

*The Western Belle  
Around Australia*



*Outback Bound*

# **OUTBACK BOUND**

## **THE JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN BELLE**

Et al.

**A journey of discovery.**

**By Marc Glasby**

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In memory of Sam & Lucy, our two beautiful dogs who gave us fifteen years of love and devotion.



## **PROLOGUE**

Some time ago while taking a couple of days holiday down at Wellington dam we met a Londoner who was living full time in a converted bus and had been doing so for around 20 years. He followed the seasons, worked when he wanted to and enjoyed himself the rest of the time. At the time it just seemed like a random event, something interesting but not too important.

Then in 1995 we went on our first really long driving trip all the way up to Broome. Prior to that we had only been as far north as Kalbarri (a mere 600 kilometres).

This trip and meeting the Londoner in his bus started the germ of an idea off in my head that would eventually lead us to abandon a traditional way of life and to end up living 'on the road' full time.

In order to fully appreciate the reasons behind our decision to take on this lifestyle I have included the articles I wrote about our earlier trips as part of the prologue to this journal:

### **The First 'Big Trip'**

Sixteen months ago I was a complete novice when it came to 4 wheel drives and serious off road adventures. I had ventured off road in 2 wheel drive vehicles, always thinking that I'd be able to get through if I didn't stray off the track. One memorable experience was in a Suzuki Carry van on a trip to Kalbarri. We had followed the tracks along the river for about an hour when the going started to get much tougher. Deciding to cut back towards the town I forced the tiny van and it's 900cc motor up a steep sandy track, and surprise, surprise within minutes I was well and truly bogged. Being somewhat pig headed (at least by my wife's estimate) I un-bogged the vehicle and pressed on. (I'm sure you have all had the feeling at some time that what lies ahead can't be half as bad as what lies behind.)



The Carry van and our first boat

After bogging for the umpteenth time we finally crested the hill and looked with some trepidation at the long roller coaster of a track heading back down towards safer ground. Having been bogged so many times, and noting the large number of very soft looking patches ahead, I planted my foot and the van took off at a break-neck pace down the sandy track. As the vehicle picked up speed it began to bottom out as we flew over the bumps and dips. One moment we were airborne, the next there would be an almighty crash as the suspension folded up and the body of the van scraped along the sand, then it was up again, and down crash ! and up and down, all the way to the bottom.

I think the fact that both the vehicle and passengers survived, owed a great deal to the pure terror I was experiencing and the extra adrenaline which was coursing through my veins. That seemed to be the end of my off road activities, as my wife flatly refused to go anywhere off the bitumen from that time on.

It wasn't until many years later when John, (one of my many assorted nephews) acquired a Nissan crew cab and seemed to be spending every free moment having great fun exploring the bush, while I was locked up on the 'black stuff'.

After watching some video footage of his outings, I began to get the old urge to go exploring the unknown, to venture where no two wheel drive had gone before, to get bogged in places no two wheel drive would get within cooe of.

Then in 1993, John and two of his brothers began to discuss plans for a four week tour of the northwest. This was something I wanted in on, but the old L300 van I was driving at the time just wouldn't do.



Mitsubishi L300 van

Since I first ventured out on to the road, my preference has been for vans over cars. I like the better visibility and the extra internal room they offer. So when it came time to buy a 4WD I had already limited my choice to that style of vehicle.

After looking at the very limited range of cab-over 4wd vehicles I opted for Ford Spectron 4wd. (In reality a Mazda with badge engineering). After an S.G.I.O. autocheck which looked good, (but which failed to detect the \$4000 worth of gear box repairs I was heading for) and the installation of an air conditioner, I got the vehicle for \$12,490. A fair price I thought, oh how naive I was! I bet the dealer is still on holiday with the profit from that sale.

In the months before the trip, I began to have the van overhauled. Brakes, full service, alignment & balance, new (bigger) tyres. I began to pick up various 4wd magazines and read all the relevant information on what safety gear and recovery equipment to carry.

Then along came the '94 4wd show and a host of goodies were added. After spending just over \$2000, I had replaced all tyres, purchased a hand winch, tree protector, steel cables, rated shackles, snatch strap & block, fire extinguisher, Sideband CB, air jack, Porta Potty, (the sheer luxury of having one of these on a trip has to be experienced to be believed) 20 Lt Jerry can, first aid kit, and a big Steel box to put all the bits and pieces in.

Next came the chance to see what spending all this money had done and we spent time doing one of Neil Baldwin's 4wd courses in the sand hills at Lancelin. This type of course is essential for beginners. You learn the capabilities of your vehicle, and if you get into trouble, at least you do it in company. Even after being the first one bogged and Neil's walk round the van and the 'Burnt it' comments, I was amazed by what the vehicle could do off road.



Now we were ready for a bit of fun on our own. We planned another trip to Lancelin with John and Rod. (Nissan & 60 series Cruiser) and spent Sunday morning gliding effortlessly over the dunes. After a short break in town for lunch we were back, this time going further north. After an hour or so of going down ever steeper piles of sand we found ourselves trapped in a large basin, easy to get into but almost impossible to get out. An hour later my wife was having visions of the Armour-all ad and skeletons in the desert. She would have been quite happy to give the van away to the next person we met. Finally the other two vehicles clawed their way out, but in doing so made it impossible for me to follow their route. In a last ditch effort I charged up a particularly vengeful looking dune and just made it over the top.

It was during this trip that I managed to pop a tyre off its rim while driving in the dunes, a lesson in not under inflating tubeless tyres. So I decided to have tubes put into the tubeless tyres. Despite some indication that this would cause

the tyres to run a little hotter, I thought it was better than the alternative, and to date I have had no further problem with tyres jumping off the rims. Even after 14 months the tyres still have plenty of tread and are wearing well.

Because the trip north would involve driving close to 6000 km, I wanted the vehicle to be mechanically sound, so when some oil leaks began to appear I had the gearbox re-built at a cost of \$3955, (double the original quotation.) but I believed this was money well spent as we would be travelling alone on the return trip over some fairly rough tracks.

We took a couple of short runs to Molloy Island and Collie to see how the vehicle was settling in. Everything ran well, except the air conditioner, which blew a pipe (\$235) and lost all it's coolant gas while we were in Collie. We were now finally ready for our 'big trip'.

One last major decision was, how do we keep the beer cold? I looked at all the articles I could find on car fridges, debated 3 way vs 2 way, compressor or no compressor, the new Fridge Mate vs. the well-known Engel, and talked to friends with car fridges. In the end I just could not justify the cost of a dedicated car fridge (about the \$1000 mark for the size I wanted) and opted instead for a small Samsung bar fridge (\$250) which only runs off 240 volt. As most of the places we would stop would have power available this turned out to be a good decision, and I suspect many people who buy dedicated car fridges could get away with a 240v instead. The advantage of the little bar fridge is the front opening door so it was easily accessible from the rear of the van and could have gear packed around and on top of it.

The longest period the fridge was without power was about 21 hours from Broome to Wittenoom, and everything was still icy cold when we got it hooked up again.

Finally the big day arrived in early April, the van was loaded and we were off on our first big outback adventure. Leaving before sun-up we were in Carnarvon by 2pm. We were due to meet the others here at 4am the next morning, so we spent a few hours exploring the town and the surrounding area.

Due to the early start next morning we left the tent packed in the van. The fold down seat design of the Spectron meant that we were able to pack all our bits and pieces behind the back seat and under the other sections. This left room to put a full double sized foam mattress on top. The one item that we had not thought to bring was a mosquito net.

For those who have not yet ventured north, Carnarvon is warm and humid, which can make sleeping without an air conditioner, in the back of a van, very uncomfortable. The only way we could get any breeze at all was to have the van windows wide open, but this let in swarms of very persistent, very hungry mosquitoes. The more repellent we used the more mosquitoes it seemed to attract, so it was with a great sigh of relief that we moved on towards Exmouth in the early hours of the morning.

Exmouth would have to be one of the best fishing grounds in Australia, the sheltered waters in the gulf allowing us to go out in small aluminium boats without too much concern. Fishing in the area is best from a boat, but even from places like Learmonth jetty, or off the beach you can catch all sorts of good eating fish.

Cape Range, which extends down the western edge of the Exmouth peninsular, provides some spectacular views of gorges. There is a track running down the west coast of the range all the way from Exmouth to Coral Bay. Areas to visit along the way include Yardie Creek, where you can take a trip up the creek (more of a small river really) by boat and see some really breathtaking scenery. If you drive all the way down to Coral Bay on the track I would recommend stopping along the way overnight. It is only about a 250km drive but doing it all at once is not only tiring, but you miss too much of the surrounding area, and there is plenty to explore. When you get to Coral Bay there are trips out to Ningaloo Reef, and a resort to stay at if you want to extend your time there. Be sure to take a snorkel and mask to view the fish that come in to be fed.

We spent ten days in the Exmouth area, most of it fishing. Our catch included Spanish Mackerel, Queen Fish, Shark Mackerel, Bluebone, Reef Shark, Trevally, Shovel Nose Shark, even a giant north west blowfish, and an assortment of other species that I did not recognise. Anything not worth eating was put back alive.



### The Spaniard

The next port of call was Port Hedland, passing Onslow and Karratha/Dampier along the way. To get back onto the North West Highway from Exmouth we took a short-cut along a gravel road just north of the Bullara station. We left about 1am (unable to sleep due to the excitement of moving on, we folded up our tent and stole away into the night) this was the first time during the trip that we saw a large number of Kangaroos, the gravel track was lined with them. Definitely not a place to travel at speed after sunset.

By this time the van was beginning to show some signs of overheating. On examination I discovered the small front radiator (for the air cond) was clogged up with seeds and grass from our trip to Coral Bay. We pulled in beside the picturesque Yule River to let the engine cool and remove some of the debris. Looking around we noticed 4wd tracks along the sandy banks of the river, and once the engine had cooled I decided to take a quick run along them. Unless you have an unladen vehicle, I would not recommend doing this along any of the rivers in the Hedland area, the sand was coarse and deep and it took only a few minutes to get very badly bogged. Even in April the temperature still hovers in the mid 30s, so while my wife deserted me and ran off to sit under a shady tree, I was left to dig the van out. Half an hour later, very hot and bothered I had the van back under the trees receiving an infusion of radiator coolant to replace the litres that had boiled off while extracting it from the sand.

We made it safely to Port Hedland, where I finally cleared the rest of the muck out of the radiator, and removed several large stones from the top of the stone guards under the engine, passengers all the way from the beach at Exmouth.

We quickly tired of Hedland, and two days later were on the road again heading for 80 mile beach. 80 Mile is a caravan park in the middle of nowhere, great for anyone who likes to relax. There is good fishing, miles of beach, and plenty of shells to collect as you stroll along. You will need to take your own beer as there is none for sale at the park.

Arriving at about 11pm we were too tired to set up the tent, so we just dumped the mattress out of the van and slept on the grass. Now armed with a nice new mozzie net we had a peaceful nights sleep. The following night we hired one of the on-site cabins, and oh the luxury of air conditioning! The cabins are well equipped and sleep 8 people. At \$55 a night they are terrific value.

As 80 Mile is about half way between Port Hedland and Broome, we only had just over 300 km to complete the first half of our journey. We arrived in Broome around mid-day, and after unloading all our equipment at the Roebuck Bay caravan park, we set off to explore the town. The weather was perfect, low 30s and blue sky. Broome has all the facilities you would expect in a town catering for tourists, and a drive up Cable Beach to Willie Creek is a must. We stayed in Broome for a week, but were advised not to try the track to Beagle Bay, as a recent cyclone had washed parts of it away.



Red rocks and azure blue water at Broome

Time eventually ran out and we began to plan the route home. At first we looked at the possibility of going via (the now abandoned) mining settlement of Shay Gap. After checking with roadhouses along the way, we were again advised against trying the track after the cyclone. By now we were travelling without my nephews, who went home via Port Hedland, so we decided to err on the side of caution, and stayed on the bitumen. We had a quick look for Goldsworthy on the way back, but apart from a row of trees by the side of the road there is now no sign of the mining settlement.

After leaving Broome at 5pm we travelled almost all the way back to Hedland before turning south towards Marble Bar. We managed a few hours sleep in the van and arrived at Marble Bar just before sun up. We were privileged to watch the sun rise at Marble Bar Pool. This area and the nearby Chinaman's Pool, are easily the most beautiful places we had seen so far on the journey. We stayed only long enough to capture the magic of dawn on video, then moved on down a gravel track past the Comet goldmine towards Hillside station and the Great North Highway.



Marble Bar Pool

This road was in fairly good condition, and featured several river crossings, something that probably makes it impassable in the wet season. The only things to watch out for along the track are small, but very deep wash-aways. These may only be a foot or so across but they are difficult to pick up at a distance and after hitting one at about 60 kph I quickly discovered what the small square markers in the middle of the track signified. If you ever travel this way the markers have black and white diagonal lines on them and are set fairly close to the ground in the middle of the track.

A five hour drive through some very pretty country saw us back on the 'black stuff' and headed for Wittenoom. Despite everything the government says about the hazards of blue asbestos, Wittenoom is a must for any traveler in the area. Most of the town is now deserted, there is no pub, (well there is but it's closed for good) and when we were there they were planning to close the petrol station. The caravan park was still operating, and the gem museum was well worth looking at, but I think it's only going to be a matter of time before it is a ghost town. It's a very spooky feeling walking through the old buildings and thinking about what the town was once like.

Wittenoom Gorge is, like the rest of the area, strikingly beautiful. A 5 minute drive from the town to the end of the road takes you to a miner's camp (which was still inhabited when we were there). The tailing dumps of asbestos are clearly visible so keep well clear of them. You can see the fibres along the sides of the creeks, and embedded in all the roads. If you are sensible and take reasonable precautions, there is no danger to the casual traveler, but I must admit I would hesitate to stay in Wittenoom on a long term basis.



Wittenoom Gorge

The area as a whole is without doubt the most spectacular I have ever seen. Yampire Gorge takes you through to areas like Fortescue Falls and Circular Pool. Sadly we were only there for one day, I wish I had had a week to stay and explore. You do need to be largely self sufficient as there are no shops or petrol stations away from the highway.

We took the Packsaddle road back to the highway, several hours drive past the ranger station to the Packsaddle mining camp, then on to the bitumen. This track has a number of gates, so progress can be a bit slow at times. Also watch out for local bird life, which seems to have a preference for sitting in the middle of the road.

From this point our trip was almost over, one night at Newman, then another at Cue. If you stay at Cue you should spend at least one night in the old Cue Hotel, which is now a guest house. The building is made entirely of corrugated iron and wood, and has a great atmosphere to it. Then on through New Norcia, and back to the rat race. The van had performed well, overheating near Hedland was the only hiccup on an otherwise faultless trip. Sadly there have been a number of problems since then including a cracked head and the re-built gear box suddenly giving up, but now I am



hooked, I could never go back to a 2wd vehicle, and we are off to Exmouth (hopefully with a stop off at Shark Bay) in June.



Cue

One last note concerns the wheels on the passenger's side of the Spectron. Not long after getting back to Perth some friends and I went down to the Medina 4wd recreation area, and during the day I managed to destroy the left hand front tyre. We duly pulled out the air jack, got the front end off the ground and began trying to get the wheel nuts off. Everyone got into the act until we had almost twisted the head off my wheel brace. Finally we gave up and got the van to a sealed road where the R.A.C. man turned up and took the wheel nuts off by turning them CLOCKWISE ! I had no idea my vehicle had reverse threads on the left side, and had I managed to wreck the tyre somewhere along the Packsaddle road we could have been in real trouble.

After all the preparation, and buying all the recovery gear, (which is still in its original sealed packing) we could have come undone by a simple thing like reverse thread wheel nuts.

### MARITIME MISADVENTURES.

As a follow-up to last years wonderful holiday through the majestic north-west of W.A. we had planned to head for Exmouth again, but this time taking a side trip out to have a look around Shark Bay. Originally the trip was planned with two cars, my (now) faithful old Spectron 4wd, and My nephew (John's) Nissan crew cab.

After the success of the fishing in Exmouth gulf last year I decided that the only thing which would improve on it was to have a bigger boat which provided a bit of shade and was a bit larger than the sharks we had seen on the previous trip.

After hounding my wife for over 12 months she finally gave in and I started to have a look around the boat yards. For the past year or so, I had been eagerly scanning Saturday's West classifieds for just the right boat, and had been keeping a weather eye on the price changes between summer and winter. I had seen several likely prospects, but due to other commitments at the time, they had slipped through my fingers.

When I did get the go ahead from the finance dept (my wife) there was nothing around in the price bracket I was aiming for. Autumn was producing clear blue skies and everyone who was thinking about selling their boats seemed to be hanging on to them until the rain started.

Then one Saturday morning as I was doing the rounds of the boat yards again, I found a little 15'6" half cabin that looked as if it would fit the bill. Time was running out, as Easter had come and gone and the holiday was due to start on June 1st. This gave us about 6 weeks to test the boat out and make sure everything was ok for the trip north.

So grabbing the tiger by the tail I signed on the dotted line and parted with \$5500, saying several prayers as I did so, that this wouldn't cause me the same problems that the van had done a little over a year before.



The first outing was a gentle cruise up the Swan River, the navigation lights didn't (and still don't) work, but the engine ran like a dream. The next day we were off again, this time much further down the river.

Everything was fine except for the strange tendency the engine seemed to have to jerk the boat forward when the gears were engaged. I spoke about this to the boat yard, who responded with 'Oh it's a dog clutch, so it will jump a bit when it goes into gear.' Trusting this 'expert advise' we were off again the very next weekend.

Next we went down to Kwinana and gave the boat a run around on Cockburn Sound. Up and down and round and round we went, but now every time the engine was put into gear you had to hang onto something or you would end up flat on your back. A little odd we thought, but then 'It's a dog clutch' so it must be normal. Oh no it wasn't.

Luckily when the crunch came, we had just come back to shore to drop off a passenger, and were about to head out again. As soon as I engaged the engine it started to rev higher and higher, but there was no forward movement at all. Deciding that something awful was about to happen I turned the engine off, but much to my surprise it just kept on screaming away going faster and faster. I was just getting ready to jump over the side when it gave a final cough and stopped. By this time the wind had swung around and was starting to pick up. Ok, so the engine wasn't working so it was time to leave anyway. My wife went up to get the van & trailer and I spent the next 10 minutes watching a superb display of how to jack-knife a trailer.

The wind picked up even more and waves began rolling up the ramp. I gave up any hope of the trailer ever being backed down the ramp and beached the boat before un-hitching the trailer and wheeling it down the ramp. (This has become my standard way of getting it down ramps now). Finally the trailer was down the ramp, and re-attached to the van, but the boat was firmly stuck on the beach. Fifteen minutes and a lot of swearing later, it was back at the ramp again.

Unfortunately I still had a lot to learn about how to bring a boat up in difficult conditions. Instead of just dipping the 1st roller under water and letting the winch do all the work, we sank the entire trailer, and as a result spent a very long and frustrating time trying to line the keel up with the rollers. With the sky darkening I was up to my neck in water at

the stern of the boat trying in vain to hold it steady while my wife operated the winch. After about 5 attempts we finally got it as straight as we could and headed for home.

A quick visit to the boat yard on the way home left us boatless for nearly a week. The weather was still holding so there was still plenty of time to shake the boat down and discover any (other) problems before we towed it up north.

The following weekend we headed for the Peel Estuary, (deciding against the open ocean just in case) and spent the day crabbing and testing the boat out. Everything was now working well, so the next three weekends we went back to Cockburn Sound (but avoided the Kwinana boat ramp) and took another run up the Swan River. The boat ran well, and we even caught a few nice fish out the back of Garden Island.

There had now been four trips with no problems, and time had run out for any more testing. The van was gradually loaded and the weather held.... until the very last minute. As the time came to hitch up the trailer and head north the rain clouds gathered. By the time we were on the road it was pouring with rain. Looking back we should have taken this as a sign of what was to come.

John, who was due to join up with us at Exmouth, was already in Port Hedland, but just before we were due to leave we got a phone call saying that his brothers, Peter & Andrew, (the same ones who were with us in Exmouth the year before) had borrowed his car, gone out on some tidal flats and got hopelessly bogged. The tide came in and that put an end to John's participation in the trip so we pushed on to Shark Bay alone.

(They did eventually get the Nissan out but it took weeks to put it right again.)

Daybreak saw us just north of Geraldton with a dark blanket of grey clouds as far north as the eye could see. Still there was the excitement of going on holiday and the anticipation of all those great fish we were sure to catch. The van had some problems towing as the engine is only a 2 litre. Speeds going uphill dropped to as little as 60k, but at least there was no swaying, or pitching to worry about.

Pulling into Denham it was still raining so we decided against putting the tent up, and found a nice unit right on the beach front (Bay Lodge). The unit was large and came equipped with everything but bedding, so after unpacking the food and beer we sat on the porch preparing the rods and lines for the following day.



Bay Lodge

The locals told us that the rain usually only lasts for two days, well three at the most, and anyway the fishing is better with an overcast sky.

Dawn arrived and the rain just kept on coming down. Pressing on regardless, off we went, abandoning the 4wd for the time being in favour of adventures at sea. We decided to follow another boat out (a good idea as it turned out) and were happily cruising along when about two miles out a strange whining sound like an alarm started coming from the gear lever box. Looking around I found smoke pouring from the engine, and quickly shut the thing down. My wife was wearing a red spray jacket which came in very handy to wave the other boat down. (it almost saw more use as a distress flag than as a jacket on this trip.)

The boat we flagged down was a charter, so they radioed in and we dropped anchor to wait for rescue. Since we were stuck there anyway, we dropped a line over the side and it wasn't long before I had hooked a small NW snapper. Too small to keep but at least it seemed promising.

Rescue arrived shortly afterwards in the form of a 'rubber ducky' which towed us in. The owner wouldn't take \$20 we offered to pay for his fuel, so thanking him profusely we started looking for some mechanical help in town.

The next day was Sunday, so no mechanic was available to look at the engine until the following day. This gave us an opportunity to hop in the van and have a good look around. Shark Bay offers a wide variety of fishing, sightseeing and 4wd driving so we were still had plenty to keep us occupied. Shell Beach, Eagle Bluff, Goulet Bluff, Fowlers Camp are all easily accessible by 2wd, but west of the Useless Loop turn off and north of Peron Station are definitely 4wd only. Out towards Steep Point you would be advised to travel with two or three vehicles as there is a lot of deep sand.

Most of Peron Peninsular is now a protected nature reserve with World Heritage listing. There has been a concerted effort to remove introduced species and re-introduce native fauna to the area. Thankfully this hasn't led to the track closures and restricted areas that are all too common in other reserves.

Closer to Denham there are several places worth having a look at. Peron Homestead with its artesian bore, Little Lagoon which produces reasonable Whiting, and Big Lagoon where beach fishing is the go.

If you head north of Peron Homestead you need to beware of the low lying flat patches of ground known as birridas. They have a thin hard crust on top and soft boggy muck underneath. In wet weather the tracks can get quite slippery. Last year friends of ours found out just how slippery when their Landcruiser flipped over when coming out of a boggy patch. The Cruiser was a write off and they were all lucky to walk away from the wreck.

Sunday's explorations behind us, and the boat returned from the garage, I was eager to get it back into the water and test out the motor. Driving straight down to the boat ramp from the garage I launched it and tied up along side the small launching jetty. Imagine my horror when looking down into the boat from the jetty I saw it was awash with water and rapidly sinking. There is a horrible feeling you get when you realise you have just done something really really stupid, and you know that your wife is going to make the most of it by telling the story to everyone when you get home. I had forgotten to put in the bungs. It's truly amazing just how fast a boat fills with water when those three little plugs aren't where they should be.

Dragging the boat back up onto the ramp I got the little electric pump out, and gave it a good work out. The shine on this holiday was definitely beginning to wear off.

When the last of the water had been pumped out I managed to get the boat going and run it around enough to be reasonably happy with the motor. Next day we decided to fish the channel leading out of town, as that would be the best place to get a tow if the engine failed again. There was very little in the way of fishing so we cruised down along the coast for a while looking for likely spots to drop a line. After trying a few and having no luck we made our way back to the channel to try again before heading back in.

After stopping and starting all day without a hitch, the engine decided not to start just when we wanted to give up and go back to shore. As soon as we spotted another boat coming in, out came the red jacket again, and we had to suffer the embarrassment of being towed in yet again.

Back to the garage went the boat, and back on the shelf went our hopes of catching some decent fish. Meanwhile we had been talking to the locals about where all the fish had gone. It turned out that in order to catch anything worthwhile you have to go almost all the way across to Dirk Harthog Island and locate a shipping channel which is the only deep water in the bay.

Neil (the owner of Bay Lodge) drew us a map and two days later, when the boat was working again, we set off to cover the 9 miles across the bay. This time the motor didn't let us down, which is just as well, because when we were almost to the other side of the bay we encountered waves as high, if not higher than the boat. It had taken us over an hour to get there only to find that conditions were far too rough to stay and fish. So back we came all the way across the bay again.

Neil felt so sorry for us when we got back that he gave us some NW snapper so we could at least see what it tasted like.

That was it for Shark Bay, I had had enough of the rain, the boat, the lack of fish and the rough water in the bay. It had taken us 11 hours to get there, so we decided against going on to Exmouth, and instead turned south to Kalbarri.

At Kalbarri I visited the areas along the Murchison river where all those years ago I had been bogged so many times in the Carry Van, but this time in a 4wd I was the master !

It was with some trepidation that we took the boat back out again. Following another boat out of the river mouth and down towards Red Bluff, we anchored about a mile off shore where we settled down to catch some 'real fish'.

Sure enough it wasn't long before something big grabbed the mulie on the end of my life and as the line began to wind off and my heart began to pound, I started to reel the fish in. It was a good weight and was even fighting pretty hard, so now I was sure the holiday was about to pay off.

The disappointment I felt on hauling a huge northwest blowie over the side would only be matched by losing a winning lottery ticket. After this happened about eight times I pulled up anchor and headed back in. Just to round the day off we snagged a craypot line round the propeller and were almost swamped trying to get the cursed thing off.

The next day the wind had come up, so there was no way to get out of the river mouth safely. I watched the waves rolling in for a while before deciding to go up river and try for a few bream. Launching had been made more difficult as the hand-brake in the van stopped working before we left Shark Bay. But I eventually settled for locking the hubs and putting the van into low range 1st.

Down we went and launched the boat only to find that the motor was refusing to start again. So off we went to yet another mechanic to spend our life savings on repairs.

The weather stayed rough for the remainder of the holiday, and we never managed to get back out into the open sea. Fishing in the river was relaxing if not productive and the only bright spot was the crabbing. Taking into account the

cost of the boat, the insurance, license, repairs and odds & ends we purchased, the price per kilo of everything we caught was a little over \$850.

To add insult to injury, when we finally got home and visited John, we were treated to footage taken a year before of fishing in Shark Bay (off Nanga 50km south of Denham) which showed dozens of huge NW snapper being hauled aboard on the same trip where the Landcruiser had been rolled.

By the time this story is printed we will no doubt have been mad enough to venture seaward again, crossing our fingers that the rain stays away and the engine keeps going. If you ever see us in the red van towing a little brown boat, and if you know any good prayers to Lady Luck, please remember to say one for us, we sure do need it.

### **MORE MARITIME MISADVENTURES**

After our misadventures last year at Shark Bay, our Christmas trip down to Augusta was almost trouble free. We hired an on site van at Doonbanks Caravan Park in the heart of the town.

Doonbanks is useful because it has it's own boat ramp and jetty, so boats can be launched once and then tied up when not in use. Although I am now reasonably proficient in launching and retrieving the boat, it is nice to just walk down and hop in without all the usual fiddling about.



Our boat at Doonbanks jetty

The only cautionary note is in regards to river depth near the Doonbanks jetty. At low tide we were unable to get the boat across the shallows to the channel and had to wait for the tide to rise for a couple of hours. People with smaller boats would be OK, but at 16' our boat is at the top end of the size limits for launching there.

The weather was cloudy and cold even in late December, but having been to Augusta many times before we were well prepared.

The river was quite productive on this trip. Tailor and bream were plentiful in the channel known as the 'sticks' and whiting abounded near the river mouth.

Cruises further up river in search of larger Bream were not met with the same success, but the peace and tranquillity more than made up for the lack of fish.

On the final day just as we were about to head in for the last time, the main engine's starter motor packed up, but by this time we were equipped with a 5hp auxiliary motor, and so for once had no problems getting back to shore.

Back in Perth once more we still had some time off and decided to make the most of it by taking the boat out as much as possible. Although the main engine was still inoperable, we wanted to go crabbing, and decided to tempt fate and launch off the Kwinana boat ramp again. The morning was still and the sea calm, so thinking that all would be OK, we launched and spent a couple of hours puttering around between the Grain Terminal jetty and the jetty just north of Kwinana beach.

Just on midday we had caught a few crabs and were pulling up anchor to come in when out of nowhere a fierce south wester blew up. We were only 100 yards from shore, and had to come around Kwinana jetty to get to the boat ramp. With the 5hp going flat out we were only just making headway against the wind, and gradually being blown closer and closer to the jetty.

Another boat came round from the boat ramp and we asked for a tow to get past the jetty, as by this time the wind was so strong that the small motor was having no effect at all. Promising to give us a hand on the way back they took off and we did not see them again.

In any case it was now too late. Just as we rounded the end of the jetty the auxiliary motor gave out, and the wind pushed us right on to the steel girders on the southern corner. The nice new canopy we had put on just prior to the Augusta trip suffered a small rip, but with the help of people on the jetty we managed to guide the boat round the end of the T, and then the real problem started.

The canopy was still up, and was now acting like a sail. The wind was coming from directly behind and we were heading straight for the main span of the jetty. Even with the help of people on the jetty the impact as we hit was enough to damage the windscreen and rip one side of the canopy up. We now - far too late - dropped the canopy, and after some buffeting against the poles, were able to get under the jetty and on to the other side.

Having passed a rope to the people on the jetty we could now survey the damage as we waited for a tow.

Rescue eventually came and with the help of a number of people who seemed quite happy to get well and truly soaked, we got the boat up on to the trailer.

Looking back on this, there are some very important lessons that I have learned, and some tips that might help anyone else caught in a similar situation.

The first thing we did wrong was not dropping the canopy before we started the motor. We also failed to recognise the warning signs of the wind coming up. About 15 minutes before the wind arrived the water became very choppy, if we had gone in at that stage we would have been fine.

Leaving the canopy up was stupid for two reasons. First it gave the wind something extra to push against, and second, once we were in trouble we could not get it down in time to stop it being damaged by the jetty.

When it became obvious that we were in trouble we failed to put down the anchor. Even if it had not held, it could have slowed us down enough to make the impact with the jetty manageable. The last thing we did wrong was not getting a line to the jetty as the canopy clipped the corner. Had we done so, the only damage would have been a small rip.

It is amazing how obvious these things are when you have the chance to look back, but in the 'heat of the moment' we made just about every mistake possible. Thankfully the damage to the boat was only cosmetic. The hull is still watertight, and the engines are running again.

We have been out again many times since with no mishaps, and with a bit of luck things will stay that way for a while. My thanks to those who helped us avoid too much damage at Kwinana, and to the guys from Mariner's World who towed us in.

The boat has been more or less mothballed for the winter but we still have the urge to go fishing. In March we took a couple of days off and went up to Jurien Bay intending to follow Jenny & Ron Watt's directions from the article in Western 4WDriver (22nd edition).

Looking for a suitable place to camp we hunted around between North Head and Sandy Point. The wind was up and Sandy Point was nicely sheltered, so we set up the tent between a couple of the beach shacks and had a look around.

Being mid-week, there were only a couple of other people around, and we took the opportunity to have a word with them about the fishing and the shacks. Apparently the shack owners only have about 4 years left before the government moves in and pulls it all down. I think this is an awful shame as the areas around the shacks are well maintained and the whole area is interesting and unique.



Before the shacks were taken away

Presumably the government can't make enough money out of the shack owners and is intent on destroying everything that has been built there as a result. Why they can't just leave it alone and keep their noses out of this terrific little place is beyond me.

For anyone who has not been to Jurien, I would recommend a visit to the shacks between North Head and Sandy point. Even 2 wheel drives can get there with no difficulty. The shacks are all unique, and the area has a really nice feel to it.

The fishing at Sandy point was very good. The first night we caught a few tailor, sea pike and herring and the following day we set off following Jenny & Ron's cave route.

The windmill on the right is not all that obvious - a note for those intending to do the same trek - as it is obscured by trees. We went right past it and only spotted it on the way back. The track heading off to Stockman's Gully is boggy in patches so let your tyres down before you head that way.

The caves are easy to find, but beware of the bees. They are very aggressive, and anyone who may have an allergic reaction to bee stings should stay well away. Don't be tempted to pick up the honeycomb on the ground, the bees

seem to be just as protective of that as the main hives. If you move slowly and stay clear of the bits of honeycomb on the ground you should be OK.



Cave entrance showing bee hives

The second cave on this route is the easiest to get into. The bee hives at Bat Cave - further on - are very close as you enter the cave, and we decided not to go in after being stung going into cave 2.

The directions were easy to follow but sadly we ran out of time and missed the caves pictured in the article.

For 4 wheel driving, the area is terrific. There are tracks everywhere. We didn't have enough time to explore too much, but what we did see has convinced us that a week or so up there next summer would be a good idea.

Before returning to camp we had to make a run back into Jurien again to re-stock our bait. If you stay overnight anywhere near Jurien, be sure to keep all food stuffs locked up. There are foxes everywhere and they pinched our bait. Back at Sandy Point we hauled out the fishing gear and walked down to the beach. The bay there is peaceful and sheltered, the perfect place to settle down for a couple of beers, and throw a line in.

Around 5pm a large school of tailor began feeding just off shore, and we were provided with a hour of the best fishing we have ever had from the beach. There were so many hook ups that we were putting fish back that in Perth waters we would be 'keepers'. The tailor were in a frenzy, and the mulies we were using as bait were taken as soon as they touched the water.

It was a perfect couple of days away. The area around the shanty towns is tidy and clean, if you visit the area be sure to take your rubbish with you when you leave. I would hate to see the area ending up like Tim's Thicket.

On ANZAC day we went down to Tim's Thicket to wet the lines and spend the night in the camp site behind the dunes. When we got there we were disgusted to find that other campers had left the place looking like a rubbish tip, and the council has now closed it as a camping area.

Councils closing areas like this really annoys me, but seeing the piles of rubbish left behind by uncaring thoughtless people, left me in no doubt that the council had no choice. Most of the people reading this are all too well aware of what happens when people litter and damage the environment. The government moves in and bans everyone from using the area, so we all suffer.

But how many of you would report someone for littering if you saw it happen ? Too few I think. If we want to keep the tracks and campsites open we have to learn to 'dob in' those who do these stupid things, and the authorities have to make a commitment to prosecute when evidence is presented to them.

The mess at Tim's Thicket was not the result of one or two careless people. The amount of rubbish left there is the result of many people over a long period of time.

From now on I will make it my business to 'dob in' the fools who ruin sites like this. If I see it happening I will take license numbers and photos and I hope the rest of you will do the same. If we want to continue to be allowed to use areas like Tim's Thicket we, as individuals, have to be prepared to do our utmost to make sure this kind of environmental vandalism is stamped out.

The other way to help is to carry spare garbage bags and clean up sites which have been abused. I know it's a pain cleaning up after thoughtless ignorant people, but it's a lot better than having all the camping sites near Perth closed down.

#### **UP NORTH IN A BUS**

**This story is actually covered by the journal that follows but this was the published version as it was originally written:**

Time rolled on and soon our thoughts turned to Exmouth once more and memories of our first big trip away came flooding back. It was time to start planning the next trip north.



This time we had purchased a 1962 Bedford bus which has been converted into a motorhome. The plan was to tow our boat behind the bus and enjoy a few weeks fishing in the Exmouth area which would also serve as a shake-down cruise for the bus.

Our long term goal is to live in the bus and work our way around Australia over a number of years. This would be our last official holiday before taking off into the great unknown.

Planning began in May 1997 when we acquired the bus. Although on this trip our 4 wheel drive was to stay at home, the bus would eventually be used to tow a car trailer and a small 4x4.

It took all of the 3 months available to get the bus ready for travel, but come August 8<sup>th</sup> we were back on the road to Exmouth. Our past trips to the north west have always been a dash to get there and start enjoying ourselves, but the bus, which travels at a top speed of 80 kph, forced us to look for camp sites on the way up, which we normally pass by.

Our first night was spent at a terrific camp on the banks of the Murchison River about 10 km north of the Kalbarri turn off. There are sites on both the north and south bank of the river on the east side of the highway. Facilities include BBQs, tables, a pit toilet, bins, and a very pretty stretch of river. We left behind a rainy cold Perth and were expecting the weather to improve as we got further north.



Galena Bridge rest area

The second day took us as far as Minilya where we pulled in at another camp site on the south bank of the Minilya River. Did someone say river? In 'the wet' there must be a river here but at this time of year it is bone dry. So much for my ideas of throwing a line in.

The camp site here is smaller than Murchison, but the facilities are the same.

As we drive along my wife often hands me something to chew, a sweet, a bit of chocolate and so on. Not long after we turned on to the Exmouth road she handed me something which felt like a soft jube, so without looking I popped it into my mouth and started chewing. I was wondering why she had handed me such a tasteless sweet when she started shouting at me to spit it out.

She had in fact handed me a silicon ear plug to put in my ear - the bus engine is quite noisy and she had decided to give me a couple of ear plugs to block out some of the sound.

We had quite a giggle about that - especially when I said I was glad the earplug was a new one not a used one.

The last day brought us to Learmonth Jetty where the first order of business was to get the fishing gear out and see what was around. The weather was dreadful, rain and chilly wind greeted us where we had memories of long hot days and steamy nights. The fish were obviously on holiday as well, but we did manage to pick up a feed of squid for dinner.

Cooking squid is very simple, but many people overcook the meat and make it tough. Our foolproof method for squid is to clean and skin it, cut it into rings and coat them in corn flour. Get the oil very hot and then drop the squid in. Count to 12 fairly quickly and it's done. If you don't have corn flour, ordinary wheat flour will do.

After a night in Exmouth we made our way down the coast to a spot just south of Kalis Fisheries. On a quiet track right next to the beach we set up camp and spent the next week fishing. With the help of some friends who were staying at Kalis, we managed to launch the boat, and moored it just off the beach in front of our camp site.



Thankfully the weather had turned the corner and we were back under the blue skies we used to.

The first full day of fishing produced a few north west snapper (emperors) but none of the larger fish we were looking for.

A trip into town and a meal at the Pot Shot that night was followed by a display of Peter Brock like driving by my wife, who dodged kangaroos which were sitting in the middle of the road. If she had not been driving there could have been a nasty accident as the rest of us were a little the worse for wear after a drink or three with dinner. It shows the value of having a 'skipper' even away from the city. As Belle doesn't drink she is always elected to drive when we go out.

The road south from Exmouth has a number of dips which large volumes of water flow down in the wet season. At night it is very difficult to see into the dips, or out of the other side when you are in them. There are a large number of kangaroos in the area, as well as sheep and goats, so be very careful if you drive there at night.

Exmouth has a fresh water tap located by the public toilets in the main shopping area. It is very easy for caravans and mobile homes to get access to it so don't forget your hose and tap connectors.

The fishing on this trip was not what we have come to expect from the area, but we did manage a couple of Spanish Mackerel and several Queensland school Mackerel.



On the last trip we were throwing Mackerel back, but this time I had brought a smoker with me so we filleted them and smoked them. I will never look on these as rubbish fish again. They were so delicious we ate almost all of them along with prawns from Kalis and more of the Spaniards caught a couple of days earlier.

We set the shower / toilet tent up earlier in the week and this was a real boon. We have a solar shower bag which recommends leaving it out in full sun for 3 hours to get the water hot. We have found that leaving the shower bag in the shower tent all day gets the water just luke warm and perfect for a shower after a hard days fishing in the boat.

The main problems with the shower tent were a lack of places to put soap, shampoo, towels, clothes etc. We eventually made up some hooks for hangers and bought a hanging shower caddy to solve these minor annoyances.

The comfort the bus provided was terrific. Just like home, and the Honda 500w generator provided all the power we required. It powers 4 fluorescent lights, TV, video, stereo, and a flood light for outside. I know many people despise generators in the bush because of the noise, but the convenience of 240 volt power any time you need it more than makes up for the slight disturbance.

At the end of the first week the weather changed again, and a strong south easterly wind came up on Saturday night. Sometime late on Saturday night the anchor line snapped and the boat was blown under the offal pipe at Kalis.

The canopy, windscreen and auxiliary motor all sustained considerable damage, so our hopes of another week fishing from the boat were dashed. The water was too rough to retrieve the boat so we bought a new anchor and made it secure behind the small breakwater just off Kalis.



Poor boat!

On Monday the wind finally dropped enough for us to get the boat out of the water. 1/2 a carton of beer went to the engineers at Kalis for their help pulling the boat up with a tractor.

Without the boat we had some time to head down the west side of the cape and have a closer look at the national park.

Entry to the national park is \$8.00 and a campsite costs \$5.00 a night. We pulled in at Mesa Camp, which is probably the best along this stretch of coast.

The next day we tried to get down to Yardie Creek but the road south of Oyster Stacks was just too rough for the bus.

We called in at Tulki camp, but didn't like the beach there, so we headed back to the Milyering information station. This is an excellent setup for anyone wanting to know more about the area. There is even a small theatre where you can watch films about Ningaloo, Bush Survival etc.

After a couple of hours watching films and picking up all sorts of information, we moved on to Mangrove Bay. Here you can use the bird hide or the fauna hide to observe local wildlife.

There are only a couple of places along the coast in this area where mangroves survive, and this is probably the best example. Don't miss it if you are in the neighbourhood.

Early morning or late afternoon are the best times to visit as birds and animals are more likely to be seen.

Not being able to go further south, we drove back round to the east coast and camped just behind the water tanks at the foot of Cape Range.

We woke early thanks to the herd of sheep passing the bus and announcing their presence in loud bleating voices.

We tried fishing at Learmonth again but the trawlers were re-fuelling so took a drive up Charles Knife Canyon. The bus crawled very slowly up the hill but once on top we had a spectacular view of the east side of the peninsular.

Our last day in the Exmouth area was spent fishing off the breakwater at Kalis which produced some bream and a golden trevally.

Our haul for the two weeks was:

4 trevally, 6 shark mackerel, 2 Spanish mackerel, 3 sharks, 8 emperor, 4 squid, 1 coral trout, 1 cod, 5 bream - and that was between 5 people on 2 boats! Not very good for Exmouth.

We hitched the boat up and took the road south heading for Coral Bay. If you are going to Coral Bay and you don't have a booking, time it so you arrive about 10.30am, that's just before the caravan parks do a site check, and if they are busy, you shouldn't have to wait long to get in.

We stayed at the Bay View caravan park which worked out at \$18 per night for 3 people.

Coral Bay has two shopping areas, and everything is within walking distance.

A trip out on the glass bottom boat cost us \$18 each, and was very worth while. The waters in Coral Bay are a marine reserve, so the fish are protected and the boats make a feature of feeding them. Most of the big fish you will see are spangled emperors (commonly known as northwest snapper).

The 1 hour cruise around the bay was very good value. The captain gives a very informative talk on the coral, fish and the area surrounding the bay. Unlike some of the glass bottom boats we have been on overseas, this one had nice clean glass, and you can see every detail of the reef as it slowly motored around.

Cameras and videos are welcome, so don't forget to take them with you. If it is tourist season you may need to book a day in advance, and you can do so via the caravan park.

Two days later we arrived at the Blowholes just north of Carnarvon. At Minilya roadhouse we discovered that a weld holding the rear bumper of the bus had broken, and that the bumper, boat and air-conditioner were only hanging on by a small weld on the other side. After rapidly deploying great lengths of rope, we managed to make the bumper fairly secure and pressed on. (Note: Minilya like many roadhouses, has no mechanic available.)



Bay just south of the Blowholes at Quobba

We arrived at the Blowholes (Quabba Point) mid afternoon, and after taking some photos of the holes in action we found a campsite overlooking the bay.

There are a large number of campsites along the road heading south from the Blowholes; some with views of the sea and others tucked in behind the dunes. Caravans and motorhomes should have no problem finding somewhere to set up.

Be warned that the area behind Quabba Point (which is practically an island) is a marine reserve, and you will need to check the signs on the beach which tell you where you can fish.

After the number of sharks we saw in the area I would not recommend swimming or even wading out to the island. We saw several very large specimens within a few feet of the beach. At least one of the camping guides we purchased comments that there is a nice sandy beach for swimming. My advice is DON'T!

Campsites cost \$1 per night per vehicle, and there is an honour box to place the money in. We saw a couple of vehicles that didn't bother, but most stopped and paid up.

There are a couple of pit toilets available here but take my advice and use some Rid on your rear end if you use them, the mozzies gather there in swarms and have a good feed from your nether regions if you aren't protected.

After two nights at Quabba we moved on to Carnarvon and got the weld fixed up by Dave at Carnarvon Engineering. He also put a bolt through the centre of the bumper to properly secure the trailer. At just \$25 I would have to recommend that you see Dave if you need any welding etc. done while you are in the area.

After refuelling, filling up on water, and stocking up on supplies, we doubled back and took the road to Gascoyne Junction. We were looking for a side track leading to a campsite known as Rocky Pool. The Gascoyne road is pretty rough, and I finally discovered that the best way to cope with it is to put your foot down and fly over the bumps.

42km later we finally found the track we were looking for and a further 4km brought us to a great little campsite on the banks of the Gascoyne River. The river was only just flowing so we took the opportunity to have a dip and refresh ourselves after the dusty trip in.



The bus at Rocky Pool

There are bins, BBQs, and a pit toilet at the campsite but no other facilities. Despite the rough road in, the trip was worth while. The river banks and gum trees along the billabong are very picturesque.

The next day we left early and arrived at the campsite on the Murchison River in the late afternoon. It was very, very cold, but we managed to have a nice fire in one of the concrete BBQs near the river, which chased away the worst of the chills.

Our final day on the road saw us arrive home just before dusk. A quick beer, unload the essentials, and a nice hot shower saw the sun go down on three weeks of fun and frustration.

Overall the trip gave us a lot of enjoyment, but best of all it has finally settled my fears about living in the bus. The information we gathered, and the things that went wrong, will help us make the next step easier.

## THE DREAM

**Wednesday May 14 1997**

This journal details a journey that will hopefully take us all round Australia. My wife Rosabelle & I have spent some 16 years working in Perth. I am a Computer Programmer and Rosabelle is a Medical Scientist.

We have achieved a certain level of success, a nice home with a pool, 2 cars, a boat and enough money so that we are not hard up, but this form of success, sought after by many people, has left us feeling very dissatisfied.

Waking at 6am, having a quick breakfast then making the 1 hour trip to work, then at 5pm spending another hour (or more) getting home. A hurried dinner and then a couple of hours of TV before bed. The weekend consists mostly of doing the household chores and shopping on Saturday and perhaps a day out on Sunday (if we were lucky) before the whole boring cycle starts over again on Monday.

Some people seem perfectly happy with this sort of life, but we are finding it harder and harder to cope with. The soul-destroying monotony is not even compensated for by the 20 days leave we get each year. More and more we yearn for the wide-open spaces, for the freedom of pulling off the road by a river and dropping the lines in to catch dinner.

A couple of years ago this dream was just that, a dream. It seems so simple, but in reality it is very hard to achieve. We want to cut our ties with work, buy a bus and travel round Australia. We don't just want to do this for a few months, or a couple of years, but we want it to become a complete lifestyle. Find an area to explore, get some casual work and then spend time, months perhaps, filming, writing, working when possible and building up enough to move on to the next place.

We are not in a position to sell our home - which would make things so much easier - but we have to rent it out after selling off much of the goods and chattels we have accumulated over the years.

Our dream is finally starting to take on substance. Tired of the same old work, and fighting the city traffic, we are about to purchase a Bedford bus, which has been converted into a mobile home. The bus comes complete with double bed, gas stove, gas electric fridge, microwave, roof rack, air conditioner and runs on dual fuel (LPG/petrol) which will cut our travelling costs considerably.

The thought of leaving steady well paid jobs and launching ourselves into what seems an uncertain future is quite daunting, but the excitement of setting off into the unknown and taking complete control of our own destiny seems like good compensation - at the moment. Time alone will tell if we live to regret it.

Once we have the bus we will take it on a couple of short trips to iron out any bugs in the system. In August we are going north to Exmouth on a 3-week trip which should provide some useful information about problems which may arise later when we are permanently on the road.

If anything major goes wrong at this stage, we will both still have our jobs, and still have the opportunity to change our minds about the whole thing.

