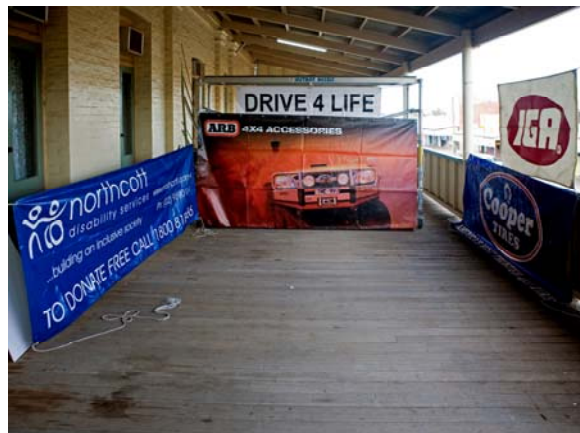


DRIVE 4 LIFE Charity Tour - October 2010 - Flinders Ranges Words and Photos - Richard Windeyer

Prologue

DRIVE 4 LIFE is a not-for-profit organization set up by a group of long-time four wheel drivers who also happen to be members of the Traction 4 Drive and Dive Club – based in Artarmon, a northern suburb of Sydney.

The aim of DRIVE 4 LIFE is to raise funds for charitable organisations that do not have a very high profile and therefore have difficulty raising enough funds to achieve their annual objectives. The publicity gained from these activities is intended to re-enforce with the general public that the majority of four wheel drivers are caring, responsible members of the community.



The organisers achieve their objectives by conducting "tag-along" four wheel drive tours of parts of Australia that are generally not on the travel "shopping list" of people who own four wheel drives. The tours are aimed at people who have either not had the opportunity to be expertly guided when driving off-road or who do not have the experience to navigate in areas where Drive 4 Life will take them.

Participants in the tour make a donation (usually \$1000), which is tax deductible, directly to the organisation being supported by the tour. Tours are generally 5-6 days duration.



The organisers have arranged major sponsorship through ARB, IGA, Cooper Tires, Overlander Magazine and the Northcott Society to provide the funds for the operating costs of the tour so that donations made by the participants go completely to the charity. Over the years \$360,000 has been raised.

This year's trip in October was a one week tour starting in Broken Hill and travelling into the Flinders Ranges, SA and Wilpena pound. It then headed up the Strzelecki Track and across to Cameron's before returning to Broken Hill along part of the Dingo fence on the NSW/SA border.

Mon 18th Oct – Broken Hill

After leaving from Sydney David, the Trip Leader and I as sidekick arrived in Broken Hill just before lunchtime. David had arranged to meet our group mid afternoon at the racetrack to hand each participant a travelling kit consisting of maps, car stickers and clothing merchandise for those who had ordered it in advance. He also briefed the group on our proposed route and fielded any questions.

We had checked the weather forecast and were relieved that it was for fine weather, at least for the next few days before another cold front was due from the south west. The area we were to travel had been inundated with buckets of rain in the preceding weeks with many roads being closed and just being reopened. David had plan B up his sleeve just in any case, and plan C etc.

Tue 19th Oct – Broken Hill to Chambers Gorge

As we watched Broken Hill disappear into the distance, in our side mirrors, the convoy 4 wheel drives with drivers and passengers on board were itching to feel the red dirt of the outback under their feet.



Our group consisted of 10 vehicles including the trip leader and tail end Charlie. The country around Broken Hill heading west consists of undulating hills and with the air a little crisp it was ideal travelling weather.

We crossed the South Australian border at Cockburn and then passed through Cutana, MacDonald Hill, Outalpa, Manna Hill before reaching the turnoff into the Flinders Ranges at Yunta. The previous towns are on the rail line and Manna Hill is the only town that still has a magnificently restored train station still standing, although trains don't stop there any more.

We all fuelled up at Yunta as fuel stops are few and far between in the remote area we were travelling. The road was in excellent condition considering the



amount of rain that had deluged the area in previous weeks and we made good time. We were kept on our toes watching for shingle backed lizards as it was their mating season and they love the warmth of the road.

Stopping off at the Waukaringa Ruins for a squiz

we then drove up the ridgeline to the ruins of an old furnace with it's chimney still standing tall and proud.

Continuing on we passed one of the other groups that had left much earlier than us and had stopped for an early lunch. Pulling off the main road onto a side track we stopped for lunch stop and whilst there a farmer came by to check a bore and questioned us as to what we were up to. He was happy with our explanation and he and us moved on.

Turning off for Chambers Gorge we arrived late afternoon and set up camp. A few of us looked around this spectacular location and climbed a small hill behind the campsite to admire the magnificent view of the gorge in the distance.



Following dinner we grouped around the camp fire and each person spoke about themselves and their background. We also marked the answers from a trivia quiz with the winner selecting a prize from a bag of mixed packets of lollies. This trivia quiz continued each day of the trip.

