers

and more road works. At the WA border some one had had an accident with a big bag of fireworks, hopefully it was out of the car and not in it when the whole lot went up. The bag hadn't been opened but there were burnt remains all over the edge of the road. An expensive explosion as well. Fuel and lunch at Kiwikurra then on to Jupiter Well to share the site with another camp. Showers and a big fire while Tony mended a tyre on my table using his new tyre pliers, fairly had the poor table rocking. Once again a grader was working and the road was smooth, but very dusty. Watered up with lunch at Well 33, just as a group of Outback Spirit vehicles doing the Canning arrived in for the night. Think they were glad when we departed again. Into a camp we use for the night to find the grader hadn't been through in a long time and the trees were starting to grow on the track. Lots of shovel work to make a cleared area for the fire, dinner, and later a shower sent everyone to bed. It was Sunday when we went through Kunawarritji and they were closed so we headed to Punmu to fuel, but when we got there they had none! Took us from 10.15 to 12.15 to get out of there with diesel they had raided from their power generator. Oh boy is that place frustrating. Some wild flowers but the further west we went the drier the country became. Laurie blew a tyre and had trouble getting it off so we turned back to help him, then in past Telfer mine and into Carrawine Gorge. The usual healthy cattle were quite bony, the green couch along the river was short and dry, the bullrushes had been eaten out and the river was just a long shallow water hole. The area had missed the rain that everywhere else seemed to be getting. Had a day there along with several other camps. We had to set up well down on a stony area and it was a loong walk to our toilet up in the bushes. The wind dropped and the reflections of the big wall behind camp were spectacular, especially at sunrise when the rocks turned to gold. Late start for Marble Bar and the caravan park. The first time we were there, there might have been three or four vans, this time it was nearly full. Off to the Ironclad hotel for dinner, cooked and served by one lady from somewhere overseas because the chef was out of town. She did a marvellous job getting the meals out one after the other because there is only one oven in the kitchen, and there were several pizza orders as well. The next day it was out to Coppin's Gap, lunch at Doolena Gorge, both almost dry, then along the old Marble Bar-Port Headland rail embankment where Pam found a tiny green bottle in the ruins of the siding. Back to the flying fox, jasper bar, a visit to the Comet mine, and back to Chinaman's Pool for afternoon tea, two fruitcakes successfully cooked by Barbara in her new dreampot. Last year the pool was bone dry, this year there was enough for an assortment of birds including a young Jabiru. On the way to Nullagine Bruce and Maree picked up a screw in their van tyre, but easily fixed with a plug. Beautiful day but the country was still very dry until we got closer to Roy Hill mine and the mullas became quite profuse. All the disturbed dirt probably helped, but the flowers did increase the closer we got to Newman, and back into the rainfall area. We had a day in Newman to do all the important things like wash and shop and cook for the ball. There is a big new shopping centre being built in town, I don't know what they will put into it, probably the shops from the other centre, then it will be empty. With the downturn in the mining industry the caravan park, which is mainly rooms for the miners was very quiet. Several of the group went

to the mess for dinner, making sure we washed our hands beforehand, so we didn't pick up a bug like 2015. Late lunch with fuel at Kumarina roadhouse, then on to Three Rivers Station for our camp and ball night. The claypan we camp on was full to the edges with water so we set up around the bank, lit the fire and dressed for the night. The owners who were starting their mustering drove in for a visit but didn't stay for the frivolities. A big fire, a small rocky dance floor and a gorgeous starry night all added to the evening. It was after midnight by the time I had packed up what was left of supper and had a shower to wash the dust off. Stephen made a delightful Queen of the desert for 2016. The notorious stretch of road between camp and Mt Augustus claimed three tyres this trip, Colin, Bob and Bruce's plugged one. (the plug didn't fail just another rock!) Our speedo needle gave up the ghost after dancing around for several days and the horn stopped beeping every so often. Cruise was no longer working either. Quite a lot of other campers in (and a group of motorbike riders) and power leads going in all directions. A day around camp, some climbed to Edney's lookout, crawled under Flintstone rock, relaxed by Cattle Pool and generally enjoyed the area. Fixed Colin's tyre with another plug, and Vicki cooked a huge pot of fried rice for everyone. Stephen woke to a flat tyre, then it was off to Old Cobra and the Kennedy Ranges. Good shower of rain on the way in but stopped for us to walk into Honeycomb Gorge. Camped on a claypan circled by flowers and with the ranges as a backdrop. The clouds cleared, the wind dropped and the night was perfect. Stephen had trouble with his caravan brake, (fixed) then off via Gascoyne Junction for fuel and morning tea. There was lots of parakeelya along the road, it really is a pretty sight. Put the tyres up just before the highway, then onto Wooramel roadhouse for fuel and afternoon tea. Camp was at Hamelin Station, got the fire going and enjoyed another lovely evening. Early to bed, early to rise, for a 7:30 start. Cold morning, 10°C without the wind chill, but a pretty sunrise. More asphalt on the Useless Loop road (more each year), and in excellent condition, but not a lot of flowers. Drove along the headland looking for whales or turtles (none this year) then ended that part of the drive at the Steep Point sign to take a group photo. Back to camp in time to set up for party night, then Tony eats cheese and crackers for the next three or four days! We did 5759 kilometres with 74 tyres (426,166 tyre kms) for a total of five tyres, some totally wrecked, some repaired. Excellent driving I would say, or maybe taught well. In the morning everyone was off on their own journeys, several north into much warmer weather, one or two straight home, others including us just cruising (us for six weeks, which was not good for the waistline). We travelled the Butcher's track to Murchison, then Cue and Agnew to see Fay and Ian (originally from Carnegie station) on their new property, then down to Kalgoorlie for a few nights (then one more because of the rain.) Following the Trans rail line we travelled to Haig then south to Cocklebidy. A slow and bouncy six hours to do 118kms, lots of animals especially stumpy tails, but no camels, dingos or emus. Stayed in Smoky Bay where we experienced life as an oyster grower, (Tony looked like a tadpole in the wetsuit) copped SA's windstorm, (lucky to have solar power) and helped clean up some of the damage to the park. Met a couple from Belgium in a tiny red citron they had travelled around Australia in, and a couple from Germany who we met up with several

times. They were all on the last days of their time here. On through Streaky Bay, Port Lincoln (still no power) Port Broughton, then to Port Vincent to stay with friends. Had a day around the Yorke Peninsular, collected quandongs and went fishing. (not too successfully). Bought a boat in Mildura, and left the caravan behind so we could bring the boat home. Had to go back a week later to get the van, then it was left at Norm and Corals so Tony could go back up later to help with the cereal cropping. It was frustrating for all when the wet weather continued, slowing the ripening and making the paddocks too wet to work in. Finally finished it was back home for Tony to have an operation on his left carpel tunnel, then it was Christmas and the end of another year. How quickly time flies.

We wish everyone a happy, healthy 2017 and all the best for anyone who had a 2016 that they would rather forget.

Brenda & Tony