

# Our 2010 / 2011 Australian Outback Safari

*By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan*

**Newsletter Number Sixteen**

Shortly after exiting the great red deserts of Western Australia, we reached Australia's southern coast near Eucla Pass. The red sand gave way to chalky white rock where the land meets the Southern Ocean at the Great Australian Bite – believed to be the longest line of sea cliffs in the world.



This felt like standing on the edge of earth itself, with nothing but the ferocious ocean between us & the icy realm of Antarctica. This rugged coastline of towering high cliffs is constantly crumbling into the ocean below. Deep cracks, sometimes many metres back from the edge, are the result of the constant ravaging by the elements and the crumbly white rocks are constantly eroding. We were very cautious when parking!



**The 'dot' on the distant horizon above is our trusty Toyota parked safely!**

**Huge open cracks in the cliff tops are sometimes not so obvious. Very scary ! >**



**<< You won't find us too close to the edges!**

However, Graeme had a close encounter with a snake near here! He trod on it but thankfully he was wearing heavy boots. Graeme jumped sky high and thankfully escaped without harm.



A three day journey travelling east along the Nullarbor Plains to Ceduna was long, flat, & very interesting. There's a lot to be found & you never know who you might need to share the 'Black-Top' with.

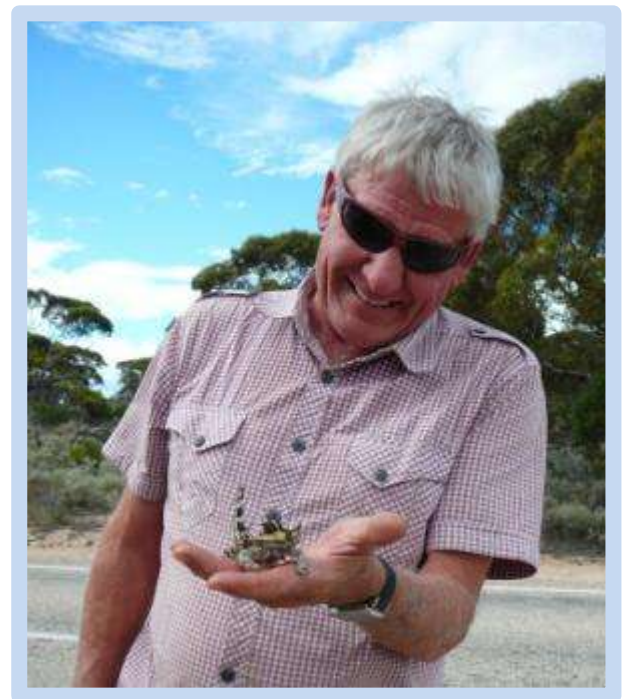


### **Our one & only puncture >>>**

This tyre wall had taken a battering in the desert on sharp rocks resulting in a nasty gash about 1,000 km ago. This finally ruptured so Graeme used the High-Lift Jack to change the wheel .

### **Rescuing a Thorny Devil >>>**

Graeme rescues this fascinating little chap from certain death in the middle of the Highway and delivers him safely to the other side. This is the third Thorny Devil he rescued in our travels this year!



This section of the Highway doubles as an **Emergency Runway** for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Just another of the many & varied uses of this long straight Highway >>





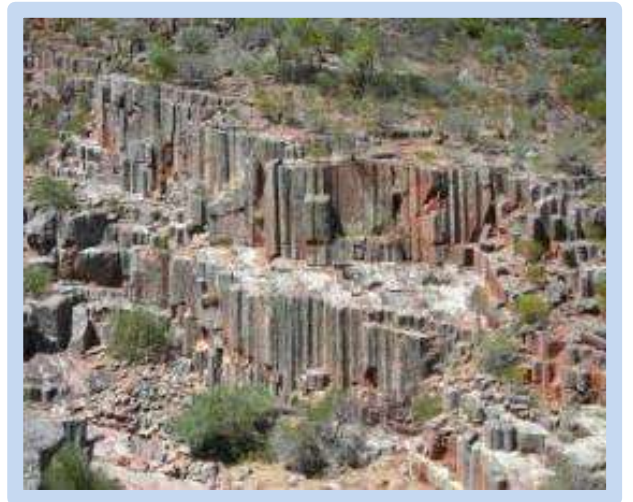
More artistic  
Roadside  
automobile  
displays!



Travelling from Western Australia into South Australia we entered the boarder town of Ceduna where we spent a few days on the coast enjoying seafood at Streaky Bay, Smokey Bay & Pinky Point. Locally, busy ports support exports of grain, salt & gypsum (a chalk like substance used as a soil conditioner)

<<< **A lot of rubber meets the road!**  
This Road Train is filled with Gypsum enroute to the port for export.

**The Gawler National Park** to the north east was a very hot and dry diversion off the main highway. A 6 km rough 4WD track took us through the southern edge of this 166,000ha park to the much acclaimed **Organ Pipe Rocks**. This volcanic 'rhyolite' is a gully of strange long & flat-faced rock columns. Hiking up the valley to view these rocks in 40+ degrees heat was punishing & the rocks were almost too hot to touch. This could be why we saw nobody else in our 2 days here!



