

Our 2010 / 2011 Australian Outback Safari

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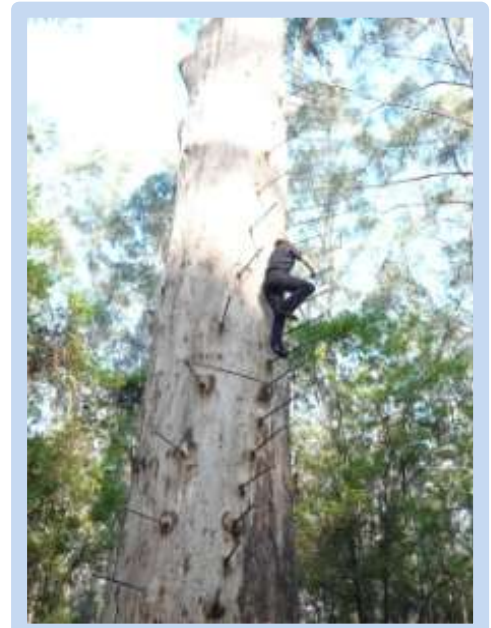
We found that Christmas Day celebrations don't always happen as planned. Megan had suggested we find a tranquil spot for Christmas lunch, travelling less than 100km, and to resist any Extreme 4 Wheel Driving along the way. I concurred, and we agreed to have a relaxing day at the beach.

Christmas Day dawned as a lovely sunny morning at Pemberton in the South West corner of Australia. We've become exercise junkies during this Safari, so we decided that a climb up the Fire



Lookout Tree near our campsite would be an ideal way to start the day. There are three of these Fire Lookout trees remaining in this area, all approx 200 years old. They are pegged with steel rods which spiral the trunk all the way to the top. These lookouts tower above the surrounding forest and are still in use today.

Megan lost no time when faced with the challenge >>>



The Rangers lookout cabin at the top, some 65 metres off the ground, sways up to 3 metres in strong winds. Thankfully for us, a gentle breeze kept us cool during this exhilarating climb!

After this climb we set off to the coast with our tiny 100ml diameter designer Christmas cake and all the special treats one



would expect to find in a well stocked Engel fridge in the back of one's four wheel drive wagon on Christmas day.

Upon arrival, these huge sand dunes looked somewhat



daunting so out we got and deflated all four tyres to 15 psi before heading for the river mouth near Windy Harbour. This is when our Christmas Day turned 'Pear Shaped' as they say.

Unfortunately our truck took a slightly different route to the one we had planned, which resulted in some very **'untidy parking'....** >>>>

Our ground anchor was immediately put in place and a double purchase winching operation commenced using the remote control and both of us stacking out on the right hand running board which we hoped would prevent our truck from falling into a deep hole on the left side.

Whilst digging and winching, the sea breeze had become a blizzard to say the least! Sand was now stinging our skin and the temperature had plummeted as a storm was brewing on the Southern Ocean only a few metres away. Sand drifts were soon covering any tools, pulley blocks, shackles, the drag-link chain, strops and shovel. By now visibility had become increasingly difficult.



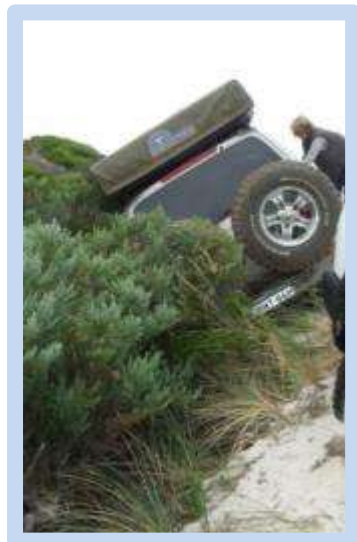
To our surprise a Toyota 4WD enthusiast entered this track from the beach looking for shelter, & could clearly see that we were in a spot of bother, he & his wife leapt out of their truck & greeted us with a big smile & the offer of a glass of Christmas Cheer!

We promptly dug his truck into the sand dune behind us until his chassis was sitting on the sand so that we could use his truck as a ground anchor. He winched us from the rear as we co-ordinated the release of our winch rope which was still connected to our ground anchor to the right hand side of our vehicle to stop the weight of the truck taking the front further down the side of a deep hole in the sand dune.



<<< During this recovery we also needed to inflate our Air-bag to stabilise our vehicle.

We used our drag-link chain by attaching it to the right hand running board and drove several Waratahs into the sand to prevent our vehicle from rolling during this recovery as by now our vehicle had slipped further sideways into a very deep hollow and was just teetering and was on the verge of tipping onto its side.



<<< **Megan assisted by ‘stacking out’** on the running board while all this nervous excitement took place.

It’s now 4.30pm, and our Toyota 4WD friends bid us farewell as we set about cleaning our recovery gear and repacking our truck. By now, the cold wind and sand were whistling around our ears and our truck.

Now packed up, Megan & I looked at each other as we took refuge on the leeward side of our truck and burst out laughing! Megan said that she’s had a wide variety of Christmas Day celebrations, but this one took the cake!

So with no Christmas lunch, no champagne and no opening of presents and not an ounce of energy left to begin to celebrate, we took cover in the adjacent Conservation Park before heading in to a remote campground for a much needed shower and a change of clothes.