When we return from Exmouth we will begin preparations in earnest. Our cars and boat will be sold off along with some furniture and all the odds and ends we seldom if ever use.

A small 4wd and trailer will then be purchased along with an aluminium dinghy and a generator. That will complete the major equipment we will require. Other major items which we need (including a portable computer for keeping this journal and writing articles, 35mm SLR camera with a selection of lenses, digital video and decent audio equipment will also be purchased between now and the August trip.)

Meanwhile I am in the process of contacting 4wd magazines, off road equipment manufacturers etc. In the hope of raising some sponsorship for the trip. If we are unable to obtain any funds we are still determined to press on with the plans, but may have to forgo some things we would otherwise have like to take along.



Western Belle – 1962 Bedford Bus

The origin of the bus' name: Well my wife Belle is ethnically Chinese and was born in Malaysia so she is the 'eastern Belle', the bus is W.A. registered so we decided to call it the Western Belle.

**Thursday May 15 1997.**

Only one day after starting the journal, but already we have some progress. The loan for the bus has been approved and I have found a generator, which looks like it, may do nicely. The bus will cost us \$17000, not a lot by today's standards, and the generator (a Honda 500 watt) is \$400. New generator prices for similar models start at just over \$1000 so this seems like a pretty good buy. The 'loan' isn't really a loan, it's equity that we have built up in our home over the last few years, so at least once we buy the bus it will belong to us and there are no repayments to make on it.

Next we have to get 'B' class driver's licenses since it looks like we could have the bus as early as next weekend. I won't feel like we are really getting somewhere until the bus is sitting on the front lawn.

**Saturday May 17 1997.**

Paid a \$200.00 deposit on the bus and made a formal offer to purchase pending a mechanical report and notification from Revs that there are no funds owing - in WA at least.

Spent the day moving furniture about and sorting out things that we will want to sell off. One room in the house will be kept as a storeroom and will be locked up before we leave. This way we can hang on to any useful items we may need at some point in the future.

At this stage I am hoping to have \$20,000.00 in the bank by the time we leave. We are saving like mad at the moment (\$1600.00 this month alone). The more we can have put away the better our chances are for establishing a work/travel pattern.

It looks as though finding a car trailer is going to be tough. New trailers seem to be \$2500 and upwards. There are plenty of small, 4x4s to choose from, and I may get one before August and get rid of the Spectron.

**Monday May 19 1997**

Spoke to Dave (a friend of mine since Uni. days who is working out at Balladonia Roadhouse) tonight. He suggested I find out about an 'A' frame instead of using a trailer to haul the 4x4. It should save a lot of money if there aren't any legal problems. Also spoke about stills cameras. Dave has been using SLR style cameras for years, and his advice confirms what I have been reading in various books. A combination of two lenses, 28mm - 75mm and another up to at least 200mm should do the job.

**Tuesday May 20 1997**

The bus went into Major Motors (RAC's heavy vehicle inspection agents) today. The report isn't too bad considering the age of the bus (1962 model), but there are two stand out problems. I will record the details of the report here for posterity.

S = Serviceable    WR = Work required    D = Dangerous

Item	Code	Comments
Seats & adjustment	S	
Seat belts	N/A	
Fan & Demister	S	
Heater & Air Con	WR	
Bonnet release	S	
Window operation	S	
Door lock	WR	
Hand brake	WR	
Headlights	S	
Park N'plate lights	WR	LHR park light not working
Indicators	S	
Stop lights	S	
Instrument lights	S	
Warning lights	S	
Other gauges	S	
Windscreen wiper/washers	S	
Wiper blades	WR	
Horn	WR	Not loud
Hazard lights	N/A	
Alternator	S	
Starter motor	S	
Radiator & cap	S	
Cooling system	S	
Brake fluid	WR	
Heater/radiator hoses	WR	Bottom rad hose damaged
Fan belts	S	
Engine bay wiring	WR	Needs securing
Engine mounts	S	
Air filter	S	
Fuel system hoses	S	
Engine noises	S	

Engine oil leaks	WR	Rocker cover?
Exhaust system	WR	Exhaust pipe broken
Gear box leaks	WR	Oil leak rear flange
Gear box oil	S	
Universal joints	S	Sight play rear Uni.
Drive shafts	WR	Sliding joint worn
Tyre condition	WR	RHI tyre
Steering joints/boots	S	
F Susp bushes/pins	WR	LHR pins & bushes
F Susp joints	S	
F shocks	WR	Bushes worn
F Bearings	S	
Steering freeplay	S	
Brake hoses	D	Rear flexible hose u.s.
Brake linings	S	
Rust in chassis/subfr	S	
R Susp bushes	S	
R Shocks	S	
Diff leaks & oil	S	Pinion seal leak
Road test	S	
Speedo/odo	S	
Tacho	N/A	
Engine performance	S	
Smokey or breathing	S	
Drive line noises	S	
Brake performance	S	
Steering	S	

COMMENTS:

Brake pedal rubber missing.  
Spot lights not working.  
Rear brake cylinders leaking.

Of course this report comes with the rider that if any thing else goes wrong, it's my problem and no one else's; if I buy the vehicle.

The two main problems seem to be the brakes and the wear in the drive shaft. Everything else seems fairly minimal. I have asked Major Motors to give a quote on fixing the main problems, and see what the likely outlay is.

I also spoke to Peter (one of my nephews) who is now a policeman but used to work for Auto Classic as a mechanic, and he recommended that the main item I check is engine compression ratios. All cylinders should be roughly the same, but apparently if they are all over the place then the engine has problems and may need to be replaced.

I also spoke to the Department of Transport about 'A' frames and they are legal in WA at least. The towed vehicle must be 1 tonne (TARE) or less, and the weight ratio between tower & towed has to be 3:1 or better. Plans have to be drawn up and submitted to the Transport Department (Ph. 131 156) for approval. The connection must be to the sub-frame or extended attachments under the towed vehicle. Attaching it to the bull bar isn't considered sufficient.

**Wednesday May 21st 1997**

Today is decision day. The workshop confirmed that the engine is in good condition, and repairs should come in at about \$2000.00. If we can get the parts and Peter does the work we should be able to save a reasonable amount on that figure. The deciding factors, well in my wife's words, 'It's duel fuel, has a full size gas stove, its clean and tidy and has nice pastel colours.'

How can I argue with that?

We are expecting delivery on Saturday, and Rosabelle goes for her learners permit Friday. The questions for the 'B' class permit are reasonably simple and we both memorised them last night.

Now we have made the big decision I have started making lists in earnest. There is nothing like being prepared well before time.

I will include the list here - although it is bound to change as we look at what we want to take and what we can actually fit in. As it changes I will add or delete items so that it becomes a record of what we are carrying in the bus.



**PACKING LIST**

aftershave	chap stick	fish scaler
Allen key set	cheese	fish scaling board
aluminium foil	chess set	fish smoker
anchor (sand) & rope	Chicken	fishing floats
annexe, poles, lines and pegs	chilli sauce (sweet)	fishing gloves
antibiotics	chopper (kitchen)	fishing handlines
antiseptic	cigarette lighter adaptor	fishing hooks
Araldite	cleaner (all purpose kitchen)	fishing hooks (gang)
bacon	clock (wooden)	fishing knife
Bait	clock battery operated (alarm)	Fishing knife (fillet)
bait pump	clock radio 240 volt	fishing line 4/9/23/100kg
baked beans	clothes peg holder	fishing lures
baking dish	clothes pegs	fishing net (landing)
Barocca	coconut milk (12)	fishing net (throw) x 2
basin (round blue)	Codral	fishing rags
basin (square red)	coffee	fishing reels (5)
battery charger 240 volt	coffee cups x 6	fishing rod (bait)
battery charger(video camera)	coffee maker drip filter	fishing rod (heavy duty)
BBQ & legs	compact disk racks x 3	fishing rod (boat) x 2
BBQ utensils x 3	compact disks	fishing traces
beach umbrella	Compass	fishing weights
beans (frozen)	computer (686 2gb 16m)	floor mop (sponge)
beds (folding) x 2	cooking books	flour (plain)
bedside draws x 2	cooking pots x 4	flour (s.r.)
bedside lamps x 2	cooking pots (camping)	flour sifter
beer making kit and bottles	cool drink (cans)	fluoro light 12 volt
beer mug (pewter) x 2	cork screw	fly spray
berley cages	cotton buds	forks x 4
biscuit cutter	cotton wool	freezer bags
biscuit tray	cough syrup	fresh garlic
blue box for hardware etc	crab nets	fridge (bar/compressor)
Boat (Aluminium dinghy)	CRC/WD40	fridge (240v)
bowl (metal) x 3	cream (thickened)	fruit juice
bowl (plastic) x 3	cream (sour)	frypan (non-stick)
brake fluid	Cross stitch hangings x 4	fuel containers 20ltr x 7
Bran	cushions x 2	fuel funnel x 2
bread	cutting board	fuel pump (bus) spare
bread maker	DC power source (portable)	fuel tank for aux motor 10 lt.
Broom	desk lamp	Fuses
brush & dustpan	Didgeridoo	gaff
brussel sprouts	dish towels	gaffa tape
bucket 10 lt.	dish washing liquid	garbage bags
bucket 15 lt.	Disinfectant	garlic (dried)
Buckwheat	Disprin	gas bottle 2kg
butter melter	distilled water	gas bottles 4kg x 2
butternut pumpkin	doona x 3	gas bottles 9kg x 3
Cabbage	double adaptors x 4	gas lantern & extension
cake tin	draws on rollers	gas mantles
Calamine	drill 240 volt	gas stove (camp stove)
camera (stills) & spare batt	drill bits	generator 1 kva
camera bag	drill cordless & charger	glad wrap
camera film 27/100	drink coasters x 6	glass (shot) x 2
can opener 240 volt	Dustbin	glasses (drinking) x 4
can opener mechanical	egg separator	globes (12 & 240 volt)
Candles	eggs 12	gloves (rubber)
canned asparagus	electric blanket x 2	grater
canned beetroot	esky (large)	grinder (kitchen)
canned corn	esky (small)	hammer (claw)
canned fruit	esky six pack	Hammer 4lb
canned meat	eye bath	hammer (small)
canned tuna	eye wash	hand wipes
canteen 1 litre	fan 240 volt (upright)	hatchet x 2
car sponge	fan 12 volt	hats & head mozzie nets
Carrots	fan belt (bus) spare x 2	heater (fan) 240 volt
cassette racks x 4	file (metal)	hip flask
cassettes (audio)	fire extinguishers x 3	Honey
CD player & power cable (shelf)	first aid kit (one for car one for bus)	hooks & eyes
CD player (portable)	fish de-hooker	hose (garden)
CD Roms x 30	fish id book	hose (silage)
cereal	fish oil	hose nozzle
chairs (folding) x 4		

hot water bottle x 2  
 ice tray for fridge  
 ink cartridges (printer)  
 insect repellent (Rid) x 2  
 insulation tape  
 Iron  
 ironing board  
 jack 15 tonne hydraulic  
 jack handle  
 jaw clamp (adjustable)  
 jockey wheel  
 Juicer  
 jumper leads  
 kettle (electric)  
 kettle (gas top)  
 kitchen tidy  
 knife (large) x 3  
 knife set & block  
 knife sharpener  
 knives x 6  
 Lemonade  
 lemons  
 lip moisturiser  
 liquid nails  
 Lomitol  
 macaroni  
 maps & books  
 margarine  
 matches (box) x 10  
 measuring cups & spoons  
 measuring jug  
 meat marinater  
 meat tray  
 metal skewers  
 microwave oven  
 milk  
 milk & sugar jugs  
 milk (long life) x 12  
 milo  
 minced meat  
 mobile phone & charger  
 monkey wrench x 2  
 mosquito coils  
 mosquito net  
 mouse (computer)  
 mouse trap  
 MSG  
 multi meter  
 mushrooms  
 mushrooms (dried)  
 nail puller  
 Nails  
 Noodles  
 nuts & bolts  
 oars for boat  
 oats rolled  
 occy straps x 8  
 oil (2 stroke) 5 ltr x 2  
 oil (car/bus)  
 oil (cooking)  
 oil (gearbox)  
 onions  
 Oranges  
 outboard motor 5hp & key  
 oven glove x 2  
 oyster sauce  
 padlock & chain  
 panadene forte  
 Panadol  
 paper holder (computer)  
 paper towels

peas (frozen)  
 pens/pencils  
 pepper  
 pickled onions  
 pie maker  
 pillow cases x 4  
 pillows x 3  
 pink salmon  
 plates (breakfast bowls) x 4  
 plates (dinner) x 4  
 plates (side) x 4  
 playing cards x 5  
 pliers (flat nose) x 2  
 pliers needle nose x 2  
 pliers bent needle nose  
 points (bus engine)  
 pop riveter & rivets  
 pork chops  
 porta potty  
 porta potty chemicals  
 pot pouri fan  
 potato masher  
 Potatoes  
 potted flowers  
 powdered milk  
 power boards (4 way) x 4  
 power cable 12 volt  
 power cords x 6  
 power steering fluid  
 printer (ink jet)  
 pump 12 volt submersible  
 radiator coolant  
 radiator hoses (bus)  
 radiator pump (bus)  
 radio aerial (UHF)  
 radio sideband CB  
 radio UHF  
 ratchet tie down strap x 9  
 rated shackles (2)  
 razor 240 volt  
 razors (safety)  
 rice  
 rollocks for boat  
 salad dressing  
 salt  
 salt & pepper grinders  
 salt pills  
 sand paper  
 Sardines  
 satay sauce  
 sausages  
 Savlon  
 scanner (desktop)  
 scanner (radio/portable)  
 scoop net  
 Scourer  
 screw drivers (blade) x 7  
 screw drivers (Phillips) x 3  
 Screws  
 scrubbing brush  
 sea sick bands  
 sea sick pills  
 Sealant  
 sealant gun  
 shackles (trailer) x 2  
 shampoo  
 sheets x 8  
 shorts & T shirts  
 Shovel  
 shower (power)  
 shower (solar)

shower caddy  
 shower/toilet tent  
 Silastic  
 smoke detector  
 snatch block  
 snatch strap  
 Sneakers  
 soap  
 soap dish x 3  
 soap powder  
 socket extension x 3  
 socket set  
 Socks  
 Solder  
 soldering iron  
 soup ladle  
 soup mix  
 soup packets  
 soy sauce  
 spaghetti  
 spanner 9-14/15-25mm  
 spanners (adjustable) x 3  
 spanners 10/12/14/17mm  
 spark plugs (bus engine)  
 spatula x 2  
 spectacles (spare)  
 spice rack  
 spices (cooking)  
 spike arrestor (computer)  
 spirit level  
 split rings  
 sponges (kitchen)  
 spoon (fat draining)  
 spoon (table)  
 spoons (desert) x 4  
 spoons (serving) x 2  
 spoons (tea) x 2  
 spot light (rechargeable)  
 spot light 12 volt  
 spot light rechargeable  
 squid jig x 2  
 steaks  
 steel cables x 2  
 steel ruler  
 stock cubes  
 Strainer  
 stubby holder  
 stuffed toys x 2  
 sugar (white)  
 sugar (dark brown)  
 suitcase (large)  
 sun shade (12'x12')  
 sundried tomatoes  
 suntan oil  
 surface spray  
 sweet jar  
 Swivels  
 table (big folding)  
 table (large plastic)  
 table (small folding)  
 tackle box  
 Talc  
 tape measure x 2  
 tarpaulin (large)  
 tarpaulin (small) x 2  
 Tarragon  
 tartare sauce  
 Tea  
 television (Colour) x 2  
 tent, poles, lines, pegs  
 terminal clamp

Thai sauce
thermometer
thongs
tides book
Tiki
tissue holder x 2
toaster 240 volt
toilet rolls x 6
tomato sauce
Tomatoes
Tool kit – boat
Tool kit – main
Toothbrushes
toothpaste
torch (Dolphin)
towels x 6
trailer plug adaptor
tree protector
tripod
type pressure gauge
tyre levers
tyre pliers
tyre pump electric
tyre pump manual
tyre repair kit
umbrella x 3
utensil holder (draining)
VCR x 2
VCR tapes
veggie peeler
vegetable racks
vicks rub
video camera
video camera > vcr cable
video camera battery
video dubbing mixer
wall rack (bamboo)
washing basket
water boiler 12 volt
water container black
water containers 25 lt. x 3
weighing scales
wheel brace
winch (manual)
window cleaner
wine cask cooler
wine goblets x 2
wire (electrical)
wire brush
wire connections
wire snips
wire stripper x 2
Wok
Worcestershire sauce
Yeast

**Thursday May 22nd 1997.**

Started looking at cameras today. Nikon seems to be emerging as the best quality in lenses, but they come at a price. As this is the area I hope to make money from along with article writing, I will have to concentrate on a good setup for the stills camera before doing anything about digital video which will be at least twice as expensive. The starting budget is about \$2500.00 for the stills gear, but DV will be put on the back burner in favour of a cheap analogue video so we can at least keep our own footage.

Even though we are still two and a half months away from the first trial trip, it feels like I need every spare second to get things organised.

**Friday 23rd May 1997.**

Belle (alias Rosabelle - my wife) went in and got her learner's permit today. Now we need someone with a 'B' class to help teach her how to drive the bus. I will go in on Monday and get my permit.

**Saturday 24th May 1997.**

The bus arrived today at 8am. After a run through of various features and their operation Rex and Pauline (the now ex-owners) left us to get aquatinted with our new toy. The first priority was to make sure the vehicle could be more securely locked up. A couple of barrel bolts on the main door and padlocks all round the lower storage bays took care of that. We spent the rest of the day fussing over the bus and starting to put some of the camping gear inside.

Tried to get a cover note for insurance purposes but had no luck. FAI aren't interested in this type of vehicle, Wesfarmers were supposed to get back to us but didn't, and the somewhat misinformed lass at the RAC tried to tell us that there is no such thing as a 1962 Bedford bus. Well I've got news for her, there's a 32 foot long optical illusion sitting on my front lawn !

I'll have more to say to her bosses this week, as we are insured with RAC for everything else, and they'll be lucky if I don't move to another company altogether after leaving us with no insurance cover over the weekend.

I slept in the bus overnight to get a feel for what it will be like. The bed is nice and comfortable and it wasn't all that cold.

**Sunday 25th May 1997.**

Had a quick look at a LWB Suzuki 4x4 today. At \$3000 the price was attractive, but the front suspension was sagging, there was an oil leak from the gear box and the brakes needed a lot of work. A timely article in the latest Western 4Wdriver on second hand Suzuki's gave me some important items to check for.

**Monday 26th May 1997.**

Passed the oral exam and paid for my learner's permit this morning (\$45). We have finally found a friend with a 'B' class license who can help to teach us to drive the bus. Will book a couple of professional lessons first just to get used to the vehicle.

Registration papers were also transferred at the same time, but we are still finding it hard to get the bus insured. SGIO appear to be the only ones interested at the moment.

EXPENSES TO DATE :

Purchase of the bus	\$16,800.00
Honda 500w generator (second hand)	\$ 400.00
Vehicle inspection	\$ 150.00
Padlocks, bolts, wood, drill bits	\$ 173.10
Registration	\$ 317.85
Stamp duty	\$ 342.50
Learner's permits (2)	\$ 90.00
	-----
TOTAL	\$18,273.45
	=====

**Wednesday 28th May 1997.**

Took my first driving lesson today. 'B' class is a lot more expensive than 'A' class. (\$40 as opposed to \$22). I have to get used to double clutching, and I will have to break some of the bad driving habits I have picked up over the past 14 years. No free wheeling, no crossing hands when turning the steering wheel and no riding the clutch.

It's almost like learning to drive all over again.

Insuring the bus is starting to be a real problem. We will have to try an insurance broker to see if they can find someone interested in taking our money.

**Friday 30th May 1997.**

Managed to find a reasonable second hand video camera today (at Cash Converters.) I have gone for the older style full size VHS as it gives better picture clarity and does not require so many dubs to edit onto a finished tape. Happily it uses the same type of batteries as my old cameras did so they will come in handy again. At \$695 the camera isn't going to break the bank either.



**EXPLORE AUSTRALIA BY FOUR WHEEL DRIVE** **\$20-40**  
**Wherrett. ISBN 0 670 90442 2 Viking O'Neil.**  
(The price variation is due to edition changes.)

If you want to see some areas off the bitumen, then this book gives a series of small treks which when all put together takes you on a round Australia 4WD adventure.

**GUIDE TO SEA FISHES OF AUSTRALIA** **\$35.00**  
**Kuiter. ISBN 1 86436 091 7 1996.**

Ever caught some peculiar looking fish and wondered 'what on earth is that thing ?' If so then chances are that this book will at least identify it for you.

There are over 950 species listed in quite a compact volume.

**OUTBACK AUSTRALIA HANDBOOK** **\$15.95**  
**Johnson. ISBN 0 91 18373 79 4 Moon 1992**

A guide aimed mostly at the overseas tourist in Australia, but includes some handy information and contact numbers. Written by a Yank, but it has heaps of information.

A few other titles which will be making the trip with us are :

**CARAVANNING & CAMPING GUIDE TO THE NORTH WEST**

**CARAVANNING & CAMPING GUIDE TO THE SOUTH WEST**

**THE ULTIMATE BOOK OF FISHING HINTS**

**YOUR GUIDE TO THE AMAZING NORTH (FREE TOURIST GUIDE)**

This one deserves a special mention. It is an excellent little handbook with all sorts of information about towns, including maps, phone contact numbers etc.

**GREGORY'S FISHING GUIDE**

**THE MACQUARIE EASY GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN LAW.**

The last book is for those times when you may need to know what your rights are and how to protect them.

I will also include a couple of books on first aid and bush survival when I can find something worthwhile.

My driving test is on Monday so I'm crossing my fingers that I pass first time. I managed to fail my 'A' class so many times I think they eventually gave it to me out of pity. Not that I'm a bad driver, it was just that every time a policeman hopped into the car next to me I got an attack of nerves. Now after driving for 14 years I should be more at ease... I hope.

**Monday 9th June 1997.**

Curses, I failed !

**Monday 15th June 1997.**

Two problems have arisen with the bus in the last week. First the gear linkages are causing problems and it is stuck in 1st gear. Second the fridge has developed a leak and needs re-gassing. Little else worth commenting on.

All in all a bad week. Eight weeks until Exmouth and it feels like eight months.

**Saturday 21st June 1997.**

Peter has let us down in regard to working on the bus. Great ! now we are looking a repair bill around the \$3000 mark. Oh well, I'm sure he would have helped if he could. We are currently waiting for the rep from Maddington Motor Homes to turn up. Rang to find out why he's late and they had forgotten all about us. We need a valuation done on the bus for the insurance people, and it's going to cost \$85 !! - seems to me we should get a discount for being made to wait around for an hour and a half.

I don't know what is the matter with people these days, there is no such thing a good service and professionalism. You can't trust anyone to do the job right first time. I was going to ask the motorhome people to give me a quote on fixing a few things in the bus, if they can't even keep a simple appointment, I'm not sure I want to bother with anything more complicated.

LIST OF ITEMS PURCHASED IN THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS :

Retractable washing line	\$ 15.95
Gas bottle gauges	\$ 3.90 each
Pressure clothes washer	\$ 65.00
Mozzie nets for hats (heads)	\$ 5.90 each
Heavy duty canteen	\$ 16.95

Audio mixer/video enhancer	\$169.00
Gearbox oil	\$ 5.95

**Wednesday 25th June 1997**

Belle had her driving test today but like me didn't make it. The examiner docked a point for problems releasing the handbrake, which was a problem with the vehicle, and a point for not looking both ways when crossing a railway - when she did ! I think they fail people first time no matter how good they are.

The stress of all this is beginning to tell on me at the moment. Now as time slips away we still have so much to get done. Getting the 'B' class is the biggest problem as it's something we can't throw money at to make it go away.

**Saturday 28th June 1997**

Having problems with the 4x4 again. The starter motor needs replacing - it was only done 18 months ago.

Bought a couple of new fire extinguishers for the bus and a rechargeable 12 volt power pack which can run 3/6/9/12 volt DC appliances as well as providing a power source to recharge the car battery if it goes flat.

After some fiddling around with the bus gear shifter I finally managed to get it out of first gear.

Chubb Fire extinguishers	\$ 28.95
DC power pack	\$135.00

Both from Marlows.

Tuesday looks like being busy. I have a driving test in the morning, then the 4x4 goes into the local garage for more work, and the repaired fridge turns up in the afternoon.

\$80.00 for the 'B' class, \$350.00 plus for the fridge and who knows how much for the 4x4 repairs. This is starting to cost some serious money. Then in order to have the bus' gas system certified, we have to get the petrol inlet moved about a metre along the side of the vehicle.

Anyone thinking about buying a mobile home should look for a gas certification sticker before buying. Caravan parks may turn uncertificated vehicles away as their insurance won't cover damage caused if there is a fire or explosion.

(Note: Since first writing this we have been to many caravan parks in W.A. who don't seem the least bit interested in gas certification, perhaps they are more conscientious in other states.)

One thing I will do in this journal is add information on the various services we need and the businesses which provide them. Regardless of any threats of legal action which may arise, I will make the comments based on the service we receive, good or bad, in an attempt to let others who may follow in our tyre tracks know which ones to avoid and which ones to spend money with.

Names worthy of mention to date are :

<a href="#">Rowley's Caravan Repairs.</a>	<a href="#">Rowley Watts</a>	<a href="#">018 907 218</a>
		<a href="#">9453 6535</a>

Rowley's number is a handy one to have if you are in Perth and need some repairs to your mobile home, especially to the gas system as he is a licensed fitter. We had problems getting the fridge out to Ross Refrigeration, so Rowley took it out and brought it back for us. He does repairs on site which is a boon if you are living in your vehicle and don't want to move it for a while.

<a href="#">Ross Refrigeration</a>	<a href="#">9418 4226</a>
<a href="#">30 Pt. Kembla Drive, Spearwood. WA</a>	

This is the ONLY place in Perth you can get your gas fridge repaired. I despise monopolies but it is a number you have to have if something goes wrong. At least they stuck to their initial verbal quote, and the fridge is now working again.

**Tuesday 1st July 1997**

My second driving test..... I PASSED ! Well that's one of the major hurdles out of the way at least.

The fridge went back into the bus today, and we are \$400 poorer. Now we have to organise to get the petrol inlet moved, then get the final gas work and certification done. Then the mechanical work and we are ready to roll.

I expect to spend at least another \$3000.00 before we are ready.

Still waiting for a bill for the 4x4 starter motor, apparently the ignition switch needs replacing as it caused the starter to burn out. At least another \$160.00 on top.

I have a small bar fridge (240v only) which we used on our last trip to Exmouth. I was going to sell it, but will probably now hang on to it just in case.

**Friday July 11th 1997**

Belle went for her second driving test today and passed. She feels she didn't do as well as the first test, but passed anyway.

**Saturday July 12th 1997**

The latest round of work on the 4x4 was completed today. We are now another \$306.00 more out of pocket. Just as well we are both still making good money, this is a fast way to go broke if you don't have money coming in all the time.

John moved out of the house in Belmont and I took the bus over to help bring back some of his gear. I managed to bog the bus on a grass verge, it took ages to get it off. I never want to get bogged like that without a few handy concrete paving slabs to stick under the wheels.

Less than 4 weeks to the Exmouth trip and I need to find someone to finish the work on the bus. Mountain Motors has been suggested by the bus' ex-owner, I will speak to them on Monday.

I am being chased by a couple of recruitment firms who want a PICK programmer for contract work. I think I may have a look at what they are offering. A lucrative contract for 3-4 months would go down well at the moment. Then again it's the money merry-go-round I want to get away from, so maybe it's not such a good idea.

The only response so far to my letters asking for sponsorship or some form of discount for the goods I need has come from Gerry Gibbs Camera House. They have given me a price of \$1590.00 for the Nikon F50 & lenses I need which is by far the best price to date.

I will step up the letter writing campaign when the Exmouth trip is over.

I have also been looking at computer prices. The old PC I am typing this on has just about had it. A new model should cost less than \$1500 so that is well within the budget.

There are still a number of items to purchase. Besides the remaining work on the bus which I have set a limit of \$3000.00 on, there is the camera, computer, roof rack for the 4x4, dinghy, A frame, modifications to the interior of the bus and the remaining gas work to be done.

**Tuesday July 15th 1997**

Latest purchases :

Ice box	\$275.00
Bait keeper	\$ 19.00
Fish smoker	\$ 39.95

I have been looking for an ice box for the boat for some time now. Fibre glass boxes are available but are about \$100.00 more than the metal one I eventually found.

The ice box is necessary as we go a couple of miles off shore, and last time we were in Exmouth that meant a trip back to shore if we landed a large fish. Now it can be put on ice and we can keep fishing.

The box has a bonus in that all the odds and ends for the boat fit inside.



Our second boat – before the accident at Exmouth

**Saturday July 19th 1997**

We have settled on a quote from Mountain Automotive to get the rest of the work done on the bus. \$2960.00 covers all mechanical work, a full service, two replacement tyres and moving the petrol inlet. The bus goes in on Monday and will be there two weeks.

As it is a fine weekend we are heading off to Dwellingup for the night just to see how everything works.



Bought a shower/toilet tent from K-Mart to day for \$69.95. Also picked up a few more books this week.

**Western Australia** **\$18.95**  
**Williams, J. ISBN 0-86442-268-7 1995 Lonely Planet.**

A similar book to the Outback Australia Handbook (mentioned earlier.) but dealing exclusively with WA Packed with all sorts of facts and figures, maps and colour photographs. Again this is aimed at the overseas tourist visiting Australia, but it will also prove useful to the domestic variety.

**BUSH CAMPS & REST AREAS AROUND AUSTRALIA** **\$12.00**  
**Fisher-Smedley. 1994. ISBN 0 9586774 0 9**

The companion to Bush camps and rest areas across Australia (already listed). This volume follows highway 1 around the country and is a 'must have' for anyone travelling around.

**THE GUIDE TO FREE CAMPING IN THE NORTH OF WA** **\$ 6.00**  
**&**  
**THE GUIDE TO FREE CAMPING IN THE SOUTH OF WA** **\$ 6.00**  
**S & S Collis 1996 ISBN 0 9586778 1 6 / 0 9586778 0 8**

(These books turned out to be invaluable. If you travel in W.A. you should get both of them.)

I am looking for a good book on bush tucker, also books on native fauna.

**Sunday July 20th 1997**

Back from our first night away in the bus. After having the radiator boil over at Armadale we decided against going to Dwellingup and stayed closer to home at the Goorolong campsite near Jarrahdale. After re-filling the radiator we had no further problems, and the bus is due for its' overhaul tomorrow anyway.

A note to those thinking a stop off at the Goorolong Campsite amid the pine trees would be nice, the camp ground has now been closed to overnight campers - thanks to the usual thoughtless louts who make it their business to spoil things for everyone else.

We had no problems with rangers while there - too cold for them to be out and about - and there were one or two others camped overnight, but the area is now listed as day use only, so be warned, you may be ejected by the authorities if you want to stay there.

I think a good idea to prevent areas like this being closed to all travellers, would be for authorities like CALM to issue overnight stay permits to people at a minimal fee, and then only allow those with permits to camp in the area. If people misbehave they lose their permits and can never obtain another one.

Other than the freezing cold weather at night the overnight stay was successful and we cooked our first dinner 'on board'. The full moon shining down amid the pines, a glass of Southern Comfort and a cigar - ah my idea of heaven.

Based on the speed the bus travels I think my estimate of 2 days to reach Exmouth may be a wee bit optimistic, but we shall see.



Goorolong near Jarrahdale

**Monday July 28th 1997**

We are facing even more expense from mechanical breakdowns. This time Belle's Barina is failing to start. Even after tow starting it and running around for a while there was no charge building up in the battery. Probably the alternator. An even bigger problem is the jerking as it turns corners. I've no idea what that could be. For a car that's only worth about \$3500 it could start costing hundreds of dollars to fix and we want to get rid of it in a couple of months anyway.

I'm yet to find anyone who has had as much bad luck with vehicles as we have. The Spectron 4x4 has had a gearbox rebuild, a replacement gearbox when the rebuild fell apart - out of warranty of course - two cracked heads, two starter

motors, an alternator, two rear bearings, a battery, an ignition switch, broken steering bolts and a blown Air-conditioner hose. This is all in the space of less than 3 years.

Repairs have cost \$10838.78 ! and the purchase price was \$14990.00. I get the feeling I was ripped off in a big way. So much for the SGIO autocheck that was done before I purchased the van. It wasn't worth the paper it was written on.

While I am having a whine about these things, I'll add Truck Line to my list of rip-off merchants. The gearbox rebuild I had done was estimated at about \$2500, and escalated to \$3955. After paying all that money the gearbox failed the day after I got the van back, it was repaired again and then failed 1 day out of warranty, and they refused to do anything about it. I went to Technical Transmissions who fitted a second hand box for \$2850 which has been running ever since. As far as I am concerned Truck Line should be avoided at all costs. They had the van in the workshop for over two weeks, and still the repairs they did failed. Technical Transmissions had the van for 4 days, stuck to their original quote, and their repairs were successful.

This kind of thing seems to go on and on for us... it does get very tiring at times.

Another piece of bad luck, I found two of my fishing reels have been broken, and had to buy replacements. <Sigh> It seems to never end.

Before we go on the Exmouth trip I still have to get a spare wheel for the boat trailer, and an extra tyre for the bus.

#### **Friday August 1st 1997**

August is here at last, and we are running out of time to get things finished. All the mechanical work has been done, and the gas work was finished up today. The final work is moving the petrol inlet. All work was supposed to have been done by now but the panel beaters are the last thing to hold us up.

It's disappointing not to have the bus available this weekend, especially since this is the last weekend before we go to Exmouth.

I have to go down to the panel beaters tomorrow to fit a new water tap and do a couple of other small jobs I won't have time for otherwise. Also have to drag the boat round to Tyrepower to get some new tyres put on.

Then get the gas tanks in the bus filled and down to Bunnings to get the last containers for the cupboards.

I think it will be a full day.

#### **Saturday August 2nd 1997**

Three re-tread tyres for the boat trailer cost \$120.00. The extra one was purchased in case one of the others gets a puncture along the way. Hopefully it's money well spent.

Lots of running around today, but most things I wanted to do are complete. The 9kg gas bottles cost about \$14.00 each to fill.

#### **Monday August 4th 1997**

Time is slipping away and the panel beaters are still holding the bus up. A 'one day' job has so far taken 4.5 and I get the feeling we won't get the bus back until Wednesday. Mountain Automotives don't seem to be putting any pressure on Down Under Panel & Paint (their choice of panel beaters not mine), so I let it be known that I had better have the bus by Wednesday night or there will be trouble.

I don't like to be kept waiting when an agreed delivery date is missed, and I hate to be kept in the dark about what is going on and how much longer it is going to take. Businesses must learn to pick up the phone and keep customers informed about delays.

#### **Thursday August 7th 1997**

Some days it seemed like it would never happen, and some days it seemed like there was not enough time left to organise everything, but here we are on the eve of our first major trip away in the bus and I think just about everything has been done.

I picked the bus up last night from the panel beaters, and had to take it back to Mountain this morning for some final checks and adjustments. The carpet near the engine bay has been left very dirty but if the mechanical side holds up, then a bit of grease on the carpet will be the least of my concerns.

I had to take another day off work today, which I don't want to do, but after problems stalling the bus last night and having to call out the RAC to re-start it, I ran out of time. To say I lost my temper when the bus wouldn't start would be putting it mildly. I am very stressed out at the moment and I really need this break. How my poor wife has put up with me over the past few weeks I'll never know. I hope things are about to take a turn for the better.

Rowley is due here any minute to finalise the gas certification, then apart from some last minute shopping in the morning, we are ready to roll.

I still have some doubts about living in the bus permanently, but this will make up my mind one way or the other.

RAC membership for the bus costs \$87.00. The recommendation is that if we ever need a tow, use an RAC towing service in combination with the \$500.00 limit our insurance covers us for.

Anyone wanting to insure their mobile home should look at the insurance offered by the CMCA, it is tailor made for this type of vehicle.

I was up until 11.30pm last night packing, and apart from a break when Mountain had the bus this morning, I haven't stopped since 6am today. Now it's 2pm and I am about due for a rest and a beer.

As I'm not taking the computer on this trip, I will have to keep a journal on paper for the next three weeks - what a chore !

#### **Friday August 8th 1997**

Rain, rain and more rain. What a lovely day to head off. The first problem was the trailer plug on the bus being wired up incorrectly - about two hours wasted fiddling with that to try and get it working. Then finally, thankfully we were away at last.

The first problem was encountered at Cataby Roadhouse where we stopped to fill up the petrol tank - petrol started flooding out all over the concrete - Down Under Panel & Paint strikes again ! I will be having words with them when I get back. At least the bus runs on LPG as well so the trip is still on.

We kept driving all day to drain the petrol tank and got as far as the authorised campsite at Murchison River (about 10km past the Kalbarri turn off.)

The campsite on the west side of the road was closed but a sealed road to the east took us down to a very large campsite which had tables, barbeques, a pit toilet and lovely views of the river.

This campsite is very popular - but there is a second site on the north side of the river with no toilet which was empty.

Although most people seem to use this area as an overnight stop on the way to somewhere else, it would be worthwhile spending at least two nights here and taking time to walk along the river.

We have travelled approximately 620 kms at an average speed of 69 km per hour. Costs in fuel were high as we had to use up the petrol, and worked out at 23 cents per kilometre.



Galena Bridge

#### **Saturday August 9th 1997**

An early start and we pressed on to Billabong and Wooramel roadhouses. You will generally find roadhouse fuel prices are the highest, with cheaper fuel available in the towns where there is some competition. LPG prices varied from a high of 63 cents a litre at Minilya, to 45.5 at Cataby. This compares with a price of 35.9 in Perth during the same period.

At Wooramel I managed to jack knife the trailer and put a big dent in the rear of the bus. This was after telling my wife that she had pulled up in the wrong spot when she hadn't - so I'm still living that one down.

On through Carnarvon where the rain clouds always seem to gather in the afternoon, we finally reached a campsite just south of the Minilya roadhouse on the Minilya River (river ?) at this time of the year don't count on seeing the river, there is nothing but a sandy river bed.

Again this campsite is popular and it is a lot smaller than the one near Kalbarri.

Only 492 Kms covered today, but our goal is now almost in sight. The weather is still cold and cloudy, I'm hoping for a change as we make the final leg tomorrow.

So far the bus is running well, but with a top speed of only 80kms (with a tail wind) it is slow going. The BIG bonus is not having to set and break camp each day, we can just pull up, put out the chairs and crack open a beer or two.



Minilya Rest Area

### **Monday August 10th 1997**

Only 200km to Learmonth and fishing, fishing, fishing.

As we drive along my wife often hands me something to chew, a sweet, a bit of chocolate and so on. Not long after we turned on to the Exmouth road she handed me something which felt like a soft jube, so without looking I popped it into my mouth and started chewing. I was wondering why she had handed me such a tasteless sweet when she started shouting at me to spit it out.

She had in fact handed me a silicon ear plug to put in my ear - the bus engine is quite noisy and she had decided to give me a couple of ear plugs to block out some of the sound.

We had quite a giggle about that - especially when I said I was glad the earplug was a new one not a used one.

We arrived at Learmonth jetty about midday and threw the lines in. Caught a couple of small fish and some squid, but there is no sign of the large schools of bait fish we saw in this area on our last trip.

It was also cloudy, rainy and windy, not the Exmouth weather we have come to expect.

The bus was low on gas so we drove the last 30km to Exmouth only to find that the petrol station on roster did not sell LPG. After a night in the caravan park (\$18!) where we took the opportunity to top up the water tanks and make some bread we fuelled up and headed out of town again.

### **Monday August 11th 1997**

The morning was spent looking for a suitable campsite. There are a number of tracks heading down to the beach near Kailis Fisheries and we eventually found one which the bus would go down (and get back) easily. We were supposed to be booked in at Kailis, but Nigel - the caravan park caretaker - decided to make life difficult and couldn't find a spot, despite there being plenty of room. As it turned out we enjoyed free camping near the beach, but at the time we were quite miffed.

The rest of the group hadn't arrived yet, so without any way to launch the boat, we went back to Learmonth jetty. Despite the fact that the weather had cleared up, there were still very few fish around.

The rest of our group arrived in the afternoon, and with the help of Ross' 4wd we managed to launch the boat near Kailis.

The light was fading as we made our way 2km south in the boat, and anchored just off the beach where the bus was parked.

John, Dave & Ross called in later that night; Ross & Dave full of fishing fever went to fish off the beach, and much to our surprise came back with a very large cod.



Campsite near Kailis

**Tuesday August 12th 1997**

The first full day of fishing produced a few north west snapper (emperors) but none of the larger fish we were looking for.

A trip into town and a meal at the Pot Shot that night was followed by a display of Peter Brock like driving by my wife who dodged kangaroos which were sitting in the middle of the road. If she had not been driving there could have been a nasty accident as the rest of us were a little the worse for wear after a drink or three with dinner. It shows the value of having a 'skipper' even away from the city. As Belle doesn't drink she is always elected to drive when we go out.

The road south from Exmouth has a number of dips which large volumes of water flow down in the wet season. At night it is very difficult to see into the dips, or out of the other side when you are in them. There are a large number of kangaroos in the area, as well as sheep and goats, so be very careful if you drive there at night.

**Wednesday August 13th 1997**

Out fishing again all day with very little to show for it.

Ross & Dave went up the coast to Bundegi and came back smiling. They managed to land a couple of Spanish Mackerel.

Had a BBQ dinner at the bus. The annexe is now set up so we have plenty of room for everyone.

It is very cold and windy at night. When we were here one April we had to buy a fan to keep cool, now we could do with a heater.



Spanish Mackerel

**Thursday August 14th 1997**

A rest day today. Time to get into town and stock up on supplies, fill water tanks and empty porta potties.

Exmouth has a fresh water tap located by the public toilets in the main shopping area. It is very easy for caravans and mobile homes to get access to it so don't forget your hose and tap connectors.

Tried fishing just off the reef later in the day. Dropping berley into the water attracted some shark mackerel and then some Northwest blowfish. But only managed to land a couple of Spanish Flag.

**Friday August 15th 1997**

Another full day fishing. This time we had a bit more luck. 4 shark mackerel landed but no sign of Spaniards.

On the last trip we were throwing shark mackerel back, but this time I had brought a smoker with me so we filleted them and smoked them. I will never look on these as rubbish fish again. They were so delicious we ate almost all of them along with prawns from Kailis and more of the Spaniards caught a couple of days earlier.

In fact the BBQ in the annexe that night was the best seafood meal I have ever had.

We set the shower / toilet tent up earlier in the week and this has proven to be a real boon. We have a solar shower bag which recommends leaving it out in full sun for 3 hours to get the water hot. We have found that leaving the shower bag in the shower tent all day gets the water just luke warm and perfect for a shower after a hard days fishing in the boat.

The main problems with the shower tent are a lack of places to put soap, shampoo, towels, clothes etc. We will have to make up some hooks for hangers and buy a hanging shower caddy to solve these minor annoyances.

The bus has been great. All the comforts of home, and the Honda 500w generator gives all the power we need. It powers 4 fluorescent lights, TV, video, stereo, and a flood light for outside.

The view we have here is wonderful, the beach is right outside our door, and Cape Range frames the view to the west.

Any concerns about battery problems have evaporated. Before we left home I fitted a 240v trickle charger into the bus, so now every time the generator starts, the bus batteries are being re-charged automatically.

The fridge is also doing a good job. A full size fridge certainly beats the little bar fridge I had last time we were up this way.

Despite a bad start things are starting to look up.

#### **Saturday August 16th 1997 / Sunday August 17th 1997**

Well I spoke too soon. The wind came up on Saturday, and despite picking up some more shark mackerel early in the morning we were forced in by the weather and sometime late on Saturday night the anchor line snapped and the boat was blown under the offal pipe at Kailis.

The canopy, windscreen and auxiliary motor have all sustained considerable damage, so no more boat fishing for us.

With the main engine slipping out of gear yesterday, I'm not going to chance going out without a backup motor. Went into town to get a new anchor, rope, chain etc. Cost \$130.00 all up.

#### **Monday August 17th 1997**

The wind finally dropped enough for us to get the boat out of the water. 1/2 a carton of beer goes to the engineers at Kailis for their help pulling the boat up with a tractor.

Since we can't do any more fishing from the boat we took off round the west side of Cape Range to have a look along the coast.

Entry to the national park is \$5.00 and a campsite costs \$5.00 a night. We pulled in at Mesa Camp, which is probably the best along this stretch of coast.

Good facilities including the best pit toilets (no smell) so far, and a nice view of the sea from the campsite.



Mesa campsite

#### **Tuesday August 18th 1997**

Tried to get down to Yardie Creek but the road south of Oyster Stacks gets too rough for the bus.

Had a look at Tulki camp, but didn't like the beach there, so we headed back to the Milyering information station. This is an excellent setup for anyone wanting to know more about the area. There is even a small theatre where you can watch films about Ningaloo, Bush Survival etc.

After a couple of hours watching films and picking up all sorts of information, we moved on to Mangrove Bay. Here you can use the bird hides or the fauna hide to observe local wildlife.

There are only a couple of places along the coast in this area where mangroves survive, and this is probably the best example. Don't miss it if you are in the neighbourhood.

Early morning or late afternoon are the best times to visit as birds and animals are more likely to be seen.

Not being able to go further south, we drove back round to the east coast and camped just behind the water tanks at the foot of Cape Range.



Charles Knife Canyon

#### **Wednesday August 20th 1997**

Woke early thanks to the herd of sheep passing the bus and announcing their presence in loud bleating voices. Tried Learmonth again but the trawlers were re-fuelling so took a drive up Charles Knife Canyon. The bus crawled very slowly up the hill but once on top we had a spectacular view of the east side of the peninsula.

#### **Thursday August 21st 1997**

Back to the jetty again but still no luck. This fishing is really off at the moment. BBQ at Kailis in the evening was pleasant. Met a number of people who come up here for 2-3 months every year.

#### **Friday August 22nd 1997**

Our last day in the Exmouth area. Fishing off the breakwater at Kailis after a trip into town produced some bream and a golden trevally - we should have come here instead of Learmonth I think.

Our haul for the two weeks was:

4 trevally, 6 shark mackerel, 2 Spanish mackerel, 3 sharks, 8 emperor, 4 squid, 1 coral trout, 1 cod, 5 bream - and that was between 5 people on 2 boats! Not very good for Exmouth.

A hint for those who don't like eating squid because it is too tough - get the oil in the pan nice and hot, roll the squid rings in flour to stop oil spitting everywhere, and drop the squid into the oil in small amounts. Count to 12 and it's cooked. Overcooking is what makes it rubbery and tasteless.

Oh, and season the flour with salt & pepper.

#### **Saturday August 23rd 1997**

Hitched the boat up and took the road south heading for Coral Bay. If you are going to Coral Bay and you don't have a booking, time it so you arrive about 10.30am, that's just before the caravan parks do a site check, and if they are busy, you shouldn't have to wait long to get in.

We stayed at the Bay View caravan park which worked out at \$18 per night for 3 people - John had stayed on and was travelling in the bus with us on the way home as Ross & Dave had to get back to Perth earlier.

The trip down through Cape Range National Park had loosened some bolts & screws in the bus so I took time to replace those that had fallen out. (Always take plenty of bolts, nuts, washers, nails, screws etc with you when travelling, they are almost always useful for something.)

Coral Bay has two shopping areas, and everything is within walking distance.



Coral Bay

**Sunday August 24th 1997**

Took a trip out on the glass bottom boat to have a look at the reef and fish. The waters in Coral Bay are a marine reserve, so the fish are protected and the boats make a feature of feeding them. Most of the big fish you will see are spangled emperors (commonly known as Northwest snapper).

The 1 hour cruise around the bay was \$18 per head, and is very good value. The captain gives a very informative talk on the coral, fish and the area surrounding the bay. Unlike some of the glass bottom boats we have been on overseas, this one had nice clean glass, and you can see every detail of the reef as it slowly motors around.

Cameras and videos are welcome, so don't forget to take them with you. If it is tourist season you may need to book a day in advance, and you can do so via the caravan park.

**Monday August 25th 1997**

Moved on to the Blowholes just north of Carnarvon. At Minilya roadhouse we discovered that a weld holding the rear bumper of the bus had broken, and that the bumper, boat and Air-conditioner were only hanging on by a small weld on the other side. After rapidly deploying great lengths of rope, we managed to make the bumper fairly secure and pressed on. (Note: Minilya like many roadhouses, has no mechanic available.)

We arrived at the Blowholes (Quobba Point) mid afternoon, and after taking some photos of the holes in action we found a campsite overlooking the bay.

