

As 2020 is fast drawing to an end, I had better do the right thing and at least attempt a start on this year's newsletter, not that there will be much to put in it. Excluding all the obvious subjects which I'm sure everyone is well and truly over, it will be a short letter. (Intended to be anyway.)

Our year started off with plans for a much slower time, just an easy caravan trip following the Darling River up into Queensland, then intended to do a bit of exploring through the state until whenever we headed home again. It was fully booked, but we only had one deposit that we eventually had to send back. The trip was all planned out, but we had to check the area from Narrandera to Wilcannia, checking times and distances with the caravan.



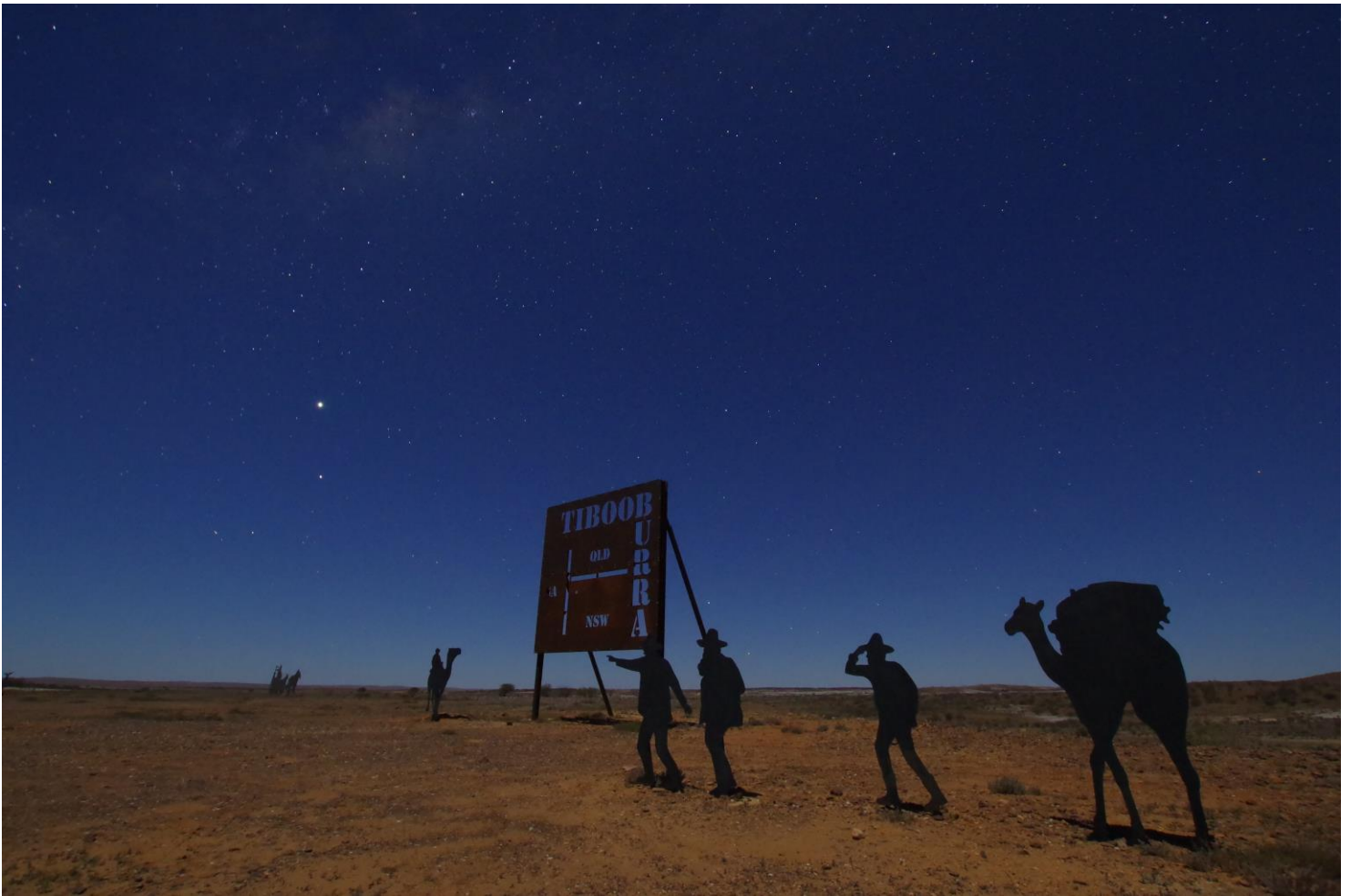
Set off in very early January in smoke from the bushfires, with smoke all the way to Narrandera and Hay. The residents of Hay were complaining of the air quality, until the wind changed and sent it back east again. At Wilcannia we turned back home, mission completed. Not quite as hot as the last time we headed out west in February! The whole world then went into tailspin and our plans for the trip north went with it. We had no trouble sticking to all the rules of Covid, nothing much changed for us in any way, except boredom for Tony who could not just wander to Wodonga when he felt like it. Eventually we were lucky being in NSW where the rules and regulations weren't as tough as Victoria, and we only had to have a permit to cross the bubble to Wodonga and come home again.