Well, this all sounds rather dramatic for a Christmas Day, and we agree! Hence we decided to cancel our Christmas Day plans and we rescheduled these on Boxing Day.

This was our Christmas Day – how did yours compare!?

Our journey east took us to Walpole where the ‘Must See’ attraction is the ‘**Valley of the Giants Sky Walk**’.

This photo shows a small section of this meandering Sky Walk. >>>



This wonderful engineering masterpiece was installed without any disruption to either the forest or its inhabitants and provides a walkway 40 metres above the ground high up in the forest canopy. **This thrilling birds-eye view was most exhilarating!**

Denmark, a quaint riverside town was our next destination with many delightful sheltered beaches nearby. (population 5000) We embarked on an exhilarating day trip to Shelley Beach at 6.30am to find a host of para-sailors & hang-gliders flinging themselves off the cliff tops and soaring out over the deep blue waters of the bay. What a way to start the day!



We resisted jumping, and continued on to reach Torbay Heads, the southernmost point of West Australia. This narrow, challenging 4WD track over some of the steepest sand hills in south West Australia had been made easier by environmentalists laying rubber conveyor belting to give traction to prevent undue damage to the track.



<<< **Graeme throwing a rock off the most southern tip of West Australia.**

Travelling East, Albany came next, with a population of 30,000. This city has the most wonderful natural harbour, with a dramatic coastline.

Albany was first established in 1876 (2 years before Perth) and was Western Australia's first European settlement, having one of the best natural harbours in the world. Albany holds a special place in ANZAC

history being the departure point for 30,000 Australian & New Zealand troops together with 7500 horses and provisions headed for Gallipoli in 45 tall-masted sailing ships. What a sight this must have been.

This beautiful Princess Royal Harbour & King George Sound is where the families and loved ones of these soldiers waved farewell, not knowing if these brave men would ever return. **The ANZAC Memorial >>>**

Albany is renowned for its tragic history of whaling. It was the home of Australia's last commercial Whaling Station (which closed in 1978 after many prolonged protests)



<<< In heavy seas water creates a magnificent scene as it surges under this vast natural rock bridge near Albany.

Note: the tourist walking across the top, hoping to get a better view.



From the beautiful pristine white sandy beaches & lush forests of Albany we drove to Hyden some 430 km to the north east. This was nothing but an arid, drought stricken wheat-belt country side, with vast flat plains without a tinge of green, or any growth at all.

Hyden is home to 'Wave Rock' a National Icon, measuring 100m long & 15m high.



>>> **Wave Rock** is the shape of a giant wave about to crash over the surrounding bush. This unique granite outcrop is coloured with vertical stripes of algae and lichen on it's rock face caused by rain water & thus creating a wonderful collage.



<<< Resourceful early pioneers recognised an opportunity to capture rain water from the top of this vast rocky outcrop which covers several hectares and have built a rock wall around the perimeter to funnel rain water run-off into a man-

made dam at the foot of this natural catchment area. This rock wall stands approx 300ml high and can be seen clearly in the photo above. ^

Today we commenced our trek along the '**Holland Track**' departing from Hyden at 6am. This undulating and demanding narrow track runs 505km from Broomehill to Gnarlbine Rock s/w of Coolgardie & was formed in 1893 as a direct result of the discovery of gold in Coolgardie. This track fell into decline just 3 years later when a rail link was completed, and the track gradually became over grown. In 1992 a local farmer retraced & opened the track, after which the Perth Branch of the Toyota Landcruiser Club took over the responsibility & the upkeep of this track for future 4WD adventurers.

We were well prepared with maps, a history book and the trusty GPS and a full supply of provisions plus double our usual water quota due to the ferocious heat. With tyres reduced to 25 psi and the high-vis self preservation flag hoisted we commenced another 4WD wilderness adventure, negotiating the deep ruts and wash-outs and taking particular care not to stake a tyre on the protruding sharp scrub stubble.



This route took us along some of the State Barrier Fence line, part of the No 1 Rabbit Proof Fence surveyed by A. W. Canning in 1901. An extension was added here in 1954 to deflect Emu flocks from the neighbouring farmlands.

<<< '**Travel Log Books**' are provided on most of these remote tracks.

These Log Books are housed in water & vermin proof containers. When we sign in we always include our names, the date, time and our direction of travel. Should anything untoward happen to us, this detail would be helpful for safety reasons. (It is always interesting to read the comments of previous travellers.)

It's now New Years Eve & we made camp at the base of Thursday Rock on the Holland Track.



A true wilderness experience. A million stars, and only dingo's & camels for neighbours. We held our own celebrations, thinking of our families & friends all attending parties back home. We had not seen another vehicle for 3 days, but who cares when you are in this wonderful environment!



<<< **This photo shows one of the unusual sculptured rocks formations found on top of Thursday Rock**



We climbed to the top of Thursday Rock to watch the last sun set of 2010 >>>

As the last sun sets and the last moon rises from the opposite horizon we bid you farewell for 2010. We hope that you all enjoy your respective New Years Eve celebrations and we look forward to bringing you more newsletters summarising our travels in 2011.

As we raise our glasses, we wish you all the very best from us at Thursday Rock.

Cheers!! Graeme & Megan