There are a large number of campsites along the road heading south from the Blowholes; some with views of the sea and others tucked in behind the dunes. Caravans and motorhomes should have no problem finding somewhere to set up.

Be warned that the area behind Quobba Point (which is practically an island) is a marine reserve, and you will need to check the signs on the beach which tell you where you can fish.

After the number of sharks we saw in the area I would not recommend swimming or even wading out to the island. We saw several very large specimens within a few feet of the beach. After talking to the locals in Carnarvon we found that Quobba is known for the sharks which hang around there. At least one of the camping guides we purchased comments that there is a nice sandy beach for swimming. My advice is DON'T!

Campsites cost \$1 per night per vehicle, and there is an honour box to place the money in. We saw a couple of vehicles that didn't bother, but most stopped and paid up.

There are a couple of pit toilets available here but take my advice and use some Rid on your rear end if you use them, the mozzies gather there in swarms and have a good feed from your nether regions if you aren't protected.





Blowholes

**Wednesday August 26th 1997**

Moved on to Carnarvon and got the weld fixed up by Dave at Carnarvon Engineering. He also put a bolt through the centre of the bumper to properly secure the trailer. At just \$25 I would have to recommend that you see Dave if you need anything welding etc. done while you are in the area.

After refuelling, filling up on water, and stocking up on supplies, we doubled back and then took the road to Gascoyne Junction. We were looking for a side track leading to a campsite known as Rocky Pool. The Gascoyne road is pretty rough, and I finally discovered that the best way to cope with it is to put your foot down and fly over the bumps.

42km later we finally found the track we were looking for and a further 4km brought us to a great little campsite on the banks of the Gascoyne River. The river was only just flowing so we took the opportunity to have a dip and refresh ourselves after the dusty trip in.

There are bins, BBQs, and a pit toilet at the campsite but no other facilities. Despite the rough road in, the trip was worth while. The river banks and gum trees along the billabong are very picturesque.



Rocky Pool

**Thursday August 27th 1997**

Left early and arrived at the campsite on the Murchison River in the late afternoon. It was very, very cold, but we managed to have a nice fire in one of the concrete BBQs near the river, which chased away the worst of the chills.

For those wondering about fish in the river, we tried fishing briefly and caught a couple of tiddlers, which we threw back. If there are larger fish there I can't tell you, but it's a nice place to sit with a line dangling from the bridge.

**Friday August 28th 1997**

Our final day on the road saw us arrive home just before dusk. A quick beer, unload the essentials, and a nice hot shower saw the sun go down on three weeks of fun and frustration.

Overall the trip gave us a lot of enjoyment, but best of all it has finally settled my fears about living in the bus. The information we gathered, and the things that went wrong, will help us make the next step easier.

Petrol & LPG costs for the entire trip were \$743.23, which covered the 3250km we travelled in the bus, and 60 litres of petrol for the boat. We still have 40 litres of petrol in reserve tanks, so the cost per kilometre worked out at just over 20 cents.

**Wednesday September 3rd 1997**

Paid a visit to the 12 volt shop in Victoria park and picked up a small 200 watt power inverter. Thanks to being a CMCA member, the inverter was \$159.00 instead of the usual price of \$199.00. That paid for our joining fee and made our membership even better value.

The 12 volt shop has all sorts of interesting gadgets for motorhome and caravan owners. They can be found at 968b Albany Highway, East Vic Park, or you can phone on (08) 9470 5949 or fax (08) 9470 5991.

They have a catalogue/price list available and will do mail orders. The catalogue also includes some useful information on low voltage power systems.

**Sunday September 7th 1997**

Took a day trip to Noble Falls in the bus, via Kalamunda, then the Swan Valley, yes I took the wrong turning at Kalamunda and came all the way down the hill again....

The bus tackled these big hills, but at it's own pace. It's a good job they have plenty of overtaking lanes on the way up.

(We were not to know it at the time but this was to be the only time Lucy was to come out with us in the bus.)

The list of books in our reference library is steadily growing. The following have been added in the past few weeks:

<b>BUSH TUCKER PLANTS OF THE SOUTH WEST</b> Drew B., Walley T, Keighery G. CALM publication ISBN 0-7309-6853-7	<b>\$5.95</b>
<b>SNAKES &amp; OTHER REPTILES OF AUSTRALIA</b> Swan G. The Australian Museum. 1995 ISBN 1-85368-585-2	<b>\$16.95</b>
<b>WEST AUSTRALIAN FIELD GUIDE - WILDFLOWERS</b> Marshall J. Quality Publishing Australia ISBN 1-8757.7-24-3	<b>\$17.90</b>
<b>MARINE FISHES OF TROPICAL AUSTRALIA</b> Allen G. WA Museum 1997 ISBN 0-7309-8363-3	<b>\$29.90</b>
<b>BUSH FOOD</b> Isaacs J. Lansdowne Press 1987. ISBN 1-86302-504-9 Wednesday September 10th 1997	<b>\$29.95</b>

**Monday September 8<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Purchased a new computer system today from BBD Computers at 61 Ley Street Como. (08) 9450 2179. It is a P166+ with 2gb hard drive, 8x cd-rom, 16mb RAM and all the usual bits & pieces. At just \$999.00 it is the cheapest machine I have seen so far, and since they are using Ocean Technology components which I used to sell myself, so I know the quality is good.

Took all afternoon to copy across all the programs and data from my old machine, but I have just about finished and this is the first entry to be typed on the new system.

**Saturday September 13<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Purchased 2 new batteries for the bus, \$115.00 and \$135.00 for the deep cycle. The deep cycle battery will be used to run the 12 volt lights in the bus, and this came from the 12 volt shop in Vic Park. They are not easy to find (the batteries not the shop), I had tried Marlows and Repco with no success before I remembered the 12 Volt Shop keeps them in stock.

Left home near lunch time heading for Bindoon and a rally being held by the Perth Wanderers chapter of the CMCA. Arrived late afternoon and spent an interesting few hours looking at a number of other mobile homes and campers. Everything from top end luxury to simple camper vans.

We both enjoyed the night stay at a rest area on the Moora-Bindoon Road, but sadly we had to come home while the rest of the group are heading off on a 13 day safari through wildflower country.

James & Kiki Platt's converted bus 'Utopia' was the real show stopper. A chopped down 76 Bedford with everything you need and then some.



Wannamal Rest Area

**Sunday September 21st 1997**

Packed up all our books & went down to Canning Vale markets. Sold a few and made \$374.00. The markets allow casual traders in from 7am at \$5.00 a bay. Things seemed to get quiet after about 1pm so we packed up shortly before 2pm.

**Monday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1997**

Purchased a mobile phone from Telstra. A mobile is going to be essential as it is impossible to have a phone any other way when we are moving around. The phone is a Motorola and cost \$99.00. Monthly connection fees are \$20 and the contract is for a minimum of 12 months.

Also received a book on photography from Doubleday.

**PHOTO TECHNIQUES (Question & answer) \$34.00**  
**Frost L. 1995 David & Charles ISBN 0-7153-0198-5**

This is an excellent book for anyone interested in photography as it explains everything in simple terms, and gives good information about purchasing camera gear.

After reading it I will be looking for the following items when I purchase a camera.

- 28-80mm zoom lens
- 80-200mm zoom lens
- Fluid head tripod with spirit level
- Teleconverter
- Remote cable release
- Polarising filter
- Skylight filter
- 50-100 speed Velvia slide film
- Nikon F70 body
- Lens hood
- Lens cleaning kit
- Carry bag with shoulder strap

These items I regard as a minimum for the kind of photography I want to get involved in. I think I will have to revise my original estimate of \$1500.00.

**Wednesday September 24<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Purchased a colour flatbed scanner and an Epson colour ink jet printer from the Harvey Norman store in Cannington. At \$269.00 each they are quite a good buy, and the results I am getting from reproducing photographs are very good.

**Saturday September 27<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Had some more bad luck today (so what's new ?). After watching the football grand final on TV we decided to take the dogs for a walk and while I was putting Lucy's collar on she head butted me and knocked my glasses on to the laundry floor. Only yesterday I took my other pair in to have new lenses fitted ! so no I have no glasses at all, which for me is a complete disaster.

We took the dogs out anyway and then discovered Belle's car has developed another oil leak in the engine !

**Sunday September 28<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Our second Sunday at Canning Vale Markets brought in \$415.00. So far we have only been selling our books, and there are still several boxes left.

**Thursday October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1997**

The bad news on Belle's car is that the whole engine needs replacing ! I can't believe how bad our luck is with vehicles. We were going to sell the horrible thing this month. There goes any ideas of getting an aluminium dinghy in the near future. If anything else goes wrong I will have to put the camera gear on hold too.

**Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Another day at the markets. A lifetime's collection of books is down to the last couple of boxes. We are now starting on the record and tape collection. Proceeds this week were \$556.00.

**Monday October 6<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Belle resigned today. She finishes up at the end of the month. That will end sixteen years at S.H.L.S./Path Centre, and two and a half years of misery courtesy of the Microbiology Lab.

My turn comes tomorrow. I have never settled in to my current job so it's not a big deal for me. Bus or not I would have left at about the same time anyway, the job is just too boring, and the work environment is most unpleasant.

I'm getting too old for programming, my mind isn't as sharp as it was ten years ago, and I am starting to have problems focusing on the screen. What a great time to take up photography and film making and hope to make money out of it!

I have had some information back from CTV Channel 31, but I don't think it's an avenue for making any money. Info and contacts only.

Channel Seven were very supportive (Not !) and said they weren't interested at all. No wonder when all they seen to broadcast is sport anyway. Not a peep out of the other stations.

The drive for sponsors is a big fat zero so far. I guess we'll have to get footage on 'The World Around Us' before anyone throws any crumbs our way.

**Wednesday October 8<sup>th</sup> 1997**

The bus goes in to the cabinetmaker today to finish off the interior alterations. Another \$1200 out of my pocket. Belle's car also goes to the panel beaters to have all the dents taken out.

(Note: December 2000 - Gee what a waste of time taking the dents out was - there are more now than there ever were before.)



New cabinet work

**Friday October 10<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Picked up the bus from Richard at R & V Home Maintenance (Ph. 9497 3104) We are very happy with the work done by Richard and the bus is now fitted out as we planned.

**Sunday October 12<sup>th</sup> 1997**

At the markets again today. \$292 for today's sales is a boost to our flagging finances.

**Wednesday October 15<sup>th</sup> 1997**

The lounge cushions from the bus have gone into Clark Rubber to be re-covered. It will cost \$150. We are spending every night cleaning and packing gear to sell at the markets. Tonight we are taking all my models over to a hobby club in Victoria Park to see if anyone wants to buy some of it.

Over the last 20 years I have collected hundreds of 76<sup>th</sup> scale models of world war two military vehicles. There is also a large collection of buildings, scenery and odds and ends. The price I must have paid for this would run into thousands, I'll be lucky to get a couple of hundred back.

- Predictably, not a single sale.

### **Sunday October 19<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Our fifth week at the markets resulted in only \$166.80, a very disappointing day.

We have only six weeks left in Perth before we are committed to leave. We have to sell Belle's car soon, but are still waiting for a rear light cover to arrive.

We have had some work done on the engine, but I'd rather not speculate on it's present condition. All we can do now is hope it sells quickly.

The boat is the real problem. After the damage on our holiday to Exmouth, we have been told parts will take two months to arrive from the U.S.A.! Presumably they are coming via the proverbial slow boat to China.

I have written to Mercury to ask if they were aware that the aeroplane has already been invented, but predictably I have been ignored.

The house is a mess, boxes everywhere, and the garden is suffering as we have no spare time to tidy it up. The grass in the front garden has large dead patches where we have to park the cars (the bus takes up the entire driveway), and I'm so very tired of all the clutter.

### **Wednesday October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1997**

More shopping today. Among the items purchased were :

Truck air compressor	\$ 99.00
2 x 20 litre Jerry cans	\$ 26.00 each
200 watt jumper leads	\$ 19.95
Battery charge protector	\$ 19.95

I have been looking for a decent compressor for a long time. The only other choices appear to be really cheap and nasty or very expensive (\$300 plus.)

The battery charge protector stops car battery levels falling below 50%. Most people are unaware that dropping a car battery below 50% charge constitutes a complete discharge for the effective life of the battery. Having a device which cuts out when the level drops to 50% means the battery's life can be extended considerably.

(Later note : Jan 1998) The air compressor combined with the power pack I bought earlier from Marlows are an absolute boon. As you need a cigarette lighter to operate the compressor, I would need a very long cable to get from the front of the bus to the trailer. The power pack allows any 12 volt appliance to be operated anywhere, and with the addition of a small inverter, I can use 240 volt appliances as well. These items along with the generator have been the most useful. (December 2000 - both the power pack and compressor are still in constant use).

### **Thursday October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1997**

I had planned to keep working until November 14<sup>th</sup>, but last night I suffered what I can only call a nervous collapse. The work I have been doing requires tremendous concentration, but sadly a number of the staff seem to regard the company as a good place to come and chat, not work. I have had pay deducted for having to attend an optician's appointment, but others are allowed to talk for hours on end and do no work without being penalised.

This has taken it's toll on how I was able to work, and eventually led to a point where I abandoned the job well before I had planned to. It was a very difficult decision as money we were counting on will now not be available, and I may even end up owing money.

We have finally found a trailer which will hold the van and have put a deposit on it. The price is \$2000 and the trailer is just over a year old.



In travelling mode

**Saturday October 25<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Went to pick up the bus cushions from Clark Rubber, and after waiting for service for about thirty minutes we discovered that 3 of the 4 cushions have been covered, the fourth was left as a foam block ! I think it symbolises to mental capacity of the staff member who took my order.

I then find out that they may want me to pay extra to have the fourth cushion covered. I think I will liberally sprinkle my next conversation with words like Consumer Affairs Office, and Fair Trading Commission if they do.

**Sunday October 26<sup>th</sup> 1997**

This weekend at the markets was much better. We managed to make \$360.90. Four more weeks at the markets, and then we will probably sell the furniture in the last week to a dealer if we can get a reasonable price.

**Tuesday October 28<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Finally we have had some action on getting the boat repaired. The letter I fired off to Mercury seems to have desired effect and they have finally discovered air freight.

Although I am grateful that this seems to have been resolved, I am still not happy that I had to complain in order to get reasonable treatment. Apparently the difference between air and surface freight is about \$5.00, which I would have been more than willing to pay myself if I had been given the option.

**Wednesday October 29<sup>th</sup> 1997**

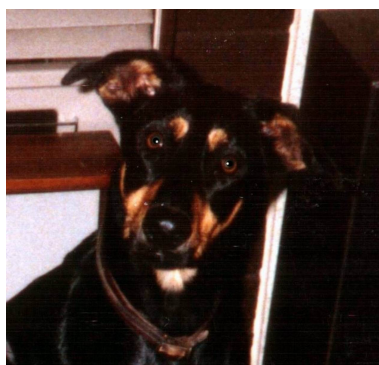
Tonight we said goodbye to our beautiful dog Lucy. She was about fourteen and a half years old, we have had her almost all our married lives and having to make the decision to have her put down was the most painful thing I have ever done.

Sadly old age caught up with her, and apart from failing sight, hearing and incontinence, she had some nasty cysts, one of which had opened up and started to bleed.

She was the sweetest dog I have ever known. We knew we would have to leave her at home when we left Perth, but this was something we hadn't counted on.

We will miss her more than words can express. We both cried our hearts out when she died. She has been gone only an hour, and already the house seems so empty. I will certainly be glad to get away from here now.

We still have old Sam, he's about 15, he will stay with my mother in the granny flat when we leave. She has a dog as well so he shouldn't be too lonely.



Lucy long legs

### **Friday October 31st**

Belle finished up at work today. We are still missing Lucy, but the initial shock has faded and we are able to look back on the good times without feeling so sad.

In some ways I am glad that she went while we were still at home. I held her in my arms and she slipped away knowing we were there. Poor old Sam (who is our very first dog) is very unsteady, but he keeps going. He doesn't seem to be missing Lucy that much, but then I keep him with me as much as I can.

Now the final phase begins. Our plans to have a 4 wheel drive with us have been abandoned for the moment. We will put a replacement motor in Belle's Barina and take that to start with. Barina Wreck in Midland can do the job for \$750.00 which is quite reasonable.

My van is too heavy for the trailer, and it has been nothing but trouble in the past, so we will try to get rid of it as soon as we are finished at the markets.

### **Saturday November 1<sup>st</sup> 1997**

We returned to Clark Rubber today to pick up the extra cushion for the bus. They said it would be ready yesterday. When we got there we were told that it wouldn't be ready until next Friday. They now go on my list of businesses to avoid. Not only can't they get an order right, they do not return phone calls and they do not inform customers when items are not ready on time.

Their manager is going to hear more about this.

Once we got home we took the bus for a run. There hasn't been a lot of time lately to just kick back and relax, so we went off for the day. Sam came along and seems to enjoy being in the bus. We are seriously considering taking him with us. We may not find work immediately, and I don't think he has too long left. With Lucy gone and then having us leave, it may be too much for him, so it looks like he will come with us.

### **Tuesday November 4<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We are concentrating on clearing unwanted furniture from the house and emptying the back room so John (my nephew) can move in when he is ready.

We have contacted a couple of furniture dealers who are coming out later in the week to quote prices.

Tomorrow we have to see Social Security and apply for unemployment benefits. We think it will take 13 weeks before we get them, but hopefully we will have found work before then. We still need to apply just in case nothing turns up.

I often take a few minutes to read some of the earlier entries in the journal to see what differences there are between what we planned to do and what has actually happened. My plans to take better quality camera equipment, a boat and a 4 wheel drive have all been shelved for the moment because we just don't have the cash to spare.

I am being as conservative as possible with the budget forecast. Many people would probably go with far less money than we will have available, but from past experience I just know we will need it.

As of today we have enough money to keep us going for 34 weeks – if we have to take unemployment benefits and we don't find any work. We still have to sell the boat and my van, plus furniture and a lot of odds and ends. This should give us plenty of time to find work and start building up our savings again. The day before we leave I will put a detailed budget forecast in the journal to show how our money will be allocated.



This was home for over 8 years (we were paying it off for 13) we lost it in 2003

### **Thursday November 6<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We had to register at the Dept. of Social Security today. With a bit of luck we won't need assistance from them while we are on the road, but we have to register just to be on the safe side. The fact that we are travelling is a bit dodgy, we can't exactly be open about it, but we will certainly be searching very hard for work, so they shouldn't complain.

Currently the benefits are \$290 per week, not nearly enough to cover the \$526 we will need to survive, so we have to find work quickly or our savings will get used up.

### **Sunday November 9<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Our last day at Canning Vale Markets brought in \$140.70. We will have a garage sale next Saturday and then if there is anything left we will go to the local Rota-Mart on Sunday.

We have had dealers in to look at the furniture we want to sell, and quotes ranged from \$210.00 to \$380.00, a long way short of what I hoped to get. We will see if any of it goes next Saturday, if not we will take what we can get for it.

The lowest quote was from Cash Converters. How they can advertise that they pay top prices is beyond me. It is of course a blatant lie. So much for 'standards in advertising'.

### **Wednesday November 12<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We picked up Belle's car from Barina Wreck in Midland today. The engine has been replaced and we also replaced the front tyres which were wearing a bit thin. \$750.00 for the engine including fitting, and \$70.00 for the tyres. Now all we need is to have the car serviced and it is ready to go. The work was done on time for the quoted price. I will comment further when we have had a chance to give the car a thorough test.

(Later: May 1998) The engine in the Barina has performed well so far. We have used the car a lot, especially when we are out at free campsites, and 'touch wood' it's been running fine.

An auto electrician is coming round tomorrow to look at the bus/trailer lights, (Advanced Auto Electric's) then next week we take the bus back to Down Under Panel & Paint to have the fuel tank fixed. A trip to a towbar fitter to make sure the towbar can take the load and then we are ready to go. We are still waiting to get the boat back – apparently there was more damage to the auxiliary engine – and once my van is sold we can go. All this waiting and we are now so very close.

### **Thursday November 13<sup>th</sup> 1997**

The bus and trailer lights have all been rewired and the job cost \$140.00. Advanced Auto Electronics goes on my list of businesses I recommend. It is useful to have people who will come out and do the work rather than having to take the bus in to a workshop.

### **Saturday November 15<sup>th</sup> 1997**

The garage sale brought in \$310.40 and some of the larger pieces of furniture were sold. We still have bookcases and other large items to sell and will probably auction them off. The auctioneer's commission is %15 plus a \$10 handling fee. The computer sold last night for \$700 so we only have the boat & my van as 'big ticket' items to get rid of.

My advice to anyone contemplating selling up and starting a life on the road is to make an estimate of what you think you will get for your belongings, and then halve it. If you get close to the second figure then you have done well.

As it turned out we managed to get \$4171.75 from my original estimate of \$5000, so I think we were lucky. We still have items left that could be sold, but furniture was the hardest to sell and brought very low prices.

### **Sunday November 16<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Took the bus down to Dwellingup for the day to have a look at the area. Everything seems to still be running well. Even after a few kilometres of rough gravel roads all the items we have packed seem to be holding up well.

I will have to resist the temptation to take the bus into places it wasn't meant to go. At Nanga Mill I managed to scrape the side on a couple of trees, nothing major, and a quick respray has hidden the evidence, but it is probably better not to do any damage in the first place.



Baden Powell Campsite near Dwellingup

### **Tuesday November 18<sup>th</sup> 1997**

More hassles today. First we found out that the fuel tank in the bus needs replacing, and then we are told by Mariner's World that the main engine on our boat needs a new gear box at a cost of \$1800. It has taken them three months stuffing around, and now we find that the boat is effectively worthless. They are without any doubt the most useless company I have ever had dealings with. There is no way we can afford the repairs so we are left with the



choice of taking what we can get, or leaving the boat to rot in the front garden. They are fully aware of our situation, and they are taking advantage of the fact that we have little time left to deal with the problem.

I managed to find a fuel tank which will fit, although it is only 80 litres as opposed to the original 120 litre tank.

Belle has been asked to go for an interview for a temporary position with Centerlink. Since we need the money, we may have to put off our departure from Perth for a month (at least) if she is successful.

We have advertised my van in the Auto Trader (\$40 for two weeks), and we have also placed an ad in the Quokka. If we have problems selling it we are going to be in real trouble.

#### Thursday November 20<sup>th</sup> 1997

Belle has been offered a temporary job by of all things the Dept. Of Social Security (Centerlink). Due to the rules governing unemployment benefits it could be awkward to refuse any job offer, so we could be stuck in Perth for at least another month, and possibly until March next year unless I can get us something in the country.

Because John is due to take the house over in just over a week, we will have to stay in the bus in the driveway. I know we need the money, and it is good for Belle to build up experience in another area, but I definitely have mixed feelings about being stuck in Perth for another four weeks or more.

#### Friday November 21<sup>st</sup> 1997

There's a line from a song that goes: 'What a difference a day makes' and now the last 24 hours have seen a job offer and acceptance based on the original offer, then a change of offer, another acceptance based on the new offer, and yet another change to conditions which led Belle to reject the job.

First she was offered one month's work at a salary of \$27,000, after she accepted this became \$23,000 which she would have taken anyway just to build up experience, then one month became four months and she had no choice but to reject the job. Hardly surprising given the circumstances.

#### Saturday November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1997

John moved in today.

I took the bus down to Armadale Mechanical Services (Stone Street) and Russel, the owner spent the next 4 hours strengthening the rear bumper and towbar assembly. All that work for only \$60. Now we can tow the car and trailer with no fear of everything ending up all over the road.

#### Sunday November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1997

We were taking the bus out but it broke down on Tonkin Highway. Thanks to an innovative RAC road service officer we were able to get home again. The fault was the rotor in the distributor. It was shorting out and no spark was getting to the spark plugs. A quick coat of 5 minute araldite was enough to get us home – a useful trick if you have a faulty rotor.

We have heard nothing at all back from Mariner's World about our boat, I still have no idea what we can do about it.

No inquiries about the van either, in the end I guess it will go to a dealer and we will get cheated again.

#### Thursday November 27<sup>th</sup> 1997

I took the van around to a few dealers and the best offer I could get was \$6,500. I don't know if they think I'm stupid, but the 4wd press lists the resale value of Spectron 4x4s at \$12,000. Replacement cost (The equivalent Mitsubishi) would exceed \$40,000 ! I guess I won't be selling it for a while.

Following is my budget forecast for the coming year. Income figures are based only on unemployment benefits at the moment as we have no idea how much we will get once we find work. It is obvious that without work we are going to go broke very quickly, so the sooner we can find something the better.

We have \$10,000 available in liquid assets, and the boat and van have not yet been sold, so on my worst estimate we can survive for a year before we have to abandon travelling. Of course if we can get work during that time the outlook will be much better.

	B U D G E T		
	Week	Month	Year
INCOME			
Marc	145.00	628.33	7540.00
Rosabelle	145.00	628.33	7540.00
Rent	75.00	325.00	3900.00
TOTAL	365.00	1581.67	18980.00
EXPENSES			
Van Hire Purchase	88.90	385.23	4622.80
Superannuation	15.22	65.95	791.44
Caravan parks	60.00	260.00	3120.00
Mortgage	143.00	619.67	7436.00
Telecom	4.62	20.00	240.00
Trailer Registration	0.54	2.33	28.00
Car Insurance	20.54	89.00	1068.00
Car License	14.77	63.99	767.85

Drv License	0.10	0.42	5.00
St John Ambulance	0.81	3.50	42.00
RAC	2.77	12.00	144.00
House Cont Insuran	4.52	19.58	235.00
House Struc Insur	4.08	17.67	212.00
Shire Rates	6.28	27.21	326.51
Water Rates	6.50	28.17	338.00
Petrol	40.00	173.33	2080.00
Food	80.00	346.67	4160.00
Pocket	19.23	83.33	1000.00
Hair cut	2.88	12.50	150.00
Car Maintenance	57.69	250.00	3000.00
House maintenance	9.62	41.67	500.00
Clothes	4.81	20.83	250.00
Xmas/B'day	9.62	41.67	500.00
Pets	9.62	41.67	500.00
Anniversary	4.81	20.83	250.00
Medical	4.81	20.83	250.00
EXPENSES	615.70	2668.05	32016.60
NET LOSS	250.70	1086.38	13036.60
	WEEK	MONTH	YEAR

### Friday November 28<sup>th</sup> 1997

Finally the big day has arrived. It took all morning to attend to the final packing, but by about eleven o'clock we were finished. Mum was upset about us leaving, but she is busy most of the time and with John staying in the house she won't be on her own. She knows this is something we have to do and I'm sure she will be okay in a few days time.

We are heading in the general direction of Donnybrook and since Belle has a job interview next week near Bunbury we will stay around the area for the next few days.

It is such a relief to be on the move at last. We have pulled off the road for the night at the site of the Waterloo State School – which is now just a roadside parking area.



Our first night on the road was spent here

Sam seems to enjoy being in the bus, the only problem is we can't go into national parks with him on board.

This is the first entry made in the journal using the generator as a power source. It leaves something to be desired as any slight glitch in the 'jenny' causes the computer to re-set.

### Saturday November 29<sup>th</sup> 1997

We spent some time in Bunbury gathering information at the tourist bureau and picking up a few small items from the shops. I have never been an admirer of this town, which I regard as one of the ugliest in the state. (Apologies to Bunbury residents.)

Most of the day we parked near the Leschenault Estuary. There are three good parking areas for large rigs along the foreshore but I suspect overnight stops are discouraged.

In the evening we motored out to the Old Coast Road and found a good overnight pull-in on the east side of the road about 10km north of the Australind turn off. This site does not seem to be marked on any of the camping books we have, and may be useful if you are in the area. Facilities are limited to picnic tables and a shelter, but it is off the road a bit so sleeping was easier here than at Waterloo.



Sunset at the estuary

**Sunday November 30<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We booked in for two nights at the Leschenault Caravan park. **They take dogs** and have room for busses. Next to us was another bus, also a C.M.C.A. member, and a real beauty it was too. Shame that it's owners were a bit stand offish and didn't seem to want anything to do with us.

After unloading Belle's car we took a trip 'up the hill' along Coalfields Road towards Collie. There is another unlisted roadside pull-in 5km before the Wellington Dam turn-off (if you are heading east). We intend to spend at least one night there this coming week.

Nearby Honeymoon Pool is far too small for buses our size – a Canter or Coaster should just about make it in. Further along the bitumen road past the Honeymoon Pool turn-off is Potter's Gorge. There is a good campsite here BUT it is listed as a day use area except when the Honeymoon Pool campsite is full.

It was at Potter's Gorge that we first decided to get a bus after meeting Londoner who has been travelling Australia that way for over twenty years.

**Monday December 1<sup>st</sup> 1997**

As many caravan parks do not allow pets we went looking for a book with a list of the ones that do. We found one at the R.A.C. and the details are as follows:

**Holidaying with Dogs** **\$11.65**  
**Dennis P & S 4<sup>th</sup> edition 1997 ISBN 0-949281-19-0 Life Be In It**

The book lists accommodation all over Australia that accepts dogs, and includes phone numbers and special conditions such as bonds which need to be paid.

**Tuesday December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1997**

We travelled to Donnybrook but found no suitable camping areas near the town. 18km toward Capel we found Ironstone Gully Falls, which although small, is a pleasant overnight stop.

The backpacker hostels in Donnybrook seem to have the casual employment market sewn up. If you don't stay at the hostels you don't get any fruit picking work.



Iron stone gully

**Friday December 5<sup>th</sup> 1997**

After spending two nights at Ironstone Gully, we moved back in to Australind and had an uninterrupted night next to the estuary not far north of the caravan park we were in a few nights ago. I am sure the local ranger would have moved us on if he were around, but a free nights stay next to the estuary was too good to pass up.

We are now camped amid a grove of pine trees on the east side of the road 5km south on the Ludlow Tuart Forest Tourist Drive. There is plenty of room for busses or caravans. There are overflowing (stinking) bins, which the local council should obviously empty more often, but otherwise it is an excellent campsite.

The Tuart forest is unique, and campfires are prohibited in the area for obvious reasons.

We have applied for a number of jobs in the area, but so far have had no luck.



Ludlow – Tuart forest rest area

**Saturday December 6<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We travelled further down the coast to Busselton today. I have always liked this town, although I have to say that it is starting to become over-developed now.

There are beaches where you can exercise your dog, and four caravan parks which allow pets (at least in the off-season.). There are also parking areas for large vehicles and caravans which altogether makes the town very welcoming to travellers.

Our generator is playing up, so we have dropped it off for an overdue service. We chose the Kookaburra Caravan Park on Marine Terrace as it is close to the beach and the town.



Rotary Park Busselton

**Monday December 8<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Belle had an interview for a position as a housekeeper today. She has been unofficially told that she has got the job, but that will be confirmed tomorrow.

The property she will be working on is north east of Bunbury. We will be given a house to live in and she will be on probation for six weeks. If this works out it could mean an interruption in our journey for quite some time.

The area is very pretty, and living in the peace and quiet of the bush will make a change from our hectic lives in the city.

**Tuesday December 9<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Belle has officially got the job. We drove up from Australind and moved most of our stuff from the bus into the house. Sam managed to find some rat poison and ate it. Thankfully we noticed it straight away and I had to make him sick by pouring cooking oil and salt water down his throat. The treatment, although unappreciated by Sam, seems to have been very effective and he brought up all the poison and his dinner.



Collie River Valley

**Thursday December 11<sup>th</sup> 1997**

Although Belle seems to be starting off well in her new job, I have my doubts as to how long she will be able to keep up a seven day week. Being chained to your work is very difficult, and I don't think many people could stand it for very long.

Sam is none the worse for his encounter with the rat poison, but he still thinks of the bus as home and hops in now and then.

I have been busying myself by working in the garden. The house we are in has been neglected for some time, and it is a shame to see a once well maintained garden in such a state of disrepair.

**Sunday December 14<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We are far from happy with the way Belle's job is turning out. There are extra conditions popping up which she was unaware of when she accepted the position. Yesterday we found out that we may have to look after guests in the house we are renting.

There are also a lot of eccentricities which Belle has to get used to. Her employer seems nice enough, but he has some peculiar requirements. One example being a large collection of sunglasses which Belle has to clean each time he wears a pair. She isn't allowed to use soap or detergent to clean things (hot water only), and the floor has to be washed with towels.

It seems the richer they are the stranger they become.

I can't see this lasting for very long, Belle just isn't used to this sort of work, and in any case we left Perth to spend more time together not less.

I have managed to injure my shoulder working in the garden. I have also been quite sick for a couple of days. I hope my shoulder gets better soon as there is no way I could drive the bus if we decide to leave.

(...later in the day)

Ha Ha! I was right, but Belle hasn't given up the job, she was fired. All for the heinous crime of leaving two cigarette butts in an ashtray – not her butts she just missed cleaning them up, and not noticing a couple of tiny leaves on the entry floor.

All I can say is good riddance. We will be back on the road by Tuesday.

### **Tuesday December 16<sup>th</sup> 1997**

After a brief stop at Margaret River to see some people we haven't seen for years, we made our way down to Chapman's Pool on the Blackwood River. It was too small for the bus – although some caravans had managed to get in, so we went further south to Alexandra Bridge. The campsite near the bridge costs \$3.50 per person per night, which is pretty expensive, but at least there are toilets, BBQs, firewood, water, and of course the river to fish in.

I am glad to be back on the road again, so is everyone else (especially Sam).

We still have some job applications to follow up in the Bunbury area and we will go back up by car at the end of the week.



Alexandra Bridge campsite

### **Friday December 19<sup>th</sup> 1997**

We are back in the Bunbury area now – mainly due to D.S.S. reporting requirements. We have been away three weeks, and as Christmas is only a week away, I don't expect to have any luck with work until the new year.

As yet we haven't made up our minds what to do during the next week, but we are moving closer to Perth in case we decide to go home for Christmas day.

The south west of W.A. isn't all that bus friendly. There are precious few free campsites as it is, and fewer still that we can get in and out of easily.

The main problem we have at the moment is being out of phone range. Most campsites are a long way from the nearest town and mobile coverage is still pretty poor.

We have booked in at Binningup for two nights. There isn't much here if you haven't got a boat, but it is a nice quiet spot.

Wayne & Heather in 'We made it!' are parked next to us. Wayne has built his mobile home from scratch, and can be very proud of the result. Being a CMCA member makes breaking the ice with other mobile home owners very easy.

**Sunday December 21<sup>st</sup> 1997**

We are heading home for Christmas and so have moved north to the campsite at Hoffman's Mill. There is a small stream, toilets, tables, rubbish facilities, BBQs, and a free gas BBQ/cooker. Unfortunately CALM (who administer the area) don't point out that there is a \$5 per night fee until you have driven the 12km down a gravel road past Logue Brook Dam.



Hoffman's Mill campsite

**Monday December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1997**

We were camped on our own, but other campers who were further away have moved in right on top of us. I can never understand why in a big open campsite, some people have to plop themselves as near to you as they can get. Must be the herding instinct or something.

**Tuesday December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1997**

Oh what a hot day. The hottest December day since 1968 according to the weather reports. We are moving north again to Heron Point, and the bus doesn't like the hot weather much. The engine is running a full 20 degrees hotter than normal.

Heron Point will be closed as a free campsite as from April 1<sup>st</sup> 1998. Another attempt to force people into caravan parks.

It is a good crabbing area in season, and we managed to catch 17 in a few minutes with a scoop net.



Heron Point

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> December 1997**

Christmas eve, and we are parked in the driveway at home. The house doesn't feel like home any more. The rest of the family seem to think we are a nuisance for not letting them know we were coming earlier, and we have been left on our own, it wouldn't have hurt them to ask us over for a drink on Christmas Eve. I think we should have stayed

away and not wasted our money coming back. (**Much later:** Had I known at the time what a pack of b\*%#\$ds they were going to turn out to be I would never have had anything further to do with them.)

As there seems to be a lot of work in the Albany area, we are heading that way after New Year. Sam may have to stay at home until the weather cools off. We have to leave him in the bus on occasion, and if we both get work he will get too hot.

Only four weeks away and already we feel out of place back in Perth. I have only just started to realise what we have taken on and how dramatically it effects our lives. Still, if I had to do it over again I would make the same decision. We will see if I still feel that way in six months time.

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> December 1997**

I rather think we wasted our time and money coming home for Christmas. We were alone Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, spent a few pleasant hours for lunch with the family but then were expected to sit in a hot car for two hours while others went to sleep, before we could turn up for dinner. Needless to say we gave up and went back to the bus at home.

I think some members of my family are rather odd at times. The overall attitude seems to have been that we were just a big nuisance for only giving a weeks notice before coming up.

Next year I just won't bother at all.

**January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Our visit to the D.S.S. was less than impressive. Somehow they managed to lose my last form and have cancelled my benefits. How they managed to do that is beyond me as Belle and I both submit our forms together, and they still had hers. This is on top of trying to get changes made to Belle's data access status. It took four goes for the twits to get it right, and despite asking (in person) for our mailing address to be changed back to Perth, they still had the Burekup Post Office listed. Words fail me!

With Christmas and new year celebrations out of the way, we are back on the road. Sadly we had to leave Sam at home, as the bus gets too hot during the day. We will pick him up again after the hot weather has finished, or if he frets and won't eat we will come back and get him and try to find a way round heat problems.

The Albany Highway is a nightmare for the bus. There are an endless succession of rolling hills which impede progress and make fuel consumption skyrocket.

There are at least three very good overnight sites between Perth and Albany. The first is on the east side of the highway just north of the Beaufort Roadhouse. The second is also on the east side of the road and about 20km north of Kojonup. The third is on the west side of Albany Highway at the entrance to the Stirling Range National Park.

All three are large, shady, and provide seats, tables, BBQs and bins.

**January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

We arrived in Albany early and made our way out to Emu Beach Caravan Park. We will spend at least the next two nights here while we have a look around the town.

The town has improved immensely since we were last here. I was never too keen on Albany, but now I have changed my mind. The general appearance of the town has been upgraded, and many more tourist facilities have been added.



Old Post Office - Albany

**January 4<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**



We were up early and after a bike ride around Emu Point, we made our way out along the coast to Frenchman Bay. The coastline is majestic. Sheer cliffs of weathered cracked granite plunge into turquoise seas and white sandy bays dot the shoreline.

In the afternoon we took another ride further along the coast with John (who is here for 2 weeks holiday), and visited Shelley Beach as well as Cosy Corner. Shelley beach is a popular hang gliding location, as well as providing one of the most spectacular campsites you will ever find. A fee of \$5 per night covers the upkeep of toilets, BBQs and flat grassed camping areas. (No dogs as it is in a national park.)

At Cosy Corner camping is not permitted at the main site between December 1<sup>st</sup> and April 22<sup>nd</sup>, but there are a number of good campsites dotted along the beach to the south. Unfortunately for us you need a 4wd to get to any of them.



Two People's Bay east of Albany

**January 5<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

We took time to register for employment with a local agency today, and have opened up a post office box (\$10 plus \$6 deposit for keys). That will give us a local address for the moment.

There isn't much work around yet, but things should improve as the new year holiday period fades away.

**January 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Our time at the caravan park has run out and we had to find a place to camp for the night. We managed to find a really beautiful spot at Gull Rock. The view is incredible, and there is a white sandy bay to the right with crystal clear water.

Unfortunately on the way up the track Belle, who was driving the Barina in front of the bus, decided to stop without warning. I managed to haul the bus around the right side of the car just in time. It was a very dangerous situation and she could have easily been seriously injured. She now has instructions to stay at least a kilometre ahead of the bus on gravel roads.

We spent the afternoon on the beach, Belle got too much sun and was sick. Sunstroke is no fun at all.

(We subsequently discovered that the carpark overlooking Gull Rock isn't an authorised camp site, but there is a good camping area at the far end of Ledge Beach.)



The parking area at Gull Rock

**January 8<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

We were up before the sun and went fishing in the bay. Not even a nibble. I think I'll sleep in tomorrow.

**January 9<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We have managed to stay by Gull Rock for three nights without any interference from the local ranger, but we won't push our luck any further. Tomorrow we will head west to Torbay Inlet where there is supposed to be a good authorised campsite.

The fishing seems to be right off at the moment. We have tried fishing off Emu Point, Ledge Beach and Ledge Point without so much as a bite. Hopefully Torbay will be better.

We are waiting on replies to several job applications and have decided that we will spend Monday to Thursday nights in a caravan park, and Friday to Sunday free camping. This should give us a better chance to apply for work during the week without having to worry about rangers etc.

I miss having Sam in the bus and it doesn't seem to get all that hot here. I think I will go up to Perth next Thursday and get him. Having him along does cause us a few extra worries but he has been with us for so long it's hard to leave him at home. I know I would feel awful if he died without us being there.

**January 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

The campsite at Torbay Inlet is small but shady. There are bins and toilets, and the inlet is safe to swim in. The fishing is still awful, but we have plenty of time to wait for it to improve.

The track leading to the campsite is reasonable until you get near to the camp. There is one bad boggy sand patch that has to be taken at speed, but the bus managed it without any difficulty.

There are a number of snakes, including tiger snakes, here, so caution is advised when walking in the bush.

A short walk from the camping area is the ocean, and Mutton Bird Island can be seen to the east, with Cosy Corner to the west. Perkins beach is a five minute drive from the inlet.



Torbay Inlet

**January 11<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

We drove along the coast to Denmark to do some sight seeing. I had forgotten what an absolutely gorgeous area surrounds the town. Wilson inlet empties into the sea at a good beach, and the forests to the north west of town offer a variety of walk trails, scenic beauty and picnic sites.

The town straddles the Denmark River, and parks line the river banks.



Ocean Beach

**January 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Had a look at the track to Mutton Bird Island, it looks ok for the bus, and the turning circle at the end should be negotiable. We will probably spend next weekend there and try some fishing from the beach. The area behind the island is sheltered and should also make for good swimming.

**January 13<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

We moved back towards Albany and into Panorama Caravan Park. It is more expensive than Emu beach but at least we have been given a level campsite, and people are not crammed in like sardines.

Belle has an interview at the regional hospital next Tuesday, and I think she has a good chance of getting the job. It is with the Health Dept. who she was with for 16 years. Strange that she is getting work and interviews and I can't seem to pick anything up. I will step up the job seeking campaign this week and begin bombarding local businesses with letters. The 'Local Link' produced by the Chamber of Commerce is a good source of information for job seeking.

**January 15<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Left early and travelled to Perth in the Barina. The 409km trip cost \$17.90 in fuel and took just under 4 hours.

Sam was happy to see us, and we spent the night sleeping on the floor in the lounge.

**January 16<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

After dropping our forms in at the Gosnells D.S.S. we headed back down the Albany Highway. The weather has turned nasty with high winds and rain, but we still managed to make the trip in 4 hours 25 minutes.

Sam has settled back in to bus life straight away, and it's good to have him back where he belongs. He is very wobbly on his legs now and I know it's just a matter of time. At least he is happy.

**January 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

As we only have enough in the budget to stay in caravan parks four days a week, we are off again to find a free camping spot over the weekend. Thankfully we have already found three sites near Albany which we can alternate between. (Ledge Beach, Torbay Inlet and Muttonbird Island)

This weekend we are going to Muttonbird. Some of the camping guides say that space is limited, and there is really only room for one or two caravans on sloping sites, but we are fortunate as we can park in the carpark near the island.

As with Ledge Point, there are spectacular views of the bay. It's a pity the fishing is still off, but it would be hard to find a more pleasant spot to spend the weekend.

There is a short walk down to a nice swimming beach, one thing you get used to in this area is walking down to the beach, and trudging back up again.

I'll miss the mobility and the ability to find nice campsites when we are both working again, but we need to build up our savings. We will probably stay in this area (if we both get work) until Sam passes away, that way we don't have to worry about him and the heat up north.



Muttonbird Island

**January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We are now staying at Albany Tourist Village, and have managed to get a discounted weekly rate of \$70, which is above my budget of \$60, but if I take into account the fuel used by the generator, the fuel used to reach free campsites, and the extra gas which would be used by the fridge, it is just within acceptable limits.

After applying for more than thirty jobs in the area we have not had any luck yet. Belle has had one interview for the medical records position at Albany Hospital, and she is still waiting to find out if she has made the second round interview.

The normal Albany weather pattern seems to have resumed, rain followed by sunshine, followed by more rain, and so on.

As we will be in the caravan park for the next few weeks we have put the annexe up which doubles our living space.

Sam is still tottering around, but I don't think he will improve.

**January 25<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Poor old Sam had a bad seizure today. I was taking him for a short walk and he just keeled over and began to have spasms. He seems to have recovered now, but this is probably the beginning of the end for him.

He had another seizure later in the day, but has since been ok. We will take him to the vet as soon as Australia Day is over and have him checked out.

**January 27<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

We took Sam to see the vet this morning, and she thinks (as I do) that he may have a brain tumour. We have some medication to control the fits and we will see how he gets on over the next few days.

Tried fishing from the town jetty in the afternoon and managed to catch some herring and a small trevally. The trevally was a bit small and we don't like herring so they all were put back.

**January 28<sup>th</sup> 1997 (Wednesday)**

I think Sam is going down hill rapidly. Belle wants to keep him going, but he can hardly walk now and I don't think it's fair to keep him alive for our sakes, it's my job to look after his best interests and he has very little quality of life left.

I will make a decision in the morning.



Sam

**January 29<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

It is exactly three months to the day since we said goodbye to Lucy. Today it was Sam's turn. I am hard pressed to write an epitaph for such an extraordinary companion. Belle and I have been married for sixteen and a half years, and Sam has been with us for over fifteen. The hole he leaves in our lives can never be filled, but our memories of him will last until we die.

I will miss him in more ways than I can ever hope to express. He had a presence, a sense of self that I have never known in any other dog. The fact that we knew he was close to the end didn't make his passing any easier.

I know the pain we feel now will gradually subside, life will go on and things will return to 'normal' but with the passing of our dearest companions, part of us dies too. The last links to our old lives have gone, gone but never forgotten.

Goodbye Sam, goodbye Lucy, I hope you are together again wherever you may be, and I hope one day we will all be together again.

**February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

The last few days have been difficult, but our lives are gradually returning to normal. We have been away from the bus as much as possible to try and keep our minds off losing Sam.

Now it is time to get on with life and start thinking about what to do next. Neither of us really want to stay in Albany now that Sam has gone. Even though he was only here with us for two weeks, the town will always hold sad memories for us from now on.

It is too early to head north, and we have to wait for our job applications in the area to be processed. We have decided that we will slowly make our way to Karratha in about four weeks time if no work comes along here.

**February 8<sup>th</sup> 1997 (Sunday)**

The winds of fate are about to move us on again. None of the work we have applied for in Albany has eventuated, but we have found something which may be suitable based in Mandurah. The work involves cleaning pillows for hotels and hospitals. A mobile home is provided, and the work will take us on a circuit through Kalgoorlie, Esperance, Albany and towns in between.

It doesn't pay that much (\$1.50 per pillow) but the mobile home, fuel and maintenance are supplied, so it is a way to bring in some money and travel at the same time.

If it works out we will have to leave our bus in Mandurah for three months while the job takes us around. We are leaving Albany today and are due in Mandurah on Tuesday.

We are still missing Sam very badly, getting away from Albany should help. My mind keeps playing tricks on me. The other day coming back from town I started thinking that we should hurry back as Sam would be waiting to go out, and then reality returned and I remembered he had gone. Another time when Belle was acting a bit strange (as she is wont to do sometimes) I was almost about to say something to Sam before realising he was no longer there. As we were packing up, Belle saw his water dish and started to cry. He has left such a hole in our lives.

**February 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

We attended an interview for the pillow cleaning job today, and are waiting to be contacted about starting some training. If we get the job it will mean living in a very poorly appointed Mazda 3500 motorhome while we are working. Most of the area in the bus is taken up by machinery, and I don't think Belle is too keen on it. If we don't get a phone call then I'm not going to bother following it up as there should be some work coming up at Kailis in Exmouth, and I think we would both prefer to be there.

The last two nights have been free camping again at Heron Point. We may as well make the most of it before the site is closed.

The weather is hot again, funny what a huge difference 400 km makes. In Albany we had the heater on at night and here we can't sleep for the heat.

We have run into Julie & Neville in a bus called 'Tardis' from Victoria. They have just come down from Karratha and are waiting out the hot weather in the south west.

**February 13<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We have done two days training for 'The Pillow Cleaner' and feel ready to take the work on ourselves now. We are waiting for a phone call to confirm this so we can start to get organised.

Yesterday we went up into Perth in the company's truck and had a full days work refurbishing pillows. The work is relatively easy and we shouldn't have any trouble taking off and doing it ourselves now. I am not willing to do any more free work in any case, so it's up to the owner of the business to make up his mind.