With our commitments in NZ we were now on a mission to get back to the Gold Coast within 30 days. Heavy rain further north was causing major flooding, so we had to negotiate our way around the many hazards.

Time no longer allowed us to explore every interesting looking track, and we needed to plan carefully to see all we could in the time allowed. A detour southward towards Adelaide via the wine regions of Clare and the Barossa Valley was irresistible!

From Gawler National Park, east through Kimba (the geographically halfway point across Australia) then to Port Augusta, a thriving town on the Spencer Gulf, followed by a loop to Quorn, an historic town featuring the Pichi Richi Railway (the old tracks run 33 Km to Port Augusta) This quaint little town is flanked by the majestic Flinders Ranges and creates an inspiring location for local artists who flourish here. Studios and galleries have taken over many of the old 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings.

The route from Quorn to Clare wove through the Flinders Ranges to the sweeping plains of the golden wheat country. Roads were busy with combine harvesters & other agricultural machinery. Along this route tiny antique towns dated from the mid 1850's when the old pubs hosted the famous Cobb & Co coaches & they still serve good food & 'cold refreshments' to road weary travellers like us!



We suddenly left the plains and dropped into the valley floor at Clare. The scenery instantly changed from golden wheat plains to lush green rows of grapes threading up and down the gently rolling valleys. Clare is the busy hub of a cluster of villages nestled in the picturesque Clare Valley. It is considered Australia's home of Riesling wine. Jesuit priests planted the regions first grapes in 1851 just 15 years after European settlers arrived in South Australia. At '**Sevenhill Cellars**' Jesuits are still making sacramental wine as well as a great selection of more commercial wines which we really enjoyed sampling!



### **“McLeods Daughters” – The Gungellan Hotel**

A surprising discovery along a long dusty country road just north of the Barossa Valley was the sleepy town of Freeling. These roads looked familiar somehow, as they should! We had reached the home of the popular TV series “McLeods Daughters”. We stopped for a drink at the local pub and enjoyed browsing through much of the memorabilia from the show & hearing snippets of show-biz gossip from the locals!



## The sunny Barossa Valley saw us savouring more of the famous fine wines!

The miles of grain country seemed endless, then finally we came to the top of Mengler Hill, part of the Barossa Ranges. A colourful patchwork of vineyards & little historic European early-settler villages filled the Barossa Valley below us. Our highlight was Tununda, which grew from the prosperous 1840's village of Langmeil on the North Para River.

We savoured some wonderful wines at the rather opulent Richmond Grove cellars, Peter Lehmann cellars and the original Langmeil cellar door.



Langmeil Vineyard was planted in 1843 – just 7 years after South Australia was colonised.

We were treated to a \$100/bottle of wine from their original 168 year old vines!

<<< **Richmond Grove Cellars**

Later that day we returned to the town centre of **Tununda**.

At 5.30pm, the temperature was still 35 + degrees. >>>

The streets were humming! The Valley Hot Rodders “Cruise On” car show had arrived in town & drew over 200 stunning American Muscle cars & many beautifully restored classic cars. Hundreds of people had turned out to admire the cars and then we danced into the night to nostalgic live Rock n Roll music in the main street.



After leaving The Barossa Valley, we travelled East to the **Murray River** to take a short car-ferry ride across to **Swan Reach**, a village perched on top of 50 metre high spectacular limestone cliffs overlooking the river. The National Murray-Darling Basin Commission maintains & operates 14 locks & weirs plus 11 Ferry crossings. These Locks make this river permanently navigate-able, each

raising the river & creating a stepped weir pool system used by boats travelling up & down the river. They are big enough to hold 6 – 8 of the very popular Murray River House Boats at a time.

**The Murray River** was in flood & brimming from bank to bank. The adjacent flood plains were fully submerged with slow moving dirty water heading south from Queensland threatening towns & the country-side for hundreds of kilometres through NSW & Victoria. This takes months to creep towards the sea.



We took several more car-ferry rides, across the Murray River until reaching **Murray Bridge**.

Glad to be entering the Adelaide Hills area, we really enjoyed our visit to the famous historic German Lutheran settlement of **Hahndorf**, a town full of traditional architecture & beautiful old buildings.

This is a popular weekend destination with city folk from Adelaide who drive up into these hills to escape the heat whilst relaxing in the many quaint **German-style eateries and pubs.** >>>



On to Adelaide - a delightful city with spectacular beaches, and certainly a place we would like to revisit! We toured south and took in the fabulous vineyards in & around McLaren Vale, before heading west towards the coast to enjoy another stunning sunset amongst hundreds of families picnicking on the shores at low tide. They basked in the last rays of sun before it slowly sunk below the horizon.

<<< **Glenelg** – Adelaide’s popular beachside resort suburb.

