

Hi everyone, another year has come and gone, Christmas has been, the New year is coming up fast and it's time to put fingers to the keyboard. It will be a change from doing photos for my books, the reason for this letter being a bit late. We hope everyone had a lovely Christmas day and are eagerly looking forward to 2016. It will be a very busy time for us with all our trips fully booked, and bookings for 2017 even though we have no details (except dates) out yet*. Tony started the year with a cataract removal. That went beautifully until a small tear appeared. To the eye doctor to be lasered, (also healed nicely) but there were a few floaties. Keep an eye on it!

Simpson Desert

It was cool and overcast as we left Broken Hill, but the country was very green. Shearing was on at Border Downs, and Lake Moolka was full. Camped on Evelyn creek at Milparinka with a very nice (& noisy) dinner at the hotel. It was a cold night, warming up during the day. Fuelled at Tibooburra and by lunchtime the flies were friendly. Omicron missed out on the rain further south and was very dry just the occasional green patch. Alan & Linda were waiting for us at Innamincka when we arrived, driving lights on. There were lots of other campers in too. Two days in town, first day out to Burkes grave and the choke, second day to Coongie lakes where the water levels were very low. While we collected wood, some of the crew got lost on the way back to camp. They just turned left instead of right, got to see more of the countryside that way. A few went up to the pub for dinner, while the rest enjoyed dinner under the stars. Off across through Walkers Crossing via King and Will's sites. We passed some of the Trackmaster club on their way to Thargomindah and Bob staked the first tyre. Camped in the coolabahs on the way across, stopped and climbed a big sandune not far from the Birdsville track, had lunch with the Page family at Deadman's Sandhill and into Birdsville mid afternoon. Georgina arrived on the plane to join Adrian across the desert. There were corellas in every tree around the waterhole, and an assortment of 100 or so 'shitbox rally' cars in the campground. They were still arriving at 9.30pm and played music til 4.30am. It was sunny, dusty and blew like blazes the next day. Did the washing, and watched the Back of Beyond at the information centre. It got us out of the dust for a while. Wind eased a bit by late afternoon. The birds stayed in the trees all day, heading out to feed around 4pm. We went to the pub (with lots of others) for a BBQ tea. It was a much more pleasant morning for our practice on Big Red before heading out into the desert. David & Gina had the second flat tyre. Across through Poepfels Corner, and lunch at the Knolls. The country was quite dry and the dunes were soft, but there had been little traffic after the wind, so going up wasn't as bad as going down. We had pancakes for dessert and Georgina made biscuits in her camp oven. Weather stayed fine but there were showers on the horizon. Had a swim at Dalhousie, fuelled the cars and us at Mt Dare and camped with the ants just north of the station. The road through the Finke floodout was its normal thick bulldust. Had morning tea and lunch at Old Andado while Jeff's tyre was changed. As we headed into Alice we frightened two dingoes who took off down the road in front of us. They can really move when they have to!

Canning

May

Eddie & Heather, Suzanne, Bruce & Mareea, Jeff & Liz, Steve & Cecily, Jim & Pat, John & Denise, Graham, Deb & Fiona, Graham & Ray.

We left Alice on the 25th, a cloudy and cool day and a big cloud band right across the continent. Elders weather was predicting very heavy rain to cross the Canning about midway. Fuelled at Tilmouth well and camped in an area of mulga, where we had to dodge the stakes but there was plenty of fire wood. Brilliant sunrise but not a good omen. Had lunch in a quarry with a leaking bore, lovely sweet water that brought in the birds; and chatted with the Cooke family from Supplejack station who were heading home from Alice. After a good run up the Tanami we set up camp on Stuart Creek and headed into Billiluna to fuel up-\$2500 later we settled in for the night. Watered up there in the morning, and saved lots of time having already fuelled. Had morning tea near Lake Gregory, and saw a dozen camels. Lunch was at Well 50, and it was a very warm walk into Culvida soak. We had an extended tea stop to replace the two tyres that Steve wrecked when he hit a steel pipe on the edge of the track. Four motorbikes passed us heading south, and one rider came off not far in front of us. He was okay, just loaded everything up again. Graham & Ray had to replaced the shocker rubbers on their 60's Sahara. We camped in front of the Breaden hills. We know that it could be windy, but the colours are lovely at sunset.