Wed 20th Oct – Chambers Gorge to Parachilna Gorge

Breaking camp we drove into the gorge where we left the vehicles and took the walking track to a location some 400m up the track where there are a substantial number of aboriginal petroglyphs. We spent some time in this area looking around to spot all the etchings.

Leaving the gorge our tail end Charlie helped out a fellow traveller who had a slow leak in his tyre and required it to be pumped up with a compressor. The fellow traveller assumed that as we all had ARB stickers plastered over the vehicles we would have the necessary equipment. This fellow was running a tag along tour and was an ex Dept of Wildlife Ranger.



Moving on we headed for Wirrealpa Station where we turned off for Blinman and arrived on lunch time. David organised a walk to a lookout on a lofty hill behind the town and then a tour of the Blinman Copper Mine which had just been reopened for tours.

The walk up the hill past Mary MacKillop's old bush hospital and Blinman cottage was rather exhilarating and the view from the top overlooking the town far below was quite spectacular.

Driving to the head of the mine for the mine tour we were split into two groups due to our large number. One group looked over the outside of the mine workings whilst the others walked into the dark and dusty mine. Once finished each area the groups were alternated.

The mine is heritage listed and a substantial amount of work has been completed to restore it. The main shaft is some 200m deep with galleries running off either side. The galleries were sold by the mine owners to Cornish mining families who worked the seams and were paid for the copper ore they extracted. The lower galleries are now flooded with water but used to be pumped out when the mine was in full swing.

We left Blinman and headed for the magnificent Parachilna Gorge where we set up camp for the night. Our trip leader set up his hot shower for everyone to have a shower and after we had dinner and adjourned to the camp fire for the evening.



Thu 21st Oct - Parachilna Gorge to Wilpena Pound

Breaking camp we headed for a small scenic loop road that hooked back to Blinman. We drove through rolling hills with steep rocky gorges and tall crags as the backdrop and across many dry creek beds that drain this area quickly after rain. The area is susceptible to flash flooding so if it does rain you need to camp well above the high water level.

Arriving back in Blinman we dumped our rubbish and headed for Wilpena



Pound passing the Great Wall of China on our way. This is a large rocky outcrop across the top of one of the hills and was the answer to one of our trivia questions with every one providing hints and joking about rabbits over the UHF radio.

Driving into Brachina Gorge we marvelled at the steep sides with intricate patterns in

the rock formation that provided evidence of the huge pressures exerted in the area millions of years ago to uplift the rocks. We drove to the end of the gorge for morning tea which we had on the river bank overlooking a lovely pool glistening in the sunlight.



Retracing our steps we turned into the awe inspiring Bunyeroo Gorge with its steep sections of track leading to lofty lookouts abutting steep escarpments that provided wide panoramas of the countryside

It wasn't long before we arrived at Wilpena Pound just prior to lunch where we secured a camping area in one of the bus bays. This gave us access to a covered area with a sink and gas BBQ and a great fire pit which we utilised later in the evening.

We had the rest of the afternoon off, each to do their own thing. Many people caught up with domestic chores as the previous camp sites had all been in the bush with no amenities.

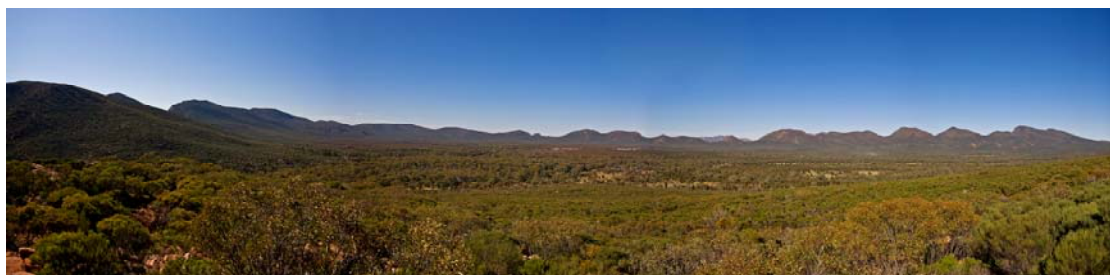
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Fri 22nd Oct –Wilpena Pound to Balcanoona Gorge

We were up early for a walk into the pound before the temperature rose and it became too hot. Setting off with drinking water for the 3hr return walk we headed up the road along a running creek which exited from the pound.

Along the formed road a bus from the resort passed us with a busload of passengers taking the easy way in for most of the way before they had to get out and walk.

Stopping off at the old homestead which has been restored we refreshed ourselves before the steep and rugged climb to the top of the pound wall. The climb is worth all the exertion to peer into this geological aberration with its wall of upraised escarpments encircling a large flat plain.





Leaving Wilpena we stopped of to view the Cazneau Tree which is an old gum made famous in a photograph by Harold Cazneau with Wilpena Pound as a backdrop. Stopping of at Stokes Hill lookout we gazed in wonder at the 360deg vista of mountains spread out around us.

