

Our 2010 / 2011 Australian Outback Safari

By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan

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January 2011 was a most fulfilling and exciting month for us and a great way to start the year. New Year's Day dawned in an outback wilderness camping spot at the northern end of Holland Track in the outback of Western Australia, with no other campers for hundreds of kilometres.

Living with the wildlife is very special in these less travelled regions. We kept a careful eye out for dangerous Australian natives such as poisonous snakes, Dingoes & spiders, but we often found strange & wondrous creatures that caused us no harm.



‘Were you expecting my friends and I for breakfast? After all, it is New Years Day!’

Exiting the Holland Track we travelled east to **Cave Hill** where an amazing network of historic tramlines had provided wood to the goldfields, known as ‘The Woodlines’. Native Salmon Gum and Gimlet were used as structural timber to shore-up the underground mine shafts and provide fuel, i.e. firewood for steam engines driving water pumps, generating electricity & domestic use. Firewood was burnt at a rate of 350,000 tonnes annually for 65 years, providing work for 1500 wood cutters.

Cave Hill is an impressive granite monolith >> 1 km wide, 1.5km long & 50m high. Five huge water dams were constructed on this rock and another two on a large rock nearby. Run-off rain water was diverted by extensive low stone walls



into these dams to provide water for the steam train boilers, industrial machinery & domestic use. These dams were still in use until 1964. This area is now deserted except for the occasional 4WD tourist such as ourselves, but a wide variety of wildlife still enjoy this water supply. We saw many lizards, wild donkeys, horses & camels as we went on to explore the Burra Rock woodline area featuring a similar water collection system. >>>



Travelling north, the track from Cave Hill finishes at the old gold rush town of **Coolgardie**. This town features a main street wide enough to allow camel trains to turn and is lined with imposing 19th century buildings and many grand two storied hotels.



<<< Sadly many of these majestic & historic buildings are now vacant.

From here it was 38km west into **Kalgoorlie**, another world renowned gold mining town. This town of 30,000 people is thriving due to its gigantic gold mine '**The Superpit**'. In its heyday this town supported 93 hotels and 8 breweries!

We took an underground mine tour descending 60 metres below the earth's surface with a retired minor.



He explained what it was like to be a miner in the days before more sophisticated opencast mining took over. As a highly skilled, third generation gold miner he detailed and illustrated the risks miners took when mining for gold before modern day safety regulations were introduced.

Back above ground level, he showed us over a **793C CAT** dump truck. These haul trucks carry an impressive 220 tonne per load.



<<< **Six tyres costing AU\$35,000** each are used to support this pay-load.



Each truck uses 200 of these tyres during its working life of 1.750 million km.

These trucks, worth AU\$2 million each, operate on two 12 hour shifts per day using 185 litres of fuel per hour, they are refuelled twice daily at AU\$6000 per fill. Refuelling takes approx 8 minutes. Wow!

Each round trip to the rim of this 'Superpit' takes 45 minutes at a max speed of 12 km/hr fully loaded. Each of these trucks has one major rebuild at 825,000 km.

From a specially constructed lookout we peered down into the colossal **KCMG Superpit**. There were a staggering number

of these huge 793C CAT Haul trucks working tirelessly around the clock like an army of ants within this massive gold mine.

A Haul truck is loaded every three minutes by enormous Komatsu PC8000 face shovels (worth AU \$4 million each) . We found these massive machines to be both captivating & fascinating to watch! Approx 800,000 ounces of gold is extracted from this pit annually making this **the richest square mile of gold bearing earth in the world.** >>>>

We are told this vast man-made wonder can even be seen from outer space!



With dust being a real issue to both the environment and the mine workers, very large water trucks continuously dampen down the dust on all the mining roads within the pit. This ensures good visibility for truck drivers when they negotiate these narrow rock ledges. **Huge dump trucks look like ants!!! >>**



<<< This photo indicates the size of these water-trucks when parked alongside large Mack road-trains. They are monsters! We believe this mine purchased a lot of machinery from the USA when the Aussie dollar hit parity with the Green Back.

‘Ladies of the Night’ flourished back in the days when Gold Fever struck. 300 prostitutes worked in this pioneer town so a visit to Kalgoorlie would not be complete without a tour to one of the two remaining Bordellos, **‘Langtrees’** >>> This business was made famous by Madam Lee, a famous Kiwi entrepreneur.



This award winning Bordello continues to do ‘business as usual’, and also opens its doors for day time sightseeing tours! We joined a tour and visited several ‘themed’ rooms but we didn’t meet any of the ‘girls’, however, we were entertained with some great stories by the Madam of the day!