That wind tried to blow us into the desert from 1.45am, when cars were shifted and more pegs were hammered in. Walked into Breaden pool, and some into Godfrey's tank, fixed Ray's tailgate and had our first encounter with Outback Spirit's four vehicles. Camped at Well 46 near their group, washed hair and some clothes, had showers and relaxed. Warm and breezy, and still heading to that predicted rain! Suzanne spike a tyre in the tea tree where we camped, we passed another vehicle and counted 15 camels on Guli Lake. Also passed a vehicle driven by a South African lady on her own. Hope nothing went wrong for her. Fuelled at Kunawarrtji, and started to pass very muddy vehicles heading north, the first we had seen in a few days. They told us they had travelled in rain for six days. The band had come north as far as Well 31 where we had lunch. Big mud puddles everywhere and we had missed it thankfully. There was also a group of ladies walking the stock route in aid of depression. They had walked all that time in the rain too. Camped below Thring Rock criss-crossing with Outback Spirit. Met a vehicle with a broken back spring, and two couples at Well 26, one towing a camper trailer, the other a Jayco camper. They had been there a couple of days, just doing the stockroute slowly. The claypans around Well 25 were all full of water, beautiful sunset reflections but it was hard to find a bit of higher ground to get the tent pegs in far enough, it is like concrete underneath. Watered up and washed hair at Georgia bore and had lunch near a claypan full of water and lots of wild tomatoes. I picked some to make green tomato pickles. There was a cover of water on Lake Disappointment and in Savoury creek,

but it was still firm enough to drive over. At well 19 it was burnt out one side and flooded the other. Passed a Nissan heading north and towing a garden variety trailer loaded to the hilt before we turned in Onegunyah rockhole (also full of water). Camped in Durba with Outback Spirit and the creek was full of water. It was lovely just the two groups and plenty of room. Spent the day exploring, washing or just wandering, and one bike from the original four arrived. So it was just O.S, us and him in camp. Tony mended Ray's tyre with a new valve, and dad Graham wasn't feeling very well. Heard that the man driving the Patrol was trying to load all the gear from his broken trailer into the vehicle not long after we had passed him. It was a late start south after Deb found her fuel tank hanging lower than it should have, and Steve took his air bed for a swim to find where it was leaking. Jim & Pat offered him their stretchers, (packed and unused) so they weren't uncomfortable for long. Further south the ground was still muddy but was gradually drying out. Our ball was off, there was too much water on Lake Aerodrome. Met up with WA's Trackcare at Well 9, and another group, one vehicle covered in gladwrap. (Wouldn't last long!) Ray was still not well. We gave them the option of leaving at Well 9 but he was adamant that he was going to finish the track. (the track out at Well 5 through Granite Peak was closed due to the rain) Most of the group climbed the Ingebong hills for great views, we washed hair and had lunch at well 6, and camped on Kennedy creek. There was a good amount of water in it and we had a beautiful sunset. Lots of flowers in patches and still some mud. Set up our last camp for the Canning near Well 1, (with our wood still there from last time) and in to Wiluna for fuel. Another pretty sunset, a few spots of rain and a mild night. Bruce's cruiser went on a 'go slow' on the way to Leonora so we stopped and changed the fuel filter. Much better thanks! Seven into cabins or motel, while the rest of us camped on the small area of lawn with the prospectors. Did the washing and more washing, and went out to the hotel for a lovely dinner. Hard to keep the men out of the bar, while the skimpies are working!, while Deb & Denise had a loong wait for their lamb curry, woops sorry forgot! Rest day for some, while Steve and Cecily headed south to Kalgoorlie for tyres and new mattresses, and a new toilet for Bruce & Mareea. Deb's fuel tank straps were welded again, and Bruce's aftermarket tank had a small split, mended with epoxy glue and a metal strip. We tried out the local mine mess, basic but plenty of it. Jim and Pat left us early for a family party, while Graham & Ray headed home to find out what was wrong with Graham. (a re-occurring problem) Made vanilla slices for morning tea at Mt Morgans, and fuelled in Laverton on one working pump before turning onto the Anne Beadell. Fuel and camp at Ilkurlka with several other groups, but lovely hot showers if you could regulate the taps properly. Warm, and heavy clouds blowing in as we set up camp in the mallee. Just finished tea and the rain came. Denise's washing had a second rinse, some went into their tents and those who hadn't eaten yet sat around the fire under umbrellas. It didn't rain for too long. In the morning Liz started a roast leg of lamb to put into her dream pot for the day. Browned it nicely then dropped it in the dirt on the way to the pot. A good wash and all was well again. One of our rear coils snapped but set itself where it couldn't move and we came home like that. Took a long detour out to Voke's hill and it was dark when we had to