Back on the road and leaving the Flinders Ranges behind we crossed open plain and headed for Balcanoona Gorge retracing some of our earlier wheel tracks and passed Chambers Gorge before we forged on into new territory.

On the way there were some dramas. We stopped to help out an old couple who were on the side of the road trying to change a flat tyre. While most of us stood around offering suggestions a few of our crew with the help of a few others did the job of changing the wheel and repairing the punctured tyre. One of our vehicles lost it's spare wheel which was almost run over by the following vehicle and another of our vehicles had a puncture which was quickly repaired in camp after we had set up.



Balcanoona Gorge although having a large camping area with a long drop toilet is fairly stony underfoot with the creek having overflowed and scoured the campsite.

Sat 23rd October – Balcanoona Gorge to Farina Ruins



While some of our group left for Marree to catch a plane flight over Lake Eyre the rest of us left camp and headed for Balcanoona Station where we looked over the old buildings. This included the shearing shed which is starting to show it's age.

Moving on we passed through the aboriginal community at Iga Warta

on our way to Copley where we enjoyed scrumptious pies and pasties from the bakery.

The weather had closed in and we were experiencing light showers. Concerned that the roads would be closed and we could be caught we had plan B up our sleeve which was to travel back into the Flinders Ranges.

Stopping in at the Leigh Creek coal field lookout we tried out our hand at the controls of a drag line crane and using our imagination that it was in operation.



Travelling on to Lyndhurst and then on to the Farina Ruins we stopped off at the Ochre Cliffs to admire the brilliant hues of the different coloured ochres.

Sun 24th October – Farina Ruins to Cameron's Corner

After looking over the Farina Ruins, which are in the process of being stabilised by a number of different volunteer groups, we drove back to Lyndhurst to head up the Strzeleki Track.

At the service station one of our group discovered a broken return fuel line and after making temporary repairs he headed back to Broken Hill. The rest of us headed up the Strzeleki Track passing Talc Alf's residence however as he was in Adelaide we could not meet this eccentric gentleman.



We stopped at Montecollina Bore for lunch and then moved on turning off for Merty Merty and Cameron's Corner. Traversing the rolling sand hills which is a similar experience to being at sea with a strong swell running we passed Bollards Lagoon and arrived at Cameron's Corner mid afternoon.

A campsite was selected one sand dune away from the corner store so that we had a combination of bush camping and a little civilisation for those who preferred it.

Mon 25th October – Cameron's Corner to Pine View



Breaking camp we headed south and turned off the Tibooburra road at Waka to head for the dog fence. The track was very boggy in places after substantial recent rains and the going was tough. Luckily there were bypasses on most of the serious bogs. We opened and closed numerous gates on this leg of our journey with the rear

vehicles alternating with the gate closure.

We came to a creek crossing near Hewart Downs which the lead vehicle tried to traverse and almost made it except that the rear tyres dug in to the axle. A second vehicle tried to pass along side and was also bogged. Utilising the winches on each vehicle was successful and an easier crossing point was located for the rest of the vehicles. We arrived at the dog fence near Hawker Gate and came to a lake near Smithfield House.

Stopping to look at the point where the dog fence disappeared under water we joked that dingoes were good swimmers. Smithfield House is the base for those workers who patrol the dog fence.



Continuing onto Pine View, a homestead on the track, we set up camp well away from the road on a smooth clay pan. A number of the group grabbed cameras to photograph a spectacular sunset on this our last night on the wallaby track.

Tue 26th October - Pine View to Broken Hill

We left the camp at Pine View and continued south, again on station properties and with many more gates to open and close we continued on to Silverton. Just prior reaching Silverton we crossed a causeway where the bitumen road had been completely washed away and had been replaced by a temporary dirt track. This was evidence of the huge volumes of water that had passed this way in the soaking rains over the last few months.



Lunch was enjoyed at the iconic Silverton Hotel with a few trying the monster hot dog on the menu. We learnt that the filming of the new Mad Max movie had been postponed as the area was too green.

In place of the black Mad Max 'Interceptor' which was an attraction at the front of the pub and which had been moved aside was the spawn of the 'Interceptor', the

'Interceptor Love Child' in the form of a souped up VW.

Everyone made their way independently back to Broken Hill and readied for the farewell dinner and presentations at the West Darling Hotel. We all gathered for a buffet dinner preceded by the presentation of awards including a cheque for \$32,200 presented by Chris Bates on behalf of Drive 4 Life to David Dennis who accepted it on behalf of Northcott.



Epilogue

Around 30 vehicles participated in the tour and they were split into 3 groups with a leader and a tail end Charlie in each group. The tour covered some 2,000km of outback territory mainly using dirt roads and camping in the bush. Many new friendships were forged and everyone enjoyed the camaraderie on the trip.

A high country tour in the same vain has been organised for April 2011 and details can be found here: <http://www.drive4life.com.au/>