We are still at Heron Point and the weather is still hot.

There are very few crabs around now, most have already been taken from the estuary. The best time for crabbing seems to be just before and after Christmas.

**February 18<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

We are still waiting for the pillow cleaning job to get organised. We have been told that some work will be arranged for us in the metro area first, but I am still waiting to hear back from the owner. If he hasn't organised anything by mid March we will head for Exmouth.

Meanwhile we have been making friends among the other campers here. A couple of nights ago we were invited over for dinner, and later went out prawning. Last night Belle produced a large batch of chilli crabs, Joyce (one of the many people we have made friends with here) made fried rice and noodles, and about fifteen people gathered around for dinner.

Everyone is so friendly on the free campsites, it's a pity there isn't the same level of togetherness in caravan parks.

Another bus (Highway Wanderer) with Robbie & Kerri called in for a couple of days, and we also met Laurie & Janet in a Mazda 3500, and John Davis from Esperance in a Winebago on a Ford Trader chassis.

We have had a lot of fun with John, prawning, catching mullet, and listening to stories of his extraordinary life. John was in No. 2 Commando during World War II, and spent many years in Africa building bridges, factories etc. He has led the kind of life that the rest of us can only dream about, and he is still living a life of adventure on the road.

Wednesday is the night people are allowed to put out set nets to catch fish. I helped John with his net and we had a good feed of mullet, which we filleted and smoked. Mullet isn't much good unless it is smoked as it is a very oily fish.



Heron Point

**February 20<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

The old 500w generator packed up today. I pulled it apart twice trying to get it going again, but it was wasted effort. In the afternoon we went into town and purchased a new Honda 1kva (\$1100.00) which we should have done in the first place. This puts a big dent in our savings as it represents about 20% of what we have remaining, but it looks as though the pillow cleaning job may eventuate so we should be able to put the money back. At least the new generator runs our microwave.

Crabbing is much better at night now. the crabs are all digging in during the day, and won't come out unless you tread on them. At night there are still plenty to be caught, but they are a nuisance when we are trying to catch prawns. Up to 30 at a time come up in the prawn nets on some nights.

**March 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

It's hard to believe but we have been at Heron point for four weeks. The job with The Pillow Cleaner didn't work out. We had done two days training and had an agreement that the next job would be paid work. We didn't hear anything for over a week and then out of the blue we were asked to do another three days training. At this stage we smelled a rat and lodged a complaint with the CES. Needless to say we won't be having anything further to do with that business.

It turns out that it is illegal for companies to ask prospective employees to do training without pay in any case.

We are getting ready to head north again. The prawning season starts at Exmouth on April 1<sup>st</sup> and we have been told that there is a good chance of getting work. Come Monday we will be on the move again, but we will be sad to say goodbye to the friends we have made at Heron Point.

**March 9<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

The excitement of moving on was tinged with sadness as we left our new found friends behind.

After a brief stop off at our house to swap the cars over again and do a bit of shopping, we were on our way north again.

We pulled in at a rest area just south of the Jurien turn off. There is a large parking area well back from the east side of the road. There is plenty of room and shade and in winter a small creek runs by the campsite.

After a short sleep we were up and moving in the early hours of the morning. Not long after getting going a tyre on the trailer disintegrated and we had to unload the car and drive both vehicles to Eneabba where we waited for the petrol station to open.



The blown tyre and damaged trailer

**March 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

After fitting a second hand tyre (\$50) and having a shower at the petrol station (\$1 each) we made our way to Gladstone for another overnight stop. The track into the campsite is 6km of the worst corrugations I have ever driven across. Once we arrived at the beach we were confronted with small tracks bordered by hundreds of wooden posts.

I don't know what idiot was responsible for the design of this area but they should be made to park a bus and trailer in it and then have to get out again. Smaller vehicles should have no trouble parking, but for us it was a nightmare.

There is a groin out into the sea which may be a good fishing spot, but we didn't have the time to try. After parking and filling the generator the tin Jerry can developed a leak and we had to transfer fuel to the other plastic containers.

Once you arrive at Gladstone there are good facilities available including shelter and toilet, but the road in needs grading, and half the wooden posts need pulling out.

Supposedly there is a \$1 per night charge for the area, but I wouldn't pay due to the state of the road in and the difficulty parking once we got there.

The turn off to Gladstone is just south of the WM 20 (Wooramel 20km) sign on the west side of the road. The track in is impassable when wet.



Gladstone

**March 11<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Today we arrived at Bush Bay (about 50km south of Carnarvon), Again the road in isn't too smooth, but at least here there is a big turning area. New Beach to the south isn't really suited for large vehicles, and there were too many sand flies about to camp there.

We have settled down early and are waiting for the tide to go out as we have been told that cockles are easy to find in the sand.

... later ...

Well the tide didn't go out all that much and we found no trace of cockles. I really can't find much to say about Bush Bay except that it is isolated and quiet. We have another unwanted passenger, a mouse, which is smart enough to steal the cheese out of the trap, but I'll get him eventually.



Bush Bay

**March 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

We arrived in Carnarvon early and booked in for two nights at Star Trek Caravan park. The fees are \$15 per night, and there is a nice enclosed swimming pool. When we went for a swim we were joined by a small snake which was summarily dispatched by the park staff. A small reminder that life in the north west isn't quite the same as down south.

The bank balance is down to about \$3700 now and I am starting to really worry about getting work. I hope there is something for us at Kailis or we are in real trouble.





Carnarvon

**March 14<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Left mosquito ridden Carnarvon behind and made for Minilya. The bus is overheating again, probably the radiator needs flushing. Stopped off at the campsite by the Minilya River and waited for the temperature to drop before heading on to Exmouth.

I haven't got anything complementary to say about Carnarvon. It isn't very attractive, and I would prefer the campsite at Quobba. Monroe's Banana Plantation was nice, very tropical, but otherwise the town hasn't got much to offer. The Gascoyne River is usually dry above the surface (an aquifer runs below the river bed and that's where the plantations get water for irrigation.) so there isn't any picturesque riverbank to look at.

Once we were off the main highway there were plenty of kangaroos, sheep and goats to avoid. Thankfully I didn't hit any but there were several near misses. Belle has started driving again, she has got the hang of the gears going up, but not coming down.

We arrived at Learmonth after dark and immediately went down on the jetty to fish. Apart from a bite off and one that shook the hook loose, there I didn't get any further bites. Probably sharks in any case and not really worth catching.



At Learmonth jetty

**March 15<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Arrived at Kailis to find that the manager is being replaced and no accommodation had been arranged for us despite being told we would be able to stay during a phone conversation last Thursday. We had no alternative but to stay at a caravan park in Exmouth until we can sort out what is going on.

With \$80 rent to the caravan park, approximately \$22 for electricity, \$85 for the van at home and \$143 for the mortgage (total \$330) the \$290 a week we get from Social Security is gone before we even think about food etc.

The weather is hot and humid. Spent most of the day in the bus with the air-conditioner on.



Looking down at Kailis from Charles Knife Canyon rim.

**March 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

We went down to Kailis to fill in formal applications for work and Belle was told that she is guaranteed work. It doesn't look like we will be able to stay on site though, which is a shame. They seem to give preference to tourists over workers wanting accommodation which is hard to understand. Maybe they make more out of the tourists. In any case it seems a lame idea.

Went fishing at Learmonth. Caught a squid and a few nice bream but nothing big.

While we were in Carnarvon we bought some Aroma essences from Woolworths Liquor, and these mixed with sugar and water produce different alcoholic drinks. They are really quite good, and relatively cheap. A litre and a half can be produced for about \$10, and the drinks imitate well known brands like Kaluha, Grand Manier etc.

**March 19<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

We joined the local library and organised a post office box for mail. The weather is still hot and humid. The air conditioner in the bus is essential for sleeping at night.

**March 20<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Went fishing at Learmonth again. Not much around today. Caught some bait fish and one legal sized bream but nothing else.

The bus has been invaded by a mouse again, but this one didn't last long. Ants and mice are the biggest pests while we are travelling.



Yellowfin & Black Bream

**March 21<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Nothing really happened today, but for the first time I think I am ready to talk about the reasons why we finally made the decision to leave Perth.

For a long time (16 years), Belle had worked for State Health, first as a Laboratory Assistant, and later as a Medical Scientist after she had studied part time while she was working and looking after our home. She was very happy in her work and very committed, but after taking on a new boss in T.B. and training him to a level of competency, she was discarded. After transferring to another lab, (when she had no other choice) where she was subjected to what I regard as mental torture, she reached a point where she came home and beat herself against the wall in our hallway, and I had to physically restrain her to stop her from causing herself real harm.

After seeking help from her union and receiving none, after reaching a point where her every action was questioned by supposed superiors and after 16 years of dedicated service, she was forced to leave her employment. Within four weeks of my wife leaving this department, three other staff members with a combined total of over forty years experience resigned. My wife made sure that the C.E.O. of PathCentre knew why she had resigned, but he did not even have the courtesy to respond to her letter.

Our belief is that a round of redundancies were planned and that every employee who resigned at that time was a bonus to the \*\*\*\* who ran the place.

For myself, well I must admit that I have had real problems staying in one job for too long. In the last fifteen years I have had fifteen jobs. Some have lasted as much as three years, others have lasted as little as six weeks.

My problem is that I get bored with work once I stop learning new things. I have had jobs that were very stressful and demanding, but the last job at Motorcharge was so boring I could have cried. Sitting in a grey cubicle all day where no one talks to you and staring at a screen looking for errors that some other clot has made, is not my idea of living. How I managed to last six months in that place is beyond me. The only solace I had was a half hour lunch break which I used to spend walking or sitting in a nearby park. Not that Motorcharge in itself is a bad company, in fact far from it. I think the stress of organising the bus and having to deal with a job that didn't suit me led me to a state of desperation.

My other problem is that I don't suffer fools gladly, and some of the twits I have had to work for in the past shouldn't be put in charge of a compost heap, far less running a business.

Apart from hassles at work we had a couple of really thoughtless ignorant neighbours. One with a stereo who wanted the whole suburb to listen to his awful choice of music and the other little thug with two large very noisy dogs, who refused to keep them quiet.

My advice is don't waste your time complaining to councils about dog noise as they couldn't care less. I even went as far as the minister for local government, but surprise, surprise he didn't have to put up with being woken up several times a night, so it wasn't his problem either.

Belle and I were earning over \$80,000.00 per year between us. We had an air conditioned home, pool, two cars and a boat, but we were so miserable I think if we had not found a way to escape we may have ended up taking our own lives. It may seem odd to others, that people with seemingly so much could be so miserable, but that's the way it was for us. Money didn't bring happiness, all it did was tie us into a way of life that we had come to despise.

If I sound bitter about all this, well I guess I am. When we bought our home over seven years ago the street was quiet, and we enjoyed coming home at the end of a days work, and despite pressures at work we were happy and relatively content. We eventually reached a point where we dreaded coming home, all due to stupid ignorant people whose only thought in life is what they want and to hell with everyone else.

Well enough of me and my soapbox. We are finally free of that kind of trash. Now if some of them pull in next to us we can move away overnight.

#### **March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

We went fishing again in the afternoon. I caught a small shark and a sea perch, but apart from some more bait fish there still isn't a lot around. We really need a small boat.

#### **March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Unfortunately our air conditioner is playing up. It works well for a while but gives up after a few hours. Looks like time to shop for a new one. This is going to play hell with my budget.

#### **March 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

We had a new air conditioner fitted today (\$925.00 installed), this is the last major item we can spend money on for a while. At least it works well and cools more of the bus than the old one did.

#### **March 25<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

It's now time to step up the campaign for some work. With all this money going out we have to get some coming in before we go broke. Belle still hasn't found out when she starts at Kailis, hopefully we will know by the end of the week.

#### **March 27<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Went fishing at Learmonth jetty again today. We didn't have any luck but other people on the jetty were pulling in mackerel, queen fish, trevally and squid. We were both a bit brassed off about not catching any ourselves.

We will have to get a bait jig and catch some of the small bait fish that hang around the jetty. That's what the locals use and the results are good.

**March 28<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

We finally moved on to our permanent site in the caravan park today. It's good to have the annexe up and everything set up properly. Belle has to go down to Kailis on Monday for an introductory session. I'll go down and do some fishing at Learmonth while she is there.

**March 30<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Belle went to Kailis in the morning and was taken through the factory and given an overview of the work. She will get \$11.20 an hour plus overtime if the season is good enough to provide for more than 40 hours a week. There is also a zone allowance of just over \$20 a week.

While she was at Kailis I went fishing at Learmonth again and managed to bag some squid and a queen fish. Finally some good fishing!

We now have a bait jig and having local bait seems to make all the difference for catching the large predatory fish that hang around the jetty. I have started using live bait, a practice I have avoided in the past as I regard it as cruel, but the fish I am targeting won't touch dead bait, so if I want to catch them there isn't much alternative.

Belle starts work next Tuesday so I will have to find a job quickly to avoid being stuck in the bus and bored. Luckily Exmouth is a small town and I can get around on my push bike if Belle needs the car. Kailis is 20km south of town, but she may be able to join a car pool.

**March 31<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Fishing yet again at Learmonth. This time I seem to have hit on how to catch queen fish. I caught three in quick succession and filled up our small esky. I continued to catch them but had nowhere to put them so they all went back into the sea. I must have caught about ten in all, and we had fish and chips again for dinner.



Queenfish

**April 4<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

On the way down to Learmonth the car collided with an emu. Sadly the bird didn't survive and we have lost a headlight. Fishing on Thursday was quite good with a haul of mangrove jacks and bream, and today we caught a few more of each. Hooked a huge queen fish but after four spectacular jumps it broke free. Still it was a thrill just to watch such a big fish jump.

**April 6<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Fishing again, yes that's about all there is to do up here. The full moon is only a few days away and as usual the fish are getting harder to catch. Brought home three bream, but nothing very exciting. There are dozens of long toms around and they are a real pest.

Took the car in for a quote on fixing the damage.

**April 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Belle's first day working at Kailis. She had 6 hours work and seemed to get on ok. I spent the morning going round the shops leaving my details in case some work comes up there. The trouble with this place is that there aren't that many businesses in town. It won't be long before I have applied to all of them.

Kailis sells what they call broken prawns, to it's employees at \$8 per kilo. Belle is crazy about prawns so it's no surprise that she brought some home today.

**April 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Today we had a good downpour of rain. Not something that would normally rate a mention, but up here rain is so infrequent that when it finally comes it breathes new life into the area.

We sat on Learmonth jetty trying to catch a feed of fish and getting absolutely soaked. We did come home with a couple of bream and a mangrove jack, but it was pretty quiet.

Belle doesn't go back to work until Tuesday due to the Easter break and the full moon. The prawn boats always stay in during the full moon as prawns seem even more elusive than normal.

**April 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Fishing again! Yup, that's all we seem to do when there isn't anything like work to keep us occupied. The full moon is wreaking it's normal havoc on the fishing and we were lucky to come home with a couple of bream and a mangrove jack. I did pull in a small queen fish but let it go.

The tourists are starting to turn up now and crowding the jetty. It was nice having the place to ourselves, I guess I know how the real locals feel about the rest of us 'blow ins'. Some twit just had to listen to the football with his car radio turned up full blast. Murphy's rule 256: 'Find a nice peaceful spot to fish and some wanker will turn up with a radio and spoil it.'

If you're tired of all the 'fishing' entries in the journal you will have to look for the entry made when we finally leave Exmouth – but as yet that should be a long time in the future.

The weather is turning hot again after a couple of days of overcast skies and rain.



Mangrove jacks, Bream and Long Toms.

**April 18<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Tourist season is starting to fill the town up now. The weather is starting to cool down and the cold water in the showers is actually cold at last. I may even have to consider using the hot water soon. I still haven't found a job, but there may be something coming up at Kailis. We are still hoping to get into the Kailis caravan park as it is \$30 a week cheaper than where we are now.

**April 19<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

I finally managed to find some work, even though it's only casual. I was on a run with an Exmouth Pearls boat today and did a job called shell chipping.

Exmouth Pearls is 30km south of the town, which means getting up at 5am, yaawnnn.

The day starts at 6.15am when the crew boards a dinghy and is taken out to the larger boats moored off shore. After a long (very noisy) ride out to the strings of oyster lines, the boat hooks a line on to two rollers on the port side. The boat moves slowly up the line retrieving each cage as it moves forward. Each of the trays contain six large oysters and it is the shell chippers job to clean any barnacles and other shell fish off the outside of the oyster shell. First the tray is sent through a cleaning machine which takes off the 'fire weed' which grows on the cages, then the tray is set upon by four shell chippers with chisels who strip off all the growth on the outside.

With chisels and bits of shell flying everywhere it's a wonder no one gets stabbed or has shell grit in their eyes, but somehow the work gets done without any harm. My main problem is that loads of gunk gets on to my glasses and I can't see too well. There isn't a lot of point in cleaning them each time as every tray deposits it's share. At least I managed not to cut anyone's fingers off.



Pearl oysters in their trays

Each line contains between fifty and a hundred trays with six oysters in. We cleaned three lines which equates to about 600 oysters. It was a long tiring day and I got home about 5pm. At \$100 a day for casual workers it just makes the Exmouth average of \$10 per hour. I am hoping there will be more work available in the next week or so, but I just have to sit back and wait. It's not the sort of job I would want to do every day, but three or four runs a week would come in handy.

**April 21<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Out on the pearling boat again today. This time as well as shell chipping I did some line cleaning and tray scraping. I got to find out first hand why fire weed is so named. The slightest touch on the skin causes immediate pain. We were short two crew members so the work was much harder and we didn't get back on to shore until after 5pm. I am totally exhausted.

**April 27<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

No more work has eventuated from the pearling boats, but apparently the cleaning has just about been completed. Kailis are just about to go after tiger prawns and are expecting catches to increase from 4 tonnes a day to 10 tonnes a day. There may be some work coming up at the factory so I'm crossing my fingers again. I spoke to Daryl (the factory Manager) and I am on the short list for work so I hope they catch more prawns than they expect.

A couple of days ago Belle caught her first spotted mackerel. It nearly pulled her off the end of the jetty, but she managed to land it by herself. The sand flies are so bad at Learmonth that we have given up going there for a while. I have been fishing at Bundegi but only managed to catch a large dart. Still it's the biggest fish I've caught since we have been here.



Large Dart

**April 30<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Well, so much for optimism. No work has come out of Kailis (for me) even though they have had catches of up to 10 tonnes. Belle is having trouble keeping up to pace as she has to examine each prawn for defects. Her eyesight isn't exactly 20/20, in fact far from it, and doing the job properly takes her longer than other workers.

We are still going broke, even though this month we came closest to breaking even. In other months we lost between \$1500 and \$2200, this time we lost just over \$300.

We have to start thinking about moving on if I can't find something soon. Even with Belle working we can't afford to stay here too long, it is imperative that we both have work.

At least we have finally got the car booked in to have the headlight replaced. Let's just hope it doesn't take as long to repair it as it did to get the work approved.

**May 7th 1998 (Thursday)**

We have decided to move to Karratha and are now waiting for the repairs to the car to be completed. How long we will have to wait is anyone's guess. We were told the parts would be here yesterday but they weren't and they haven't arrived today either.

Belle stopped work at Kailis on Tuesday, this was after getting very sick on Sunday. The work is too much for her and as I can't find anything here, it just isn't worth staying any longer.

The bus is packed and ready to go so as soon as the car is ready we are off.

At least Karratha has a decent shopping centre. We are hoping to free camp for a while at Cleaverville Beach and slow down the rate at which we are losing money.

**May 8th 1998 (Friday)**

We left Exmouth early but stopped off at Learmonth to do some fishing before we left the area. We managed to catch a couple of queen fish which we let go and a couple of trevally for dinner.

We spent the night at a roadside pull-in and woke early to resume the drive to Karratha.



Belle with some small queenfish

**May 9th 1998 (Saturday)**

Everything was ok until mid morning when the engine started overheating again. We stopped every few kilometres to replace water which boiled off, but by the time we reached Fortescue I was too worried about cracking the engine head so we were towed the last 100km into Karratha.

\$527.50 later we arrived in Karratha and booked in at the Mooligan Road caravan park – big mistake – this is a caravan park for workers and is not a pleasant place to stay, and at \$18 a night it was a real rip-off.

Our CMCA insurance will pay for \$500 of the towing bill so at least we don't have to worry about that.

**May 12th 1998 (Tuesday)**

We have now moved to Cleaverville Beach, a free campsite about 32km out of Karratha. As usual the council is trying to close it down and is telling travellers that it is illegal to camp here. Everyone here is ignoring the bombastic little twits so we intend to stay here as long as we can to save money.

We have met up with Blue and Skeeta again (we first met them in Exmouth) and everyone here seems very friendly. There is one other bus here and several caravans. Everyone gets together in the evenings for a chin wag, and like Heron Point, people are much more sociable than in caravan parks.

We will use this as a base and go into Karratha to look for work.

It was hot and wet last night but the clouds have gone away and the breeze is blowing nicely through the bus. As I sit here typing I can hear the waves rushing up the beach which is about 50 metres away.

One of the intriguing things about this place is the number of hermit crabs in the area. There must be thousands of them and they all come out at night in search of food.



Cleaverville – we would eventually come back here many times.

**May 15<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Over the last couple of days we have been exploring the area around Karratha. Point Samson and Wickham aren't much to rave about but the old settlement at Cossack is picturesque.

The annexe on the bus is up again so we expect to stay here for a few weeks at least.

As usual the work is staying one jump ahead of us. When we were in Bunbury there was plenty of work in Albany, when we went to Albany it moved to Karratha, and now we are here there is plenty of work showing up in Kununurra. Maybe one day we will arrive in the right town at the right time.

The days here are pleasant but the nights are still and humid. Today we have had a lot of rain but I went out onto the rocks and caught a large trevally. It's the biggest fish I've caught so far and the fillets will be enough for six meals.

Tomorrow we plan to go back to Cossack and try to catch some mud crabs off the old wharf.



Cossack

**May 19<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

We didn't catch any mud crabs, or anything else interesting either.

It's been raining again and everything is damp and unpleasant. Sleeping is very difficult in these conditions, I can't begin to imagine how horrible it gets up here in the hot months.

Yesterday we spent most of our time in Karratha getting various chores done and applying for jobs. We also did the laundry and found that the local laundry-mat charges \$4 per wash and \$1 per five minutes on the tumble dryers. Needless to say we won't be going there again – it cost \$12 to get two loads of washing done.

Today we are off on a free tour of Robe River Iron, and we also get a guided tour of Cossack.

...later...



The tour was very good. We were taken round on an air conditioned bus and shown the old settlement at Cossack, then out to Robe River's operations at Cape Lambert. The loading facility there is huge, and the ore jetty is the second longest/highest in the southern hemisphere.

We caught up with another couple who we first met at Heron Point. The numbers of people at Cleaverville are steadily growing as the cool season approaches.

#### **May 20<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Had another go at fishing this morning but there wasn't much around and the tide was falling too rapidly. When I got back to the bus, I received a call for an interview tomorrow for work selling computers. I'll cross my fingers that we have finally turned the corner and can start putting money back in the bank.

We will also call in to Robe at Wickham as the driver of our tour yesterday told Belle that they may need lab assistants in the near future.

#### **May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

The interview yesterday seemed to go well and I should know about the job on Monday. It would be nice to get back into sales for a while and with the large companies here I expect commissions would be quite healthy. But I won't start counting my chickens just yet.

The trailer was showing signs of rust so I have spent the last couple of days applying Fisholine and Kill Rust. That should keep it rust free for a while. The only trouble is it was expensive (\$57 all up), but the salt air here really gets to any exposed metal.

I have finally managed to rig up a shower off the back of the bus. We purchased a shower kit yesterday for \$75 and I have set up a screen under the air-conditioner. We run the pump from a large basin so the water can be recycled, that way we can stand under the shower for ages without wasting water.

Unfortunately the water from Karratha is horrible, it's like drinking swimming pool water and after a shower you feel all sticky. The water at Roebourne is much better so as long as we are at Cleaverville we will have to try and fill our tanks there.

One good thing is that the local council have finally decided that they don't have the power to move people away from Cleaverville. There are probably about 20 vans, mobile homes etc here now and I don't think anyone would have moved anyway. At night it's just like a little town in the middle of nowhere, all the lights from the vans make the campsite look quaint.

Again I have to comment on the difference between free campsites and caravan parks. Here everyone says hello, and we all keep an eye on the area when people go into town. Caravan parks are horrible places, no one wants to talk to each other and no one mixes.

#### **May 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Yesterday I went out with Blue in his dinghy. His motor has packed up, and I have an engine but no boat so we teamed up and went along the coast to the nearest creek. I dropped some crab nets but the only mud crabs around were too small to keep. The only thing we caught all morning was a barracuda which grabbed a popper I had out as we motored down to the creek.

Today I went fishing off the rocks again and landed a large remora (sucker fish). They aren't any good to eat so I dropped it back in again.

This is also the first anniversary for the bus. Exactly one year ago today Rex pulled the bus into our driveway and our lives slowly began to change. So far they have changed for the better, even though we still need to settle into work for a while. It has been a long traumatic year in other ways with the loss of our dogs bringing us more than our share of heartache, but we are slowly recovering from that. In four days time we will have been on the road for six months. It's hard to believe that time has gone so quickly.

#### **May 29<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Belle had an interview at Karratha College on Wednesday and as a result has been given a job as a casual lecturer. She will only be working one day a week (6 hours) at first, but at \$35 per hour it's very good money. The only catch is that she will be teaching in ROEBOURNE GAOL ! It will be interesting to see how that turns out but it could open doors to other areas. She has also been contacted by Western Pathology about job sharing which would see her back in her own field as a Medical Scientist again.

My interview doesn't seem to have come to anything which is a real shame. Hopefully there will be something else available through the college, but I have to wait and see. Meanwhile I am still applying for anything else that comes along.

Now that this journal has been going for over twelve months, I find myself going back and reading what was going on, on this date last year. There isn't an entry for May 29<sup>th</sup> but on the 28<sup>th</sup> I took my first driving lesson for a 'B' class license. Driving such a huge vehicle seemed a daunting prospect at the time but since then we have travelled over 8300 kilometres in the bus with only a few minor dents to show for it. The odometer shows 56,000 miles, I wonder how many times that has been wound round in the last 35 years?

We saw some sort of sign being erected at the track leading in to Cleaverville today. I expect the council is up to some mischief. No doubt we will find out sooner or later.

**May 31<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

One of our neighbours (John) lent us his boat today and we were able to go out to an offshore reef and do some fishing. There were plenty of fish biting but the best catch was a large emperor (north-west snapper). Yesterday I caught a small Spanish mackerel off the rocks. Smoked mackerel for dinner yesterday and deep fried snapper today. Who could ask for more?

The sign we saw being erected was, as expected, the council trying to scare people away from Cleaverville. As this is crown land and is supposedly part of a land rights claim by the local Aborigines, they don't have any authority here, so no one is taking a blind bit of notice.



Blue Lined Emperor

**June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Belle had her first day working at Roebourne Gaol today. The work isn't difficult and the pay is good so hopefully it will last for a while.

The weather has turned hot again, and sleep doesn't come easily.

**June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Belle & I borrowed Blue's boat today and tried fishing out on the reef. The water was as flat as I have ever seen it. The water was clear and still, but there weren't anymore nice snapper around. I hooked the largest long tom I have ever seen, it was over 3 feet long.

**June 5<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We had to go into Karratha in the morning and on the way back one of the water container taps got turned on. The car is now sloshing with about 15 litres of water. I will have to leave it open for the next few days to dry it out.

We had a party at our bus tonight. Blue, Skeeta, Jack, Lyn, Hilton, Daphnie, Joy and John all come over for a BBQ. Several caravans and campers are going to pull out shortly so the campsite will seem quite empty. Everyone contributed to the meal and it was a fun night.

I lost count of the number of beers I drank, and we finished the night polishing off Blue's bottle of bourbon. Everyone finally crawled off to bed about half past eleven, that's very late for us as the generators round camp usually go off before 10pm.

**June 6<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

The bait fish have reappeared round the rocks today. Blue & I took the throw net out and caught about a hundred or so. If the bait fish are back it won't be long before the larger fish are back too.

**June 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

We went fishing in John's boat again today. After a fairly ordinary start we came back in with 2 flag perch, 2 bluebone and one sweetlip snapper. A tiring but rewarding afternoon. We discovered that the proper name for bluebone is blue tusk fish.

**June 8<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

One thing dominated today and that was rain. There was a brief but quite severe storm with high wind and bucket loads of rain. Blue's camp was blown about a bit, but we survived without any major problems. Later in the afternoon we walked along the reef collecting octopus for bait. We caught 19, which were then put in the freezer for later use.

Blue & I are planning to take some drop nets out to the creek tomorrow, maybe this time we will get some 'muddies'.

I have had another call from the computer mob I had the interview with, and I have to go and see them again on Wednesday. I'm still not holding my breath.

Five caravans have pulled out of Cleaverville in the last few days, there are only ten campsites left now. The place seems almost deserted.

We'll miss Jack, lyn, Daphnie and Hilton, and happy hour seems to have finally petered out.

**June 9<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Belle went in to work again today, but was lucky to get through as the track out to the main road is getting very soft.

Blue & I went out in his boat and tried crabbing at the creek again. Still no luck. Fishing wasn't much better as I only caught one small queenfish which was thrown back.

The weather was ok on the way down to the creek but it blew up a bit on the way back. It's a good job we came back when we did or we would have had to pull the boat out of the water and walk back.

**June 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

I was due to go in and see about a job in Karratha today, but the track is impassable to 2 wheel drives and we got stuck in mud. Luckily we were still in mobile phone range and Blue came along to pull us out again.



Poor little car coated in mud

**June 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

It's still raining! I hope it stops soon as we're getting cabin fever from being stuck here and unable to get into town.

At least we aren't short of water. In the space of about 20 minutes on Tuesday I collected enough rainwater to fill our tanks and reserve containers.

Apart from the rain there is another new development, it's COLD.

**June 13<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

The rain has finally stopped! I was able to go into Karratha today with Blue in his 4wd. The track is still impassable to 2wd vehicles and will probably take until Monday to dry out. Hopefully there won't be any more rain between now and then.

We had a look at Miaree Pool (another free camp site) but that is just a muddy hole at the moment. There isn't a good level area to park the bus so I doubt we'll ever go there to camp.

Jack, Lyn, Daphnie and Hilton moved to Miaree Pool when they left Cleaverville, but they left only an hour or so before we arrived.



Miaree Pool

**June 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

The rain started again last night, I hope it doesn't last as long as the previous lot.

**June 18<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Woke this morning to glorious blue skies and warm sunshine. We walked along the coast gathering octopus for bait and came across a blue ringed variety. There isn't much chance of confusing them with a normal octopus, they have very bright almost fluorescent markings.

Later we went fishing further along the coast than normal and found a good little bay about a kilometre west where we caught a cod and a mangrove jack. We'll probably try there again tomorrow when we get back from town – presuming we can get through after the rain.

We have been here for nearly six weeks now which has saved us a minimum of \$690 in caravan park fees. Taking into account fuel for the generator and gas for the fridge which has cost about \$135 we are still \$555 ahead.

**June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

The hardyheads (bait fish) have shown up again and I used the throw net to catch enough to last the next few days.

Went fishing at the creek mouth again today. This time we fished on a low tide and found that there were fewer snags and more fish. Belle caught a good size (310mm) black bream, I caught three yellowtail bream and also pulled in a stonefish. Another oddity we caught was something called a banjofish. - We later decided this wasn't a Banjo fish but something called a butter fish.



Butterfish – beware of the poisonous spines

**June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Belle is off to work at the gaol again today, I went down onto the rocks to try my luck fishing but there wasn't anything around.

There are still plenty of campers and caravans pulling into Cleaverville despite the 'camping prohibited' notices. At the moment there are about 18 different camps here and another six or seven along the coast.

I hope the van sells soon as we will then start to get back on top of our vanishing finances.

**June 25<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Belle went into town shopping and I spent the morning out on the rocks fishing. I caught a big catfish which punctured one of my fingers with a spine. The pain lasted for hours but the fish ended up in the fridge so I had my revenge. The clouds are gathering on the horizon again so I have started packing the camp up and loading the rack on the bus. We will wait out the night but if there is any sign of rain in the morning we will move out rather than be trapped up here again.

Blue & Skeeta are leaving in the morning so we went over and sat round the camp fire with a few wines and ports to wish them farewell.

#### **June 26<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

The rain has been threatening all day but so far there have only been a few drops. We pulled out of Cleaverville just in case and are now down at Miaree Pool, Sadly we can't get either phone or television reception here, but we'll only be here for a few days. Blue & Skeeta left Cleaverville today as well. We will miss them a lot.

The big worry with this campsite is flooding, so we will keep a close watch on the weather.

#### **June 27<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

The weather is starting to clear today and it seems that we may not have had to move from Cleaverville in the first place. Oh well the change of scenery is welcome in any case.

The pool is deep and nice to swim in, but I seriously doubt that there are any fish worth catching in it.

We took a trip into Dampier which is 35km if we take a shortcut along the H.I. railway line.

#### **June 29<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Well we are back at Cleaverville again. Miaree Pool was too cramped and too noisy so we packed up this morning and came back.

While it's nice to be back here, it still doesn't feel quite right. Something I have yet to get used to is the transient nature of friendships that we strike up as we travel round. Over the past six weeks, we have had a lot of fun with Blue & Skeeta. Blue & I have been off fishing together. Blue has pulled our car out of the mud a couple of times when we got stuck, he even tuned up the engine of the bus for me. Belle & Skeeta have both cooked meals and we have visited each others camps all the time. We have got drunk together and basically had a lot of fun. Now they've moved on I feel quite sad.

#### **June 30<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

I can't believe it! It's b&\*\*#y well raining again! We are supposed to go for an interview tomorrow at the Karratha Country Club and the way it looks now, the track out will be impassable again. If I didn't know better I'd say there was some kind of conspiracy to prevent me from getting a job. I'm getting sick of this stupid weather, it should be dry until December and all we are getting is rain.

We are in a real catch 22 situation. We can't afford to live in town but we can't seem to get work so that we can afford to move there because the weather keeps forcing us to abandon job interviews.

#### **July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

I have finally got round to making a camp fire outside which we used today to heat water for the shower and then boil some potatoes for dinner. A couple of potatoes cooked in the coals brought back memories of camps with the scouts.

We went over for happy hour with John, Pat, Baz, Buz Jack and Lil. I had a few too many ports and ended up with a hangover. Cooked dinner while I was still under the influence and almost sliced the end of my left index finger... OUCH!

#### **July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

The rain cleared on Wednesday but it is still dull and cloudy. We have to wait a few days for the track to dry out – the council actually closed the road this time as the flooding was so bad. Let's just hope it doesn't rain again before we can get into town and get some supplies.

Today we went fishing at the mouth of the creek and caught a number of black bream. Four of the largest were brought home. One was a real beauty, 34cm long – bigger than the one Belle caught last time ☺

#### **July 11<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Not much going on at the moment. I'm still sending off several job applications a week but nothing has come up. I can't even afford to pay the insurance money on the bus, but as it's \$765 that's hardly surprising.

We've been at Cleaverville for nine weeks now except for the three nights we spent at Miaree Pool. I would have thought that something in the way of a job would have turned up by now.

I am thinking about going back to Perth and bringing the van and boat up here to sell. Since the van isn't generating much interest at home maybe it would be better to sell it here. I want to sell the van, trailer, boat and car all in one go and then buy a small 4x4 and a dinghy. If I can get all the items together it will make it much easier. It will also simplify all the licenses and insurance we have to pay.

Two new busses have pulled in to the campsite recently. Nikki and her two boys are travelling round Australia and have the first bus I have seen with a bonnet. It's very similar to the American school buses you occasionally see on T.V. We haven't met the owners of the second bus yet as they only pulled in yesterday.

Jack & Lil are due over tonight for dinner. Jack hasn't been too well over the past couple of weeks but he's not doing too badly for 80.

**July 16<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

The weather has been a bit dull and drizzly for the past couple of days. Haven't had much luck fishing and the phone is playing up.

We enjoyed the evening with a BBQ over at Nikki's bus. Fish, crabs and prawns were on the menu.

I am now keeping written records of petrol usage for the generator and have found that we use 20 litres per week which is about \$18. Gas is being used at a rate of 9kg every two weeks which is \$7.75 a week, so our power costs are 25.75 a week.

We have now been in this spot for nearly 10 weeks.

**July 21<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Belle has got the contract work again for Karratha College but they have reduced the hours from 6 to 5. Because of the strange way the dole works that means only a drop of about \$6 instead of \$35.

Nikki is leaving tomorrow and she came over in the evening and we roasted chestnuts on the fire and had coffee and port. We will be moving into the spot her bus is now.

**July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

After much stuffing around with the batteries I finally managed to start the bus and we are now right by the beach. We have put the annexe up again as we aren't intending to leave until the end of September.

Fishing has been lousy but we were given a threadfin which was caught in a net so that took care of dinner.

**July 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We were given a nice big gold spot trevally and have invited four people over for a fish curry tonight. Even though I'm not catching any fish myself at the moment it's good to know that they are still out there somewhere.

To try and earn some extra money we have taken to collecting aluminium cans. At 65c per kilo it's going to take a lot of collecting to get a good return but at least it's tax free (as long as we keep quiet about it that is.)

The local council are starting to make grumbling noises about closing the campsite down again but with about 55 caravans along the coast here now they will be pretty unpopular if they try anything.



Big trevally

**July 29<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Today we drove down to Millstream which is about 150km each way, most of it along dirt roads. Millstream is the biggest fraud I have ever encountered. The tourist brochures show palm trees lining the banks of the river which is coated in lily pads. Since CALM have poisoned and cut down all the date palms and the lily pads have gone it's not even as pretty as Miaree Pool which is only a few metres off the highway. The drive down to Millstream was interesting and Python Pool was worth visiting, but Millstream has been ruined and CALM has a lot to answer for.



On the road to Millstream

**July 31<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Went into Karratha to pick up supplies and to get some money out of the bank. We have finally found a dinghy for sale and purchased it today. We have been carrying round the auxiliary engine from the boat at home in the hope of finding something like this so now we can finally make use of it.

We signed a contract with the bank which fixes our home loan repayments for the next five years. At least that should head off any interest rate increases. (Turned out that interest rates only went DOWN after we did this; B&\*\*#Y TYPICAL!)



Our boat – a bit too small

**August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

It's hard to believe how quickly the year is going past. This time last year we were in the final stages of preparing for the test trip to Exmouth. Financially we have a bit of a reprieve as the tax department owes us quite a lot of money. That will keep us going for a few more months and we are hoping to find work at a roadhouse over the wet season.

We took the dinghy out today but didn't have a lot of luck fishing, but after seeing what other people caught I felt a bit better about all the fish we threw back. Some people take some awfully small fish.

**August 5<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Over the past few days we have been out fishing four times. We have had some good catches of blue lined emperor (north west snapper) as well as Spanish flag (stripey or striped perch), big bream and cod. Needless to say that the freezer is now well stocked with fish again.

The water has been calm and clear. Sitting out in the boat enjoying the warm sun and blue sky has been as close to perfect as anyone has a right to expect.

We have met another group of people travelling round in two mobile homes. George, Kathleen, Flo, Bill and Merle headed off to Millstream today but we had dinner and drinks at their campsite last night and it was good fun.

George was an ATC in Perth and knew Ian Sibert's sister Anita.

**August 6<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

I had a job interview at Opposite Lock today but again I'm not holding my breath. We have decided to bring the van up from Perth just in case some work eventuates so I am going down on Saturday to pick it up. Belle was offered a job as a cleaner today but the trouble is she needed to start today and the job is Monday to Friday 5pm to 9pm and since we are out at Cleaverville it isn't practical for her to travel alone out along the dirt track to town.

The bus to Perth leaves at 8.40pm on Saturday so Belle will stay overnight at the Backpacker's hostel (\$15) and drive back to camp in the morning. The trip costs \$139 and takes about 20 hours. I hope to be back either Wednesday or Thursday.

Mum wants to come up and visit so she will come back in the van with me and then book a flight back when she is ready.

**August 8<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Belle & I had dinner in Karratha before I caught the bus down to Perth at 8.40pm. Belle stayed the night at Karratha Backpackers rather than drive back to Cleaverville in the dark.

**August 9<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Arrived in Midland at about 3.15pm and caught a taxi back to Maddington. 20+ hours on the bus and one of the most boring movies I have ever seen. The only plus is that I had a seat to myself from the Exmouth turn off to the Jurien turn off.

**August 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Spent the day running round town getting all the shopping done. Sold the boat to Foothills Marine but only got \$1200 for it. Pretty poor but at least it's out of our hair now.



The Spectron 'money pit'

**August 11<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Left Maddington at 4.30am and drove all day. Mum came along and will stay with us for a week.

Some idiot of a truck driver held me out on the other side of the road as I was overtaking then proceeded to overtake me and slow down again. When I put me high beam on him for a while he let me past and then tailgated with his lights on high beam for a long time. What a twit, no wonder most motorists don't have anything good to say about truckies.

**August 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

Arrived back at Cleaverville at 3.44am (23 hours and 15 minutes after leaving Perth.) The drive up was very tiring but I still managed to find enough energy to take the boat out and go fishing. Only caught one snapper so perhaps it wasn't worth it.

The only problem on the way up were the number of roos on the road between Nanaturra and Karratha. One found out the hard way that jumping in front of a vehicle is a health hazard, but I managed to dodge all the others.

**August 13<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Took mum up to Roebourne, Cossack, Wickham and Point Samson.





Hearson Cove

**August 14<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Took mum to Karratha, Dampier, Burrup etc and also have finally both found work – at Halls Creek! We have until next Thursday before we leave. Mum flies back on Wednesday.

Now that the van is here as well we will both have to drive separate vehicles. I am giving us 5 days to reach Halls Creek which means an average of 280 km per day. We should be able to manage that with no problems.

We have ordered a rack for the van (\$300) so the dinghy can be carried easily. We will pick that up on Wednesday.

Took the boat out again today but only managed to catch one spotted mackerel. Still that's better than nothing.



Dampier

**August 19<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

After meeting everyone at camp and enjoying several 'happy hours' I think mum has had a good time with us and has found out what living in the bus is all about. I think she wasn't terribly impressed with the WC & shower facilities but she seemed to have a good time anyway.

We dropped her off at Karratha airport this morning and then set about our last big shopping spree before we go to Halls Creek.

Mum would have arrived home before we did and it was quite sad to see our campsite all cleared up and packed away. (We have been here since the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, just over three months).

Mum will now have to save her pennies and fly up to stay with us again when we get to Darwin. I'm glad she had the opportunity to stay with us for the last week and really see what life on the road is like.

**August 20<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Took off about 8am and made our way through Port Hedland (I hated the place last time I was there and I hate it even more now!) and on to a camp site by the banks of the DeGrey River.

The area by the river is very pretty and has a lot of shady trees. It's a pity about the crocodile warning signs as the water looked so inviting.



DeGrey River

**August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Last night we camped near the Broome/Derby turn off and today we arrived at Derby. We will spend the day having a look around town and we have booked into the caravan park (\$16) for the night.

The bus is running reasonably well. It got a bit warm yesterday when we stopped at Sandfire and wouldn't re-start until it cooled down, but otherwise it's a case of 'so far so good'.



Derby Jetty

**August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Arrived at Fitzroy Crossing about 11am and booked in at the Crossing Lodge for two nights. (\$18 p.n.) There isn't much to the town, just a few shops and a couple of petrol stations. I expect Halls Creek will be much the same. Fitzroy lodge is definitely the best place to stay in town but the flood level indicators show it can be a bit dodgy in the wet.

The bus started to get quite hot today but didn't boil over. Hopefully there won't be any major problems before we get to Halls Creek.



**August 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Took the CALM boat tour of Gekie Gorge in the morning (\$17.50 per head) it was a bit expensive but we couldn't just go past and not see the gorge.

The bus is dropping a bit of oil which seems to be coming from the cap on top of the engine. With luck it won't stop us getting to Halls Creek tomorrow. We will leave at 4am to avoid driving in the heat of the day. It's already reaching the high 30s here and the bus doesn't like the hot weather. 288km to go.

The lodge has a nice swimming pool which we have made use of during our stay and the air conditioner has been going all through the daylight hours.

**August 25<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Well we got here, but not with out a bit of drama. We had booked in at a caravan park at Old Halls Creek but the track out there was so bad we had to turn back and stay at the caravan park in town. Along the way the bike rack on the trailer snapped off, one of the supports on the trailer snapped in two and God knows what other damage has been done to the bus. The bus kept conking out when we were trying to get back into town and I finally lost my temper and hit the door. That didn't do a lot of good as I now have a broken thumb.

We are having problems with the petrol system in the bus so that will have to be overhauled while we are here as well.

The caravan park in town charges \$90 per week plus power and it's little more than a red bowl of dust – what a huge con! Well at least it has a swimming pool. The site we have been put on has no shade and slopes so I'll have to dig under the wheels to level the bus up. Not a good beginning.



Old Halls Creek

**August 26<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

The computer screen died today (this is being put in on October 1<sup>st</sup> while I have the loan of another monitor – which looks like it's about to die as well.)

**August 27<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

My first day at the roadhouse today, 2pm – 10pm, 8 hours on my feet with no break!

**August 28<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

Belle's first day at the supermarket, she enjoyed it, I didn't enjoy working at the roadhouse much. My feet are so sore.

**August 29<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Today I discovered that shifts at the roadhouse can be from 3.30am to 2pm and 2pm to 11pm – all without a break. If you get an afternoon shift and finish at 11pm and then have a morning shift starting at 3.30am there are only 4.5 hours to try and get some rest. That's plain stupid and probably illegal. There is no written contract so there's no way of telling where you stand.

No too impressed!

**August 30<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Perhaps not surprisingly I am no longer working at the roadhouse. I don't know how these people get away with the stuff they pull on employees these days. When I took the job I was told that the shifts were eight hours not 9 or 10.5 with no break. Well now I'm looking for another job.

**August 31<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

I have managed to find a part-time job at the supermarket where Belle works. I will be doing some after hours cleaning but it's only 10 hours a week. It's better than nothing but I will need to find another job as well.

**September 4<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

No a lot to do around here. Belle works during the day and I work in the evenings. It's boring and hot.

Prices here are about twice those in Perth – a pity the wages don't keep up with the prices.

**September 5<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Belle is coming down with the flu. All the stupid tourists coming through town are coughing all over her at the check-out so it's no wonder she's caught something.

**September 6<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

Belle is very sick today. I work at the supermarket for 4 hours on a Sunday polishing the floors. It's not a bad job and the store has the air-conditioners going all the time but the pads on the polishing machine need replacing. The stupid thing drags me all over the floor. With a damaged thumb I find it very hard to control the machine.

**September 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

Belle was too sick to go to work – a bit embarrassing when she has only been there a week. I went in to help out as they get all their stock delivered on Monday morning.

**September 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

I celebrated my birthday by drinking far too much of a 1125ml bottle of bourbon whisky and then for some reason didn't seem to feel too good.

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

A big break in the journal reflects just how little goes on around here. I have finally managed to get another part-time job, this time as the Coordinator of the Halls Creek Telecentre – a bit more prestigious than the cleaning job but I still have to do both as they only add up to 20 hours a week between the two of them.

**September 25<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We were invited out to dinner by a lady called Margaret who is financial coordinator at one of the Aboriginal corporations in town. She has only been here 9 weeks and has already had enough of the faction fighting and poor work standards. She is leaving in three weeks which is a pity because we got on well and had a very enjoyable evening.

**September 26<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

We got up at 4am and drove up to Kununurra for the day. It's 359km from Halls Creek and only takes about 1 tank of petrol in the car (each way).

The drive to Kununurra is quite spectacular once you pass Turkey Creek. The town is quite large and modern with REAL shops (we spent \$275 on groceries to avoid buying stuff in Halls Creek for a while.)

Although we stayed overnight we didn't have much of a chance to look around the area. It is much more humid here than at Halls Creek.



Ivanhoe Crossing

**September 27<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Sunday)**

On the way back to Halls Creek we stopped off at Turkey Creek (Warmun) roadhouse and bumped into Nikki and her boys again. She has been making her way along the coast and sounds like she has been having a good time in Broome and Derby for the last few weeks.

We have had a look at Old Halls Creek – not much there, and Caroline Pool, which is almost dry, as well as China Wall and were not very impressed with any of them. When we can afford it we want to book a flight over Wolf Creek Crater and the Bungle Bungles. A place called Sawpit Gorge has also been recommended.