find somewhere to camp. Lightning in the north for most of the night but stars overhead. Turned south from the corner in clear skies, then into a thick fog, followed by a fog bow, and back to sunshine. 9 camels at Waldana well, and more big clouds coming in, so we camped early in the desert oaks just in case. Our wood though wet was still there from last year. Very heavy dew again but tents were drying by the time we packed up. As the ladies walked out on the track, a camel was walking up behind us. Didn't like the look of us so headed into the scrub and walked parallel to the road grumbling about it. Called into Cook siding where they had had a heavy hail storm the day before, thankfully we had missed that, but there were a lot of puddles on the road south. Still storms all around us, none just over head, and it cleared to stars in the evening. A shower of rain as we were packing up and more as we fuelled up at Nullarbor roadhouse. Lunch at Penong, and after buying some oysters it was into the motel at Ceduna. Because we couldn't have our ball, we dressed royally for dinner instead. (Graham and Ray arrived home on Sunday and on Monday Ray was flown to Melbourne for a gall stone removal, the largest one the surgeon had ever seen.) As old as Ray and the 60's series were, they did the trip almost without a hitch.) We headed home for a few weeks before we started on Cape York. Visited our families in Mildura, the day my 95yo mum was admitted to hospital after falling over. (She died just before we left home for Cape York.) Arrived home on Thursday, Monday Tony rang the eye man again, and by Wednesday he was in day surgery for a torn retina. Eye was lasered and stitched and filled with oil. He had to lie face down for three days, (should have be five) not quite long enough before we had to head north to Atherton. Cape York was a caravan trip so we shared the driving, taking a bit more time than usual. Met up with son Dale and his family heading back from the Gold Coast, had rain, and swam in Innot hot springs, very relaxing for stiff muscles from sitting too long.

Transcontinental

August/September

Michael & Raewyn, John & Lana, Jeff & Liz, Bruce & Linda, Norm & Coral, Paul & Kate, Rod & Judy, David & Mary, John & Pat, Ron & Marie - Tony had his eye checked, all looking good.

After a noisy evening, a delicious meal and an early night we were ready to head off for country far to the west. Chris, Kim & John, (with a plate of fruit cake) met us for morning tea at Casino and to catch up with fellow travellers for a chat. Chris has not long returned home after teaching maths at a boy's school in Turkey for two years. It was a cool night at Glenlyon dam but we kept the fire cranked up. The foggy morning cleared before we left camp. We had to find a dentist for Coral in a hurry. A lovely morning tea at the Texas tobacco museum, lunch at Goondiwindi, leaving Norm & Coral behind (we were to meet them that evening in St George, minus a tooth) then out through the cotton fields to St George. The cotton had all been harvested and the paddocks were ready for the next crop. Other paddocks were full of wheat and oats. They had had 2" of rain so there was a lot of water lying around. The sun was low in the sky and full in our face as we headed into town, and there was no room left at

the park after we arrived. They have a large fire box in the camp kitchen which provided everyone with plenty of heat on the very cool night. There were lots of flowers along the road from earlier rains, but the closer we got to Thargomindah the drier the country became. They have had very little rain in the last three years. Morning tea was in the Grey Range where Kate later discovered she must have left her camera. Stopped on the Cooper for lunch with the friendly flies. There were only a few muddy puddles left in the creek bed. The country around the dig tree was very dry, and Kidman & Co no longer lease Nappa Merrie station. Overcast in the morning and showers around, but the wind was warm. Arrabury waterhole was dry, but the dunes into Haddon's Corner were covered in flowers. We even took the vans in over the two dunes. The roads gangs had been busy and the road was in excellent condition. We had 15 spots of rain, the waterhole on Brown's Creek where we camped was full and two road trains went through covering us all in fine dust. Stopped at Betoota and were able to wander all through the pub which had been closed since Simon Remienko died in 2004. It is the first time we have been inside the building in a long time. Typically Birdsville, it was hot, windy and dusty when we arrived, calming down in the evening, only to blow in again from the NW early the next morning. Leaving the vans behind, we crossed the dunes of the Simpson out to Eyre Creek for lunch, arriving back around tea time. Visited Ian (originally from the caravan park), did my washing and cut his hair at the same time. Turning north we stopped at Lake Machattie for lunch, a new toilet block, and water but not many birds. 30 c Called into Bedourie where we watched a film on the floods that surrounded the town a year or so ago, followed by a swim in their heated artesian spar pool. Woke up through the night to a brilliant show of thunder and lightning. It was so bright I tried to convince myself to get the camera and tripod out in the car but bed won. I have kicked myself ever since. There was another dose around 5am, but it got the same response. Weather stayed windy & dusty. Lunch in Boulia, a visit to the Min Min centre, the stone house and fuel, then west across the Donahue towards Alice. Tried a couple of camp sites but the ground was dry, holey & hard, almost impossible for a toilet. It was a bouncy trip heading across the holey ground with the van behind. Eventually found a spot and settled in. Plenty of wood, wind, and rain to the south; and two cattle trains went through. The road gangs had been busy so once again it was dusty, but a shower of rain helped to settle things. Fuel and ice-creams at Jervois then camp was set up at the base of a low rocky range. Paul, Kate and Bruce I think climbed to the top. The views from the top are wonderful especially at sunset. Paul had a flat tyre and Michael had trouble with his tailgate. We turned off the Plenty onto Binn's track towards Arltunga. A quick visit to the old police station, then a video at the info centre before camping in an area just out of the reserve. We were surprised to find it open and we were the only ones there. Nice hot showers, clean toilets and a good fire. John & Pat got out the keyboard and squeeze box and we had a concert by the Arltunga Sisters, (Lana, Kate & Linda). The following morning someone noticed Rod & Judy's van was crabbing. Another broken spring pack in the caravan was the cause. Tony plated it together and they had it fixed in Alice. Being an unusual size they were lucky to find one at a camper factory. The town was booked