The following morning we departed this serene beach camp setting in search of some more 4WD action. At this time we had to focus on the fact that we both had individual commitments back in NZ in early March. With time against us now,

we needed to reassess how many more 4WD Safari adventures we could squeeze into our itinerary prior to reaching the end of this leg of our Australian 4WD journey.

After some deliberation we decided to enjoy as much 4WD driving as we could in the states of both South Australia & Victoria with the knowledge that we would be returning to finish off the last 6 months of our safari journey some time in 2012.

We rolled through many interesting towns such as: Gumeracha, Mt Pleasant, Walker Flat (where we once again caught a car-ferry across the Murray River) Wunka, Loxton, Monak, Swan Hill, Echuca, Barooga, Cobram, Mulwalla, Yarrawonga, Corowa, then we spent some time in **Rutherglen**, Victoria, on the fertile river flats beside The Murray. We visited some well known wineries here including All Saints, Pfeiffer Wines, & Valhalla Wines. This region is renowned for its fortified wines such as Muscat, Tokay Port and, unique to this area, the 'Durif', a rich & robust red that we absolutely loved!



### << **Australia Day in Rutherglen**

It was here at Rutherglen we observed **Australia Day**, joining the town folk to celebrate a day of remembrance & national pride.

The day commenced with a big picnic breakfast & an anthem of Aussie-Aussie- Aussie – Oi-Oi-Oi!



The local town folk made all-comers very welcome. The Rotary Club provided a hearty cooked breakfast, followed by inspirational speeches by some distinguished Australians followed by the presentation of awards to outstanding locals, young and old. We truly admired the spirit of this occasion where we witnessed communities joining together to actively rejoice '*being Australian*'.

We ambled along some quiet country back-roads and through the charming historical towns of Wangaratta, Beechworth & Yackandandah before reaching the twin cities of Albury Wodonga, which sit peacefully alongside the Murray River. These cities cleverly blend city style with a country pace. The perfect place to catch up with some 4WD friends from the 2008 expedition Graeme had made to Tasmania. We restocked our provisions before we went off-road again into some exciting 4WD tracks!!

From Old Tallangatta (near Albury Wodonga) we had a very hot climb up sun-baked ridges into Mt Granya National Park. We followed some steep rugged tracks



through the bush, reaching great heights and we were rewarded with grand views from the ridge tops over the huge man-made Lake Hume. Many of these tracks had not been maintained for years. We encountered many fallen trees and performed frequent chainsaw & winching operations to crawl up to the summit of **Mt Granya**.

**Graeme in action with the saw again >>>**

Then directly on to Mt Lawson State Park where lots of criss-crossing 4WD tracks through bush that challenged Megan's map reading, especially



when some huge fallen trees too big for us to move resulted in u-turns and alternative routes! We managed to reach the summit of **Mt Lawson** (870m) via some very scenic 4WD tracks that less determined adventurers would not have persevered with!! Most of these tracks had not seen any 4WD drivers for 10 years going by the number of fallen trees and overgrowth.

**<<<Plenty of double purchase 'Winch Action' was required**



**Graeme attaching a Tree Protector for our next winching operation >>>>**



**<<< Megan perspires after rewinding the winch rope for the 6<sup>th</sup> time today!**



Exiting this National Park at Koetong, we headed for the Victorian high-country.

We were in awe of the impressive rows of steep "blue" ranges rising up behind the pine plantations as we proceeded towards Towong. This country is known for its great valleys, crystal clear waters and spectacular mountain scenery – clean, unspoilt & un-crowded.





The Victorian High-Country town of Corryong is the final resting place of the legendary horseman, **‘The Man from Snowy River’ – Jack Riley.**



He was the inspiration of the famous Banjo Patterson poem and the movie of the same name.



**<<< We continued to negotiate just another tricky mountain summit pass, but no track to follow this time!!**

We climbed through these mountainous rocky ranges covered in Alpine Ash trees to the Hydro power station town of Cabramurra, the highest town in Australia. The Tumut power station here provides 70% of the renewable energy for the mainland Australian power grid. This town comes to life in the winter months as a ski resort, but it is scorching hot in the summer! An extreme and unforgiving place for the early pioneers & stories of very harsh conditions prevailed from the many historic Copper & Gold-Fever villages scattered amongst these rugged ranges.

We went off-road again, winding our way north-east towards Canberra via Goobragandra and Sawyers Summit (1480 m) on the Great Dividing Range along

some great tracks (with a frustrating number of locked National Park gates) to finally reach Adaminaby. This Hydro Dam, ski resort town and fishing village boasts some of the world’s biggest trout! Wild-life abounds – herds of brumbies, a few spinney echidna, & a fox delighted us along the way. Deep in the valleys we found shelter huts. Many of these were destroyed in the

terrible bush fires in 2002, but some have been lovingly rebuilt.

**We took advantage of the shade provided by this high altitude mountain hut for a picnic lunch. >>>**



From this idyllic spot in the high country of Victoria, we will continue on our way to Canberra which we will elaborate on in our next Newsletter.

We hope you have enjoyed scanning through this part of our adventure even though it was a little longer this time.

Kind regards, Graeme & Megan