Ant Hill (Termite mound) near Halls Creek

**October 1<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

My impressions of Halls Creek to date: hot and getting hotter, dusty, remote, expensive and the caravan park is just over the road from the hotel so when we aren't being assaulted by noise from bands we get the enchanting sound of drunken Aborigines fighting in the streets at night.

Temperatures in the bus have reached 49C and are currently 35.8 at the front (furthest from the air-conditioner), 27C in the bedroom which is right next to the air-conditioner and 33.2C in the middle of the bus with the air-conditioner on.

**October 8<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Time slips by but nothing much happens here. the big event of the day was a few drops of rain last night and some clouds today which kept the temperature down to about 34C (Perth recorded 24C today).

Belle finally lost her temper with one of the YADAs today (what's a YADA – yet another drunken Aborigine.) He came into the store asking to get some money out of his account and Belle explained that he had to make a \$10 purchase before funds could be taken out using EFTPOS. He got abusive and started swearing at her non-stop so she threw him out of the shop – GOOD! The drunks around town are a real pain and need a good kick in the pants. Why the booze outlets are allowed to sell grog to the Aborigines is beyond me, perhaps the politicians think that death from alcohol abuse is the quickest way to get them off of welfare.

#### **October 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Well the cleaning job I was doing at Super Value has gone by the wayside now. I have ended up getting a hernia and when I saw the local doctor today he said I had to stop putting stress on my abdomen. It's a nuisance as the remedy is considered elective surgery and I may have to wait until we get to Darwin to get it fixed - if I can wait that long and nothing bursts inside.

Meanwhile I have to be careful not to make it any worse. At least I still have the job at Telecentre – which still may get increased funding for more hours.

The weather just keeps on getting hotter and the air conditioner is hardly ever off now. The clouds are beginning to build up but there isn't enough rain at the moment. When the 'wet' finally starts the temperatures drop by as much as 10C - so I am told.

This town has been pure bad luck for us so far. Even though we have managed to find work, so many things have gone wrong that the money we are making is chewed up by the repairs.

This is a list of the problems we have had since we first arrived:

- 1)3 welds on the trailer broke
- 2)Windscreen on the bus cracked
- 3)Windscreen on the van cracked
- 4)Computer screen broke
- 5)Electrical element in the fridge failed
- 6)Radio in the van stopped working
- 7)Annexe roof ripped
- 8)Printer broke down
- 9)Tail pipe fell off van
- 10) Starter motor in the van is playing up
- 11) Left rear tyre on the van has a slow puncture
- 12) Air-conditioner belt in the van has come loose
- 13) Bus not running properly on petrol
- 14) Broke my thumb (my fault but it still happened here)
- 15) Got a hernia

(Note: little did I know just how bad things were going to get or I would have packed up and gone at this stage)

Apart from all this we still need to get the trailer light fixed (broken since Eneabba), two new tyres for the bus and the trailer has to be re-registered. We also need to re-insure the bus and the van and register the change of ownership of the dinghy before we move on again.

The only thing I have managed to put aside money for is the computer screen and I am hoping the replacement I have ordered will arrive some time next week. (How am I writing this? I'm borrowing a screen from the Telecentre.)

#### **October 21<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

I received my new screen today, it came from Adelong Computers in Sydney - they were cheaper than anyone in W.A. and only charged \$20 freight. The cost all up was \$295.00 as opposed to \$375 plus freight from Perth.

Today was actually cool, I was able to sit out in the annexe during the afternoon and the air conditioner only had to go on when I cooked dinner.

#### **October 29<sup>th</sup> 1998**

Today marks one year since we lost Lucy. I still dream about the dogs sometimes and in a way that brings them back to me if only for a short time. We still miss them both so much.

#### **November 6<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

The weather is getting wetter. Days are still hot but we regularly get thunderstorms at night now. We lashed out tonight and went over to the hotel for a meal. The place is surprisingly up-market and has a good menu. We ended up having Atlantic pink salmon and a couple of bottles of bubbly.

Next week I start working 20 hours a week so that will help the finances a bit.



Little Panton River flooding Highway One

**November 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

One of the biggest problems with living in Halls Creek (besides the never ending heat) is the boredom. There is nothing in the town besides the pub that could be classed as a recreation facility. It's probably little wonder that the Aborigines get drunk and start fights, it's the only way they have to liven up mind numbing boredom.

We have finally saved up enough money to pay the insurance on the house in Perth. The next hurdle is the insurance on the bus which has been uninsured for nearly six months now. I used to wonder why people didn't insure their homes etc now we are on restricted incomes it's not so easy to come up with \$675 for the bus, \$212 for the house structure, \$235 for contents, \$517 for the van, \$364 for the car and whatever it's going to be for the dinghy and engine - a total of over \$2000 a year. So far we only have the house structure and Belle's car insured.

The Telecentre has had the long planned expansion finished so I now have more room at work and we now have a total of 3 computers available. Although my hours of work have officially been increased the funding hasn't arrived to pay for it. I hope it will turn up soon.

**November 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

After a week of stinking hot weather it has finally started to rain today. I was so impressed I took the camera out and took some footage. It has been raining on and off for about 7 and a half hours now and we have only had the air conditioner on for about three hours during the day.

It looks like the Telecentre may move to new premises before Christmas and we will be able to park the bus there. That will save us about \$15 a week as we will share the rent of \$75 a week (we are currently paying \$90 a week). The only minus is that we will lose access to the swimming pool.

We had been hoping that the house in Perth would be taken over by Kate (John's sister - our niece) when he leaves in March but now we find out that that is all off. I don't know what we are going to do about it except just cough up the whole \$143 a week ourselves as mum won't want strangers in the house. We will probably manage as the van has now been paid off and in real terms it won't make us any worse off than we were, but I would like someone to be in the house to keep mum company. Maybe John would consider staying if we cut the rent down to a bare minimum.

(How I wish I knew then what I know now).

**November 28<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

Went over to visit Karen this afternoon. She and her husband have been trying to run a business with a mobile food outlet and are getting nothing but hassles from the local council. The reason for that is obvious, all the local shopkeepers are on the council and don't want any kind of competition. They are a greedy selfish load of backstabbers whose only concern is shovelling as much cash into their pockets as fast as they can. Not one of them gives a damn about the town and the attitude of most of the 'whites' living here makes me sick.

**December 1<sup>st</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

Below are the financial results of the past year.

Income	35552.23
Tax	1436.85
Super	791.40
Mortgage	7454.64
Electricity	898.38
Telecom	624.08
Car Ins	669.00
Car Lic	682.00
Car HP	3852.50
Bus	3432.39

Drv Lic	0.00
St John	49.00
RAC	116.00
House Co	0.00
House St	213.00
Shire	182.49
Water	135.63
Petrol	2859.94
Food	5326.14
Pocket	1282.69
Misc	2829.61
Hair cut	54.25
Car Maint	825.28
House maint	434.90
Pets	200.78
Clothes	363.20
Christmas	397.29
Cvan Park	2369.10
Medical	194.70
Boat	1088.70
EXPENSES	38763.94
<u>LOSS</u>	<u>-3211.71</u>

Effectively this means that we have dipped into our savings to the tune of just over \$3000 for the year. Despite this we have survived our first year on the road and with a little luck the coming year will be a bit better.

Our bank account went as low as \$1108.78 but we have now been working for three months we have \$6671.73 and have started to get some of the items that were damaged when we first got here repaired or replaced.

We have travelled from Albany to Kununurra, seen some amazing things, met some wonderful people and generally had a pretty good time. We have had our share of misfortunes but they are easier to cope with when you are away from the hassles and pressures of the city. At the start of all this we did not know what to expect or even if we would survive, we left behind everything we were familiar with to face uncertainty and challenge. We have made it through the first year in fairly good shape and now have more confidence that whatever comes our way in the next twelve months we will get through it.

#### **December 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Belle has had a series of problems at work stemming mainly from the owners two stupid sons who are incapable of doing anything right themselves and seem to resent anyone with more than half a brain.

The owner is either too soft or too ignorant to do anything about the situation and it looks like we will either end up taking them to EEO or Belle will just have to walk away from the job. The decision is up to her.

This has overshadowed the fact that we moved into Sister Sarah's house today which is a nice change from the bus. When we asked the Scottish shrew who runs the caravan park for a reduction in fees because we wouldn't be there she refused point blank. It seems to me there should be some regulations governing caravan parks and what they can charge. I will spend some time looking this up and see what I can find out.

I bet the entry in the tourist guide I am writing will make them think twice about trying to screw other people once it gets published. It is the only caravan park in town and as a result they think they can do anything they like. I hope to prove them wrong.

#### **December 11h 1998 (Friday)**

This morning Belle 'had it out' with the owner of the business she works for. His son was all for sacking her immediately and Belle dared him to issue a separation certificate. Knowing full well that they had no grounds to dismiss her and we would have them up for unfair dismissal they backed down but Belle was given veiled threats. Stupid Son 1 guaranteed that the conflict would continue and that things might then get out of hand. We take that as an implied threat of physical violence.

I am proceeding with a claim for workers compensation for the hernia I suffered while working there simply because they have shown no compassion for my injury, they have denied any responsibility under the Workers Compensation Act and they are trying to make it difficult if not impossible for me to get to Kununurra Hospital to see a Surgeon next week. It's bad enough that I have to suffer the pain of the injury, the apprehension of surgery and the costs involved with going to Kununurra without all this other nonsense. The elder stupid son has got a big mouth and dared me to take action over it, maybe after this he'll learn to keep his trap shut. If they had given Belle the necessary leave to get me to Kununurra I would have let it slide but now I'm going after them to the bitter end.

I don't know if it is because Halls Creek is so far from civilisation or if it is just because they are unbelievably stupid that they think they think they can break the law and get away with it.

They have also tried to infer that Belle has been dishonest with No 1 stupid son saying 'I wouldn't trust you as far as I could throw you.' This unfounded, untrue and highly slanderous remark was made in front of several customers.

If this goes on there are all sorts of juicy things I can tell the Taxation Office about the owners relatives being given free reign to take stock from the shop and only making token monthly payments for it - that breaches the fringe



benefits tax. Also they use a forklift, which is even driven on public roads by an operator with no forklift ticket - Worksafe would love to hear about that.

They have put themselves in a no-win situation and continuing to make threats will in the end only make things worse for them.

If I have one piece of advice for anyone looking for work it's 'never ever work for anyone with Aborigines in the family' they are impossible to reason with. Even the owner tried to use their Aboriginality as an excuse for their disgusting behaviour.

As far as the Worker's Comp claim goes, they are trying to claim that I was operating the floor polisher incorrectly because I was using one hand. I had to operate it that way because my thumb was so badly damaged - a fact I made the Manager aware of on at least two separate occasions. Allowing me to continue to operate the machine in this manner may or may not have contributed to the hernia, (in fact by the time the injury happened the thumb was almost healed and I was using two hands) but it was his responsibility to stop me from using it if he felt it was unsafe.

**December 12<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Saturday)**

The word 'stupid' does not even start to describe the latest actions of Belle's employer. Today they fired her, and the reason... the ONLY reason given on the Separation Certificate, that she sexually harassed the owner's two sons - a pair of 6' half cast Aborigines who are 20 & 29 years old. Words fail to express the utter stupidity of such a claim. Anyone who knows Belle, who is only just over 5' high would never dream of making such an outrageous claim, far less being crazy enough to put it in writing and use it as a reason for sacking her.

Needless to say we are now going to register a claim for unfair dismissal and take these fools to court. They could have come up with any more plausible - if untrue - reason for sacking her, but SEXUAL HARRASMENT ! They must be completely out of their tree.

**December 14<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Monday)**

We left Halls Creek about 1pm to go to Kununurra. Despite having an air conditioner in the van the journey was hot and uncomfortable. We booked in at a very nice caravan park by Lake Argyle (Kona Lakeside). The budget cabins were \$50 per night and looked out on to the lake.

The only problem is the mosquitoes - we thought they were bad in Carnarvon, but that was nothing like Kununurra in the wet season.



Hidden Valley

**December 15<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Tuesday)**

I saw the surgeon about my hernia but he has decided to send me to Darwin to have it attended to so this trip was a waste of time and money.

**December 16<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Wednesday)**

We have loaded up with shopping while we are here which will hopefully save us some money over the coming weeks. I think this trip cost us about \$1000 all up. A lot of that was covered by food but accommodation was \$150 for the 3 nights and petrol was about \$120 - the van isn't nearly as economical as the Barina. Hopefully I'll get some of the expense back under workers compensation insurance.

**December 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Woke at 4.30am and went back to Halls Creek - known to Kununurra residents as Hells Crack - can't say I disagree with that description much.

**December 18<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Friday)**

We filled in the Unfair Dismissal and Workers Comp claims today and sent them off by post. Now the fireworks should really start.

It may sound strange but now that we are temporarily living in a house again, I miss the bus. I have become so used to living in the confined space and having everything within reach I now feel uneasy about living in a house.

**December 24<sup>th</sup> 1998 (Thursday)**

Christmas Eve in Halls Creek - no one about and nothing to do. The only positive note is that we will be long gone from this dump this time next year.

Now the rains have really started it's impossible to go outside at night because of the mosquitos. They seem particularly hungry and a dozen or more will attack you within seconds of stepping outside.

**January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

Well the Christmas New Year period is over for another year. Things were fairly quiet around town. The only sour note is that our bicycles were stolen from the caravan park. We aren't that bothered about it as we didn't use them much and they were well past their use by date, but it just goes to show that if it isn't nailed down the Abos will pinch it. I have some sympathy for what Aborigines have been through in the past but they have no excuse for what they get up to these days. The more I see how they live the less sympathy I have for them, they have no self respect and absolutely no desire to improve themselves. There is the odd exception to this but most are lazy and deliberately useless. If a University were to run a course on how to be lazy, shiftless unreliable then there would be plenty of work for the Abos as lecturers. They are past masters at sitting under a tree all day doing nothing.

We have been in this dump for over 4 months now and I can't wait for the day when we turn the bus onto the highway and I can shake the dust of this town from my feet.

**January 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

After work we went out to have a look at Palm Springs and Sawpit Gorge. 80km along Duncan road was too much for the van and something has happened to one of the rear brakes, it keeps locking up and there is an expensive clunking noise coming from the rear axle. Duncan Road strikes again.

Palm Springs was pretty but Sawpit was flooded out and the nice pool that is supposed to be there was just another part of the river.

The causeway was flooded so we sat in the running water for a while to cool off before the trip home.



Palm Springs

**January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

I had the van's brakes fixed today plus a few other bits & pieces attended to. The rear brake linings had completely come away and were rattling around on the drum. That was the noise we could hear when we were coming back from Palm Springs. It cost about \$150 which isn't too bad but I still have to have it serviced and the trailer needs to be repaired & licensed, if I get any change out of \$400 I'll be lucky.

We have decided to go to Kununurra again tomorrow. Our food supplies are running low and strange as it may seem it is cheaper to go all the way up there than to shop locally - as long as we buy in bulk.

**January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

We got as far as the first river (Little Panton) before we had to turn back. Even 4wd vehicles couldn't get across. Such is life up here in the wet season.

We have now been here five months, how we've managed to last that long is beyond me. At least we only have a couple of months to go before the wet is over and we can go on towards Darwin.

**January 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

We moved back into the bus today. We have moved on to a 'tourist site' rather than a permanent site, we discovered that it's cheaper! Every other caravan park we have been to the permanent sites are always cheaper but here because of the high cost of electricity the tourist sites (which work out at \$112 a week) are \$10-\$20 cheaper because you pay a flat rate of \$16 a night no matter how much electricity you use. Needless to say the Air-conditioner is going full bore all the time now.

**January 29<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

Today is another sad anniversary. This was the day we lost dear old Sam.

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Belle has managed to get a part time job working at the local school canteen. Its only 3.5 hours a day but it's better than nothing.

Last week we had problems with the lock on the bus door and have been trying to get another one from the local hardware store. The first lock they supplied was not a deadlock and could be opened from the outside with very little effort. The second they ordered in and it was completely the wrong type - we gave them our original lock as a reference but they threw it away. When we took the lock back and asked for a refund they had the gall to charge us for the freight \$11. I have now fired off a letter to the Manager telling him that I will go to the Ministry of Fair Trading if I don't get my money back. They acted as if it was our fault that they supplied the wrong lock. I'm damned if I am going to pay for their mistakes.

Belle's fight with Super Value is still going on. She had the first reconciliation conference via a phone link up last Wednesday and to start off with the lawyer for the store was denying any liability. By the end of the conference they were asking to settle the matter out of court but offered an insultingly small amount. Belle refused the offer and will be proceeding to the hearing. She spoke with a couple of Perth based lawyers who are conversant in these matters and one said "Your boss is in the s&\$t." Well lets just hope he's up to his lying teeth in it by the time we are finished with him.

One interesting note is that we had always thought that the owner would use both his sons in the sexual harassment allegation. It turned out that he used one son and the storeman but we have written proof that at the time we believed that it was his sons who would make the accusation and now that they have used someone else we've got them just where we want them.

We are getting quite fed up with this place. Anyone who actually enjoys living here must have had a frontal lobotomy.

Through the Telecentre I have set up a web site for the town and we are offering advertising for as little as \$10 a month. Not one of the local businesses are interested despite the fact that the site is attracting more and more visitors and is a great way to promote the town. I have just about given up trying to do anything for the town, no one is interested, even the grant application (for \$20,000) to start up a local newspaper can't go ahead because I need two letters of recommendation from local businesses and no one can be bothered to write them. It's like banging my head against a brick wall, in this case a stupid greedy brick wall.

I have to get the trailer fixed this week and the van still needs a service and tune up. Once that has been done we can leave whenever we are ready. It won't be soon enough for me.

We have had lots of rain over the past two days so we won't be seeing Kununurra any time soon. At least it has cooled the place down. We even had to turn the fridge thermostat down today!

I guess we will look back at Halls Creek in years to come and have a good laugh, but at the moment it is decidedly un-funny.

**February 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

Today is Belle's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. We wanted to go up to Kununurra but it was raining when we woke up and it didn't look like we would make it. By the time we had finished work for the day the sky was clear so I decided we would give it a go anyway.

We left town at 1pm and only made it as far as the Little Panton about 40km out before we were stopped by flood waters. We waited an hour to see if the water would drop, it did and we crossed with no problems. Unfortunately the Upper Panton was in full flood as well so we gave up.

We went to the Hotel in the evening and had one of the best meals I can ever remember. A storm came in as we were eating and we were treated to a spectacular lightning show outside.

When we got home one of the people we have got to know at the caravan park (Rosco) came over with a bottle of rum and we nattered on until after 1am.

**February 14<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

We were invited over to Bill & Guylan's caravan for drinks this afternoon and had a pleasant time chatting. Bill is the jeweller who made the broach we bought for mum's Christmas present.

They trade under the name Areton and make all sorts of jewellery in a caravan. The gold they use all comes from the surrounding area and most of it they find themselves on prospecting trips. Anyone travelling to Halls Creek can get in

touch with them at the caravan park and buy direct or if they are away their work is available at various shops in town.



Bill & Guylan's caravans

**February 21<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

We are due to do some more house sitting for the Shire's CEO for the next seven weeks. Once Peter & Carmel return from their holiday we will be moving on towards Darwin.

Yesterday I attempted to start the generator but something has jammed inside and we will have to have it looked at quickly as technically the warranty (which I think was 12 months) has just about run out. - It turned out that the warranty was 24 months so that was a relief at least.

We also learned on Friday that the lawyer for Super Value has been advising Malcom to settle before the case comes to a hearing. Malcom being as stubborn as a mule and only half as smart won't take his own lawyers advice and wants to fight on. That is fine by us as Belle stands to get more money in the settlement that way.

**February 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday/Sunday)**

We decided to try and get to Kununurra again this weekend. We were able to borrow a troop carrier which gave us a better chance of getting over any flooded rivers.

It hadn't rained for the past few days but just after midnight on Friday it started to bucket down. We took off straight away in order to get closer to Kununurra before the rivers started to rise. As it turned out we needn't have worried and although it rained off and on all the way up, the rivers stayed down.

We did our shopping for the next 6 weeks spending about \$500. The generator was dropped off the Elgee Motors to be fixed and we will pick it up in six weeks time when we are passing through.

Shortly after we got back to the Creek the skies opened up and it poured down. Anyone staying up at Kununurra for the extra night might have problems getting back now. I'm glad we came back when we did.



Crops near Kununurra

**March 13<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

I brought the bus over to the house today and started getting her ready for travel again. We will be on the move again in four weeks from today.

**March 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

Well today was certainly an interesting day! To start with we had an Aboriginal family call in as they were interested in purchasing the van. After some faxes back and forth to Alice Springs it has been sold for \$8500, as long as the money finds its way into my bank account I am very happy with that price.

Later when I was at work I received a call from the Aboriginal Corporation I applied for a job with in Katherine and I have a phone interview on Monday.

Then came the biggest surprise of the day; the maniacs at Super Value have actually gone to the police and signed statements accusing Belle of sexual assault. She received a call at work and shortly after 1pm a detective and a constable came round to the house we are staying in and interviewed her.

To begin with the detective was a little on the aggressive side, and I suppose his attitude is understandable when you look at what has gone on from the outside. He couldn't understand why someone would bring such a charge if it wasn't true, then again neither could we. Their whole case is based on the 'Gerbal's principle'. Joseph Gerbals the Nazi propagandist during the Second World War believed that if you told a big enough lie and told it often enough then people would start to believe it. That is what almost happened here.

The detective seemed to change his mind after reading all that has been written about the proceedings, especially when he read what I have written in earlier entries of this journal.

Belle gave him a list of character witnesses to check with including all the doctors and consultants she has worked with at State Health for over 16 years. As he left he said to her that he thought there was something not quite right with the statements but that it was his job to investigate any complaints that were made.

He will obviously have to check Belle's references but they are all professional people and we think he has already made his mind up that we are telling the truth - which of course we are!

I just hope the police see fit to bring charges against 'the gang of four' for making false statements.

#### **March 20<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

This morning we took a trip out to Wolfe Creek Crater. The Crater is about 150km south west of Halls Creek and is reputedly the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest in the world.

The track down to the crater is definitely 4wd country but now is the best time of year to travel through it. The crater is quite impressive and worth the ride over some fairly corrugated tracks.



Wolfe Creek Crater

#### **March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

I found out today that the Telecentre is going to be put in 'mothballs' once I leave and will only start operations again when the demountable unit arrives. This makes me feel as though I have been wasting my time for the past six months as all efforts at getting a higher profile for the centre will come to nothing.

In the afternoon I had a phone interview for a job in Katherine. It is a six month contract to revamp the computer systems and re-skill the users. Half of me wants the job but the other half wants to go fishing for a couple of months. I'll just wait and see what happens.

Cyclone Vance is busy flattening Exmouth where this time last year we were sweltering in the tropical heat.

#### **March 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

Today I finally had a conciliation conference regarding my workers compensation claim. QBE have agreed to pay all medical, accommodation and travel expenses as well as five weeks pay for loss of wages. I am happy enough with that but why they took so long to agree to this is beyond me. It has been nearly six months since I sustained the injury and I let their representative know that I wasn't at all pleased with the delay. So much for Malcom's idiot son saying I wouldn't get anything if I made a claim. That's one down and two to go. The next two should hurt them a lot more.

#### **March 27<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

We took a drive out to see if we could find a place called 'the old stone hut' this morning. The track we were following gradually got rougher and rougher and eventually the signs become non-existent and we had to give up.

After a last look at Caroline Pool and Old Halls Creek we drove back down the dreaded Duncan Road for the last time. Two weeks to go and we will be out of this town at last.



Caroline Pool

#### **April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

The Telecentre is all packed up now and I just have to survive the boredom of Halls Creek for one more week. The job in Katherine didn't come off, but as I am still waiting for the hernia operation I don't mind too much. It will be better to get that out of the way before I take on anything significant.

Now with a few days to reflect on our last seven months in this town I realise that it hasn't all been bad - it's been b&\*\*#y awful! I've already said all I have to about the town and the people who run the businesses here so I won't waste any more space on it or them. I have to be fair and say that we did meet a few nice people in the town. The people at Shire and our Telecentre Chairman were all very friendly but on the whole this is not a town I can recommend to other travellers.

#### **April 7<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

Belle was contacted by the Industrial Relations Commission and was told that Super Value now do not want to go to a hearing. Our assumption is that they are now ready to settle and as the conference will be held next week in Kununurra, we will know more about where we stand then. Our position hasn't changed. We will still demand a retraction and payment of lost wages.

The good thing is we are going to be in Kununurra anyway so it won't cost us a cent.

#### **April 10<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

After another nice meal at the local hotel last night we were away from Halls Creek by about 9am. The drive up to Turkey Creek (Warmun) was uneventful but turning the bus round to move to the correct fuel pump at the roadhouse I stalled the engine. For some reason the bus decided not to re-start and we were stuck for about 40 minutes before I could get it re-started.

By this time the right hand front tyre had developed a leak and had gone flat. It was very difficult to manoeuvre the bus into a site behind the roadhouse but eventually I managed to get it in straight.

Now I had to get the bus jacked up and change the wheel. With a hernia this was more difficult than I had anticipated and eventually Belle found someone to help get the spare wheel on after I had removed the flat tyre. The bus runs on 20 inch tyres which to say the least are pretty darn heavy. Finally by about 5pm everything was complete and we settled down for the night.

The roadhouse at Turkey Creek has a limited number of caravan sites and must fill very quickly in peak season. At \$15 a night for a powered site it is fairly cheap and there is even a small swimming pool to cool off in.

#### **April 11<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

We woke early and made inquiries about the helicopter flights over the Bungles and booked for 9.30am. Flights run almost hourly so there was no waiting for a booking. They are expensive (\$170 a head with a minimum of two passengers - max 3) but since we didn't want to drive in to see the area it was our only alternative.

We had never flown in a helicopter before and it was quite an exciting experience, at least it was for me. By the time we had reached the 'beehive domes' which the Bungles are so famous for, Belle had turned rather green and started

vomiting copiously into a handy air sick bag. Of course to make matters worse the bag leaked, filling the cabin with a rather unpleasant odour.

I enjoyed the flight but filming from the rear seat was difficult and I was disappointed with the footage I obtained. I am hoping that we got some good still shots but as Belle was busy being sick she wasn't able to help much with the photography. Back on the ground Belle was sick again and took most of the day to recover.



Bungle Bungle – The only good shot Belle managed to take

**April 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Since we couldn't get a new inner tube for the bus tyre in Turkey Creek we decided to tempt fate and head off for Kununurra without a spare. Apart from an occasional hiccup from the engine when we switched from gas to petrol the trip was uneventful - thankfully.

We arrived in civilisation about midday and booked in to the caravan park at Kimberleyland. The difference between this caravan park and the dump we left behind in Halls Creek can only be imagined by those who have not experienced both.

We sat in a large shaded pool surrounded by coconut palms and decided that we must have died and gone to heaven.

**April 14<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

We have been spending money like water at the moment. Our video player broke down so we had to buy a new one \$285, then we found out that it wouldn't work properly with our old T.V. so we bought a new one of those - \$299.99. The car was serviced today - another \$202 and the bus is booked in to get new tyre all round next Tuesday - \$2121 !!! Aaargh! that hurts. We decided to get a mountain bike as well - I am planning to exercise a bit more and it will be handy if we both find work; that was another \$280.

I have decided that the money I got for the van will pay for this and we won't be getting a 4wd for the foreseeable future. The bus needs servicing and the radiator needs replacing so there is probably another \$1200 or so in that. When all that is done I am going to have a frame put on the trailer and a towbar put on the car so we can move the boat about easily. This isn't going to give us much change from the money I got for the van. Still we shouldn't have any worries for a while once it has all been completed - I hope.

It is such a joy to meet people in Kununurra who are helpful and friendly. Nothing at all like the ignorant, sour, unhelpful and belligerent toads we had to deal with in Halls Creek. They are so used to being horrible to the Aborigines they do it to everyone out of habit. I haven't met anyone in Kununurra with anything nice to say about H.C. One comment was that when going through H.C. you close your eyes and hold your breath until you are well past it. We were there for seven months and sixteen days which was seven months, fifteen days and twenty three hours too long. Words can't express how glad we are to be out of the place.

I am still getting used to the size of Kununurra and the fact that I can get almost anything I want the same day.

**April 15<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

The conciliation conference today was a complete waste of time. Why Malcom bothered to call the conference when they were not willing to settle the matter is beyond me. His wife; who is supposed to be an elder of her people and who as a result of the lies she is telling is a disgrace to Aborigines everywhere, went on and on about their Aboriginality and Aboriginal law and how tribal men wouldn't tell such lies - what a huge crock! Even their lawyer made bleating remarks about how the poor Aborigines are never believed and how badly they are treated by the law. Well it's hardly any wonder if this is how they behave. This was the biggest load of crap I have ever heard.

Now we are not just fighting a false accusation, it looks like we are fighting so called Aboriginal culture as well. I don't know if they realise it but we don't live under Aboriginal law so it has nothing to do with the lies they are telling. The commission's time was wasted and our time was wasted. The Registrar told us that it was obvious that their stories had been concocted after Belle had been fired but that he didn't have the power to do anything about it. We will now

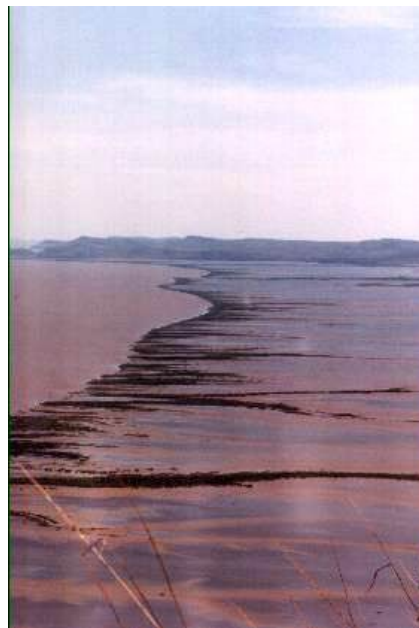
have to insist that this matter goes to hearing and let the Commissioner make a final determination. After two fruitless hours I eventually walked out but Belle stayed on for a further hour trying to get the matter finalised. In the end we had to tell the Registrar that we wanted to go to hearing anyway.

I am also contemplating going to the media and making this as public as possible. We have nothing to fear as we are telling the truth.

**April 17<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

After rising early we went up to have a look at Wyndham, which I had been told was a bit of a waste of time. The town was neat and tidy and the Five Rivers Lookout was worth the 100km trip on its own. The road up to the lookout is steep and winding and not at all suitable for those towing caravans. At the top there are tables, chairs, shelters and even a toilet. Tourist guides rate this as one of the best lookouts in Australia and having now seen it for myself I have to agree.

On the way back we stopped off at the Grotto which despite the long steep climb down provided a deep cool pool to swim in and a waterfall at the far end. Later in the dry season it probably isn't quite so attractive but while the water is still flowing the cool waters and numerous fish make the Grotto a perfect place to stop and relax for an hour or so.



View from 5 Rivers Lookout - Wyndham

**April 21<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

Yesterday the new tyres were put on the bus and tomorrow it goes in for a full service. We are still trying to work out how to move the boat about easily. We can't get a towbar for the Barina as it is too old and getting a roof rack is proving to be just as frustrating.

Time is slipping away quickly and we still need to arrange to have a new radiator fitted in the bus. If only time had gone this fast at Halls Creek. I bought a new deep cycle battery for the bus (\$130) and while the tyres were being fitted three inner tubes needed to be replaced at \$26 each and two inner tube protectors at \$32. We also bought 6 windscreen sunshades at \$10 each - these will go under the flyscreens on the side of the bus to help in very hot weather. On top of this lot we bought new seat covers and a steering wheel cover; another \$77.

Video	\$ 285.00
Chopper flights	\$ 340.00
TV	\$ 299.99
Car service	\$ 202.00
Bike	\$ 280.00
Tyres	\$2121.00
Inner tubes	\$ 104.00
Tyre protectors	\$ 32.00
Battery	\$ 130.00
Seat covers	\$ 65.00
Sunshades	\$ 60.00
Steering cover	\$ 12.00
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\$3930.99 since leaving Halls Creek	
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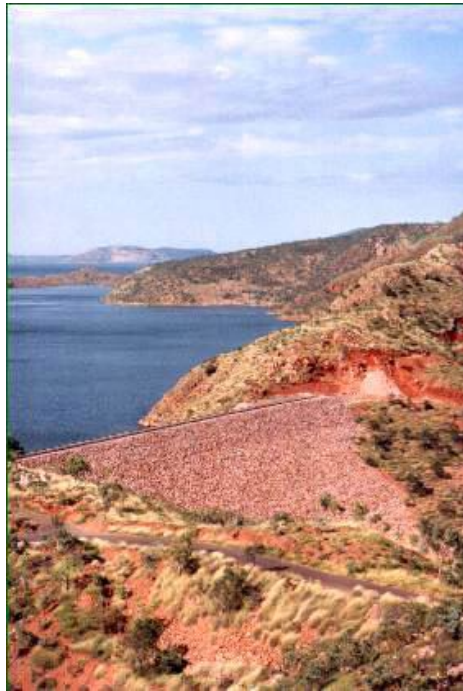
The bus service should be about \$400-500, a roof rack \$300 and the radiator about \$700, at worst we should still have about \$3000 left from the sale of the van once all this is over with.

**April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**



The bus was in the workshop all day for servicing and there is still more to do tomorrow. As a result we camped in the workshop overnight.

To fill up the day we took a trip down to Lake Argyle. The drive down was pleasant but there wasn't a lot to see once we got there. Although the view is quite spectacular the road over the dam wall was closed and we couldn't get down to look at other areas.



Argyle Dam

**April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

After spending the night at the workshop we knew we were in for a big bill from the mechanics but even being prepared didn't help the shock of a bill for \$996. All I can say is that I had **better not** have any problems for quite some time. I can kiss goodbye to the \$3000 I hoped to keep from the sale of the van.

We didn't get the bus back until after 3pm and went out to the Zebra Rock Gallery in the morning to try and use up some time. Although it was 9km out of town it was interesting and feeding the fish in the lake was fun. For any would-be fishermen, the lake certainly holds some BIG catfish. Of course there is no fishing allowed at the feeding site but there are bound to be some very large fish elsewhere.

**April 27 1999 (Tuesday)**

The surgeon from Darwin rang today and my hernia operation is set for May 19<sup>th</sup>. Although I want to get it over with I can't say that I'm looking forward to it.

**April 28<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

\$1040.00 for a radiator! aaargh..... all I can say is that I hope nothing else needs doing for a while. That's \$5966.99 we have spent since leaving Halls Creek. The roof rack for the car SHOULD be the last thing before we leave Kununurra, if it isn't I'm going to have a fit. At least the \$1011.11 for my workers comp has come through, that helps a little.

The water pump for the bus was on its last legs and the spare I had isn't a whole lot better so I will have to look for another one in Darwin.

**April 30<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

The bus went back in for some final adjustments to the gas system and some more problems were discovered so we spent another \$189. The car roof rack was fitted (another \$385) and I have finished bolting extended bars to the top and the boat is now in position. We have to get some more ratchet tie downs and a good tarpaulin so more money is on the way out. Looking at the budget for April I nearly had a fit, we have spent over \$9500!!! all the money I got for the van plus another \$1000..... where's the Valium.

Filling the bus with petrol & gas will cost another \$150 or so then finally we should be able to spend a few days free camping on the way up to Darwin.

Beaupaires couldn't get a split ring for our spare tyre so we have to do the next 800km without a spare. Hopefully as all the tyres are new we won't have any problems but I'm crossing my fingers just in case.

**May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

A little after 10am WST we crossed the border into the Northern Territory. This is one of the most significant milestones in our journey so far. Almost two years after first purchasing the bus we have finally left W.A. and crossed over into another state. All our clocks have now been wound forward one and a half hours as we are not only in a different state, we are in a different time zone. At least now it won't be dark at half past five in the evening.

About 260km from Kununurra is a camping area in the Gregory National Park. Facilities include BBQs, Tables, Toilets and drive in, drive out parking bays. There is a boat ramp nearby and fishing is said to be good in the river but as we only stopped overnight I didn't bother to get the boat off the car.

So far the only sour note is that the generator which Elgee Motors are supposed to have fixed, isn't running properly. We managed to get by, but it isn't putting out enough power and has to be run with the choke on all the time. We will have to wait until we get to Darwin to get the problem sorted out.

#### **May 4<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

As there isn't much worth stopping for between Timber Creek and Katherine we pressed on and booked in for a week at the Katherine Low Level caravan park.

As we reached the outskirts of the town the bus engine started to race when it should have been idling. I hope it isn't anything more complicated than a sticky accelerator cable, but I'll check on it tomorrow.

Katherine seems much bigger than Kununurra but we haven't done much more than drive around the town centre to get our bearings. Belle has seen several shops she wants to look at and there looks like a lot of good scenery around the town for photography so we'll both be busy.

#### **May 5<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

Katherine has been a bit disappointing. The hot springs are very pretty and we expect that the gorge will be spectacular, but people are not at all friendly. After Kununurra where everyone we met was smiling, cheerful and helpful, this lot are a real grumpy bunch. We have been into a number of shops and even asking people directions on the street we are met with an unfriendly disinterested attitude. For a town that makes the better part of its income from tourists, I would think that people would make a bit more of an effort. Perhaps it is the after effects of the floods here last year.

The bus is booked in tomorrow to have the idling problem looked at, lets hope it isn't going to cost anything after spending so much in Kununurra.

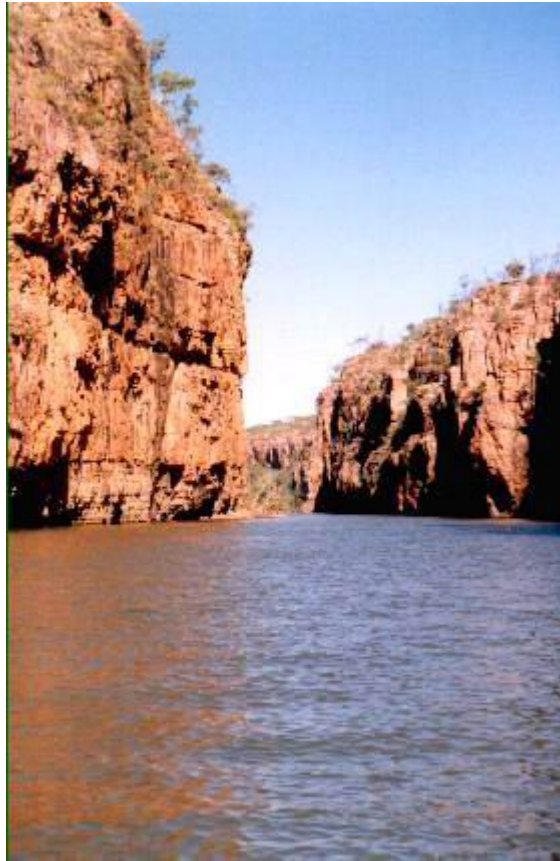
We took a trip out to Cutta Cutta caves and the guided tour was quite interesting but the cave doesn't compare to Jewel Cave in W.A. The cave is about 30km from Katherine and entry cost \$8.25.

In the afternoon we went to the hot (warm?) springs and soaked under pandanus palms. It was very relaxing.

#### **May 9<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Katherine Gorge was every bit as spectacular as we had been told it would be. The two hour cruise took us down the first two of the thirteen gorges and cost \$29 each. Longer cruises are available taking in seven of the gorges but they are more expensive and we have to start watching our money again.

The problem with the bus was simple and was rectified without spending any more money which is a big relief. We will visit Edith Falls tomorrow and then we are off to Darwin on Tuesday.



Katherine Gorge

**May 10<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

62km north of Katherine is Edith Falls. The falls aren't particularly awe inspiring but the pool at the bottom is an excellent place to swim and the water is crystal clear. There is also a camp ground run by National Parks but most sites are fairly small and I doubt we would have been able to stay there with the bus.

**May 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

We finally arrived in Darwin yesterday but not without our usual drama. Everything was fine until just before Pine Creek when the bus started to violently backfire. The engine cut out, but after stopping on the side of the road I managed to re-start and we were on our way again. After stopping for fuel at Pine Creek we had more backfires and more re-starts until we were about 50km out of Adelaide River. The bus backfired many times from the carby and the exhaust and when we stopped (right on the start of a bend in the road) it refused to re-start no matter what I did. We unloaded the car and Belle took off to Adelaide River to summon help while I sat by the bus waiting for said help to arrive. A couple of hours - or more - later a huge tow truck arrived from Darwin and we were towed 160km and spent the night on the road outside a workshop.

Today the bus was checked and the mechanic couldn't find anything wrong - this is a bit of a worry! The tow cost \$400 which thankfully will be covered by the CMCA insurance; but our premium is going to go up again next time we have to pay. (Turned out towing didn't affect the premium which was a big relief.)

We have booked in to the Shady Glen caravan park and have been given a terrific shady site which is almost like our own private garden. We spent the day driving around Darwin to get our bearings and so far I am very impressed with the city. It is clean, neat and new - thanks to Cyclone Tracy - and has a number of excellent parks and nature reserves scattered around the coast.

I had always thought Perth was the most attractive city I had ever seen but Darwin is better. Driving down some of the roads I almost get the feeling that I am in Singapore. The surrounds are green and very tropical and I am really looking forward to further explorations over the next few days.

**May 13<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

This morning we went to have a look at Palmerston shopping centre and then on the Karama. We joined the local library and then relaxed for the afternoon before going down to Mindal Beach markets in the evening.

The markets are a mix of food and odds and ends - mostly aimed at tourists. They are held every Thursday in the dry season from 5pm to 10pm and the setting on the beach is ideal. There is a wide variety of foods available including Chinese, Greek, Malaysian, Thai, Japanese, Sovakian, Indonesian, Singapore, Mexican, South American, Middle Eastern, BBQ Seafood, Indian, Vietnamese and Italian - pretty well something for any taste.

There are 4 other markets held around Darwin at Nightcliff, Parap, Rapid Creek and Palmerston. We will eventually get round to visiting them all.



Darwin

**May 16<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Today we took the dinghy down to the closest boat ramp to try and catch a few fish. Not knowing the local conditions or where to go we were singularly unsuccessful but at least it was a chance to test the engine out after a lay-up of several months.

I like Darwin; it's not too big and although all the shops and facilities you would find in any other city can be found here, there is a definite laid back relaxed feeling about the place. With only 80,000 people it is only 1/15<sup>th</sup> the size of Perth and no matter where you want to go it is only a maximum of a 20 minute drive to get there. The biggest shopping area seems to be Casurina - it is also the most expensive. The town centre is a lot like Perth without the skyscrapers, and Palmerston to the south is probably the third biggest shopping district.

There are still a number of places close to the city that we haven't explored, but I have a good mental map of the suburbs now and can find my way round fairly well.

So far the only hassle about the city is the speed at which people drive. All the major arterial roads are 80-100 kilometres per hour - far too fast for built up areas and something it will take some time to get used to. One of the strange road rules (at some traffic lights) is that you can turn left on a red light as long as it is clear. As this rule only applies at some intersections it can be a bit of a worry for newcomers.



Parliament building Darwin

**May 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

Today I had to go to `Darwin Hospital to see the surgeon about having my hernia fixed. I am booked in to have the op tomorrow and I will be in hospital overnight. I can't say I'm looking forward to it much but it will be a relief to get everything fixed up.

**May 21<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

My hernia has finally been fixed but I now have to wait 6 weeks before I will be back to normal again. I am VERY sore at the moment and spend most of my time flat on my back in bed. Even getting up to write these few lines is a real effort.

**May 25<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

Being stuck in the bus is getting a bit tiring. Recovery from this operation is going to take longer than I expected. I did feel a substantial change when I got up this morning so hopefully I will be able to go out in the car in the next few days. I am also eager to start looking for work and being laid up like this doesn't help at all.

Yesterday was the second anniversary of us getting the bus and Friday marks 18 months on the road. Despite the hassles we have had from time to time it has still been worth doing.

**May 28<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

I was feeling fit enough for a day out today so we took off to Litchfield National Park south of Darwin. It is a 100km drive out to the south end of the park which features terrific swimming holes like the rock holes (one of the first places you get to in the park). Some of the sights are only accessible by 4wd vehicle and as I was not 100% fit I couldn't get to places that required a long walk. I did see enough to convince me that it would be worth while coming back when I am completely over the operation. Wangi Falls it's the centre piece of the park and it is certainly the most spectacular waterfall I have seen so far.

In the evening we took a trip out to Palmerston markets which is quite similar to Mindal markets except it isn't in such a nice location.

Belle got a call from the WAIRC today which indicates that the twits at Super Value are finally ready to settle. She will get a new separation certificate and another weeks pay - which I think isn't nearly enough - but I think she is glad to finally get it all out of the way.



Buley Rockhole

**May 30<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Yesterday I went to have a look round the old Darwin Gaol which is quite an eye opener. This was a gaol based on punishing offenders not giving them free accommodation in carpeted air-conditioned luxury like they do now. The gaol is situated in a prime location on the beach so it's a surprise that it has been preserved and not torn down for some new development. Admission is free and it is worth spending some time strolling round the compound.

Over the last couple of days we have been to the other three markets which are held around Darwin. The following table gives an indication of the differences between them.

Market	Day	Time	Description of things available
Mindal	Thursday	5pm	Tourist junk and cooked food
Palmerston	Friday	5.30pm	Tourist junk, fresh food and cooked food
Parap	Saturday	8am	Tourist junk, fresh food and cooked food
Nightcliff	Sunday	8am	Second hand stuff, fresh food and cooked food
Rapid Creek	Sunday	8am	Fresh food and cooked food

Mindal has the best location as it is set right on Mindal beach. Rapid Creek is the most difficult to find parking at but is the best fresh food market.

We also had a quick look at the Darwin Botanical Gardens which normally would be a pleasant stroll but in my current condition it was overdoing it a bit.

On the down side - and there's always a down side - the video camera has all but packed up so I have to go out shopping for another one. A local store is offering 12 months interest free terms and that makes it affordable as long as they have the right model.

**June 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

Despite some misgivings I bought another video camera today. As it cost \$1099.95 our savings have taken a big dive but if we don't have one we will loose so many memories.

**June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

I had a job interview today, but as it is front office work - usually reserved for females - I'm not holding out much hope.

**June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

We woke at 3.30am and went fishing off Nightcliff jetty - it was a complete waste of time.

I am starting to feel fit again now and have finally been able to go to sleep on my side - the way I do normally. At last I can come off sleeping pills. In the morning we had a look at a couple of boat ramps south of Palmerston, they are a long way out but it looks like good barramundi territory. Perhaps we will give them a go when I have fully recovered from the op.

**June 5<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

The trip today was out to Berry Springs Nature Park and the Territory Wildlife Park. The Nature Reserve is free to enter and contains beautiful clear springs which are very popular for swimming.

Entry to the Territory Wildlife Park costs \$12 (1999) and is worth every cent. The park is set in 42 hectares and showcases native and introduced species. It is very well laid out and you can walk around shady tracks or take a ride on the shuttles which continually circulate in the park. The most interesting exhibit is undoubtedly the freshwater walk through aquarium with some of the biggest barramundi you will ever see.

On the way back to Darwin we stopped off at Howard Springs which is a slightly less attractive version of Berry Springs. It is more popular with the locals as it is very close to town.



Berry Springs

**June 7<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Aquascene at Doctors Gully is well known in Darwin for the fish feeding at high tide. Entry is a bit expensive at \$4.50 a head but it is one of the main attractions near the city. The fish that turn up to be fed are mostly milkfish and mullet but there are also a few rays and catfish. The admission price includes plenty of bread to feed the fish but the price is a bit high for this sort of attraction.

**June 14<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Our sightseeing trip today took us out to the Adelaide River crossing and a cruise down the river to see the jumping crocodiles. At \$26 a head this trip is reasonable value as it is a spectacle you won't see anywhere else.

After the cruise we went to the 'Window on the wetlands' visitors centre and then out to Fogg Dam which is one of the best places to film birds I have ever seen. The dam was originally constructed as a rice growing project in the 1950s but now has been turned into an incredible nature reserve.

I have had 5 job interviews over the past week so I am hoping that work is just around the corner.



**June 19<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

We went out to Darwin Wharf last night for a bite to eat which has come back to haunt me today. Something I ate had a little bit extra and I woke with a case of the trots. Most of today was a loss as I recovered.

**June 21<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

It looks like we may have problems finding a new water pump for the bus. No one locally seems to have much idea of where to locate one but we do have some hope of having it rebuilt by CBC who are bearing specialists. I have to pull the pump apart so they can have a look at it.