out because of the 25th transport reunion so we were in the local showground along with quite a few others, but a big area to ourselves. Shower block was solar and by the time we got to it the hot water was cold. Knew better the next day and got in earlier.

A halfway dinner was had at a very busy Golf Club and two of our meals were forgotten. They did arrive eventually. A few light showers helped to keep the grass green. They tried to kick us out on Monday because of the summer NATs the following weekend, but we were booked in until Tuesday when we departed. John & Lana headed home because of Lana's back, and Ron and Marie turned north. We had scones, jam, cream and strudel for morning tea at Hermannsburg, and a wander through the historic precinct. There is a lot of work being done, with excess sand being removed from the small cemetery revealing a lot more grave sites, and a lovely new shop and entry. It was a late lunch at Goss Bluff and a stop at Tyler's Pass where Jeff discovered the dust cap from his caravan was missing. A new one was made from a beetroot tin. Glen Helen station where we camped was very dry. Fuelled at Papunyah where they now have a big new shop and small takeaway. The road was in great condition but they are using a lot more rock in the mix, flowers were in patches and we saw two camels. Camped not far from the border, and 2 police vehicles went through giving us a lights and siren hello. Bruce staked a front tyre going in, and Tony found out that his tyre pliers don't fit 18" rims. Rod also found a flat tyre before we left in the morning. Plugged it. A big fire had been through as we headed to Jupiter well, very black trees and bare sand, but the desert oaks around the well had been missed so it was still a pretty site. Showered up and had a very pleasant night. Jeff found the fridge in his new van wasn't cold any more. The pipe had cracked, so all his food was farmed out, frozen stuff into ours and bits and pieces elsewhere. Crossed the Canning and fuelled up at Kunawarritji. Rod was quite noisy coming in, and another broken spring was discovered, the tyre jammed in the wheel well. Some time was spent getting the axle back and plating the spring pack, and fitting a new tyre to Bruce's rim. Camp was the first flat spot we could find. There were lots of flowers along the road edge before Telfer mine but the ground around was very dry. We were surprised to find no-one in the area we wanted to camp on the Oakover river. A very pretty spot, and even though the water level was low it was good enough for a cool off. There was a mudlarks nest over the water with two young, and very busy parents. Two big Droughtmaster bulls came into camp and eyed each other off, neither willing to yield way but too lazy to get aggressive. They spend a lot of time along the waterhole in the native couch and bullrushes. The ladies probably have to come to them! Sunday was father's day, more firewood and just relaxing. Went to bed with the glow of a big fire behind the ranges the other side of the river. Station owner called in the next morning looking for a missing couple in a camper, (we hadn't seen them), it was 35c in the sun and windy. Lots of black smoke on the horizon, Bruce blew a tyre on his van, and Paul put a rock through one of his as we pulled off the road waiting for Bruce. Late lunch was in Marble Bar and we set up camp, then out to Chinaman Pool, marble bar and the flying fox. Dinner was at the Iron Clad hotel. Not many patrons were expected, and