Early June I had an infected tooth pulled, and lost a little weight by not eating as much because of it. Didn't last long!

In late June Jamie & Anita, Michael & Raewyn, Jan & Gerard and we two headed west to get away from it all, spending the first night in Lockhart where Laurie, Joy and Coral from Lockhart joined us for the evening. It was overcast and showery, but stopped long enough for us to get a fire going. With wood from Laurie, and the local IGA, it eventually started, smoking for a while before burning nicely by the time everyone headed to bed! Our second night was at Carrathool overlooking the river because the ground was too wet to go down the bank to camp alongside it. Feet and tyres grew several inches with the wet black clay. Once again the weather held for a fire to cook tea and to sit around for a while. From there it was up to Hay for two nights on the Murrumbidgee river. Weather had improved, but the ground was still very damp. Spent the day exploring Hay. Lovely clear night at Wilcannia with nibbles (supplied by the park host) around the fire, and lots of travellers. Onto White Cliffs for three nights, town tour by bus (no social distancing), a drive to Lake Peery (full of water) and dinner at the local hotel. (s. distancing with a double table (across!) for eight of us, so we had to yell to each other to talk). Onto Tibooburra to camp in the town caravan park tucked up the back so we could have a fire; and the park was chockers. The highway from Broken Hill had finally been sealed so there were people in all sorts of vehicles with campers and caravans, and a lot heading north to Queensland. Did a day trip out to Cameron's corner, no problem getting through the gate into SA but the crossing into Queensland was well and truly shut. Padlocked and signposted!



Fought the flies to have lunch then headed back to Tibooburra through Sturt National Park.



Some of the area had some rain and green was showing through, but a lot of it was still very much in drought. Headed east again stopping the night at Wanaaring on the Paroo River, picked up groceries in Bourke and had a flat tyre mended (picked up a screw) then onto Rose Isle station on the Darling for three nights. Tried for fish and yabbies but not a lot of luck. The station does a lovely morning tea with cake, and scones, jam and cream. We also enjoyed a curry dinner in the camp kitchen, followed by lemon meringue, and apple pie. It was a holiday remember! Spent a day exploring Gundabooka National Park, and tried more fishing, same result! It was an isolated camp along the river so we put up our own toilet, and went back to the main camp area for showers. The owners had started a shower block nearby but it was still in the process of being built. From there we followed the Darling River to Trilby Station for two nights, (still no yabbies), Nelia Gaarie, and Bindara stations. Tourism NSW had been pushing the Darling River run for holidays because overseas was out, so every station was having a bumper year with bookings. While Jan & Gerard and Michael & Raewyn headed back to Sydney, we