On the way back we decided to drop in at the local second hand dealer and as we were walking in Blue & Skeeta (from Cleaverville) were walking out. They were not intending to visit Darwin but ended up here anyway only arriving yesterday. The laws of coincidence must have been stretching a bit thin as the chances of us being there at the same time as them must be millions to one. It was great to see them again and we chatted for a couple of hours over lunch. We will drop over and see them again tomorrow for dinner.

**June 26<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

We are getting quite fed up with things at the moment. We apply for job after job without any success. There have been plenty of jobs I could do but none of the applications have come to anything.

If nothing happens in the next couple of weeks we will leave Darwin and look for work in a roadhouse or one of the small towns along the road.

I am still trying to get a water pump for the bus, no joy there either. We have managed to get the generator fixed and I think I have found a split ring that can be used for the spare tyre but despite these small steps forward I am feeling rather lack lustre and depressed at the moment.

**June 29<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

I have gone from feeling depressed about not having work to feeling anxious about going back to full time work for the first time in about 20 months. Tomorrow I start a 2 month contract with the Department of Corporate & Information Services. The pay is ok - about \$800 a week less tax & super, but being back in full time work will be a bit of a shock to the system.

**July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

The last three days have been a bit tiring and learning to support a mainframe computer system that I have never worked with before is quite challenging but I always enjoy learning something new.

For the first time in a long while I am really going to enjoy a weekend.

**July 4<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

I have finally managed to get out in the boat and go fishing again. We took the dinghy down to East Point and launched off a nice little beach just round the corner from the gun emplacements.

We caught one or two small fish and I managed to catch a good sized yellowtail bream but despite the small catch it was great to be back out on the water again.

Unfortunately the tide was a big one and while we launched off a nice bit of sand we had to bring the boat back up some gooey mud and rocks.

**July 5<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Back at work again today I now spend all day waiting for confused users to phone in for solutions to their problems. The morning was quite busy but the afternoon was fairly quiet and pretty boring.

**July 7<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

The job I am doing at the moment may pay well (\$20 an hour) but I don't think I could stay at it for too long. A trained monkey could just about handle it and although I don't want to sound egotistical, it is a bit beneath my skill levels and if I am not challenged by a job I get very bored very quickly.

I have applied for a Network Manager's position at Nhulunbuy - miles from anywhere - which pays \$30 an hour, so I'll bide my time and see if that comes off.

**July 11<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Today we took the boat to Buffalo Creek and spent the day catching baitfish and whiting. I was putting the bait and whiting into a bait keeper which hung over the side of the boat. We must have had a dozen or so fish in it when it dropped off the rollick and sank out of sight. The lid was never too secure so the fish inside may have had a lucky escape.

Thankfully the day wasn't a complete waste as the whiting continued to bite and we came home with about a dozen. Buffalo Creek is very attractive but at low tide we had problems moving around as the long shaft motor we use tended to clobber the bottom.

A lot of locals were pulling up mesh pots, presumably with mud crabs inside. We tried our crab pots with no success.

**July 17<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

One day off our 18<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary (tomorrow) and we went shopping for a washing machine. Not the most romantic of purchases but at \$2.40 a wash in the caravan park, the washing machine at \$406 will pay for itself in just over three years. I was hoping to find a washer that would fit under the desk when we are travelling but we could not find anything small enough. This one is a compromise as it will fit about half way in.

We also bought a new bed base (\$239) and threw out the old one which didn't allow room for storage underneath. The new one is quite high and we can put all sorts of things under it in boxes which will give us more storage space in the cupboards.

Tonight we are going on a harbour cruise on the Spirit of Darwin. Because we went on the Adelaide River Queen a few weeks ago tonight's 2 hour cruise is only \$15 a head instead of \$25.

**July 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

After a good buffet at the Victoria Hotel at lunch (\$6.95) on Friday we went out to the Casino for lunch (\$9.95) today expecting something even better. I was sadly disappointed. The only good thing about the food at the casino was the view. There was little variety and everything was tired and dry.



Sunset at Mindal Beach

**July 20<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

Feeling very run down today everything is getting me down and I haven't been feeling too well. The bus I catch home from work used to leave spot on 10 past 5, now it is leaving at 5:07 which doesn't give me any time to spare.

**July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

It's a public holiday in Darwin today (Show Day) and the show has moved in right next door. God what a racket! We are off to Litchfield for the weekend to get a bit of peace and quiet.

**July 25<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

The camping grounds in Litchfield were full to overflowing but luckily there was a nice privately owned camp ground just the other side of Wangi Falls. We spent the last two nights there and despite finding the folding beds we took with us a little uncomfortable we enjoyed the weekend. Sleeping in the tent for the first time in ages took some getting used to. Wangi was open for swimming this time so we made the most of it and spent some time in the rather cool water only to find later that the camp ground we were staying at had its own thermal spring with nice warm water.

On the way back to Darwin we had a quick look at Rum Jungle Lake - a complete waste of time and Manton Dam which was pretty but would be better if we took the boat with us next time.





Wangi Falls

**August 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Predictably, just as we were about to start building up our bank account again something else has gone wrong, in fact two things. First the rear brake cylinders on the car are leaking and a brake hose needs replacing and now the gas/electric fridge we have been using in the bus for the last 2 years is packing up.

For the last three days the temperature in the fridge has been steadily rising to a point where everything in the freezer is starting to defrost and the fridge section isn't much colder than a winter's day in Perth.

As a result we went to Chandlers today (isn't Sunday trading useful?) and ordered a fridge and a separate freezer. This will give us more room to keep things (especially beer) cold and both should run quite happily on the 1kva generator when we go bush camping again. It will mean keeping the generator on longer than usual but that's the price we pay for compressor fridges.

The only bright spot in this is that we were able to buy the fridge and freezer interest free over 12 months and at a total of \$1250 that means a monthly payment of about \$104 instead of raiding our bank account for the whole lot right now. Both items have a 5 year warranty which is another bonus.

**August 4<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

Our plans of having a separate fridge and freezer came unstuck when we discovered that the freezer wouldn't fit under the desk. Now we have had to get a smaller fridge/freezer which at \$549 is considerably cheaper but is smaller than the old gas/electric fridge. This was quite a disappointment.

**August 7<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

Every time we have been down to the wharf I have taken note of a large barge moored some distance out. I had a theory that it would attract schools of baitfish and today we took the boat out to see if the theory was correct. It turned out to be quite right and schools of small fish were being chased round and round the barge by other predatory fish. Despite trying a variety of lures and baits we were spectacularly unsuccessful in getting a hook up but if we had some live bait I'm sure the results would have been quite different.

That was the last fishing we intend to try up here and most of the fishing gear has now been packed up and put away on the roof rack. Let's just hope Queensland provides better fishing than the N.T.

We only have a couple of weeks left before we move on and we are now looking for jobs to move on to in Mt. Isa.

**August 13<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

The car was booked in at the local Holden dealer to get the brakes fixed this morning and Belle arrived to find that no-one had bothered to order the parts. Then she was told that we had to pay for the parts in advance. No one informed us of this when we booked the car in so now we have to wait until next week to get the brakes done; although we will be dealing with another company!

Only about 11 days now before we think about leaving Darwin. The time we have spent here has gone by pretty quickly. We will have been here about three and a half months by the time we go.

I was looking at the bus the other day and it struck me how many of the items we have were bought on the road as we have been travelling. Just for fun I have made a list: (since updated several times)

Generator	Pinjarra W.A. (replaced by 2ka Karratha)
Camp beds	Mandurah W.A.
Rear air conditioner	Exmouth W.A.
Boat	Karratha W.A. (replaced at Karratha)
Top air conditioner	Halls Creek W.A.
Video player	Halls Creek W.A.
Computer screen	Halls Creek W.A. (replaced Karratha)
HP Printer	Halls Creek W.A. (replaced Perth and again in Adelaide)
Fan	Halls Creek W.A. (replaced Rockingham and again in Alice Springs)
Deep cycle battery	Kununurra W.A. (Replaced Baldivis and again in Perth and Albany)
T.V.	Kununurra W.A. (Replaced Rockingham)
Bicycle	Kununurra W.A.
Washing machine	Darwin N.T. (replaced Rockingham and again in Welshpool)
Bed base	Darwin N.T.
Video camera	Darwin N.T.
Fridge	Darwin N.T. (replaced Rockingham)
TV. (Second one)	Townsville Qld.
Swivel chair	Townsville Qld.
New annexe roof & poles	Townsville Qld. (replaced Rockingham)
Video player (second one)	Townsville Qld
Deep cycle battery	Townsville Qld
Starter battery	Townsville Qld (replaced Alice Springs)
120w solar panel	Townsville Qld
Regulator and gauges	Townsville Qld
Rear speakers	Townsville Qld
Vacuum Cleaner	Townsville Qld
New porta potti	Townsville Qld
1500w inverter	Townsville Qld (Replaced Karratha twice)
New bed mattress	Mackay Qld
New folding chairs	Brisbane Qld (Replaced Karratha)
Tent	Adelaide SA
Camping mattress	Adelaide SA
Gas cooker	Adelaide SA (Replaced Rockingham)
Camping table	Adelaide SA (Replaced Rockingham)
Spare folding chairs	Adelaide SA (broken)
Picnic basket & set	Adelaide SA
Pentax MZ50 camera	Adelaide SA
Bike rack	Perth WA (Finally broke)
Center speakers	Perth WA
Filing cabinet	Perth WA
Canon printer	Perth WA
Laminator	Perth WA
Stereo	Perth WA
9Kg gas bottle (3)	Perth WA
Canon printer	Adelaide SA
Belle's Cycle	Adelaide SA
New front seating	Adelaide SA
Exhaust fan	Barossa SA
Chest of draws	Alice Springs NT
Fan	Alice Springs NT
Deep cycle batteries (2)	Alice Springs NT
Starter battery	Alice Springs NT
Yamaha outboard	Karratha WA
Honda 2kva generator	Karratha WA (later sold)
20A Battery charger	Karratha WA (broke down)
40watt solar panels (2)	Karratha WA
Folding boat trailer	Karratha WA
Echo sounder	Karratha WA
80w solar panel	Karratha WA
85w solar panel	Karratha WA
Fuji digital camera	Karratha WA
GPS	Carnarvon WA
Ice cream maker	Narrogin WA
Mixer	Narrogin WA
UHF aerial	Narrogin WA
2 <sup>nd</sup> 2Kva Generator	Karratha
2 <sup>nd</sup> echo sounder	Karratha
Printer	Karratha
Computer	Karratha
Engel fridge & 2 zone	Karratha
Flojet Water pump	Karratha
New boat	Karratha
New laptop (Belle's)	Karratha

Cannon printer yet another one Karratha  
500gb External hard drive      Karratha  
500gb External hard drive      Margaret River

This is only a partial list but Karratha seems to have done quite well out of us over the years.

New bus parts

Radiator	Kununurra WA
New tyres	Kununurra WA
Tail lights	Adelaide SA
Water pump	Lincoln SA
Clutch plate	Ingham Qld
New windscreen	Brisbane Qld
Master brake cylinder	Brisbane Qld
Coil & ballast resistor	Alice Springs

We are certainly doing our best to spread our money round the country. By the time we get back to Perth we will probably have replaced most major items with something we bought along the way.

#### **August 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

One company I want to give a special 'plug' to is Beaufort Tyres. We had some problems getting the split rim back on the spare bus tyre and we needed a repair done to one of the trailer tyres. They did both these things for us without charging us a cent. They were helpful and friendly so if you are in need of tyre in Darwin go and see these guys they will look after you.

#### **August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Just about everything is packed away now and we are just waiting for the clock to wind down over the last two days in Darwin. In general I would recommend Darwin as a destination for travellers. Our stay here has been an enjoyable one for the most part but I wouldn't think about staying here long term.

The caravan park (Shady Glen) is a reasonable place in general but it is situated in a terrible position. Right next door is the showground so every time there is an event the residents of the caravan park cop all the noise. Then there is the racing circuit at Hidden Valley at the back and the airport across the road. Apart from these inconveniences the park's roads are all unsealed so there is quite a dust problem.

The owners are at least doing the right thing by keeping other noise in the park to a minimum and don't hesitate to kick people out if they make more than reasonable levels of noise.

#### **August 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

My last day at work with DCIS and what should be our last full day in Darwin. We have enjoyed the last three months here and Darwin is certainly a place I will recommend to other travellers.

Some of the highlights were East Point, Berry Springs, Fogg Dam and Litchfield National Park.

The area surrounding Darwin is far less tropical than I had imagined but that only serves to heighten the impact of the city itself.

The only minus as far as I am concerned was the almost total lack of fish - at least at all the places we tried. Others have undoubtedly been more successful.

#### **August 25<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

After a final pack up of last minute items we dropped the bus off in Beremah to have the gas system looked at and went off to Larekeya to have a swim. When we got back to the bus the only problem they could find was related to a corroded tachometer cable which may have been shorting out. The cable was disconnected and we took off hoping that everything would be ok.

We hadn't even got out of the suburbs of Darwin before a car pulled round in front of us and indicated that we should stop. When we got out we found that a tyre on the trailer had blown out so we unloaded the car and changed it and went back to pick up another spare.

Then finally we were on our way. We stopped at Bridge Creek for the night and met a couple of other people with buses. One had a Bedford and had the number of a parts supplier who should be able to help with a water pump so as soon as we are settled I will give them a go.

These are the two numbers I was given.

[Don Kite 1800 029 957 \(spare parts\)](tel:1800029957)  
[SMS 1800 620 026 \(engines\)](tel:1800620026)

(I have since purchased a new water pump from Don Kite and they were very fast and efficient.)

#### **August 26<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

A short drive down to Pine Creek and then 3km south of town to the Copperfield Dam turn off. 4km further down an unsealed but reasonable road we came to an excellent campsite which overlooks the dam. The campsite includes

toilets and even town water. There is a grassed area near the dam with BBQs, seats and shelters. The water is fresh and clear and there is even a sandy bottom. The best thing about the campsite is that it is FREE although stays are limited to 3 nights.

After a refreshing swim we went into town and had a look at the mine lookout and then went to have a go at gold panning. It costs \$5 each which includes a short (somewhat rote) talk on the history of mining and a look at Australia's oldest working stamper battery which is worth the admission fee on its own. Lastly you get to do a bit of panning and keep the few flecks you find in a vial of water.

Pine Creek Railway station was also interesting but sadly the local producer of mango wine had run out of stock. The town is still heavily involved in gold mining and with a terrific free campsite close by it is worth stopping for a night or two.



Stamper battery at Pine Creek

**August 27<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

Up early and off through Katherine and on to Mataranka and the thermal springs. The caravan park by the springs is a bit ordinary and from my point of view Berry Springs are better, but it is a nice spot to spend the night before contemplating the next bleak 1800km or so.

The drive from Darwin to Cairns (our intended destination at the moment) is about 2800km - the longest distance we have attempted to cover over a short period of time. From all accounts there isn't much between us and Mount Isa.



Mataranka

**August 28<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

Now we are getting into the real driving with miles of scrubland and wood thickets to keep us company. We had another tyre go on the trailer (courtesy of local road works spreading rocks all over the road) and managed to get a replacement at Daly Waters where we also stopped for a beer and lunch at the pub.

We pushed on to Elliott where we stopped for the night at the caravan park (\$20) which although a bit expensive was better than others we had stayed at in the past.



Airfield near Daly Waters

**August 30<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

At just after 12 noon local time we crossed the Queensland border and are now stopped for the night at a campsite 90km from Mt Isa.

I can't say that I'm all that impressed with the northern gateway into Queensland as the road between Camoweal & Isa is dotted with single lane bitumen sections. The Government have the gall to put up signs saying "Survive this journey" when an extra lane so vehicles can pass each other without going off onto the gravel would make survival much more likely!

**August 31<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

We arrived in Mt. Isa about 10am and had a quick look round. There isn't much here to attract tourists as Isa is a working town and is dominated by the smokestacks of heavy industry. The road into the town improves about 60km out and hopefully we have seen the last of one lane bitumen roads.

Q. What's the difference between a dirt road and a Queensland one lane bitumen road?

A. The dirt road is much smoother.

Someone really should do something about the state of the road between Camoweal and Isa.

Mount Isa is a town that you are going to feel something about. I don't think anyone could possibly come here and leave without a strong impression of the town. Unfortunately for many people that impression is going to be negative. Isa is very much a working town with VERY wide streets and a few too many sets of traffic lights. The intersections are the size of football fields and there isn't much evidence of careful town planning. Everything seems to have developed in an add-hoc sort of fashion which gives it a rough and ready atmosphere. Some people will love the place, I hate it.

15km from town is the Moondarra Dam and recreation area which is a little piece of heaven in a wild land. Below the dam wall is a well maintained park with a large flock of resident peacocks. Boating, fishing and swimming are allowed in the dam and there is a pleasant recreation area opposite the dam wall.



Mount Isa – an ugly town

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

The last couple of days have been little but driving, driving, driving. The Barkly/Flinders Highway from Camowial to Charters Towers is a real shocker of a road. There are a few sections which have been upgraded but 80% of it is b&\*&#y awful and some sections are downright dangerous.

Anyone contemplating a trip along this road should be aware that the camber (angle) of sections varies greatly and you can go from completely flat to several degrees without warning. This has the effect of throwing the vehicle off centre and can lead to the wheels going off into the gravel on the side which in many places is several inches lower than the bitumen.

Miles and miles of the drive are across vast flat BORING plains which seem to go on forever. The interesting sections are a mere 120km from Mount Isa and then past Hughenden as the terrain starts to become more hilly.

Last night we stopped off at a campsite by the Campase River (river bed more like) and met some fellow members of the CMCA. (Don & Joan, Norm & Rose) Luckily they were familiar with the area and put us on to the CMCA campsite at Charters Towers showground (\$5 a night including power - for CMCA members only).

Charters Towers is a charming town with some perfectly preserved buildings dating from the gold rush days. There is a rodeo on here tomorrow so we'll spend two nights and go on to Townsville on Sunday.



Charters Towers

**September 4<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

The rodeo cost \$15 but was good entertainment and on the whole it was good value for money. There were 50 of Australia's top bull riders doing their thing and most emerged unscathed if not entirely triumphant. I don't think you

could pay me enough money to convince me to get on the back of one of those bulls, especially the ones with great long horns. The rodeo 'clowns' do a great job in distracting the bulls when they have a go at a downed rider but they only seem to get away with it by the skin of their teeth.

**September 6<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Today we arrived in Townsville and after settling in at the Showgrounds Caravan Park we had a quick look around the immediate area. I can't say I'm all that thrilled with the town or the 'tropical' countryside which is nothing more than a few burned shrubs at the moment, but maybe that will improve with the coming of the rains.

Belle has a problem renewing her driver's license - which expires on the 8<sup>th</sup> - as we haven't had a mailing address for the last two weeks and the renewal is still in Perth. She tried to get a Queensland license but apparently you have to be here a month before you can apply and by that time her W.A. one would have expired.

You would think the dickheads responsible for licensing in each state would make it easy for people to renew a license when they are on the road, but as usual when dealing with government departments all you get is hassles and static.

The journey down from Darwin took us 13 days and cost about \$650 in fuel. We only saved about \$110 in caravan park fees by free camping as often as we could, but at least that is something.



Townsville – one of our favourite places

**September 9<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

I had my first job interview today (boy that was quick!) and I am hopeful of getting some contract work doing Universe support. We are still in the Showgrounds caravan park but want to move out on Monday As it is so noisy here. Every bit as bad as Darwin as there are netball courts that seem to be used every night of the week and a greyhound track with speakers blaring tonight. I am fed up with noisy caravan parks!

Tomorrow we are going over to Magnetic Island 8km offshore, I hope the place is as pretty as the pictures we have seen in tourist guides. We are now equipped with snorkels, masks and flippers to do a bit of snorkelling over the reef and we have hired a moke to get around the island.

**September 10<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

The trip to Magnetic Island was very enjoyable. The package included transfers to and from the ferry terminal, return ferry ride and moke hire for the day. This worked out to just over \$40 a head (It gets cheaper for 3 or 4 people as the moke hire amount stays the same).

The Island is every bit as pretty as the pictures in the tourist guides and there are several bays scattered along the coast which can be explored. There is only one of the bays that is really suitable for swimming at low tide but the rest are great for just sitting and relaxing or walking along.

There is also a car ferry which will take a vehicle and up to 6 people for \$96 - which is better value if more people are going. The snorkelling wasn't too successful as there was a lot of sand in the water which kept visibility down so hopefully we will get better use out of the gear when we take a trip out over the Barrier Reef later on.

Today we have to decide on a caravan park to move to - the one we are in is VERY noisy.



Magnetic Island

**September 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

My 39<sup>th</sup> birthday passed without as much as a whimper but at least I'm not in Halls Creek for this one.

**September 14<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

We have settled in at the Range Caravan Park which is nice and quiet. It is further from town but it is also cheaper (\$84 a week) than the Town & Country park (\$90) that we were in. After 4 weeks at \$84 we can go on to a long term rate of \$55 plus power which will probably work out at around \$70 a week.

We need to find work here and aren't expecting to move on to Cairns until next year - but you never know.



Little Crystal Creek

**September 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

As there isn't much around Townsville to go and look at we took off for Mission Beach (about 200km north) and had a look at a few interesting places along the way.

The 'Great Green Way' as it is known has a number of overnight campsites along the main road (Bluewater and Rollingstone to name two) as well as excellent rest areas at Saunders Beach and Balgal Beach.

The Great Green Way is aptly named as about 50km north of Townsville the scenery changes and despite the fact that we are currently at the end of the dry season, everything is green and attractive beyond this point.

A real treat up high in the hills is Little Crystal Creek which flows under an ancient stone bridge. It is hard to believe that you aren't in Tasmania or some other southern state when you stand under the archway watching the stream flow past.

Ingham was a reasonably attractive country town but the real gem in the vicinity was Lucinda which is the southern access to Hinchinbrook Island. A caravan park and nearby boat ramp as well as easy access to the Hinchinbrook Channel make a stop over here a real must.



North of Ingham is Cardwell which stretches along the coast at the north end of Hinchinbrook. A jetty here may be a good fishing spot and I intend to check it out one day.

The road north leads to Tully through sugar cane and corn country. Small cane railways cross the roads and a weather eye needs to be kept out for the trains which are in almost constant use at this time of the year.

22km from Tully is Mission Beach which is everything the tourist brochures claim. Development in the area should be halted where it is or the casual laid back atmosphere which still exists will be ruined.

As we were only here for the night we didn't get to go across to Dunk Island but we will put that on the agenda for later on.



Mission Beach

**September 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

Yesterday we both had job interviews and although I don't like making predictions about work I would bet that we will both be working in the near future. Belle looks like going back to work in her professional capacity as a Medical Scientist and I look like getting work as a Programmer again so we should make some good money. We hope to stay here until at least April next year and I have a long list of things I want to buy:

Solar panels, new starter battery for the bus, another deep cycle battery, new annexe roof, water pump for the bus, 1200 watt inverter so we can run the fridge without using the generator, echo sounder for the boat which will all cost a lot of money.

Belle received a message today from the hospital and she has been offered a 6 month contract, so we will now be here for at least the next 6 months. Going back to her profession is good because it will give her a refresher and keep her skills current as well as making good money.

**September 25<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

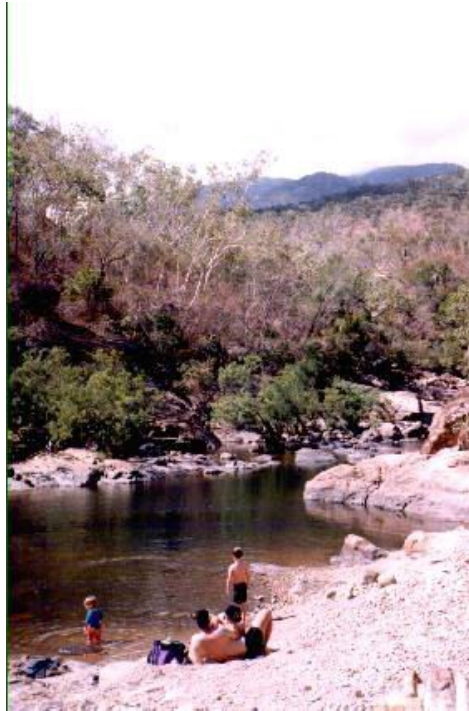
We took the opportunity of going down the coast to Ayr and Home Hill today. 28km south of Townsville is the turn off to Bowling Green Bay national park and a small campsite by the side of a river. It's not a place I would attempt to get the bus into as the last part of the access road is too narrow but smaller units would manage to get in without a problem.

The river is safe to swim in here (no crocs) but at this time of year it isn't too deep.

Further down near the coast is a town called Giru. A short drive from town down a dirt road is a boat ramp leading the junction of a couple of rivers. The area looks good for a couple of nights stay as well. We didn't see any 'no camping' signs and we know of another bus that spent a couple of nights there.

I certainly wouldn't go down there if there was any chance of rain as the whole area looks like it would turn into one big bog very quickly. (The turn off to this spot is 53km south of Townsville).

88km south of Townsville is Ayr which is typical of many of the towns around this area. CMCA members can stay at the showground here for \$5 a night. 9km further on is another small town called Home Hill. The whole area is cane country and like the areas north of Townsville there are narrow gauge railways crossing the roads and cane processing plants all over the place.



Alligator Creek

**September 28<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

Belle started work today and we also had the first rain we have seen in nearly six months.

**October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

We had a look at Reef HQ today and were a bit disappointed. The large tank which holds the living corals had very few fish, and other exhibits were sparse and on the whole there wasn't enough to see to justify the \$14.80 entrance fee.

After Underwater World in W.A. and the Territory Wildlife Park aquarium in the N.T. this exhibit isn't very inspiring.

**October 10<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

The weather is gradually getting warmer in Townsville but there is still no sign of the humidity that was starting to make Darwin uncomfortable when we left there about two months ago.

I am still waiting for the council to get its act together with regard to work but they still seem interested in getting me to help them out. Belle is getting on well at her job but doesn't like the (relatively) long journey of 18km each way.

One of the more interesting attractions in Townsville is the Flinders Street Markets which are held every Sunday. It is better than any of the markets in Darwin but doesn't have the kind of foods available at Mindal.

The area of coast near town known as The Strand is being redeveloped after a recent cyclone washed most of the original way. The opening of the new area is set to happen on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month so it will be interesting to see what the area looks like when it is all completed. When we got here it was a real mess.



Casino

**October 13<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

At last I have received the call I have been waiting for. I start work with Thuringowa Council next Wednesday.

**October 17<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

We finally got the chance to go fishing today and spent some time at Saunders Beach. Unfortunately there wasn't much around and Belle caught one small fish which we put back and we caught one crab in the crab pots.

**October 20<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

My first day of work was fine, but a little bit of a strain on my poor grey cells as I tried to remember work I was doing over two years ago. I was quite surprised at how quickly most things have come back to me.

**October 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

We try to go out somewhere on the weekends and today we planned a BBQ up at Little Crystal Creek. As we arrived early we made our way up to Paluma which sits on top of the range a further 11km from the picnic area near the Crystal Creek bridge.



Historic Little Crystal Creek Bridge

As we made our way higher into the mountains the vegetation changed abruptly from temperate to tropical rainforest. There was a complete change in the air as it became cool and damp. Thick lush greenery covered the area around Paluma and we decided to have the BBQ up there instead. Having selected a table and got ready to start cooking we found we hadn't brought any matches with us. There was no one else around so we packed up and made our way all the way back down the winding road to the lowlands again.

In the end we arrived at Balgal Beach and since there weren't any gas BBQs there we bought lunch and had a BBQ dinner when we got home. A lesson in being prepared!

**October 30<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

No I didn't forget the second anniversary of Lucy's passing yesterday, but I left the entry late deliberately as she and Sam both paid me a visit in my dreams last night. My personal beliefs on an afterlife are that there isn't one but when my faithful old friends visit with me so often in dreamland it's hard sometimes not to think that I might just be wrong. In some ways I hope I am because I would love to be back together with them again. (2006: Even years later the dogs are still visiting me from time to time in my dreams, but as time goes on their visits are getting further and further apart. I still miss them terribly and the pain of their loss has stopped me from getting another dog.)

**November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

The weather is gradually taking on a hotter more humid aspect but I'd put money on the fact that Darwin is much, much worse than here.

Both our jobs are going well (lets hope that doesn't put the mockers on them) and time is passing quite quickly. We have booked in at Lucinda (near Hinchinbrook Island) for a couple of nights at Christmas when we plan to go fishing in the Hinchinbrook Channel.

The only thing that really bugs me about Townsville is the number of round-a-bouts on the roads here. On one fairly short stretch of road (Thuringowa Drive) there are no less than 6. The drivers here are either flat out or dead slow and the local trick is to pull out in front of you without any warning.

Besides that Townsville is pretty alright.

**November 5<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

I had the day off today as I am working a 9 day fortnight at the Council. Didn't do much but I enjoyed the time to myself.

#### **November 6<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

Today we had to go and vote on whether Australia should become a republic. I voted 'no' as I believe the republican model that has been proposed is not the right one and that it was all slapped together in too much of a hurry.

There seems to be a big push by the 'yes' campaign to get all this through in time for the Olympics and I think that a fundamental change to the constitution needs a lot more debate and serious thought before it takes place.

I actually expect that the 'yes' vote will win and I hope that shoving this thing through so fast doesn't backfire on the country as a whole some time down the track.

I am very much in favour of having a directly elected president - the politicians don't want that because they might get someone they don't like. All I can say is 'too bad'.

As for the monarchy, I think even England should get rid of that load of parasites. Tourists will still come to see the buildings even if the privileged class no longer inhabit them. What a saving for the poor old English tax payer that would be. (Being born in England I have strong views on the monarchy and the class system.) Pensioners burning their furniture to keep warm in winter while QEII and her hangers on live in the lap of luxury doesn't sit too well with me.

This morning I purchased a jig-saw (not the puzzle type the saw type) as I had to cut a hole in the back of our TV cabinet area. Last weekend I bought a second video player to help with making tapes about our trip but when we got it home it wouldn't fit into the cabinet, - hence the saw today - now its all neatly shelved at last.

The video was a bit more expensive than I had intended (\$659) but I needed a unit that allows audio dubbing and that was the cheapest one I could find. Good job we are both earning good money at the moment.

We investigated the cost of a new annexe for the bus and discovered that it would be in the region of \$3500 !! Arghh, way too much. I'll wait until we get to a bigger town where there is more competition and try again.

#### **November 8<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

Much to my surprise Australia is not a republic, which for the moment I think is a good thing. What really got me mad on Saturday night was watching the absolute wankers like Stan Grant being thoroughly rude while interviewing the leader of the 'No' side. The media immediately took the line that those who voted no did so because they wanted the Queen to remain as head of state.

I voted 'no' because I wasn't presented with either enough information on the changes to the constitution or any alternative model. I certainly didn't vote 'no' because I wanted the Queen kept on.

Even fairly respectable journalists on the ABC like Kerry O'Brien took this stupid, and to me, extremely offensive line. Much to my great surprise Peter Reith (who I can't stand) was giving the journos a serve about why many people voted no.

In any case we now have the time to sit back and consider carefully what needs to be done. I am sure that Australia will become a republic but now we have the chance to do it properly without being railroaded into something we know nothing about.

As for the leader of the 'yes' campaign, I have never seen such a poor loser in all my life. I hope he gets the boot and someone more rational gets to lead the republicans next time round.

#### **November 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

It's hard to believe how fast time is slipping past at the moment. We are only 7 weeks out from Christmas and we have been in Townsville for just over two months.

This year we finally look like being able to put some of the money back in the bank that we lost during the first year on the road. Over all we will still be about \$1000 behind our starting point but that's not too bad.

The year would have been much tougher if I hadn't sold the van in Halls Creek (I wonder if the horrible thing is still going? It probably is now I don't have it any more.)

We are adding to our list of items purchased on the road with :

Sony Hi Fi Video  
Executive office chair (finally something comfortable to sit in while I write this)

both purchased in Townsville.

#### **November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999 (Sunday)**

Another week gone already and the rainy weather seems to be setting in. Despite the weather we took time to have a look at the redeveloped Strand. It certainly is a huge change from when we first arrived. The locals are flocking to it every weekend and it will attract its fair share of tourists when the dry season rolls around again. All that is needed now is something like Mindal markets in Darwin to really make it a big attraction.

Tropical fruit season has started and we bought some fruit at the Francis Street markets in town. There were fresh lycees, something called a soursop (not at all sour and very tasty), Jambus, paw paw, jack fruit and some purple and green things that we haven't got a name for, all for just over \$10.

We also had a look around the Palmetum on the way home and I will be going back with all the camera gear. This place was incredible. It is dedicated to the palm plants of the world and entry is free. There are lagoons where hungry turtles rush towards the shore hoping for a hand out and three separate walks around the very large park which are said to take an hour each.

Anyone coming to Townsville MUST NOT MISS the Palmetum.



Townsville from Castle Hill

**December 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (Wednesday)**

FINANCES FOR YEAR 2

48539.91 *INCOME*

*EXPENSE*

5572.21 *Tax*  
791.40 *Super*  
7480.68 *Mortgage*  
324.35 *Electricity*  
339.70 *Telecom*  
237.00 *Car Ins*  
590.00 *Bus Ins*  
463.00 *Car Lic*  
356.00 *Bus Lic*  
6450.71 *Bus/Trailer*  
95.00 *Drv Lic*  
42.00 *St John*  
0.00 *House Co*  
239.00 *House St*  
98.42 *Shire*  
88.13 *Water*  
2224.56 *Petrol*  
6192.14 *Food*  
1502.63 *Pocket*  
6387.00 *Misc*  
15.00 *Hair cut*  
1617.35 *Car Maint*  
1100.00 *House maint*  
30.00 *Pets*  
432.92 *Clothes*  
1126.79 *Presents*  
3421.00 *Cvan Park*  
122.34 *Medical*  
65.00 *Boat*  
47404.33 *TOTAL OUT*

48539.91 *TOTAL IN*

1135.58 *BALANCE*

Although this year we finally made a profit overall it was at the expense of selling a large asset (the van) for \$8,500. Without that our savings would have taken a real beating. At least we start off the new year on a firmer footing and hopefully that will see us through.

**December 4<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

This has been a pretty lousy week. First on Wednesday night the computer started playing up and although I have got it partially working again I have lost a lot of files.

Second was the video camera breaking down yesterday and third was the bad news today that Buggy (our cat at home) seems to have failing kidneys and may need to be put to sleep.

Poor old Buggy hasn't rated much of a mention in the journal so far, but we have had him for about seventeen years. He is still living at home and although it's probably fair to say that he wasn't quite as much a part of our lives as the dogs he will be sadly missed when he goes.

We won't know any more until Monday when Mum gets him looked over by the vet, but we have told her to accept the vets advice and from the sounds of things the news isn't going to be good and we are preparing for the worst.

Sam was the first of our pets we had another little dog called Susie who died quite young, then came Lucy and then Buggy. I still remember the day we brought him home, he was so small he sat in the palm of my hand. We took him into the back garden to introduce him to the dogs and he took one look at Lucy and puffed himself up and chased her down the garden. That was when he got his name 'Buggy' after the gangster Buggy Malone. He has been beating up on dogs ever since.

I'll just bet he gives the grim reaper a few claw marks to remember him by when he goes to pussycat heaven.

**December 7<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

Good news, Buggy is much improved since last week. So far so good, I'll cross my fingers that it was only a short term illness of some kind.

**December 13<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Monday)**

We are having the time of our lives with tropical fruit up here at the moment. There are all sorts of unusual and tasty fruits that you don't see down south. Our favourite over the last few days have been fresh lychees. At \$6 a kilo we have been filling up on them.

Today we opened up a whole jack fruit which was quite an experience. We have always bought this fruit ready to eat before and had no idea what lay in store for us on the inside of the huge green casing. The sweet orange pods that are sold in many tropical markets are encased in what can only be described as something like flat STRONG spaghetti which itself is coated in a VERY sticky latex like substance. It gets everywhere when you are extracting the edible pods - next time we will do the job outside the bus.

Still we love jackfruit despite it quite strong smell so the effort was well rewarded.

I don't know how I'm gong to adjust to the south again with its cold climate and boring fruit. If I ever settle down again I suspect it will be somewhere north of Capricorn.



Tropical fruit

**December 17<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Friday)**

Another RDO today and I managed to do a couple more jobs round the bus that I have been meaning to get to for some time. In the last couple of weeks I have put up three new shelves in the bus, one over the desk, one under the desk to hold video tapes and another over the driving area which has helped to sort out proper mountings for the CB radios.

Today I put some speakers up in the bedroom area which are linked to the stereo in the front of the bus. We have been using a large portable stereo in the bedroom but this makes better use of space as the speakers are mounted

up on the wall. The speakers cost \$99 abut after adding in wiring, selector switch and cabling for the CBs the total came up to \$178.

One sour note today was that I picked up the supposedly repaired video camera from Chandlers only to find that it was chewing up tapes. I found out who the repairers were and took it round to make sure that they knew I wasn't too pleased. I suggested that this time they actually put a tape in and test the camera before sending it back.

**December 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday)**

With the Christmas rush almost over and most of the jobs I wanted to do around the bus almost complete I have had a little spare time to sit back and reflect on the journey so far and think about what is still to come.

Although we now have the most populated area of Australia and lots to see in front of us I am starting to yearn for the west coast again. I don't want to hurry through the next part of the trip but I am starting to miss places like Quobba, Exmouth and Cleaverville. It may be some time before we get back to W.A. but these places are on top of my list of ones to re-visit.

The feeling when you are driving north along the coast and come across the first cattle grid is really special to me. I really want to see the wildflowers in full bloom again as well so I want to organise that section for August-September.

So far on this trip the West Coast has still been my favourite area. From Shark Bay through to Karratha strikes me as being a very special part of the country. It has a feeling about it that defies description but I can feel it drawing me back.

**December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999 (Thursday)**

I have a couple of weeks off over the Christmas period and hopefully I can get some of the outstanding work on the bus completed before I go back to work.

Today I bought a couple of new batteries for the bus. A new starter - which has been needed for a long time (\$109) and a second deep cycle (\$165) plus a couple of gauges (\$45) so I can keep an eye on the charge level and make sure it stays up.

The last big item we want to purchase is a 5kva generator (trading in the 1kva we have) so we can be completely self sufficient when we are out in the bush. I want to mount it under the bus which means looking at marine generators, I expect I am going to have a nasty shock when I start to get prices. (I was)

**December 25<sup>th</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Saturday/Sunday)**

We arrived at Lucinda about 11am and settled in to one of the cabins in the local caravan park. The weather was wet and drizzly but I did make an attempt at fishing off the jetty without any success.

Sunday was clearer and we spent the morning fishing from the jetty but the only catch was a catfish which we threw back and which was promptly snatched up by a large fish hawk.



Lucinda

**December 28<sup>th</sup> 1999 (Tuesday)**

The trailer top is looking a little rusty at the moment so I went down to the local hardware store to pick up some kill rust to re-surface the top. It was a little expensive (around \$65 for everything I needed) but I have used kill rust on the trailer box steel and it has done a good job so I'm sticking with what I have used before. When I got back I started thinking about all the money that has gone into the bus so far and decided to make a list and give myself an idea of what the bus owes us at the moment.

Expense	\$
Purchase price	16800

Inspection	150
License	1008.85
Insurance	1674.36
Valuation	85
Mechanical work	4145
Gas work	428
Cabinet work	1299
Misc work	85
Air conditioner rear	925
Air conditioner front	600
Tyres	2275
Batteries	658
Fridge repairs	400
New fridge	549
Generator	1550
Seat covers	65
New radiator	1040
New bed base	239
Rear speakers	178
Volt meters	45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34199.21</b>

This list covers all the major expenses and most of the minor ones but I could add another \$300 or so for bits and pieces that aren't listed. Taking away the purchase price of \$16800 gives a result of about \$17400, this divided by 30 ( the number of months we have owned the bus) and multiplied by 12 (average for a year) produces a figure of \$6959 per year that we have spent. Not too bad considering the work we have had done and the age of the bus.

The reason I have included these figures is to give any prospective bus buyers out there an idea of the things you may be up for when purchasing an older bus. This might help in working out a budget. In our case we have needed an extra \$134 a week for ongoing maintenance and improvements to the bus.

#### **January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Having just checked the date on my watch I'm glad to see that it is Y2K compliant. Finally the Christmas new year period is out of the way and things can start to return to normal.

In December's Wanderer (the CMCA magazine) I spotted an ad for 1500w inverters for \$699 so I have ordered one and hope to have it by the end of the week. This will allow us to run the fridge while we are on the road and may do away with the need for a generator when we are moving from one place to another. (The inverter lasted until 2003 before it packed up.)

I still think we need a bigger generator although I am now looking at a 2.6kva (2000w) Onan instead of anything larger.

We took the boat out on Saturday night as we went fishing with some friends in Ross Creek. We hooked a few small fish - no keepers - but at least we were getting bites. (fish as well as mosquito).

Today we did most of the packing up around the bus as we are due to go house sitting for three weeks starting next weekend. The bus is going out to the back of the caravan park and we will only have to pay \$5 a week to keep it there.

I start work again on Wednesday and as I have finished most of the work around the bus that is perfect timing.

Less than three months to go before we head up to Cairns and Atherton - I am really looking forward to that.

#### **January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

With the period of house sitting nearly over we have moved the bus back on to a site at the caravan park. It's wonderful to turn the Air-conditioner on and get REALLY COOL.

Although the house we have been looking after has a pool, it is an older style Queensland house with ceiling fans and NO FLYSCREENS!! God the mozzies have driven us crazy over the past two weeks. You can't close the house up because it gets very hot so all the windows are open and the mozzies just come swarming in. Even mosquito coils failed to keep them at bay for long.

House sitting makes a change but its always nice to come back home to our old bus.

We still have two days before we are back here full time but we can now come down here and put the Air-conditioners on during the hottest part of the day. The weather is getting quite warm with no sign of a 'wet season' yet.



### **January 28<sup>th</sup> 2000**

We have now set a date for leaving Townsville (March 18<sup>th</sup>) when we will head up to Tinaroo for a week with some friends we have made here and catch some red claw (the Queensland version of maron).

After that mum is planning to fly into Cairns and we will come back up the range to Atherton where we can do some exploring. We want to go out to Undara and then on to Daintree. With luck we can get a ferry up to Cooktown which is the furthest north we want to go. Then back down the coast and on towards Mackay.

Tropical fruit is still in season although lycees are going out but longans (my absolute favourites) are coming in.

### **January 29<sup>th</sup> 2000**

It's hard to believe that it is two whole years since we lost dear old Sam. Time has flown and I guess it has eased the pain somewhat. I often wish we could get another dog, but it just isn't practical while we both have to find work. If we ever decide to settle down again I think that will be the first thing I do.

We are now starting to plan for the trip north. Our first stop will be Tinaroo where we will spend a week catching redclaw in the dam. Then we move to Atherton and shortly afterward we hope mum is going to fly into Cairns where we will pick her up and spend some time touring north Queensland.

Mum will be 87 this year and although she lost her drivers licence a little while ago she is still managing to keep busy. I know she is looking forward to coming over and seeing Queensland. Hopefully we can all go out to Undara as well as going to the Daintree and Cooktown.

### **February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000**

We have added a few more tropical fruits to our expanding palate in the past week or so. I'll try and describe a few that we have tried so those with less adventurous tastes will have some idea of what the fruit is like.

Abiu - Big yellow fruit with a soft centre that tastes like caramel. Yummy.

Sempote - Green fruit which we didn't like.

Marang - Big prickly looking fruit which is probably related to the jack fruit or durian. It has small white pods with a seed in the centre of each. Unusual taste, worth a try.

Ice cream bean - YUK ! Supposed to taste like ice cream - tastes like cotton to me!

Lycees - Just like in the tin but much better

Longans - Similar in flavour to lychees but stronger and sweeter. Brown skins rather than reddish.

Rambutan - Red hairy looking fruit. Nice sweet flesh inside but the woody part of the seed tends to cling to the fruit and spoils it a bit.

Star apple - Green star shaped fruit which are crisp and quite refreshing.

Star fruit - Green or purple fruit with seeds in the shape of a star. If the ones we tried were typical I won't try them again.

(it is possible I have mixed up the names of the star apple and star fruit)

Jambu - Really just a lily pilly fruit - we used to eat these as kids. Red fruit with a crisp white centre. Not unlike star apple in texture.

Jack fruit - Big green fruit - looks like a durian but less spiky. String smelling and tasting with orange pods. Some people don't like the smell but it tastes good.

Sour sop - Not sour at all. Green fruit with a soft creamy and delicious centre.

Along with the more unusual fruit there are plenty of mangoes (Bowen mangoes are best), paw paw, passionfruit, bananas, pineapple, grapes, coconuts and so on.

### **February 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Yesterday we spent the day out at the local speedway, not as you might imagine watching the races, but helping John put together an annexe roof for our bus. We met John (whose brother owns the Townsville speedway) via a mutual friend (Max) and he was kind enough to offer to stitch up a roof for us if we were able to get the material.

All up the main roof (21'x7'6"), an offside cover (3'x21') and a windscreen cover has only cost about \$300 - very good value.

Friday night we were visiting a neighbour in the caravan park and I managed to put away a bit more grog than I should so I have been feeling very seedy today. We didn't get to bed until after 1am but despite this with John's hard work the roof is complete and is now attached to the bus.

6 weeks to go now before we are back on the road.

### **February 10<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

Work for me at the Thuringowa Council is petering out a bit now. I have had the last three days at home as there isn't any work at the office. I have managed to put the driver's side shade up in the last couple of days and also do a few other minor jobs that have been on hold for a while. Now we have a 22' annexe on the passengers side and a 3' x 22' shade on the driver's side. This will not only help keep the temperature in the bus down a bit but it will allow us to open the windows when it is raining and let fresh air in. The main idea is to cut down on air conditioning and save a bit of money - although as I write this the air-conditioner is on - so as the Yanks say 'go figure.'

Belle is getting a bit cheesed off with work as well but won't take a day off as it means a lost days pay.

Not being at work means no access to the internet and I can't update the site as regularly, so the update when it comes should be a big one.

**February 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Mum's flight is booked for March 26<sup>th</sup> and she arrives in Cairns at 4.20pm local time. We expect to have the bus in Atherton so will go down to Cairns for the day and pick her up when she arrives.

I have been spending plenty of time (and money) working on the bus but everything is an effort to make life easier when we are travelling. We are on design number 6 for our outside shower tent and I think this time I finally have a winner. It is free standing and quite large and can be set up in about 5 minutes. Hopefully it will be the last time I need to re-design one of our more important facilities.

It has been very hot outside but I am gradually getting all the work done. I'm very happy not to be working at the moment as I just couldn't have found the time to get this done otherwise.

**February 17<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

I am no longer wondering where the wet season has got to as it has arrived with a vengeance. I have been getting work on the bus done between showers and I am almost finished now. I am still waiting for word about the solar panel which is due to be in stock by next week. With just over 4 weeks to go until we start heading for Tinaroo I am trying to make sure we are 100% ready for life on the road again.

As part of a power management system for the inverter I have purchased a 24 hour timer which I will use to cut power to the fridge between 8pm and 4am. I am putting this on trial with standard 240v power now to see how it goes. The operating temperature of the fridge is about 2.2 Celsius so I'll see how being off for 8 hours overnight effects things.

As I want to have the shower tent and poles easily accessible I have put a 2 metre length of 160mm storm water pipe across the front of the trailer and capped the ends. This will hold most of the poles etc that we need when we stop overnight.

Apart from the solar panel I still have to put a series of rings along the top of the annexe rail so the roof can be rolled up and tied into position when we are moving. I have to wait for a dry day to finish this off.

**February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

Rain, rain, rain.... ever since the start of the month there seems to have been little else. Thankfully the council have found some more work for me to do and I will probably be there for the next three days - I'm starting to go stir crazy in the bus.

**February 25<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

Very heavy rain fell most of last night and is still continuing this morning. Huge areas of Queensland are under water and for a short time today we were cut off as the water came up over the top of the Bohle bridge and water flooded the road towards Hervey Range so we were completely stranded.

There is also a cyclone watch current and Cairns has been flooded. I hope this weather starts to dry up in the next couple of weeks or we are going to find it difficult getting to Tinaroo and Cairns.

**March 1st 2000 (Thursday)**

After nearly a month of rain we finally have a clear blue sky today. Cairns, Atherton and surrounds have been flooded by a category 2 cyclone which passed through a few days ago, but apart from the rain we were ok down here.

I hope things start to dry out soon as we only have two weeks left before we are due to leave.

I'm stuck in the bus again after having only two days work last week and time is crawling by. The anticipation of moving on always seems to make time slow down in the last few weeks.

I have almost finished all the work on the bus. The last major thing is to install a solar panel and regulator which should be here in the next few days.