the cook was on holidays so the Armenian lady waitress/cook/barmaid was very busy. Typically Marble Bar, it stayed warm and windy for our drive to Coppin's Gap, then Doolena gap for lunch, where there was only a couple of inches of water in the Coongan river. Waterholes further down had more water. We usually drive along an old rain line track, but an infill bridge across a small gully had a big hole in it, so a small detour was made down through the creek. Some were back to the hotel for dinner and the wind swung around to the SE. A much milder night. Down through very scenic country to Nullagine, past Gina Rinehart's Roy Hill camp (where the flowers were truly magnificent) and into Newman for two nights. The flowers there were prolific as well, all different varieties of Mulla Mullas. Washing, shopping, cooking, out for dinner, all those sort of things. Rod & Jeff drove out to Ophthalmia Dam where Rod did a tyre, so bought a new one to replace it. Our van fridge-freezer was still cold but the bottom section was warming up, so Liz had to find room for her stuff, and I had to rearrange the fridge in our car to take all of ours. Also find room for the slices I was making for our ball night. Met a lady mine worker in the park who nicely shook hands with everyone she met, not mentioning the fact that half the mine camp was suffering from a dose of the flu! Tony was first to go down. A good report from some of the crew who went to the mine mess for dinner meant there were several more who went there for breakfast the morning we departed. Plenty of variety, and containers to fill for morning tea and lunch. Camped on a huge clay pan full of water, but the flowers had finished and the ground around was drying out. A beautiful evening for our Trans ball and beautiful, blonde haired Norm was crowned Queen of the Desert. Tony was away with the fairies and spent the night in bed. A very still early morning and the sunrise reflections had cameras madly clicking. Just gorgeous, but the flies were up early too. The drive to Mount Augustus is notorious for tyre problems and the day was no different with Paul, Rod & Bruce all doing tyres. Paul & Bruce still had original tyres with not much guts to them; they are now much wiser. There were a lot of other campers and vans at the station but the showers were hot, and we had a bin for our normal campfire. I took nearly everyone up to Edney's lookout, and the scenic drive around the mount. The wild flowers were erratic but there was one section around the back that was just brilliant. The three tyres were mended and Tony spent the day in bed.

Called in to the old Cobra shearing shed and between Mt Augustus and the Kennedy Ranges, Rod and Bruce had another flat tyre each. Getting on in the day we found a nice flat spot for camp, and saved the ranges for the next morning. A late morning tea and fuel at Gascoyne junction and onto a dam we call Budgie Hole for afternoon tea, nearly driving straight past it. We have seen it very dry, but this year it was full of water, no budgies just some flowers. The road was smooth, we fuelled up cars (and passengers) at Wooramel roadhouse then it was on to Hamelin Pool to camp. Tony still off with the fairies, and my throat was sore so dinner was from the shop, a huge hamburger. We had a fire going but most were happy to be in bed early for an early start the next day. Off at 7am it was cool and windy but the weather improved as the day went on. Excellent road in, we deflated the tyres and drove along the

headland that alternates between sand and limestone rocks. Ooh Ooh tyres, tyres, tyres but with low pressures we got through without a puncture. Lunch was on the cliff edge, we saw five or so whales, two very close, the others further out, a turtle and four dolphins. Altogether a beautiful day. Photos at the Steep Point sign, afternoon tea on the sandy beach then back to camp for our party night.

Our year finished, we headed to Kalbarri for four nights which were spent on or in the bed cursing the lady in Newman and slowly improving. Managed to do all the washing the first day, but very little else. Down to Gerald- ton against the wind, Dalwallinu, (warm & windy) Corrigan, (still windy) Ravensthorpe (now cool & windy) and Esperance. Took a bus 'port tour' organised by the local Rotary club on Saturdays only, \$5 and excellent. Feeling much better we went out to Lucky Bay and Cape Le Grande for the day. Beautiful clean white sand and blue water. (where we couldn't get to on our Desert Wander). From there it was across the Nullarbor to Ceduna, Port Germaine for some crabbing, Mildura and home.

Tony was back to the eye doctor in November to have the oil taken out and replaced with saline, now we just have to wait to see if it improves any more. He is not quite looking cross-eyed at me! He has spent several weeks rebuilding our collapsing back fernery (nearly finished) and then we are flying to the Antarctic for New Years Eve. It is a 12 hour trip by plane and we don't land, just fly around it. Camera is ready, cards are empty and batteries are fired up. In early January Tony and son Dale are driving a B-Double and semi (he couldn't borrow a 2nd front trailer) of hay to Ilfracombe in Queensland for the drought affected properties, part of the Burrumbuttock Hayrunners organized by a farmer from, off course Burrumbuttock. (It's on facebook) There are to be around 120 trucks taking the hay up. Hopefully outback Queensland got some of the rain coming down from the cyclone but not enough so that the trucks can't get through.

Well that is all the news from this year. We hope you all had a good year and are looking forward to 2016. We wish you good health and safe travelling.

Brenda & Tony

**(2017 is now on the website)*