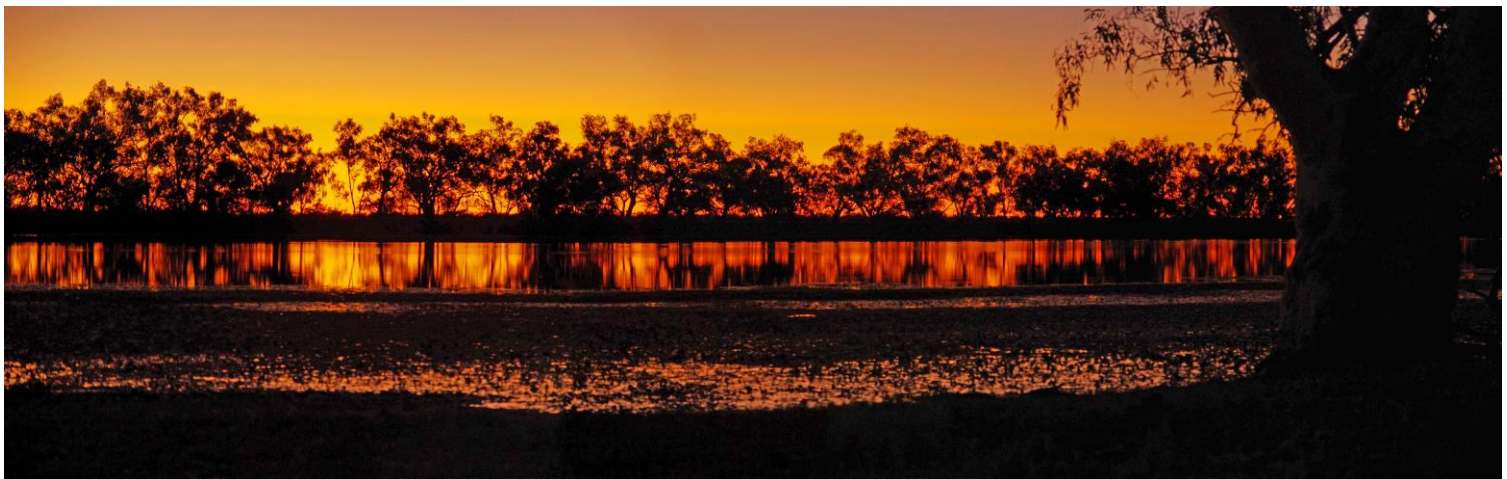
were going south to Mildura and Jamie & Anita were looking at heading back to Melbourne. Then Victoria shut the border, our family in Mildura said no they didn't want visitors, J & A definitely didn't want to head home to a lockdown, and all our kids said why come home, so we turned north again. Back through Nelia Gaarie, Wilcannia, Cobar, and Bourke, where we downloaded a border permit to go into Queensland. We arrived at the gate 5 minutes before the police lady unlocked it to let the last travellers through for the day, just three vehicles.

While we were away we were told that the farmer on the property we had taken hay up to just before Christmas last year was killed in a quad bike accident. Some of our clients generously contributed money for Tony's hay run, and we took two loads to the family, and arranged for three other loads (purchased privately from where Tony had been harvesting) to be delivered there as well. The four-wheeler can be a dangerous piece of farm equipment.

We camped on a nice little waterhole just out of Hungerford, then the sports ground at Eulo, and



Alroy Station for two nights. Had a day trip to Yowah, then Eulo and back to camp.