Belle is still at work and isn't due to stop until the day before we leave. She's lucky, I wish I still had a bit of paid work to do. I know I'll get at least one and perhaps two more days before we leave but everything at the shire is pretty well tied up now.

**March 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

The weather has cleared up enough for a day out, and well overdue it is. Despite the locals telling us that there wasn't anything to see at Ravenswood we decided to make the 130km trip back along Charters Towers Road and then take the left hand turn off to go and see for ourselves.

We were pleasantly surprised by a quaint little town with several heritage buildings and two operational pubs. Ravenswood was once the centre of a gold field and has been somewhat restored. Sadly the local authorities have allowed the construction of modern buildings in the town which spoils the pioneer atmosphere, but it was still worth the journey.

As the Ravenswood turn off is about 40km out of Charters Towers, we made the trip into the larger town for lunch - steak and salad for \$5 at the local RSL.

The solar panel arrived this week and I spent yesterday wiring it all up. Initial tests show that it delivers more power than the fridge uses, but we are still to make a full test when we get back on the road. The only thing left to do now is get it mounted up on the roof.



Ravenswood

**March 11<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

Poor old Bugsy's kidneys finally gave up on him and we had the sad news last night that he has been put to sleep. Belle spent a restless night shedding more than a few tears as Bugsy was her special pet. I think he was about 16 and a half and up until he started to show signs of kidney failure last year he was never sick a day in his life. Not a bad run. Now the last of what was our little family have gone.



Bugsy – tough guy to the last.

The day we brought him home as a little kitten, he took one look at our dogs, fluffed himself out in a big ball and chased them down the garden. His was promptly named Bugsy after the gangster Bugsy Malone.

**March 16<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

We are just about all packed up and ready to go, so guess what happens? We get a cyclone warning and by evening the rain is pouring down in torrents. At 7pm the cyclone warning is called off but the rain keeps on coming all night.

**March 18<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

We were due to leave for Tinaroo today but thanks to the rain the roads are cut and Tinaroo is overflowing so the trip has been postponed. The weather has started to clear now and we hope to be away tomorrow.

**March 19<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

We stopped off for the night at Bluewater which is only about 30km north of Townsville. Bluewater is an attractive campsite with toilets, shelters, BBQs and even drinking water but it is quite noisy as all the semis heading north pass right by it.

**March 20<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Left Bluewater early and headed for Cardwell. Everything was fine until we got over the Cardwell range. The bus got jammed in first gear and when we were almost on the other side of the range the clutch made some nasty scraping noises and then with a lot of expensive crunching sounds it completely disintegrated.

Luckily we were able to coast into someone's property drive way and phoned for assistance from the CMCA. The bus was eventually pulled up on to a low loader and we were driven back over the range to Ingham where we spent the night in a workshop.

Thankfully I did have a spare clutch plate.



After the clutch blew up

**March 21<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

B#%!!&r b#%!!&r b#%!!&r! the clutch plate wasn't any good and now we are stuck for another night and a new clutch plate has to be brought in. The worst part is going to be the time wasted (and presumably paid for) putting in the plate I had and taking it out again.

**March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We finally got back on the road about mid morning. The 12km tow cost \$300 and fitting a new clutch plate cost \$842.60 - My advice to anyone travelling near Ingham is not to break down! Both these prices are ridiculous.

The towing company was Barra's Transport and the repairer was L&W Repairs. Although everyone was very pleasant their charges were nothing short of profiteering, so I guess they could afford to be friendly.

We stopped overnight at Bramston Beach which is about 36km from Innisfail. I don't have anything nice to say about the drivers in Innisfail as they make life very difficult for heavy vehicles trying to get out on to the road from service stations. I watched a semi driver have to push his way on to the road after being stuck for several minutes and then I eventually had to do the same thing as no one was going to let me out. The drivers in this town are a bunch of ignorant pigs.

Back to Bramston - This is a nice little camp ground situated right on the beach. There is no power but there are toilets and hot showers as well as drinking water. You can use generators from 8.30am to 8.30pm and the overnight fee is \$10. The camp ground is a little difficult to turn round in for big rigs but it can be done and there is also plenty of shade.

The road in to Bramston Beach is a bit narrow and it winds about a lot but it is worth it once you get to the end. A couple of wooden bridges looked a bit suspicious but we got across with out vanishing into the rivers.

The drinking water at Bramston is apparently ok but it looked a bit on the brown side to me. We have been using it but I think I will flush out the water tank next chance I get.



Bramston

**March 24<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

After a nice relaxing day by the beach we moved on to a small campsite 7km west of Babinda at a place called The Boulders. The camp only caters for about a dozen sites but at this time of year we had it to ourselves.

Nearby is a great swimming hole with clear cold water and there are a couple of walk trails through the rainforest. Technically there is a \$5 per person charge for overnight stays but as no one turned up to collect the money we were more than happy to stay for free.



Babinda

**March 25<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

We were up early and arrived at Fishery Falls Van park just before 9am. The first two nights here are \$18 (that's \$18 for both nights not \$18 each) and after that it is \$12 a night including power. The park was easy to get in to and easy to turn around in - a big plus for anyone with a big rig. We are about 40km from Cairns and have chosen to stay out here because we will be going both north and south and this is a reasonably central point.

The park is well laid out, has plenty of shade and a nice little pool and I think we will be very happy to spend our time here for the next two weeks.

**March 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

We had a good look around Cairns and were a little disappointed. Compared to Townsville it was not all that attractive, and the muddy seafront was rather ugly and the town itself seems unplanned and disorganised. The only things Cairns has over Townsville are the nice places scattered around the town.

Mum arrived at the airport on schedule at about 4.30pm and we got back to Fishery Falls sometime after 5pm.



Muddy Cairns

**March 27<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

We had a full day out today up in the Table lands. We were thinking about taking the bus to Tinaroo but after going up the Gillies and then coming down the Palmerston we have changed our minds.

The trip today included Eacham Lake - good swimming, Tinaroo - good camping and boating, Atherton, Dinner Falls - only average, The Crater and Milla Milla - wow!. The highlights of the day were Eacham and Milla Milla Falls.



Millaa Millaa

**March 28<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

This morning we had a bit of a rest and after lunch went down to Josephine Falls. The guide book says the falls are a 10 minute walk from the car park, which may be true for an athlete but for us unfit people the uphill walk took about twice that long. The falls were beautiful and there was a great little swimming hole at the bottom.

From here we moved on to Bramston Beach for lunch and then back up to the Boulders for a quick swim before heading home for a few well deserved drinks.



The Boulders

### **March 29<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Today we had to go in to Centrelink (oh God!) to register for benefits again. As usual there was a complete cock up where we were sent from one office to another, and yet another before we finally got to where we were supposed to be. This time I lost my temper and let fly with a few expletives about the dills that work there - but it won't do any good. After making an application and having all the details lost and re-entered, and after wasting 2 hours of the morning we finally got away and went down to The Pier - a big building on the sea front - where we had a look at Undersea World - which was ok but not all that big (\$8 each). We had lunch at Windows Restaurant which offered a buffet for \$14.50 and was very nice.

Finally we went to Stockland shopping centre to pick up a few items before once again making the 30km trip down to Fishery Falls. Cairns is really a dump. The streets are badly laid out and it is quite scruffy compared to Townsville. After experiencing an 8km traffic jam trying to get in to town this morning all I can say is that I am VERY glad we spent 6 months in Townsville; this place would drive me mad.

About 6pm the skies opened up and after a hasty reinforcement of the annexe roof and making sure the tent was secure we had to change our booking for a cruise out to the reef that we had planned for tomorrow.

The cruise we have booked is with Sunlover Cruises and includes a day out on the reef at a pontoon and a second day going up to Kuranda by train and back by skyrail. Both days include lunch and although it is a bit expensive (\$230 a head) it works out as reasonable value if the tours were taken separately.

It is now pouring with rain outside and I am hoping that it isn't going to set in. The weather over that last 10 days has been good but I don't like the look of this.

### **March 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

Despite the rain we managed to get in some more sight seeing today. This time we went south to Innisfail and despite my earlier criticism of the ignorant drivers there, the town itself was quite attractive.

Flying Fish Point to the east was a bit of a disappointment - Bramston was much better - and a visit to the crocodile farm (\$11 each) was interesting but the highlight of the day, in fact the highlight of our time in Queensland to date, was Paronella Park. It is about a 15 minute drive from Innisfail and costs \$12 entry and is the most incredible single thing I have yet seen in Queensland. Anyone who comes up this way and doesn't go to Paronella Park has missed out in a big way.

The area was developed by a Spaniard who came to Australia and built what amounts to a fantasy kingdom for himself and his wife. Words can't do this place justice so do yourself a favour and come up and have a look.



Paronella Park

**March 31<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

Today was a rest and chores day as we got the washing done and settled down to a roast in the evening.

**April 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

Up reasonably early and off to the Rusty's Bazaar in Cairns to pick up some more tropical fruit. From here we went up the Kennedy Highway to Mareeba which was a bit of a bore so we went on to Mount Molloy and had lunch at the only pub in town. Lunch was huge and cheap, and surprisingly good.

From here we went down the \_\_\_\_ Highway and out to Port Douglas which is getting over developed and is hemmed in by plush tourist resorts for the rich. The area around the town and the foreshore is very nice but most of 4 Mile Beach has been gobbled up by the resorts. The lookout and Anzac Park were the best areas in town.

The drive along Captain Cook Highway from Port Douglas to Cairns is mostly along the coast and very picturesque. There are a number of pull ins for vehicles to stop and take pictures or just admire the view, but drivers beware! Keep your eyes on the road, if you want to admire the view stop and get out of your car. This section of road has more than its fair share of accidents.

Palm Cove wasn't all it is made out to be and the 'camping area' is too small for big rigs like our bus. It was pleasant enough but I still think Bramston Beach is by far the best in the Cairns area.



View from the Cook Highway

**April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**



We are doing the reef & rainforest tours back to front so today we took the train up to Kuranda (after getting up at about 5am) and had a look round at the markets. The market area was quite large and prices weren't as bad as we had expected, but we didn't buy all that much as we would have to cart it round for the rest of the day.

The butterfly sanctuary (\$11.50 a head) was pretty but there weren't enough species of butterfly to see so in the end was a bit disappointing.

If the sanctuary wasn't much good the trip back on the Skyrail was absolutely spectacular. The cable car system carries you over the rainforest canopy for about 7km and although it costs \$45 return (you can go up by train and come back by cable car) it is worth every cent.

Lunch at the Tjapukai complex was part of the tour and was buffet style, (not as good as Windows but adequate). The shows put on by the Aboriginal people were informative and interesting. There are three shows detailing creation, history and dance with special headsets for the creation and history sessions which allow visitors to hear the audio section in their own language (8 languages in total).

The Tjapukai complex is well planned and staffed entirely by the local Aboriginal people and it is certainly a good place to visit if you come up this way. It is good to see Aboriginal people involved in and operating a business of this type and something that should be considered in many other centres.

It was a long day out as we only arrived home about 6pm so tomorrow looks like another rest day.



Sky Rail

**April 4<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

We had to go back to Cairns and pick up some photos today and had lunch at Cairns Central. The weather has been bad but we can't complain because Townsville has just been hit by a cyclone. The bad news is another one has formed and is heading this way.

**April 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Finally we managed to get a day out on the reef. The tour took us to Fitzroy Island and then out to a pontoon at Moore Reef. The trip included lunch and snorkelling on the reef was one of the highlights of the trip so far. The cyclone moving towards the coast has caused the cancellation of tomorrow's boats to the reef so we made it just in time.



Moore Reef

**April 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

Although the weather has been pretty good all day we haven't been out because we are preparing for the cyclone off the coast which looks like it may pass this way later this afternoon. The annexe and tent have been packed away and all loose items are in the car. We had lunch at the local pub and are now sitting and waiting to see which way the wind is going to blow.

**April 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

The cyclone, which was category 3 at one point, petered out into a rain bearing depression before hitting the coast so now we are coping the rain without the wind.

We managed to get up to Kuranda again yesterday and were hoping that the rain may have eased a bit by today but it has been getting steadily worse overnight. The trip to Daintree is cancelled as the river has risen too much and no boats are going out today. Missing out on seeing the Daintree is a big disappointment for all of us.

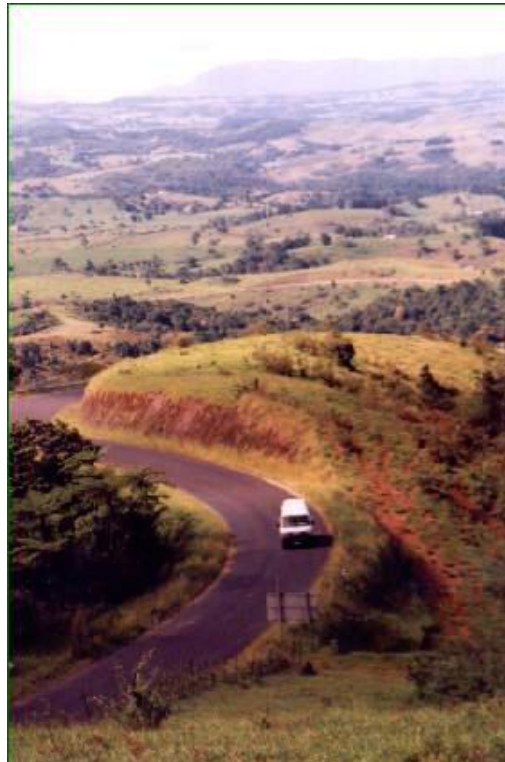
I am quite sick of all the rain up here, the roads north and south are both cut due to flooding as we have had about 200mm of rain overnight. We have all lost about 4 days of a 2 week holiday due to the weather.

**April 9<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Mum's flight was put back from 1.25pm to 3.15pm due to the after effects of the cyclone that didn't happen.

We are preparing to move south ourselves tomorrow, depending on the road conditions and we won't be sorry to say goodbye to this area. Cairns is a dump, it is badly signposted and the traffic is awful. We really feel like this has been quite a waste of money, but going out to the reef and coming down the skyrail were two things that were worth doing as was visiting Paronella Park.

If the weather had been better and we had been able to spend a week up in the tablelands I think we may have left with a different impression, but as it is I wouldn't waste my time coming back this way again.



Atherton Tablelands

**April 10<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

We were due to leave today but the weather closed in again and we will stay one more night before making our way south along the coast.

**April 11<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

We are all packed and ready to go but the rain just keeps on coming down. The roads are flooded again and the rain doesn't look like stopping for a week. We are now heartily sick for far north Queensland and its miserable never ending rain.

**April 12<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We finally decided to make a move despite the rain - which continues unabated - and made our way south to a rest stop 20km north of Cardwell. This area allows for 48 hour stop overs and there are toilets, shelters and lights at night. The only problem is that it is only just off the highway and like most rest stops up here the train line runs behind it so a peaceful nights sleep is out of the question.

If you pass through around May you should be treated to some free tropical fruit as we discovered paw paws, bananas, sour sop, jack fruit, passion fruit, pomelo, mangoes and coconuts all around the rest area. Most of the fruit wasn't ripe but there were some sizeable paw paws which will be ready in a couple of weeks time. The only thing we managed to get was a coconut.

**April 13<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday )**

After moving on past Cardwell we have stopped at 5 Mile Creek swimming hole (which isn't an overnight area) and are waiting to see if we get kicked out. We haven't gone swimming in the very inviting looking pool in the river because we don't know what the chances of North Queensland snapping lizards (crocs) being present.

It is STILL raining and very sticky. There are seats, a toilet here and BBQs but no shelters. It would be a lovely spot if the wretched rain would just GO AWAY!



Cane fields that seem to never end

**April 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

We didn't get kicked out but the rain keeps on coming so we are off again and heading for Balgal Beach closer to Townsville.

The further south we drove the better the weather became and by the time we reached Balgal (50km north of Townsville) we had beautiful blue skies and sunshine. Balgal is a good (free) campsite right on the beach and a couple of kilometres inland is another campsite at Rollingstone where you can swim in a fresh stream.

The big problem with Balgal at the moment is the number of mosquitos and sand flies. We took the boat out fishing twice with no luck and only managed an undersized mud crab in the pots.

**April 16<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Belle has come down with a fever so instead of free camping at Rollingstone as we had planned to do we have come back to Townsville and the Range caravan park.

**April 24<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

We decided to stay at the Range until after Easter to avoid the traffic on the roads and Michael (a friend we have made at the caravan park) put on a BBQ today. Yesterday I managed to do an update to the site as Peter (a friend of Michael's) kindly let me use his PC for a while (thanks Peter).

Today we sat around drinking and eating most of the afternoon, a most pleasant way to spend the day. Thanks to Michael for putting on such a good do.

**April 25<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday) ANZAC Day**

We went over to Fleur & Kevin's (Belle's ex-boss and her husband) early and then went down to see the ANZAC Day march along the Strand. Another of the many friends we have made in Townsville (Max) was marching in the parade and we made the effort to go and see him dressed up with all his medals.

We still expect to move on tomorrow and are going over to see Max & Gai and say goodbye tonight - although they are planning to get back on the road themselves in the near future so I hope we catch up with them again.



Max & Gai's Beast

**April 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We left Townsville a bit before 9am and drove the 80km to Ayr. The showgrounds are available for CMCA members to stay overnight and cost \$5 including power so we decided to stop over.

The ground is well grassed in the showgrounds but I am paranoid about getting the bus bogged so I asked Belle to get out and check the ground. After walking up and down for a bit she declared that it was ok and that I should drive in. I knew half way through the turn that I was in trouble and suddenly the bus came to a squelching halt. I got out to find the wheels sinking into black oozing mud and the grass awash with water. After a few rude comments from me Belle ran off to get help from the shire who sent a tractor round to pull us out.

The weather is still grey and drizzly and still doesn't look like clearing up. Oh for a week of sunshine.



Ayr

**April 27<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

Yet another tropical low has formed off the coast and there is the possibility of another cyclone developing. That makes 3 full cyclones and 3 tropical lows that have formed up here in the last couple of months. We are going to stay put for the moment as we have electricity here and there isn't any point on going on to Whitsunday until the weather starts to improve.

**April 28<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

We have moved on (a very short distance) to Groper creek 15km east of Home Hill. Groper Creek has boat launching ramps, a jetty, water, power and toilets. It costs \$12 a night here but by the looks of the people with boats here there must be some good fishing somewhere nearby.

We are booking in for 3 nights to see how it goes. Apparently there are prawns, crabs and a number of fish species in the creek so we will cross our fingers. All we caught on our outing today was one small catfish but at least that was something.

**April 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

So far we have caught 1 catfish, 1 prawn and 7 undersized mud crabs - not exactly fishing paradise. We are going to have another go tomorrow and if it is still as bad we will head off. The tides are big at the moment so water

movement is very fast on the creek and it was a battle getting back up to the camp site. The only way to go is to go full throttle all the way. No wonder everyone here has big engines on their boats.

Weather wise we got more rain this morning but it has cleared up for the rest of the day.

**May 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

The fishing is gradually getting better but we still haven't managed to catch a meal. We caught several catfish and three bream but the bream were either undersized or just legal size so we put them back. Crabbing isn't much better. We keep catching crabs but they aren't legal size.

We are going to give it one more day and see if there is any improvement before making up our minds about moving on.

**May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

After a quick trip into Ayr for supplies we went out fishing again and apart from 3 catfish, another undersized bream and several undersized crabs we were again unsuccessful. Later in the day I checked the crab pots again and we finally caught our very first legal sized green mud crab. HOORAY !

Since we arrived we have met 3 other couples (Sam & Daphnie, Kaye and Terry, Deardrie & Buckets) - all CMCA members; who are staying at Groper Creek for a while. Today we joined forces to produce three different crab dishes for dinner and the results were enjoyed by all. (Deardrie's Crab stir fry, Terry's curried crab and Belle's Singapore chilli crab.)

A total of 9 mud crabs went into the pot and by late evening only a few cleaned out shells remained. A yummy end to a good day. We have now decided to stay a full week.

**May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

More fishing and crabbing resulted in the loss of one of our crab pots and only undersized catches. We are now keeping any catfish we catch to use as crab bait.

**May 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After not having much success fishing at Groper Creek we have moved on to Bowen. We are spending our first night at the romantically named Harbour Lights Caravan Park. The name is about the only thing remotely romantic about the place. We have been charged \$17 for the night and the park is a disgusting mess. I have rarely seen such an ugly, unattractive caravan park. We have had a good look round at the other parks and have booked in for a week at the Tropic Beach. It is a bit expensive at \$103 for the week but it is right on the beach and is very nicely kept. Horseshoe Bay - which was recommended to us by friends only has a limited number of large sites and we didn't feel happy about getting the bus into one of the small sites that were available.

Bowen and the surrounding coast is very attractive, and as we had yet another flat tyre on the trailer thanks to Queensland roads, we are hoping to find some work in the area.



Horseshoe Bay

**May 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Bad weather continues to dog our footsteps, and after one fine day when we arrived in Bowen the weather is overcast and rainy again. We joined up with the local library (\$53 deposit for tourists) and I managed to update the web site (\$4 per hour at the library for internet connection).

We also registered with NEATO (an employment agency) and will register with CHR tomorrow. There doesn't seem to be much work around here at the moment but fruit picking season isn't far away so we may wait for that to start while we keep an eye out for better jobs around the Mackay area.

4 new tyres for the trailer \$296. - I'll cross my fingers that we won't have any more trouble with blown tyres now.

**May 10<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

The weather has cleared up a bit but blowin' Bowen is certainly living up to its nick name.

**May 13<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After a fairly dull week in Bowen we are moving on to Mackay tomorrow. Today we went down to Airlie Beach which despite being over commercialised is still a very pretty area.

Further north Hideaway Bay is cluttered with houses which block access to the beach and Dingos Beach which is very nice but it is a long drive. We were going to have a look at Elando but the state of the road was so disgusting we turned back after only a few kilometres.



Airlie Beach

**May 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

On the way out of the caravan park at Bowen this morning I collected a pole and then blamed Belle for not helping when it was really all my fault... now I'm in the 'dog house'. The pole ended up a bit bent but the poor bus has had a panel buckled and it will take me a lot of work to fix it. I'm still trying to work out how it happened.

Our first impressions of Mackay are not too good. We tried 3 caravan parks before finding one that would take a bus. Big rig owners avoid Central, Tropic and Premier as you won't be welcome.

We finally found a very nice caravan park (Andergrove) which not only takes buses but has a nice pool area and one of the best camp kitchens I have ever seen in a van park. It's a little expensive (\$96 a week) but it is a well kept park with good toilets and showers so if we do end up being here long term it will be a good place to come home to after work.

The weather is gradually getting better - today was beautiful - but the mornings are getting very chilly.



Mackay

**May 16<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

Belle went to see the labs in town today to find out about the chances of finding work. I sent out some job applications yesterday and have already had one response asking me to call back.

We have been looking round the general area and have found that Mackay has some nice beaches to the north of the town. We haven't had much of a look at the southern end yet but hope to get to that in the next couple of days.

Our first negative impressions of Mackay have gradually dissipated as we find both the town and its surroundings are quite attractive.

**May 19<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

The change in the caravan park since we got here is unbelievable. When we got here on Monday there was only one other caravan in the tourist area now it is almost full. Most people have come in within the last two days and have brought the weather from down south with them - wind and rain!

We finally got rid of our old mattress which really should have gone over a year ago. The new one cost \$325 so our savings took another big hit.

We have seen most of the interesting places in the immediate area including an amazing marina with the biggest boat ramp I have ever seen. There is going to be a lot of development in that area and already there are dozens of yachts and launches moored there.

If the weather clears a bit on the weekend we want to go exploring further from town.

There isn't anything promising on the job front yet but I have been applying to a large number of businesses in town, hopefully something will turn up in the next month or so.

**May 20<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After a quick visit to the rather disappointing Foundry Markets (on the road to Mackay Harbour) we drove out to Seaforth in the afternoon. Seaforth is about 45km north of Mackay.

There is a very large camping area at Seaforth with well grassed shady sites which will accommodate even the biggest motorhome. There are toilets, showers, water and shelters - all right next to the beach. The cost is \$8 a night or \$40 a week. There is no power available so you need solar power if you want to run electrical appliances.

Further along the coast from Seaforth is the national park at Cape Hillsborough. There is another (smaller) campsite on the bay here and the same fees apply. The only problems in this area were swarms of biting sandflies.

The countryside in these areas is very attractive with a mixture of farms and forest covered hills.



Cape Hillsborough

**May 24<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Today we went west from Mackay along the Pioneer Valley then up to Eungella (apparently pronounced Young-ella - by the way locals pronounce Mackay Mack-eye) and finally to Broken River where the platypus is said to live. We didn't see any but there were quite a few turtles.

The drive up the range at the end of Pioneer Valley is very steep and there are some real hairpin bends. It is a much more difficult road than any we came across in the Cairns area so I certainly wouldn't think about taking the bus up there.

At Broken River there is a campsite in the National Park. There are some excellent walking trails in this area along side the river. The rainforest here is very attractive. 33km further on down a pretty rough unsealed road is Eungella Dam. At the top of the range is a lookout called the Sky Window which gives a complete view of Pioneer Valley and is a good spot to stop and have lunch.

Heading back towards Mackay (back in the valley) you pass through the small town of Finch Hatton before reaching the turn off (left) to the Finch Hatton Gorge. The last section of road out to the parking area is VERY rough. We managed to get through in the little Barina but there are several creek crossings and the track is in very poor shape. (Typical national park road).

On the way out to the car park is a small campground but it is small and unsuited to big rigs or caravans.

The Gorge is a 1.6km walk from the car park but it seems like a lot more as you are going uphill for all but about 400m. The walk is still very pleasant and the falls at the end are something like Dinner Falls on the Atherton Tablelands.

Once you are back on the sealed road the drive back to Mackay takes you through several small towns and the trip up to Eungella is a good days outing. There are two other dams along this road which we will take the time to explore a little later on.

The weather has been a bit cloudy but there hasn't been any rain.



Broken River

**May 28<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**



Today marks two and a half years on the road and I have to admit to a growing desire to go back to W.A. While it's interesting moving around seeing different places, you start to feel out of place. There is no sense of belonging and everywhere you go you are just a stranger.

The east coast is much too over populated for me. There isn't anywhere that is all that remote and around every other bend in the road is another small town. Perhaps I have spent too long in W.A. where you can drive a couple of hundred kilometres without seeing another vehicle, far less another town. I have to admit that I yearn for the wide open spaces that just don't exist over here.

Our outing today was back out towards Pioneer Valley and up to Teemburra Dam. There is a big parking lot by the dam (where we noticed a Motorhome has set up camp) with a boat ramp, but again it is at the top of a steep winding road - part of which had collapsed - so no chance of getting the bus up there.

We came back towards Mackay and then south to Kinchant Dam where there is a good recreation area and a campsite - but again not much space for a bus. Water skiing is popular at the dam and the road out (from Marian) is sealed all the way.

I think I'll give it another week here looking for work and if nothing turns up we'll head south again.

#### **June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After a fruitless week of running around looking for work we took time out to relax today and took the boat out fishing in the local harbour. The morning was crisp and clear and the wind was blowing fairly strongly from the south east (doesn't it always!), the hooks were loaded with succulent bait - and the fish had gone on holiday.

We were so spectacularly unsuccessful that the fish we are having for tea tonight came from the supermarket. Thinking back I don't remember catching a decent fish since we left W.A. (Yet another reason to go back).

Weather wise; the days are sunny and clear and the nights and COLD. This is the first time we have given the heater a good work out since we have been on the road.

#### **June 9<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

Well the fine weather didn't last too long. The past 3 days have been grey and wet. I wonder if there is ever any real fine weather up here.

The lack of entries signifies a big drop in things to do at the moment. We still have just under \$5000 to keep us going but now we have to start being careful. Our search for work is now spreading south and I have even started applying for work in Sydney - not that I really want to be any where near that city when the Olympics are there.

I know now isn't really the time to start thinking about buying things but I'll keep this list for the time we are both back at work:

##### Wish List:

Service & tune bus	(done at Alice Springs 2003)
Spare tyre holder on trailer	
2 deep cycle batteries	(Bought in Alice 2003)
New water hose	(Bought in Adelaide 2001)
New cushions for bus	(Done in Adelaide 2002)
New lino for bus	(Done in Perth 2001)
Fish finder for boat	(Bought in Karratha 2003)
Swivel bases for front seats in bus	(Sort of done in Perth 2001)

#### **June 18<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Today marks our last day in Mackay. We haven't found any work here and despite a few fine days it seems to do little else but rain. We have to move on to a bigger centre before our money gets too low. We only have about \$4000 in the bank at the moment and with fuel for this trip costing from \$350-\$700 and the car rego due next month we can't take too many chances.

#### **June 19<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

After a 9am start we got almost as far as Sarina (30km) when trouble struck (again!). A car pulled round in front of us honking his horn, so we pulled over to find that a wheel had come adrift from the trailer and had sailed off into the grass at the side of the road. (So much for my ability to tighten wheel nuts).

While I was unsuccessfully looking for the wheel (with brand new tyre attached) another bus that we had been parked near in Mackay (Arthur & Kaye) pulled up and by the time I got back they had put the spare on for us. Thanks guys.

There was a wreckers only 100 yards from where we pulled up so we managed to buy another spare and 5 more wheel nuts for \$35.

We pushed on without further incident and reached a rest area 12km past the St Lawrence turn off about 2pm. This is a good spot to spend the night as it has toilets, water, BBQs, shelters, tables and seats and a large turning circle.

We met another CMCA member (Ron) who provided some steak for dinner - while we did the vegies - and spent the evening chatting while the weather kept trying to put the BBQ out.

**June 20<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

An early start got us to Rockhampton at about 11am, but by this time we had another problem to contend with. The brakes on the bus have stopped working correctly. We ran all over town looking for a repairer and eventually found Bramac but they can't look at the bus until next Monday, so in the meantime we have booked in to a caravan park and will take the opportunity of looking round the area.

We spent the night at Ramsays Creek rest area 11km north of Rockhampton, and a noisy restless night it turned out to be.



Rockhampton

**June 21<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We had the chance to look around Rockhampton today and despite the fact that the town is 40km or so from the coast, its setting on the Fitzroy River is quite attractive. The Fitzroy is the longest river in Queensland and there are a large number of boats moored near the centre of town, and there are many historic buildings along the river's edge.

The caravan park we are in only charges \$13 a night including power but we later found out that CMCA members can stay at the showgrounds for \$7.50 a night (Curses foiled again!).

**June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

This morning started cold and misty, but by mid-morning the mist had started to clear and we took a trip out to the coast to look at Emu Park and Yeppoon. The Capricorn Coast as it is called is dotted with bays of various sizes and is very attractive. The big attraction in the area is Great Keppel Island but as we don't have the funds we won't be going out to see it.

Further north from Yeppoon is state forest and the tiny town of Byfield. The campground 2km off the main road is easily accessible but the whole area would be cut off after any heavy rain.

Yeppoon is becoming over developed, and as with all development, once it starts the small camp grounds get closed down and travellers are forced into caravan parks.

**June 27<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

We took the bus in the Bramac yesterday to have the brakes looked at but were told that we were looking at a bill of \$3000 plus. Since we don't have that kind of money to spend on repairs we are making our way VERY slowly south.

Last night we stopped at Calliope (pronounced Cal-Eye-O-Pee) River and are now parked on the south bank of the river in a big 48 hour camp ground.

We will stay another night before moving on to the Boyne River which is another 20km or so south of here.

**June 28<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

After two nights at Calliope we moved on to the rest area at Granite Creek (63km north of Gin Gin). There is a good turning circle and all the usual amenities including toilets but we arrived early and moved on in the afternoon to another rest area which is just north of Gin Gin. This is a large area where you can get back from the main road a bit, but there are so many semi-trailers going past it is still quite noisy.



Calliope River

**June 29<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

We heard about a good campsite at Inskip point from Mary - another CMCA member - who is staying here for a couple of nights. This morning we packed up and were in the process of driving out of the rest area when the engine failed. After determining that I had plenty of fuel, and that there was spark from the distributor to the plugs, I gave up and called a local [mechanic](#). ([John Goggi Ph. 4157 2398](#)). John was very helpful and located the problem in the gas system. As he isn't a gas fitter we decided to take the offending part in to Bundaberg to a gas conversion business who found that the diaphragm had ruptured. All up this will cost us about \$150, but with a bit of luck we will be back on the road tomorrow sometime.

We hadn't planned a trip to Bundaberg but it turned out to be quite a pleasant little town and on the way back down the Gin Gin road we came across a fruit winery. Despite the current lack of funds we treated ourselves to three bottles of different fruit wines which are reasonably priced from \$8.50 to \$12.95.

We are now settling in for another night and hoping the new day will see us moving again.



Bundaberg

**June 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

The part we are waiting for still hasn't arrived so we are stuck for yet another night. Thanks to the delay we will also get charged GST on top if it doesn't manage to get here later today...

Later.....

Thankfully the diaphragm arrived and the fuel mixer was ready just before 5pm, so I made the 100km round trip and fitted the mixer back in to the engine. The engine fired up without any problem so we packed up ready to leave in the morning.

**July 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After testing the engine on gas and petrol we set off towards Childers. The only problem was the speedometer had now stopped working.

We stopped at Childers hoping to find some fruit picking work but nothing was available so on we went to Maryborough. Only 20km north of town the bus started violently backfiring and suddenly lost all power.

Stranded yet again, we took the car off and drove into town to organise a tow. The only suitable tow truck came from Gympie and another \$300 vanished from our dwindling bank account.

We have been taken in by Wayne and Sue who have very kindly given us the use of their back garden and hooked us up to power in their house. Wayne runs a towing service in Maryborough ([Kellys Towing Ph. 4121 5974](http://www.kellys-towing.com.au)) and their help is more appreciated than they will ever know.

Now we have to decide what to do next. The bus already has brake problems and now seems to be unreliable when travelling so we are thinking about having it transported directly to Melbourne where I have the best chance of finding a good paying job.

**July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

The transport costs to Melbourne are about \$2000 which is very tough for us to pay, but we will clear the VISA card for this month and then put the transport bill on the credit card. This will give us a month before we have to pay it off, and hopefully by that time I will have a job lined up in Melbourne and we will be settled down again.

Wayne and Sue have made us feel very welcome, and Wayne has spent time arranging the transport for us so despite the problems with the bus we aren't feeling too bad. It's very nice to have someone helping when you are down.



Maryborough

**July 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We took Wayne and Sue out to dinner last night to thank them for all their help while we made up our minds what to do with the bus and then this morning the bus was picked up by a large hook truck and carted all the way down to Brisbane (\$650 - oh no!). Our ideas of going to Melbourne were just too expensive and too difficult so we have settled for Brisbane where we should be able to find work.

Although the bus is driveable the lack of brakes made it just too dangerous to try and get into the city, so we opted to fork out the extra money and now we are safely in place at the Watson Convention Centre on Old Gympie Road north of the CBD.

Watson Park is owned by the Seventh Day Adventist church and is one of several sites around Australia where the general public can come in and stay for \$77 per week. These camp grounds are not widely known, but they have excellent facilities and are available for all but a few weeks a year when the church holds its own gatherings.

We will spend the next few days settling in and getting to know our surroundings and then on Monday we will have to start our job search in earnest.

**July 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

We were looking round the Redcliffe area this morning when we passed a caravan park (Bells) which is right near the sea. We spotted a couple of busses there and went in to enquire about sites. Apparently these are the only two bus sites but one is due to move out in about 4 weeks so we put our names down for the site once it is vacated. Rent there is \$60 plus power so it should work out cheaper than where we are at present.

Redcliffe is a very attractive area (reminiscent of Cottesloe or Peppermint Grove in Perth) and is not too far from the city if that is where we end up working.



Bells Beach

**July 7<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

As the weather is staying fine (for a while anyway) we drove north to have a look at the southern end of the Sunshine Coast. From what we saw in Caloundra we won't be going back all that often. The beaches are very nice but the whole area is full of traffic and is vastly over-developed.

On the way back to the bus we had a look at Donnybrook which is much more to our taste. Very few streets and a quiet seaside location looking out on to Bribie Island to the east. Bribie Island itself is accessible by a bridge and the southern end is typical of many suburbs on the mainland.

On the eastern side of the island is Surf Beach - which at the time we were there was hardly living up to its name. Back on the west side of the island is Bungaree and views of the mainland across the water.



Sunshine Coast attraction

**July 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

Today's trek took us south into the city and the over the river to South Bank. The CBD area is about twice the size of Perth and the journey in to town is not very straight forward. South Bank is a public open space combined with museum, art gallery, exhibition centre, markets and so on. It is a nice area but difficult to get to and expensive to park in \$6.60 for two hours!

Drivers here all seem to be nutty as fruit cakes. Red lights, double white lines and stop signs seem to be alien concepts. We have seen more accidents or near accidents here in three days than we would see in Perth in a month.

The Queensland trick of pulling straight out in front of you from side roads is hardly new, but the wild abandon with which it is carried out beggars belief.

Yesterday we saw a tail end collision, today we saw two lots of screeching brakes, one driver running a red light and one going straight from a right turn only lane. No wonder this place has so many accidents, they must have all got their driving licenses from Kmart.

I think we will stay away from the city as much as possible.



South bank

**July 9<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> 2000**

We haven't been doing much over the past few days except apply for jobs all over the place. We did take one trip out to Ipswich - a big waste of time. And called in at Mount Coot-tha and got a good view of the city on the way back. Needless to say we got lost trying to find our way out of the city area again!

I wish Queensland road authorities would stop the practice of having different names for the same road. Another example has popped up in Kippa Ring (renamed Fish Butt by me) where Elizabeth St becomes Coote Rd and then Elizabeth St again further along. This kind of stupidity exists all over the outskirts of Brisbane.



Brisbane

**July 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

I had a job interview this morning and have managed to get a part time job doing mostly technical work at a small computer store in Clontarf (in walking distance from the caravan park we hope to move to in a couple of weeks.)

The job won't even get us past the break even point but at least it is a start.

**July 15<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

We went out to Deception Bay this afternoon to do some yabby pumping on the mud flats when the tide went out. After catching a few (pretty hard work) we went round to Woody Point and tried some fishing but the fish were still on holiday.

**July 18<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

My first day at the new job wasn't much of a success. Of the four jobs I looked at today I only got close to finishing one. Driving home in the dark was a bit nerve racking and I've decided not to drive at night anymore. My eyes aren't too good at night so its safer if I stick to driving during daylight hours.

Today was also our 19<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, but due to the tight financial situation we are in at the moment we will have to put any celebrations on hold for a while.

**July 19<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Although I was a bit more productive at work today, I have been out of the technical side of computing for a long time and have fallen behind in a few areas. It will be interesting to see if I get asked to go back in next week. I still don't know how much I'm supposed to be getting, but since I haven't got anything better to do at the moment I don't have much to loose.

**July 21<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

As a change from driving around the city we decided to take the train in today and purchased what are called southern explorer tickets (\$8.60 each) which allows for all day travel on bus train and ferries.

After a look around the central city area we went out to 'The Valley' (Fortitude Valley) where there is a small Chinatown area covering a couple of blocks. Belle has been hanging out for some dim sum so we had lunch and then took another train out to Sandgate. Once we are staying at Woody Point, Sandgate will be our closest train station and we wanted to see how long the trip into the city would take.

Brisbane city is so full of vehicle fumes it was a relief to get back out into the suburbs again.

**July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After a quick trip up to Morayfield shopping centre near Caboolture we decided to head further north to have a look at the Glass House Mountains. Most of the area around the mountains is national park or state forest and the mountains themselves are a series of isolated peaks which travellers along Bruce Highway will be well acquainted with. The area was pretty but I can't say that it was overly impressive.

After a few minutes at one of the lookouts we went back to the main road and then north again to Maroochydore and finally to Noosa.

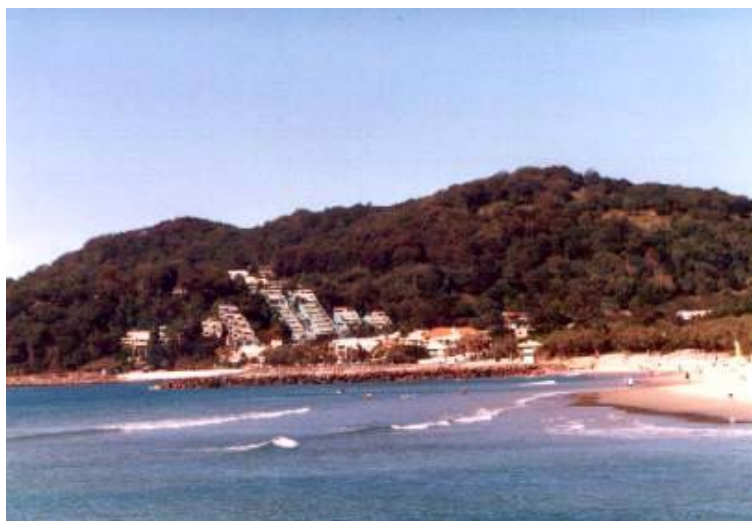
Both areas are heavily developed but both have the saving grace of lovely waterways for boating and fishing. It's a nice change to see the ocean looking crystal clear after months of looking at the churned up brown waters further north.

On the way back we called in at the Ginger Factory and the Nut Factory - both were horribly over-priced and real rip-off tourist joints. A couple of pricing examples: Chocolate ginger in Coles is about \$14 a kilo, the Ginger Factory was asking \$30. In the Nut Factory macadamia nuts were \$22 a kilo and \$17.50 a kilo in Coles. What's the point of driving all the way out to these places if all they do is try to rip you off?

Another time wasting place was Aussie World where the admission is free only because no-one would go there if it wasn't. If you like half baked amusement parks and more tourist prices for tacky souvenirs made in China then you'll love Aussie World. We hated it.

The Ettamogah pub replica wasn't all that good either. Depending on which way you go, the drive from Brisbane to Noosa is between 120-150 kilometres. Thanks to the Bruce Highway the drive is pretty easy and stress free.

From what we've seen of Brisbane and its surroundings so far, we only really like the Redcliffe/Woody Point area. Parts of the Sunshine Coast are ok but mostly it's over developed. Bribie Island is nice enough but nothing special and inland there are a couple of big lakes and a lot of hills. Over all it's a bit disappointing and the city is an absolute nightmare to negotiate.



Noosa

**July 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Another week gone and we aren't any closer to getting full-time work. The part-time job I had fell through because I am no longer up-to-date on the technical side of computing and nothing else has turned up so far.

We haven't been going out much but this morning we went south across the Gateway bridge (toll \$2.20 each way) and had a look at Wellington Point. I still don't think much of Brisbane but at least we have discovered the Gateway is a good way to bypass the city.

I am getting a bit concerned about a large lump that has come up on my abdomen after having the hernia operation. It has gradually getting bigger and has recently started getting sore so I suppose I had better get it checked out.

**August 9<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Nothing going on but job hunting at the moment and we are starting to get pretty desperate. I applied for 40 jobs today alone but out of all the applications I have sent so far I have only had a handful of replies and they have all been negative.

On a completely different tack, I am forced to comment on the weather again as it has been rainy and miserable for the last week. It doesn't seem to matter what time of year it is, there is always some rain hanging around. Looking at the pictures I have taken in Queensland only about 30% show blue skies and I think that's just about the right proportion. So much for 'Beautiful one day, perfect the next' What a load of BULL!

**August 13<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Well a lot has happened in the last week. We started a training course on Monday designed to help us find work and despite some misgivings to start with I have to admit that it has saved me money in making applications by mail.

Belle has managed to find 8 weeks work at Chermside Hospital but only as a Lab Assistant so the money isn't great. It will take a bit of pressure off for a while but by the end of that time I hope to be in a job myself.

Yesterday we went fishing at Donnybrook but only managed to catch three undersized whiting which we let go. Never the less it was a nice day out on the water and the first time we have managed to get out since we were in Mackay.

Last night we moved from Watson Park to a caravan park near Woody Point. We had been waiting for a site to open up in the park next door but had to move now as I will need access to public transport. The upside is that the area round the park is lovely, in fact we think it is the best area in Brisbane. We are just across the road from the sea and there are plenty of places to walk and cycle.

As the bus brakes are still dodgy we decided to move the bus in the early hours of the morning. I was surprised to find that the brakes have come back to being about 80% effective - they were only about 20% before - and instead of moving at 4am we could probably have done it during the day. Anyway now we are finally settled in with the annexe up and everything tidy and clean.

**August 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

We have been at Bramble Bay for two weeks now and Belle has settled in to her work at Chermside. I have sent out about 130 job applications in the last two weeks but have only had one reply.

We have trouble brewing on the home front with my niece's defacto getting on the phone yesterday and abusing me for refusing to allow them to have a Rottweiler on the property as they are untrustworthy and my mum who lives in the unit at the back would not feel safe. He had gone behind my back and bullied my mother into agreeing to let them have the dog when I had specifically told him he could not bring it on to the property. He was aggressive and wouldn't let me get a word in and when he started using four letter words I told him that I had, had enough and he could get out of the house. He then went on to tell me that I was "F'n ungrateful etc etc..." I have now given him two weeks to find alternate accommodation before I have him removed for trespassing.

People never cease to amaze me. We have allowed him to stay in our home for over 18 months and have not received a cent in rent during that time, AND I AM UNGRATEFUL ! What a little s&\$t.

**August 31<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

The end of August and I still don't seem any closer to finding a job. We have started looking at alternatives now and it is even possible that we will go overseas for a year, possibly to the middle east to find work.

Southern Queensland has not been a good place for us so far. I continue to see work in my area going in Melbourne and Sydney but we haven't got the resources to get the bus down there.

The situation at home has calmed down a bit now and I have extended the deadline from 2 weeks to 2 months but I can't say I'll be sorry to have peace and quiet again once the house is vacated. I still don't know why I put up with being walked on all the time.

**September 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Although I have another interview tomorrow, I don't have much hope of getting a decent position in Brisbane. We are still in discussions with a company with regard to going to work in the United Arab Emirates for a year. The discussion has been going on for some weeks now and it looks like it is a real possibility, although its not going to happen overnight.

**September 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

The interview I had yesterday may have been just another time waster as there is nothing is available for at least a couple of months. Belle also had some bad news and has not even reached the interview stage for the job she applied for at Chermside. I am getting the distinct feeling that we are not welcome in Brisbane.



The job Belle has now finishes in about five weeks and the money she is being paid isn't even more than we get on the dole when we take petrol and car expenses into account. Currently we are going broke at a rate of between \$80 and \$180 a week. Our savings aren't going to last forever so I hope something turns up soon.

**September 16<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

I have switched focus now to applying for work in Melbourne or Adelaide. There are jobs in my line of work going there almost constantly, but the challenge will be to get one without having to attend an interview.

Today we took a long drive out to Mount Glorious, where the scenery reminded us of the hills behind Cairns, and then on to Lake Wivenhoe and up to Sommerset Dam. There are some very pretty areas around the lake and a couple of good campsites at the base of the dam and another further north at Kirkleagh. At \$11 a night they are a bit expensive, but Kirkleagh is an excellent camping area with access to the dam.

At the end of the dry season the area around the lake is very dry and brown, it would be so much more attractive after rains when it all greens up again.



Somerset Dam

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

Another week gone and still I can't find a job - this is getting ridiculous!

This weekend decided to go and have a look at the Gold Coast, although it isn't exactly the kind of place we are drawn to. For a brief period we left Queensland while we had a look around Tweed Heads (which is just over the border in New South Wales.)

The Gold Coast is everything you would imagine from the photographs in tourist brochures. Big brash and modern with tourists everywhere. The traffic in the area wasn't as bad as I had imagined and parking was surprisingly easy even right by the beach. I have to admit that it really is a great beach but all the skyscrapers really don't make it attractive.

Shopping in the area is good with Daimaru centre being one of largest complexes we have seen in Australia so far.



Surfers

**October 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

The lack of journal entries signifies that nothing has changed in the past two weeks. We are now thinking about moving on to Melbourne as I have been completely unsuccessful at finding work up here. Belle's temporary job finishes up in two weeks and next weekend we are planning to go back up to Maryborough and pick up the car trailer. Belle is taking 3 days off and we plan to stay at Inskip Point for 4 nights which might make up for missing it on the way down. We don't have the money to go to Fraser Island even though it is only just across the channel at Inskip. Maybe we'll go over in the dinghy just to say we set foot on the island.

We have managed to get a tow ball put on the car (\$195) which means we don't have to rent a vehicle to pick up the trailer. The challenge will be to pack all the camping gear and the boat gear into the car. Coming back will be fine as we can put the boat on the trailer, but going up will be a bit of a squeeze.

We did manage to go swimming at the Redcliffe Lagoon last weekend but it isn't something I can recommend as it was absolutely packed out. Far too many people and not enough space.