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In pursuit of another serious 4WD adventure we continued to head north-east to Laverton to commence the remote **‘Anne Beadell Highway’**. This long lonely stretch of desert track heads 1370km due east across the vast sandy plains of the Great Victoria Desert (north & parallel to the Nullarbor Plains) to Coober Pedy, at an average of 470m above sea level. This track was initially built to give access to the Woomera Rocket Range, Australia’s first atomic testing site in 1946.

The Australian & British Governments had commissioned notable Australian surveyor, Len Beadell, to select a suitable location as an atomic testing site which was extremely remote, uninhabited and had no economic value.



As a result of this atomic testing the radiation levels in this area are still considered unsafe, however, 4 Wheel Drive adventurers like ourselves can safely approach the two marker totems to view the blast site.

<<< Our **In-Dash GPS** system assured us of our exact position when negotiating these remote tracks.

The Anne Beadell Highway was built in 1959 to 1961 by Len Beadell and his team ‘The Gunbarrel Highway Construction Team’. This track was named after his wife Anne & crosses the **Connie Sue Highway**, (which was also built by Len & named after their daughter) The word ‘Highway’ is very misleading as these are little more than two remote narrow dirt tracks!

Where these two tracks intersect in the desert is known as **Neale Junction**. (Neale being Len & Anne’s son)

These track surfaces are mainly firm red sand with some long stretches of severe corrugations punctuated with several serious wash-outs. These tracks run through some intriguing desert terrain, predominantly *parallel* to the windswept sand dunes, rather



than *over them* as in the Simpson Desert track or the Canning Stock Route. We revelled in this vast wilderness where the views along the track are incredibly long, as corners are rare!

<<< **Graeme reducing tyre pressures**. This makes for a smoother ride over the corrugations.

377 km east of Laverton we came to our turning point, **The Neale Junction** >>>>

From here we headed southward on the Connie Sue Highway. We registered our details in the visitors book at Neale Junction where passing 4x4 Drivers sign in stating the date, time & direction of their travel. We were surprised that this register showed an average of only three vehicles per month passing this point. This explained why we hadn’t seen another vehicle for four days, and



it was another two days before we came to the first inhabited homestead where we called in & met the owners of this 990,000 acre ‘Arubiddy Station’.



The wildlife was scattered but we occasionally encountered emus, camels, snakes and lizards (some small & others very large) plus lots of colourful birds. Dingoes often appeared near our campsites seemingly unafraid of us, however, we were always cautious of them!

Scenes from the Anne Beadell Track



The desert Highway – ‘Straight as a Gun Barrel’ all the way to the horizon & beyond >>>

<<< A remarkable natural rock ‘bridge’ is not what you expect to find on the edge of a vast & lonely desert.



<<< **The Old Yeo Homestead** - A reliable water supply for travellers – but watch out for the snakes who like to drink here too!



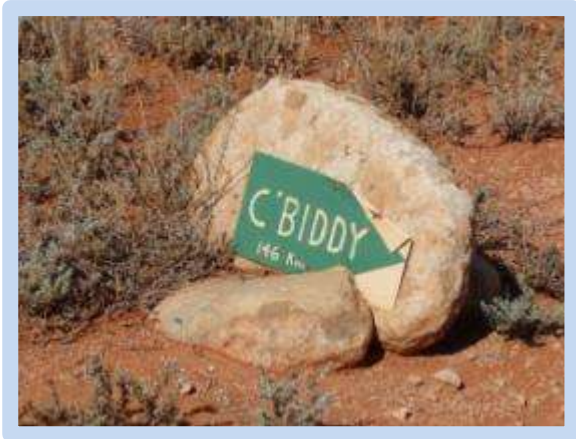
<< There’s no place like home! Ours is all set up, cool drinks in hand & dinner being prepared, all within 15 minutes of making camp. In the deserts we keep on the move until the sun sets and the temperatures fall.



If towing a trailer through the desert or the outback in Australia, be sure not to overload it & to always carry spare springs, if not, be prepared to abandon it where it falls! >>>



Good signage is always reassuring in the Outback



<<< Sad but true

A puncture + a box of beer = disaster. Another wreck abandoned near an Aboriginal Community.



A rare overnight deluge of rain changed this 'Highway' beyond recognition! Fortunately it was the main entry into a cattle station and it had a hard rock base >>>



Arriving at this little town of Cocklebiddy spells the end of this epic Desert journey through the wilderness – it's time to head east now along the Nullarbour Plains and reluctantly leave Western Australia behind us. We've thoroughly enjoyed our 6 months exploring W.A. and the vast contrasts it presented. We just loved it!

As we cross the boarder and adjust our clocks (2 1/2 hours), we commence the last leg of our journey. We'll be back soon to wrap up this 2010 /11 Safari.

Cheers!!
Graeme & Megan