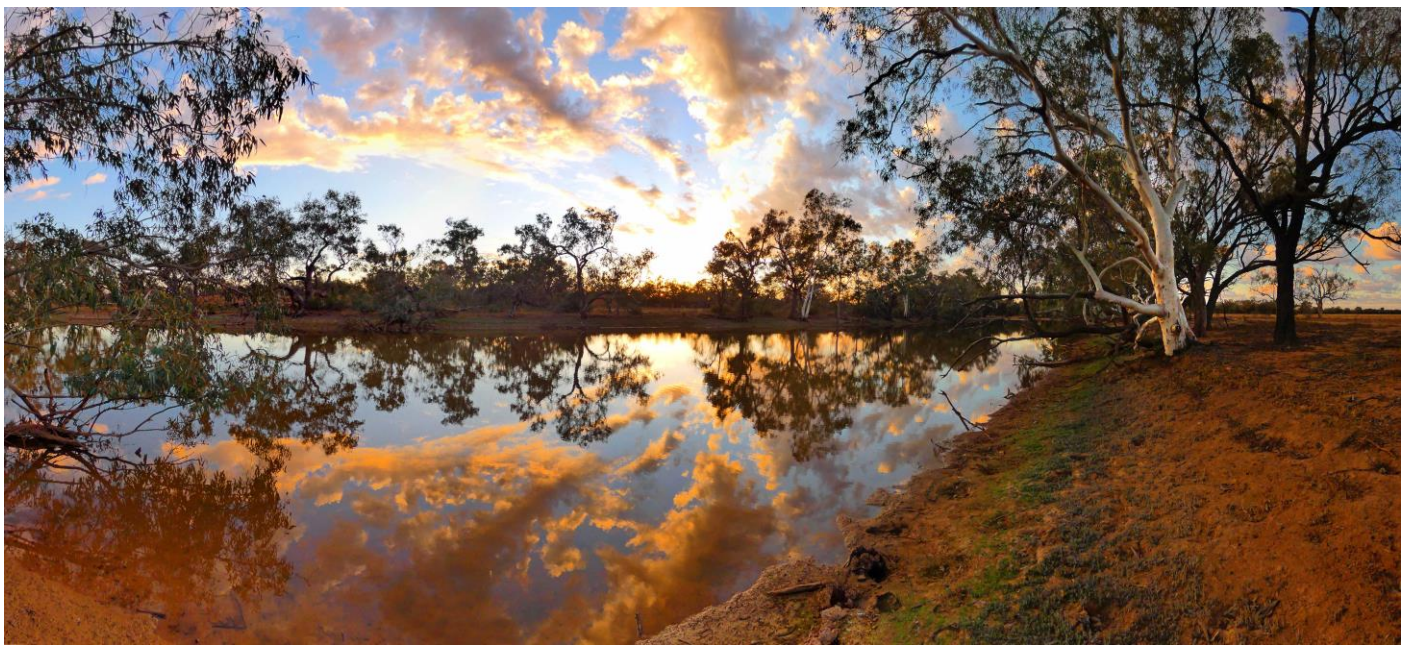






From there it was The Lake at Quilpie, a lovely campsite around a large waterhole, where we finally caught some yabbies!





Had two nights at Nickavilla Station where Tony delivered hay to two years ago during the drought. It was still very dry.



Hell Hole



Spencers Creek



At Adavale we left the vans behind at the local hall and drove out to Hell Hole and Spencers Creek. A very rugged place and I don't know how they would get tent pegs into the ground. Planned to stay on the Paroo at Isisford, but it was wall to wall caravans and campers so back out to the stock-route just off the road, very quiet with the toilet set up behind a bush with 360-degree views. With three nights in Ilfracombe, we enjoyed three different dinners at the local hotel, and a day run into Longreach for groceries, fuel and a haircut for Anita.



We followed the regions' art trail of assorted barbed wire and metal statues



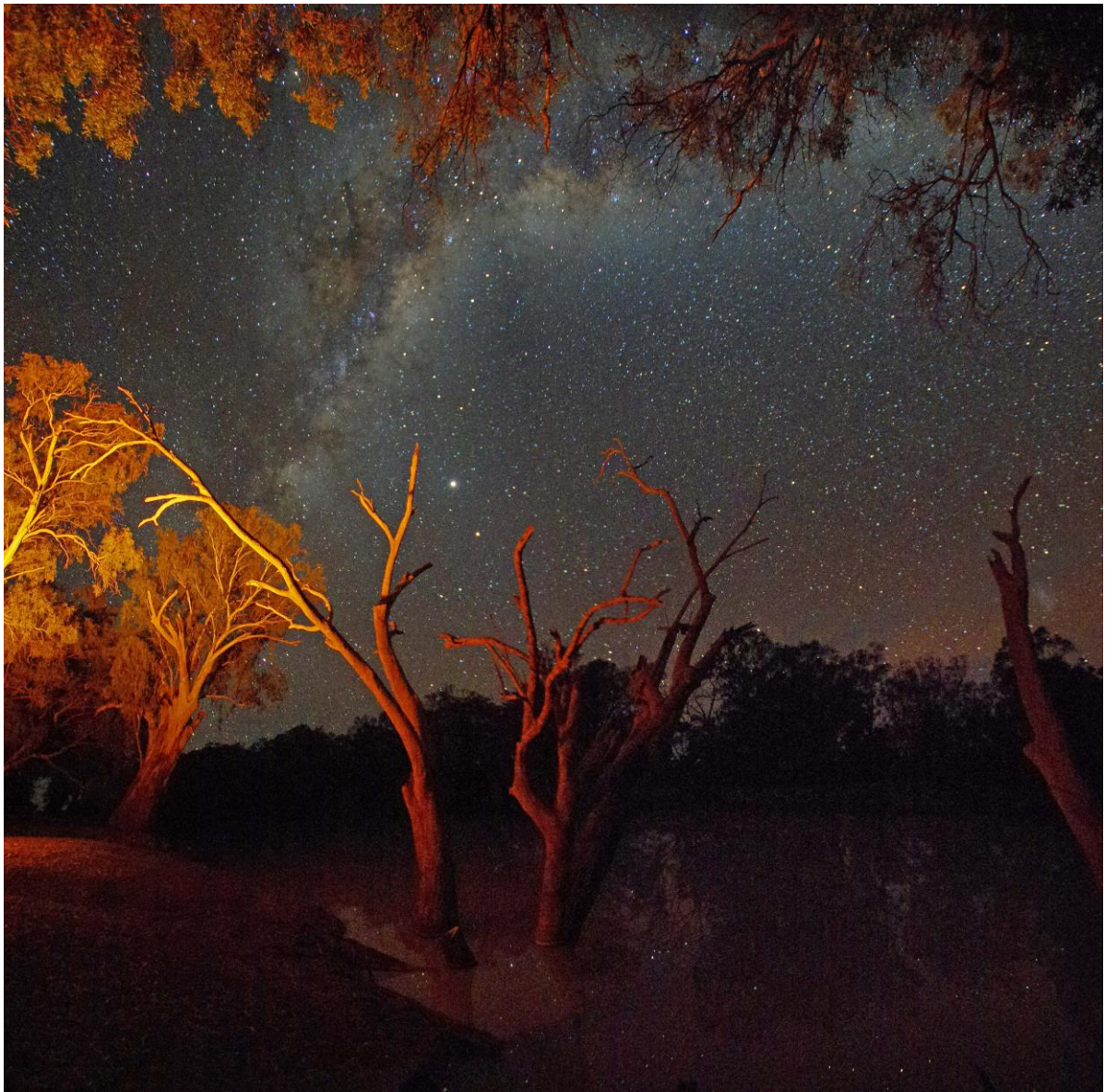
## Lake Dunn

to Lake Dunn, where we turned south and Jamie and Anita continued north. We came down through Jericho, another couple of nights at Nickavilla, where we yabbied and did some landscaping at the homestead, then onto Cunumulla. We intended to come back through Bourke on the dirt but after quite a bit of rain, we stuck to the asphalt down through Cobar (with more rain) and home.

We left Jamie & Anita at the end of July to head home for doctor's appointment, a bridge fitted to replace the pulled tooth and had a crack in the Toyota's diff welded. Our two weeks away had eventually become 7, and 23!

October 7<sup>th</sup>, we went back to Bourke to join Jamie & Anita who had spent the last 10 weeks doing figure 8s in Queensland before finally heading south again. Back down the Darling (the shower and toilet at Rose Isle had been finished), stayed at Dunlop station, with their new camp facilities, morning tea and station tour, Wilcannia, (lots more campers)





Nelia Gaarie, (still no fish), Menindee lakes (where it was hot enough for a swim) then onto the banks of the Murray out of Wentworth. Fish for tea!! We helped my sister celebrate her birthday; and visited Tony's family.

October 21st we headed home via Boree Creek (to drop off the caravan for Tony while he was helping with the harvest) which got off to a very disrupted start. The new secondhand header blew a gearbox and parts were like hen's teeth to procure, Tony went A over Z chasing some blown-away papers and hurt his shoulder, they had rain and couldn't get into the paddocks, the borrowed header failed to proceed, and a couple of flat tyres on the truck. The new-new second hand header was a much better proposition, and the crops were the best for many year, but then there was more rain, hot winds that send the headers out of the paddocks for the day because of the chance of fire, and the biting bugs that live in the crops and create intense itchiness! Tony came home twice in between, the first because of rain, and the second time for our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Both were flying overnight visits, then back to start all over again. Off at 6am and usually in bed around 11pm, totally stuffed! I think he is still getting over it. There was still around 500 acres to be harvested when he came home.

While he was working his backside off, I was lounging at home, catching up with the garden. Had a huge crop of snow peas, six lovely big cabbages, lots of strawberries, raspberries and beetroot coming in now, and tomatoes, beans, cucumbers and capsicums to follow if we can keep the fruit fly out! Also finally finished three photobooks of our Canada trip from last year. We are off to Melbourne this week for Tony to have an operation to trim a bulging disc in his back, then back for an MRI to see what is happening to his shoulder. Should be all fixed by the time he is another year older!

Hopefully our planned tours next year will go ahead with the borders being opened up, but who knows how soon the communities will open, and we have had no information yet from anyone. If we can't do the Canning we have plans to explore all the areas of the Simpson Desert, then a caravan tour south from Mt Surprise in Queensland, and down through NSW to finish in Mildura.

Our year in a nutshell. We hope you all have a wonderful Christmas and look forward to a much better, brighter happy, healthy 2021.

Brenda & Tony xx

\*We know that some of you haven't been with us for a long time, but we think of you often and this is just to let you know we are still alive and travelling. (and finally heading for retirement after nearly 30 years) but not retiring from travelling we hope.