On a completely different tack, I noticed that the one place I did get a job here closed down a couple of weeks ago. I can't say I am surprised as it was a real disorganised mess.

**October 11<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We are off to Maryborough in the morning to pick up the trailer. We are stopping at Inskip point for a few nights on the way back and hope to do some fishing. The weather has been fine for nearly three months so guess what happens the day before we are due to go off and try to get some fishing done - it pours with rain! If I didn't know better I'd say someone had got it in for us at the moment.

**October 12<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

We left early under darkening skies and reached Maryborough about 9.30am. After a brief stop over at Wayne and Sue's to pick up the trailer - and after thanking them again for all their help, we took off for Inskip Point praying that the weather would improve.

Inskip is an excellent camping area but it is getting some very heavy use and is starting to get overcrowded despite having almost 300 campsites. The cost per night is \$3.50 + GST per head and there are some good toilet facilities at the point but no sign of rubbish bins and NO WATER - fill up at the taps on the road to Inskip from Rainbow Beach.

It was a very grey day but managed to hold off actually raining so after we had set up camp we went fishing. There weren't many fish on the bite and by this time it was starting to get dark so we resorted to steak for tea.



Sunset at Inskip

**October 13<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

We woke to more rain but by mid-morning the skies had cleared and we were treated to the magic of Inskip Point at its best. The sand flats are home to thousands of yabbies and armed with a bait pump we quickly managed to pick up enough to supplement the bait we had brought with us.

There were plenty of whiting around but all were undersized so again we ended up eating the food we had brought with us.

**October 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

Overnight the weather closed in and the early hours of the morning saw the skies open. Undaunted we were off and out fishing again early but now the weather really livened up. Ripping winds and driving rain tried to chase us from the water but we were made of sterner stuff. We sat it out and finally the weather began to break. The fish were off the bite so we had sat out in the boat freezing and getting soaked for nothing.

Still it was better than sitting in the tent which was a long way from waterproof.

**October 15<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Now with the weather totally clear and the winds fairly light we fished the whole tide and had a few whiting to show by the time we made our way back to shore. The yabby banks were now producing heaps of free bait for much less effort than before (I had learned by watching others and now know that angling the bait pump got much better results than going straight down).

By evening we had cooked all the remaining food and were wondering what to do as night closed in when I suggested we go out in the boat and do some night fishing. Belle complained loud and long but when the rod she was holding suddenly bent almost double and the line snapped she was singing a different tune.

Not long afterwards it happened again and she chickened out and handed me the rod (now with the drag set correctly) to me. I was hoping for a huge flathead but in the end I brought a biggish ray to the surface and having had the opportunity to land it, decided (wisely) to cut the line and let it go.

Shortly afterward I caught an eel which also got put back then we started getting among the whiting, and this time they were good sized fish. Now 'happy as Larry' Belle couldn't get enough of night fishing and we were out until after 10pm.



Campsite at Inskip

**October 16<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Our last day at Inskip and we were up early to catch the low tide and stock up on yabbies again. After packing most of the campsite up we took the boat out one last time but didn't have a lot of success. The engine wasn't exactly running smoothly but Belle wanted to go out into the main channel so with a little misgiving (NOTE TO SELF: Next time you feel like this don't listen to others) we went out and were soon getting bite after bite - but no fish. We just kept on losing bait and no matter what we did the fish remained masters of the moment. With the bait all but exhausted and only two fish to show for it we were going to move back near the campsite but of course the engine now refused to start. I'm not exactly a mechanic, but I do know how to remove and clean the plug, this I did with the same results.

By this time I was getting mad - we were on the Tin Can Bay side of the inlet and I could just imagine a long row back to the campsite with the hot sun baking me to a frazzle. It didn't matter what I tried that cursed MERCURY engine would not start, so that was it, row back across the bay, pack up the campsite then drive 200+ kilometres back to Brisbane.

Despite the rain, the wind and the sodding engine we did have a good weekend and would rate Inskip as one of the top ten campsites we have stayed at.

Sadly all we got to see of Fraser Island was the shoreline just opposite Inskip, so along with Undara, The Whitsundays and one or two other missed opportunities, Fraser has to go on our list of 'We'll see it if we ever come back this way'.

**October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

We moved out of Bramble Bay about mid-morning and made our way south to the boat ramp caravan park at Nudgee. This is a big area with toilets and water nearby as well as the river which is supposed to have lots of crabs in it - not that we caught any.

**October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

We left the boat ramp area early to avoid traffic and parked near Action Brakes waiting for them to open. We dropped the bus off and then had to make arrangements to stay in a caravan overnight as we couldn't stay in the workshop.

We ended up at Newmarket Caravan Park which is at best pretty ordinary but the on-site van only cost \$33 a night. We found out why when we looked inside and found there was NO TV and NO Air-conditioner. After a trip back to the bus we solved the no TV problem by bringing over one of ours.

While we were walking round the park we found five buses parked down near the rear fence. We made friends with Christine and her husband Alan who also have a Bedford and are planning to take off round Australia soon.

#### **October 24<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

The bus was finished by about 3pm and after a quick test drive and coughing up the \$1512 it cost to fix the master cylinder, we took off again for the Nudgee boat ramp. We are booked in tomorrow at Windscreens O'Brien to the a new windscreen and then we hope to book in for one final day to get a few other bits and pieces sorted out.

Action Brakes seem to have done a good job and they stuck very closely to their original quote, so for now I only have nice things to say about them.

#### **October 25<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

This morning we had a new windscreen fitted by Windscreens O'Brien at Geebung. Their facilities easily accommodated the bus and by mid-morning we were on our way out to Bob Gears to have the rest of the work on the bus completed.

Things that still need doing are: Speedometer, bus brake lights, trailer lights, service & tune, weld broken mudguard on the trailer. We will be in the work premises overnight but we have access to power, toilets and A SHOWER!

#### **October 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

The bus has now been finished and everything seems to be working ok. It cost us another \$509.12 but at least it went on the VISA card so we have until the 18<sup>th</sup> of next month to pay it off.

We spent one last night at Nudgee boat ramp but didn't bother setting the crab pot this time.

#### **October 27<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

By 4.30am we were on the road and off over the Gateway Bridge. Brisbane got its hooks into us one last time as we paid \$5.50 \$3.90 and \$3.90 in toll fees just to get away - toll roads are a disgusting rip-off considering the amount of tax we already pay.

The biggest obstacle we faced was Main Range where we had to climb up in to the mountains. We unloaded the car and hooked the trailer to it just before the hills. The road up Cunningham's Gap was excellent and the bus almost made it to the top without resorting to first gear, but the last few metres were the steepest and down into fist we had to go - thankfully this time it didn't stick.

Not long after we had made it over the range the bus started playing up when running on petrol, so I switched to gas hoping that we will make it all the way without having to get more work done.

We stopped for the night at Coolmunda Dam (14km east of Inglewood). There is a caravan park (which looked awful) and some camp grounds on the far side of the lake but we spent the night at a large area near the boat ramp. There are toilets, shelters, tables and BBQs and well as untreated water for washing etc. The area was very picturesque but the insects at night made sure we stayed inside the bus.



Coolmunda

#### **October 28<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

On the road by 7am we continued west to Goondiwindi (Good roadhouses east and south of town) then turned south to cross the New South Wales border. There were very few good rest areas from Brisbane to Goondiwindi, most

being nothing more than a big patch of dirt right next to the road. The only area of any note was some 28km after we crossed the range where toilets and shelters were available and the area was set back a little way off the road.

On the NSW side the pull-ins and rest areas are generally better, but much further apart. We finally found one that was suitable about 12km south of Narrabri. There is untreated water and rubbish bins as well as good shade and a big turning circle but precious little else.



Newell Highway Rest Area

**October 29<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

After a later than usual start we passed through Coonabarabran and on to a pleasant campsite at Hickey Falls (34km south). The campsite is fairly basic with only one small shelter but the falls are pretty and there is a good turning circle. The area we are travelling through now is quite hilly and has gone from dead and brown to green. One hill not far out of Coonabarabran is very long and steep but despite the lack of power the bus eventually crawled its way to the top.

The bus just seems to be getting slower and slower, the sooner we get to Dubbo and get it fixed the better.

**October 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

The bus finally slowed enough so that it wouldn't start again, but luckily we were still sitting at Hickey Falls so Belle drove to the nearest house (just over the road as it turned out) to seek assistance. The owner of the house (Mr. Hickey - the grandson of the man the falls were named after) gave the NRMA a ring and within a short time we were back on the road again. The problem was just a sticky set of points but being a mechanical moron I had no idea what it was. The NRMA man from Coonabarabran worked it out as soon as he turned the engine over.

We spent some time chatting to other travellers while we were at the rest stop and made friends with Norm & Sue from Victoria. They were on their way home and we kept leap frogging each other on the highway.

The run in to Dubbo was pretty smooth and the bus now had back all its lost power (that means 50mph instead of 35mph). We want to have a look at the Western Plains Zoo while we are here, so have booked in to Dubbo City Caravan park which looks like an excellent set up. It was very easy to bring the bus in and it is only \$17 per night which is quite reasonable for such an up market park.

On the down side it is now pouring with rain and the sky is completely overcast.



Hickey Falls Rest Area

**October 31<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

After chasing all over town trying to find a battery for the video camera (the old one having died after only 12 months and 15 tapes) we finally found what we wanted at Grace Brothers and then went out to have a look at the Western Plains Zoo. The zoo is a huge area that you drive/walk through. It's not exactly a safari park as the animals are all in enclosures, but the design is such that moats have replaced bars and the animals are housed in large natural surroundings.

The zoo houses over 1000 animals - many of which do little else but sleep all day - but it is a full days outing to see all the animals around the 6km of roads and 15km of walk tracks. There are good picnic facilities in the park so taking a packed lunch or some steak for the free BBQs is a good idea. The entry fee of \$18 a head is a little high but over all I think it is reasonably worth while. It is much bigger than the Territory Wildlife Park (See earlier entries while we were in the N.T.) but doesn't have the diversity of interesting exhibits. Over all I still think the park at Berry Springs is the best we have ever seen.

The carnivore exhibits are beautiful but somehow disappointing. Sad looking bored tigers (one with a very sore leg), one cheetah and a couple of Asiatic lions make up the core of the big carnivores, but although all seemed content enough they lack the true majesty and vigour of wild animals.

Giraffe, zebra, antelope, hippos, deer, tapir, buffalo, bison, pigs, birds of various sorts, gibbons and many others make the visit interesting, but all have that overfed, bored look of zoo animals which I find quite sad. The zoo does some useful work in breeding endangered species but the older I get the less impressed I am with looking at captive animals even if they are in cleverly designed enclosures which give the illusion of freedom.

**November 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

After a LOOOONG drive from Dubbo, we are now sitting in a rest area 1km west of Goolgowi while a thunderstorm passes overhead. This section of road badly needs more rest areas and we were driving all day to get here.

Probably 2 or three more nights until we get to Adelaide.



Goolgowi Rest Area

**November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

The road on this section of the drive passes over some pretty flat and uninteresting country. We ran out of autogas 25km out of Hay and had to rely on petrol which just got us to the nearest gas outlet before the engine coughed and stopped. After filling the tank again the engine didn't want to re-start and had to be coaxed to do so by the local NRMA man who just happened to be driving by.

By about 1pm we had stopped at a good rest area 9km east of Balranald. The sealed part of the rest area is a bit on the small side if several people want to use it, but in dry weather there are some excellent sites near the river. There is only a shelter with seats and tables and a disused water tank but the area is set a long way back off the road so a good nights sleep should be possible.



Balranald Rest Area. NO TRUCKS!!!!

**November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

Well the good nights sleep came to an end at 1am when some thick witted truck driver decided to bring his semi-trailer into the rest area (which is clearly signposted "NO TRUCKS"). Not only did this sub-moronic git wake us up, he then got his semi stuck and started knocking over the posts around the rest area in an attempt to get out again. This of course just wasn't enough so when he started to get bogged it suddenly became all our fault for getting in his way - in an area that he should not have come in to - and so he started swearing and abusing us. Charming little turd - it really is no wonder that no-one has anything nice to say about truckers. The scum sucking little w\*\*\*\*r comes into an area that specifically says no trucks, gets himself stuck and somehow this is all our fault! Truckies can go to hell from now on - I used to pull in and let them pass, now they can b&\*\*#y well get round on their own.

So after an interrupted nights sleep we made our way to Mildura; crossing another state border in the process and by mid-afternoon we had crossed another border and were finally in South Australia. The border crossing into SA has a quarantine station where they pinch all the potatoes, garlic, onions, tomatoes, capsicum and fresh fruit that are on board - then presumably have a good feed at other people's expense. Quarantine stations are a bit silly when you consider that insects don't usually stop to get sprayed, they just fly on in. Too bad for those people who have just stocked up on fruit at Mildura.

Crossing the bridge over the Murray (entering Renmark) I heard a bang from the trailer and stopped to find that something had snagged a trailer wheel and we had to drop the car off and change it later. This particular bridge looks like it was made in the days of the horse and cart and is barely wide enough to get through. It wouldn't be a bad idea to knock it down and start again.

Finally we set up camp on the banks of the Murray River at Plush's Bend. This area looks like it could get very boggy after rain, but at the moment it is quite hard and we had no problems getting the bus down here. It is a beautiful setting next to the river and there are toilets here as well as a boat ramp. We may stay here two nights as we are within a days drive of Adelaide and I don't really want to get there on a Saturday.



Plush's Bend

**November 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Waiting another day to avoid the traffic was a waste of time as there was plenty on the roads when we did finally reach Adelaide. The bus started playing up as we went up the east side of the range but still managed to get us here

ok. We have booked in to the Adelaide Beachfront Tourist Park which is not only expensive at \$114 but as usual the bus sites are the worst in the park and are right next to a very busy road. We won't be staying here any more than a week.



Adelaide

**November 7<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

We have had a chance to have a bit of a look round Adelaide in the past two days and I have to admit that I am very impressed. There are so many old character homes as well as historic buildings and of course the churches. The city is surrounded by parkland and is set against a backdrop of hills. The Torrens River is a little on the small side but over all it is a most attractive place. People here seem to be very friendly and I am crossing my fingers that the job interview I had today will turn out favourably as I would like to stay here for a while.

On the down side (there always is one isn't there?) my niece and her horrible boyfriend have finally moved out of our home in Perth and after living there for nearly two years without paying any rent they left piles of rubbish in the garden, have damaged some of our furniture and have stuck us with a phone bill of over \$300 - so much for happy families. I hope they don't think they are going to be allowed to get away with it.

(NOTE: At least the phone bill 'eventually' got paid 10/2/01).

**November 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

I have been told to expect an offer of a six month contract in the next day or so, so it looks like we will be here for a while, which suits us fine. The weather has turned sour so we went to have a look at the local maritime museum. At \$8.50 a head it is vastly over priced and too many of the exhibits are aimed at children. If this is an example of what the other museums in Port Adelaide are like then we will give the rest of them a miss.

**November 9<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

With the weather gradually clearing we went into the city early to have a look round the Central Markets. This is a terrific mix of fruit, vegetables, cheeses, seafood, meats, smallgoods and other specialty stores which also happens to be right next door to Chinatown with its Asian restaurants and emporiums.

Belle was delighted with the place and we took our time browsing the stalls until 11am when the food court opens. After a yum cha lunch we returned to the markets to pick up some seafood before heading back to the caravan park. One item of particular interest that we had to try was seafood sausages which we had never seen before. After doing so we can thoroughly recommend them.

Later in the afternoon I received confirmation of a six month contract at Epixtech so now we know we will be here for a while. The work doesn't start until December 4<sup>th</sup> so we have a few weeks just to sit back, relax and enjoy ourselves - Boy what a change!





Central Markets

**November 11<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

There are many areas to explore around Adelaide and the first place we chose to have a look at was Victor Harbour and Goolwa. These towns lie on the opposite side of the peninsular to Adelaide (about 60km away). The weather looked ok so we set off only to find as we crossed the hills that eastern side was cloaked in cloud and was very overcast.

Victor Harbour is pretty, at least from the little we could see through the haze of cloud and drizzle, but it is a bit too big, so we moved up the coast to Goolwa where we had lunch. The weather was just too overcast to do any photography so we will go back when we are sure the weather is fine on both sides.

Part of the journey was via the Southern Expressway which is a three lane road that allows traffic to flow in one direction only. We aren't sure when the switch over happens but traffic was flowing south when we went down and north when we came back so we were able to use the road going both ways.

**November 12<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Today we moved out of Adelaide Beach C.P. and down to Brownhill Creek. This is a much better park set at the bottom of a valley in the foothills 8km south of the city. It is not only quieter but is also cheaper and takes long term residents. After setting up the annexe we had a quick look round the area before settling down for a well earned break.

**November 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

After a cloudy few days the skies finally cleared today and we went up to Mount Lofty and Hahndorf to have a look around. Mount Lofty - being the tallest peak in the area - is well named. Views out over the city are spectacular and the design of having parkland around the central city block is very obvious from up on the lookout. There were parking meters in the lookout car park which is a bit of a con, but we didn't pay as I don't think 5 minutes looking at the view should cost anything.

The area around Mount Lofty was the one involved in the Ash Wednesday fires way back in 1983. Apart from the ruined buildings that were never restored there is little evidence of the fires today. The botanic gardens nearby are very attractive but to explore them fully you need a backpack, lunch, drink and a good pair of hiking boots - also a level of fitness we don't have. The gardens are set on a very steep slope and require quite some effort to negotiate.

From Mount Lofty we made our way further east to the old settlement of Hahndorf, which as the name suggests was founded by German immigrants. The town retains many original buildings and the shady main street has a number of interesting shops and restaurants. We opted for the buffet at the Old Mill which was very good quality with a huge selection and at \$10.95 (weekdays) is very good value.

The Princess Highway which leads through the hills to Murray Bridge is a very good road. The tunnel which now cuts through the main hill has made the journey much easier than it once was.

In the evening Belle's brother Mike and his son Darryl dropped in and took us out for dinner. Unfortunately as we were still so full from lunch all we could manage were a couple of drinks.



Mt. Lofty Botanic Gardens

**November 15<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Today was more or less a rest day except for a brief excursion to the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. Here you are charged to park, charged to look at the rose garden and charged to enter the butterfly house - they like charging for things that should be free here.

Needless to say we didn't look at the rose garden or the butterflies and just had a look round the gardens. The area is pretty enough but nothing special.



Botanic gardens

**November 17<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

While I am waiting for my work to begin in December, I am taking every opportunity to explore the areas surrounding the city. This time we went south along the peninsular to Cape Jervis. This is a very scenic drive which takes you along the coast in some areas and further inland in others. The hills dotted with trees and scattered farm buildings and the lush green colours that are still there after the winter rains make this a beautiful place. There are a number of small sandy coves along the coast with a good camp ground situated at Second Valley (this should have said Rapid Bay – Second Valley has a caravan park.). Despite the name the campsite is right next to the beach and is \$3 a night per head of about \$14 a week.

Just across the water from Cape Jervis is Kangaroo Island which can be accessed by vehicle ferry. I would like to explore the island if we have time later on. The drive is about 200km return but quite a few more kms are added by exploring the side roads leading to the coast. The only bay we found that wasn't worth while was Myponga. This bay is well named as the creek running down through the few shacks really stinks. The track down is unsealed and there are some very sharp rocks over its surface. The only other bay not really worth the drive down is at the resort and marina. They even charge \$6 just to let you launch a boat at the boat ramp here.



Cape Jervis

**November 19<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

We caught up wit Blue and Skeeta today (the last time we saw them was in Darwin over a year ago). They were living out near the Murray River but are re-locating to Port Lincoln.

**November 20<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Skeeta and Belle went off into town for the day and Belle finally found a place that sells the special BBQ pork she loves.

**November 21<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

After a trip down to Brighton to have a look at the beach went up to Blue and Skeeta's camp for a few drinks and a feed of pizza. As usual I overdid the 'few drinks' bit and ended up feeling a bit seedy in the morning.



Brighton

**November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

We have booked a 3 night cruise on the Proud Mary which comes down the Murray River from Blanchetown to Murray Bridge. It is quite expensive (\$900 for both of us) but usually it is double the price so we are putting it on the over used VISA card and hoping to pay it off quickly once I start getting paid.

This weekend we are due to visit Belle's brother in Pirie, then when we get back we are off the next day on the cruise so all our time is well planned for the next week.

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

Well the trip to Pt. Pirie was called off at the last moment and we had to find something else to fill in the weekend. I made the mistake of going up to the Barossa Valley yesterday when the weather was too hot and we didn't enjoy it much at all.

If anything the weather was hotter today and after a trip out to the Brickworks Market in the early morning we hid in the bus with the air conditioner on all day. Funny to think that this time last week it was still quite cold at night. The markets were a bit disappointing as many of the stalls didn't open and the fresh food market was selling a rather poorer quality range of produce than we have seen at either the central market or the Sunday markets at the Cross.

The worrying thing at the moment is that we are technically out of money - there is more owing on the VISA card than we have in the bank - but with a bit of luck and juggling for the next three weeks I will get paid enough to cover it just before the bill falls due. I don't much like it as we have never been in this situation before.



Barossa

**November 28<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

After killing time all day we caught a taxi into town just after 4pm and then boarded a bus for the long ride out to Blanchetown. At about 7.30pm we boarded the Proud Mary and soon afterwards settled down to dinner with our dining companions Midge and Bob from Adelaide and Ros and Ken from the U.K.

Little did we know at the time that these four people would turn out to be the salvation of this trip.

Our first meal was a lamb roast and steamed vegetables - no choice, and too bad if like me you don't like lamb - followed by ice cream. Not a very impressive beginning considering the \$900 we had paid for the trip. No one on our table was happy with the food and as far as first impressions are concerned this was pretty bad.

Our 'Cruise Director' made herself known to us but instead of the usual happy, courteous helpful person one would expect in such a role, we were confronted with someone who had the mental level of a 13 year old with all the manners and charm of Mike Tyson. Our conclusion was that she must be related to one of the company directors as there is no way she would get a Cruise Director's position otherwise.

While our table would rather have sat and talked while we got to know each other, we were press ganged into a stupid quiz game without even the incentive of a prize for the winners. We did our best to ignore proceedings but our 'Cruise Director' made it clear that everyone was going to play whether they wanted to or not. (Would there be guard dogs and sentries outside to prevent us leaving we thought?).

After retiring to our cabin with tummies grumbling from lack of food we spent a reasonably comfortable night in what can only be described as a pretty average room.



Proud Mary

**November 29<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

An early start saw an improvement in the food at breakfast with a buffet style full English breakfast, but last night's lousy food had left its impression on all of us.

A brief shore excursion was our morning activity and then we re-boarded for a cruise along the River to Big Bend. The Murray River was everything I had heard it was and with our new found friends we began to enjoy the cruise in spite of the food and the 'Cruise Director'.

Lunch appeared at 12.30pm and again there was no choice of meals. Silverside, steamed vegies (AGAIN!) and cheese cake - which I loathe and would not eat. By this time we were getting really cheesed off (pardon the pun) with the food and lack of choices.

After arriving at Big Bend around 2pm we were taken on a short boat tour of a nearby creek which although informative didn't really show us much more than we had already seen from the main vessel.

The evening meal was a BBQ on shore which at least had some variety to it, followed by a sing-a-long round a camp fire. Nice for the oldies and overseas tourists but listening to all the well worn favourites re-hashed for the thousandth time was too much for us and we retired to the dining room to play cards.

To be fair the entertainer was very good and did his job well but sin-a-longs are just not 'our thing'.



Big Bend

**November 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Thursday)**

An earlier than usual start to the day saw everyone a bit bleary eyed and breakfast was served in the same manner and style as the day before. At least it seemed we could rely on the quantity and quality of at least one meal a day.

The on shore excursion today was a guided tour of an Aboriginal site and the tour guides were very friendly, informative and entertaining. Some people decided not to go to the top of the cliffs but those who did were rewarded with a spectacular view over the river and some very interesting rock formation on the way.

The rock art, although significant historically and culturally, was not as spectacular as some painting galleries that can be seen in northern Australia. It was sad to see the vandalism that had occurred on the site and it is rather surprising that after being subjected to that, the Aboriginal people still allow any white people near the area.

Back on board lunch was again one option only, but at least this time we got salad instead of steamed vegetables.

The ship pulled in to Mannum for the night and we had a chance to have a look round the town before preparing for 'The Captain's Dinner' at 7.30pm. This turned out to be the best meal of the trip, but having said that, it was the type of meal we would have expected to be available all the time. Finally we had a choice of main meals but the appetisers left a little to be desired (Cheese and crackers and bread with melted cheese and bacon bits) and the soup was awful.

Entrée - smoked salmon - was excellent, in fact the best thing we had on the entire trip. The main meal was a choice of chicken or venison, both of which were nice. Desert turned out to be apple crumble and custard which is hardly exotic but it was edible.

Pre-dinner cocktails turned out to be orange juice or wine - not cocktails at all.



**December 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

Our final day on board started with the reliable buffet breakfast and then a bus trip out to see Reedy Creek Waterfall - which had no water. The walk was fairly easy but not very interesting. After visiting a local school where the children run their own small shop we boarded Proud Mary for the last time for the run down to Murray Bridge.

The final meal - lunch - was buffet style but lacked anything remotely interesting.

By 4pm we were at Murray Bridge and more than ready to disembark and get home again.

Conclusion:

The Murray River was beautiful. Cruising along was relaxing and most enjoyable BUT, the food served on Proud Mary was average to poor at best. The Captain was charming and very adept at handling his vessel but the rest of the crew would at best rate as mediocre. The 'Cruise Director' was a waste of space and her manner bordered on offensive.

While there was a nice covered area for relaxing on the top rear deck, right in the middle of it was a huge very noisy exhaust outlet which totally ruined the tranquillity that should have been available. The loud speakers on board are tailored to the hard of hearing - for the rest of us - we are in danger of having our hearing damaged by them. The same applies to the speakers on the bus which took us to Reedy Creek.

The cabins were comfortable enough if somewhat spartan and there was adequate room in the ensuite. The dining room on board was well appointed, comfortable and attractive but at times a little on the stuffy side.

The bar was not adequately stocked despite the rules preventing people from bringing their own alcohol on board. We could not buy a decent bottle of champagne - even Yellowglen - and prices for the poor quality champagne were too high.

We managed to get this cruise at half price (\$450 a head) but even at that price it does not rate highly as value for money. At the normal price of \$900 a head it is a huge rip off.

On our normal scale of rating, at \$450 a head, this cruise rates a 3/5 but only because the River is so majestic and beautiful. In the end we did enjoy the cruise but we would not consider going again. The cruise and program of activities are designed for elderly people and I could not, with a clear conscience, recommend it to anyone else.

The majority of people on board were elderly, and they seemed to think the food and activities were fine. For the more sophisticated, or the younger travellers, a houseboat would probably be a better bet.



Murray River Princess

**December 6<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

The first and most distressing news today is that Belle is very ill and in hospital. She had very bad abdominal pains yesterday and went to see a local doctor who told her she had constipation and to go home and take some laxatives. By the time I got home she was in agony and was vomiting so I took her straight up to Royal Adelaide Hospital where she waited from just after 6pm until well after 10pm before a doctor finally got round to seeing to her and 4am before she was admitted to a ward!

I went in this afternoon to see what was going on. At this stage we still don't know exactly what the problem is but they are fasting her in preparation for an operation - it would be nice if they bothered to let us in on why!?

I rang again a few minutes ago and still no news so we have to wait until the high and mighty doctor does his rounds in the morning to find out what the hell is going on. Meanwhile I am stuck in the bus fretting while Belle is in the hospital feeling very unwell.

Meanwhile I am in the process of learning the software system at Epixtech but due to Belle being so ill my mind isn't as much on work as it should be.

**December 10<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

We found out that Belle has an inflamed pancreas and will also have to have her gall bladder removed. She is very sore and is still only allowed to take fluids so hasn't eaten a thing since last Tuesday. Her operation is supposed to be this Wednesday, and I think we will both be glad when it is finally done.

I have been going to the hospital every day to see her but there isn't much I can do except just be there.

**December 13<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Wednesday)**

Belle had her operation this morning and when I went to see her after work she was still very sore and unhappy. For some reason I get very queasy in certain situations and when the doctor pulled back the sheets and I saw the drain hose coming out (I won't go into the gross details of what was leaking from it) I started to feel very ill and broke out in a sweat. It was so bad that I had to go outside for a few minutes to settle down. I know Belle must think I'm a bit of a wuss but there are some things that make me feel very odd indeed.

Now we just wait to see how quickly she improves and with luck she will be on her feet again before Christmas. She hasn't been overly happy about her treatment in Royal Adelaide - but then again she has been in constant pain for the last eight days so she has every right to be a bit on the cranky side - I know I was after my hernia op.

Work is still a bit stressful as I have been worrying about Belle and about our lack of money, but hopefully we have finally turned the corner and things will get back to normal - whatever that is.

Monday was the first time I haven't gone into to hospital to see Belle. I feel a bit guilty about it but there isn't much to do there and after work there's so much traffic around. Well at least I have been in every day but one so my record isn't that bad.

Well it's now 11pm and I still have a shirt to iron for tomorrow so I'd better get on with it if I want some sleep.

**December 16<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

After running round getting the bus tidy, doing the washing and then the shopping I was finally able to go and pick Belle up from hospital some time after 2pm. She is still sore and it was all she could do to go for a short walk down to the caravan park pool area and back. It will be some time before she is back to her chirpy self again I think.

**December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 (Friday)**

Belle spent last night in hospital after she experienced some sharp pains in her side. Another ultra sound was done and more X rays but nothing showed up. She is home again but still quite dependant on pain killers.

**December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2000 (Saturday)**

I spent the morning running round the shops doing the last of the Christmas shopping. I have managed to spend much more than I intended as usual. Tomorrow we head off to Port Pirie to stay with Belle's brother and his wife Helen for the next couple of nights.

**December 24<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**

We arrived in Pirie about lunch time and it wasn't long before we (well more I than Belle) were getting right into the Christmas goodies and the odd beer or three. Mike and Helen (Belle's brother and sister-in-law) took us around town to see the Christmas lights. For a small country town, Pirie certainly does have a good community spirit and the efforts put in by the locals in lighting up their houses is amazing. Earlier in the day we met Wayne and Bev (Mike and Helen's friends) and we dropped in to see Wayne's 'mechanical' Santa. Belle was lured into pushing the button to make Santa work and then the mechanical Santa dropped the bell he was ringing. I could smell 'set-up' all over it but Belle was asked to put the bell back into Santa's hand - the mechanical Santa was of course Wayne with a mask on - who was quite convincing - and as Belle put the bell back into the hand he gave her a fright by grabbing her with his free hand and she jumped about a foot into the air. Bev managed to catch in on video and everyone had a good chuckle about it. Wayne apparently does this every year and sits out for 3 hours every night in the week leading up to Christmas.

We were pretty tired and crawled off to bed just after midnight but everyone else - who seemed to have boundless energy - partied on until after 3am.



Smelter at Port Pirie

**December 25<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Monday)**

Christmas day was pretty standard issue with parcel opening in the morning and a huge meal put on by Helen for lunch. After a quiet afternoon and the post lunch siesta we all went off for a ride up into the Flinders Ranges where Mike and Helen showed us some of the local scenic attractions. When we get back up this way with the bus we will certainly do some more exploring. One place of particular note was a foreshore campsite 10km before Port Germain. After the PG10 sign there is a bend in the road (heading west on highway one) then a train crossing sign. The next track heading to the coast takes you down to a good little campsite right by the sea. We will probably spend some time here when we pass through.

Back at the house Bev and Wayne returned and we continued drinking and eating into the wee small hours. Mike and Wayne are quite a comedy team when they get going, and everyone enjoyed themselves immensely.

A very satisfying and pleasant Christmas and the first we have had in three years when we were not on our own - a big difference. This was a special Christmas for Belle as she has hardly seen Mike since he left Singapore 26 years ago and she was very glad of the chance to catch up. Happily she is well on the road to recovery from her op although she is still in need of the odd pain-killer.

**December 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 (Tuesday)**

I am beginning to wish that I had taken tomorrow off work as I am struggling to recover from all the activity and over indulgence of Christmas. The drive back from Pirie was fairly easy and traffic free but we still didn't get back until after noon and I am feeling the effects of the last few weeks catching up with me.

Pirie doesn't seem to have much to attract the casual tourist and is famous for the lead smelter and the virtual forest of huge TV antennas that allow the residents to get Adelaide television. The town does have some nice old buildings and according to rumour there is some good crabbing and fishing in the local creeks - so it may be a good place to base ourselves and explore the coast and the nearby ranges.

**December 31<sup>st</sup> 2000 (Sunday)**



The last day of 2000 and with tomorrow being the real start of the new millennium it is time for a little reflection.

The last year has brought its share of troubles, but has also held some rare delights for us as well. It nearly ended on a sour note with Belle in hospital and the operation, but she came good at the last minute and Christmas up in Port Pirie with Mike, Helen and their friends made this Christmas the most memorable of our time on the road.

I can't quite believe that I started work 4 weeks ago, time has just flown. We have been in Adelaide nearly two months already and still have lots to explore so I don't think we are in danger of getting bored before we leave.

Adelaide is a lovely city and so far it is the only place we have been to so far that we would consider settling down in when the time comes and we tire of a life on the road. Everything is so close with the hills right behind us, the city a ten minute drive away and the beach only about 15 minutes.

We discovered the Fisherman's Markets up in Port Adelaide today and despite the name they don't have fish for sale. The markets are housed in a huge building and there are dozens of stalls all selling bric-a-brac, collectables and all sorts of trinkets and knick-knacks. Anyone coming to Adelaide would be well advised to at least visit these markets on a Sunday morning and have a look around.

Although we are missing the tropical fruit we were getting in Townsville this time last year, the quality of fruit and vegies here is very good and there are some excellent cherries available this time of year for as little as \$6 a kilo.

#### **January 7<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Whole day written off after I over did it with a bottle of single malt scotch last night. Very very sick all day. Apart from throwing up into the porta potty I only got out of bed after 3pm. Haven't done this to myself in a long time - what a dill.

#### **January 14<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Weather very hot over the past two days, yesterday 43C and today round 40C, lots of money going on air-conditioning. Haven't been this hot since we were in Halls Creek.

#### **January 25<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

Time has been passing without much to comment on, but today we finally got some rain after a record breaking stretch of hot weather. It has cooled off just in time as we are heading off into Victoria tomorrow and making our way down to see the area along the Great Ocean Road.

#### **January 26<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

Finally a chance to get away for a few days. We started out of Adelaide early, early enough in fact to experience thick fog right across the top of the Adelaide Hills as we drove down the Princess Highway. Once out of the hills the fog vanished and we drove south east to Murray Bridge and Talem Bend before turning towards the coast and The Coorong.

There aren't many major settlements along the coast but the first you reach is Meningie. This town appears to be set next to the sea but it is in fact Lake Albert - an offshoot of the much larger Lake Alexander, where the Murray River finally reaches the sea.

The next main settlement is Kingston S.E. (S.E. stands for south east and is used to differentiate this town from Knigston on Murray.) The only attraction I could see in this town was the giant crayfish which is a rather lifelike model. The rest of the town is a bit scruffy and the coastline is very exposed to the south westerly winds.

Only another 45km on down the coast is the much prettier town of Robe. Another 40 minute drive south is Beachport and both these towns look like very popular tourist destinations. From here we went inland to Millicent and then to Mt. Gambier where there are some extinct volcanos which have filled with water, one of which turns a bight cobalt blue during the summer months.

The last leg of this days journey was across the Victorian border to Portland where we booked in at the William Dutton Motor Inn. This is a very nicely done out motel but a little on the expensive side at \$70 a night.

Portland is another attractive coastal town that boasts about the good fishing in the area. We had a very limited time table so couldn't put these claims to the test.



Portland

**January 27<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

From Portland we continued west to Port Fairy and then Warrnambool, which was less attractive but still had some nice areas along the coast. From here it was only a short drive down the coast to the start of the Great Ocean Road. As we drove south a huge bank of clouds began to move in from the sea and it was a race against time to get to some of the attractions and take some pictures before the clouds moved over. We made it to the first of the scenic pull-ins just minutes ahead of the clouds, but sadly the light had deteriorated badly by the time we finally reached the Twelve Apostles - which is probably the best of all the areas along the coast.

There are about ten main areas to see on this section of the road including Martyrs Bay, London Bridge (which has been broken for some time), Port Campbell, The Arch, Loch Ard Gorge and The Bay of Isles. I was impressed when I first saw the cliffs at Kalbarri but they are nothing compared to this section of coastline. This is one of the places I most wanted to see on this trip and I am very glad we made the effort to get out and see it.

As we were still on a time table we had to find somewhere to spend the night and we didn't want to go back to Adelaide the same way we came out. After checking the maps we decided to go back west past Warrnambool and then turn north and make for Hamilton. We arrived in the late afternoon and booked in to the. We found some motel style accommodation at The Gordon (check this) Hotel which at \$61 a night with breakfast thrown in was good value.

I am hard pressed to understand why people live in places like Hamilton. It is a pleasant enough place but I can never see how anyone could stay there long term without going round the twist with boredom.



Belle at the 12 Apostles

**January 28<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Today we kept heading north, a route which took us through the mountain country of the Grampians. I had heard of this area but knew little about it. As you head north east from Hamilton towards Dunkeld, a huge line of hills suddenly emerge from the haze on the horizon and soon you go from flat arid plains to thick green bushland.

What a change it made to be driving not only through hilly terrain but also through beautiful bushland. Huge knobs of granite jut out from the tree line and high lookouts give you a chance to gaze down over blue lakes and what looks like impenetrable bush.

The small settlement of Halls Gap provides accommodation, supplies and fuel, which is just as well since the car battery failed after one of our frequent map check stops and we had to flag down a passing motorist to get a jump start.

Despite this minor hiccup, the day was very pleasant and the cool temperatures in the Grampians were most welcome to my (now) sunburned arms.

Our stop over point for this night was Bordertown where \$66 got us a deluxe room at the Bordertown Budget Motel. As we were now back in South Australia we could stop adding half an hour to the time on our watches.



Grampians

Bordertown isn't much to comment on, but then on this stretch of road it is far from being alone. We had dinner at the Bordertown Hotel but the steak was almost completely devoid of flavour, perhaps it was meant to go with the scenery.

#### **January 29<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Monday)**

The final day saw us pass more flat farmland and more bland uninteresting towns before we finally got to Hahndorf and decided to finish the trip on a high note by having lunch at the Old Mill Restaurant.

At about 1.30pm we pulled up at the bus and flaked out for the afternoon to catch up on some much needed rest.

#### Summary:

This was a very enjoyable trip. It goes without saying that the highlights were the Great Ocean Road and the Grampians but overall the drive was very easy and for the most part free of traffic. The weather was perfect with cloud cover the first day, then sunshine most of the time but very cool conditions for driving.

The only section of road to be wary of is the southern entrance to the Grampians along the Victoria Valley. Here it is single lane bitumen, but it really didn't last all that long and all other roads on this trip were very good.

As we were in the car, not the bus, we weren't looking for free campsites, but there are several good spots along the Coorong and some very good rest areas on Princess Highway. The southern route has fewer good overnight stop overs but with a bit of effort I am sure there are plenty of little hide-aways that can be found along the coast.

Robe, Beachport, Mt. Gambier, Portland, Port Fairy and Port Campbell would all make excellent holiday destinations and Halls Gap in the Grampians is the best place to explore the national park from. If we ever manage to get down this way with the bus I will certainly take more time to explore the coast. Unless I had a VERY good reason, I would tend to avoid the northern route, which is quite barren.

### **February 10<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

We are starting to run out of new places to see close to the city but today we went in to have a look at the Adelaide Zoo. At \$13 a head entry it's not cheap but then again they have a lot of animals to feed so it isn't all that bad either.

The Zoo is situated right next door to the botanic gardens and despite the fact that space is limited it is very nicely laid out. It is similar in some respects to Perth Zoo with natural looking surroundings instead of the awful old concrete enclosures that I remember seeing as a child.

The weather has been very hot but has started to cool off this weekend. Belle's birthday is coming up on Monday so tomorrow we are going in to the city for a seafood buffet at LeMirage.

### **February 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

LeMirage is a fancy name for what basically is nothing but a Chinese Buffet restaurant. We were a little apprehensive when we saw what was on offer but after trying the food we found that appearances can be deceptive. The quality of the food and the different favours made it a very nice meal. A bottomless glass of cool drink for \$2.20 and the fact that desert was included and desert included Gelati - my absolute favourite - made the \$15.80 price tag seem not too bad.

Otherwise life continues much as normal. Work goes on and weekends come and go. Three more weeks will mark the halfway point of my contract and then I can start to count down to the time we are back on the road. I wonder if I will ever be able to settle in one place again?

### **February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

We are gradually trying to replace some of our old camping gear which is either rusting away or full of holes like our old tent. To that end we have purchased a new gas cooker (Horribly expensive at about \$80 for a three burner model) and a new tent, which was reasonably cheap (\$128) for a 4 man tent which we can stand up in.

As a practise run we (mostly I) put the tent up after work today and boy what an exercise that was. There are something like 13 guy lines and at least another 12 tent pegs holding the thing down. The instructions didn't have any diagrams but despite that we managed to put it all together over a period of about half an hour. Our old tent was bigger and it only took about 10 minutes to sort it all out.

No doubt we will get better with practise but it is never going to be easy or quick.

### **February 24<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

Today turned out to be a day for spending money. A trip to Snowy's Outdoor Centre to look at buying a second table for camping turned into about \$400 worth of purchases.

The camping table I was thinking about buying was one with a wash basin set in to it and was only \$70, but when we had time to think about it there still wouldn't be enough room for the camping stove so eventually we settled for a Coleman table with an extension for the cooker. At \$149 it is expensive but I am sure we will make good use of it. The other items were a self inflating queen size mattress (very expensive at \$210) and a new picnic set with enamel plates, cups and stainless steel cutlery, the bargain of the day at only \$27.

Even though we aren't planning a camping trip until Easter we were busy sorting everything out and packing everything up most of the afternoon.

### **March 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

With summer officially over we are looking forward to some cooler weather. I have been feeling particularly run down over the past few weeks and have resorted to taking sleeping pills to get a good night's sleep.

Belle is chasing work at Gribbles Laboratories and is going in today to have a look around. The work will be in the evenings so we won't see as much of each other but at least we won't have any problems with only having one car and it will only be for three months anyway. The extra money will come in handy as we start to plan the trip to Phuket.

In the afternoon we went to have a look at the Adelaide Caravan, Camping and Off Road show. The entry fee of \$10 was a bit on the steep side but to add insult to injury they tried to charge us another \$4 just to park the car. We drove out again and parked across the street.

The show was mostly concerned with caravans, campers and motorhomes but there was a very good tourism information section and we even got to meet Mal Leyland, one of the original 'travel around Australia' buffs who we view with some esteem.

I managed to pick up two back issues of the magazine Leyland's Australia. This quarterly magazine is excellent. I don't think I have ever seen better photography and each issue seems to include articles on every state. Anyone who loves this country and doesn't subscribe to this magazine is missing a real treat.

When I originally saw the price of the magazine in the newsagents (\$9.80) I was put off, but once I picked it up and had a look inside I couldn't resist buying it. These are beautifully presented magazines with interesting articles and superb photos of this country.

If this magazine isn't available at your local newsagent then you can order direct by writing to:

Leyland & Leyland, PO Box 51, Tully, Qld. 4854.

and no, I don't get anything for advertising this magazine, I believe it is so good that I freely recommend it to anyone who loves Australia.

I also managed to find a flat water hose for the bus so we can finally get rid of the ordinary garden hose we have been using for the last three years. (Word is that garden hose plastic MAY be carcinogenic.) The flat hose comes from New Zealand and cost \$55, sounds expensive until you realise that the normal blue drinking hose that most caravans have costs about \$80 for the same length and you have to buy attachments on top of that. The flat hose also rolls up on its own winding device and can easily be stored when it is time to move on. The blue hose is just like ordinary garden hose and is a real pain to roll up and store.

### **March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

For some time now we've been waiting for the weather and the tides to be right in order to go crabbing. Today we finally got our chance. In W.A. when we go crabbing without a boat we just take a scoop net and a bucket, drive down to Mandurah and wade out a few yards and pick the ones we want. In 20 minutes we can fill a bucket. Things are a little different here in S.A.

- 1) Drive 80km up the coast to a remote beach.
- 2) Walk 3 kilometres out to where the sea was last seen
- 3) Wade through sticky mud and weed up to your knees
- 4) Look around hopefully for any sign of crabs
- 5) Get cooked by the sun
- 6) Walk 3 kilometres back to land without being encumbered by any crabs.

This isn't crabbing, this is some kind of sado-masochistic torture.

### **March 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

After 14 weeks working I have managed to amass the huge sum of \$1100 in the bank! Hardly seems worth it! At \$40 an hour I am in the top tax bracket and paying \$435 a week in tax. More tax a week than we used to get on the dole but we still aren't getting ahead. Something is sadly wrong when you make nearly \$1400 a week and the bank balance still won't come up.

Some of it is our fault, we spent \$400+ on camping gear, but our old stuff was all worn out and it was a one off purchase but it is the house at home that is really draining our money away. Mortgage, rates, pest control and general maintenance is running to over \$10,000 a year and that makes life VERY difficult. Add \$9,000 in tax for the six months I am working plus caravan park fees, insurance and living expenses and there is precious little left over.

After Belle got so ill last year I wanted to take her to Phuket as a treat, sadly that is looking more and more remote, especially since the dollar has plummeted and the trip would cost \$3000 plus - we just won't have the money.

The weather is still hot (36C today) and time is starting to drag out. I have 12 weeks left to run on my contract then we have to work out what we can afford to do. Most of the things I want to have done to the bus haven't been done for lack of funds so to say we are starting to feel a bit low is putting it mildly. We need something to give us a lift in the next few weeks.

### **March 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

The first part of the contract work is now complete so I'm having a couple of days off to relax before the second and final part of the work begins. The weather is still looking good so instead of wasting time and hanging around the bus all week end we are packing up the camping gear and heading down to Rapid Bay to do some fishing from the jetty.

### **March 16<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

After getting to Rapid Bay and having some problems getting the tent up - due mostly to hard ground and soft tent pegs we wandered out to the jetty and did some squidding. We only caught two but they were a reasonable size but when we cooked them they weren't all that tasty. By evening dark clouds began to roll in (why does this happen when we go away?) and by nightfall it looked as if we were in for a rough night.

Around 4am the wind really picked up and the tent which had been upright until then suddenly fell over on top of us. In the howling gale that had come up I had to go outside and put more guy lines on and re-stand the tent.

By first light the wind and rain had continued to get worse so by mid-morning I had had enough and in pelting rain we (well really I) packed up and headed back to Adelaide. (Belle ran off and sat in the car watching me get soaked.)



Rapid Bay

**March 18<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Today seems to be market day all over Adelaide and we went off the Gepps Cross to stock up on fresh produce. As there is another market just north of Gepps Cross (Adelaide Produce Market) we went on there as well. It may be useful to have the information on the markets all in one place so I have put together a table as I did for Darwin.

MARKET	OPEN	ENTRY	PRODUCTS
Central	Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday	Free	Fresh fruit and veg, meat, seafood, gourmet products.
Gepps Cross	Sunday	\$1.00	Fresh fruit and veg, second hand goods. (Very good second hand market)
Adelaide Produce Market	Sunday	\$0.50	Many new items, craft work, collectables, giftware and some fruit, veg and a small second hand section.
Fisherman's Wharf	Sunday	Free	Second hand collectables, antiques, confectionery, kitchenware and processed food.
Brickworks	Saturday/Sunday	Free	Fresh fruit and veg (poor quality), giftware, confectionery and the largest collection of posters we have ever seen. Worth going to just to see the old kiln. Also a bottle shop with some good wine specials.
Morphettville	Sunday	\$1	Second hand (mostly junk) Don't waste time with this one.
North Arm	Sunday	Free	Fresh fruit and veg, seafood sold direct from boats.



Brickworks Markets

**March 27<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

Time is starting to drag out too much now. With only 9 and a half weeks of my contract left to run everything seems to be going by SO SLOWLY. The weather has turned pretty lousy with lots of rain and cold mornings. At least the stupid daylight savings time has gone now so we are getting up an hour later in the morning.

We still have quite a few things to do and see before we head off. I want to go round the York Peninsular, visit the National Motor Museum at Birdwood in the Adelaide Hills and have a look round the wineries at McLaren Vale. We went up to the Barossa again on the weekend but only to take pictures. The wines up there are so over priced we came back to the city and bought a couple of bottles at the local hotel.

Our plans for June now involve going back to Perth via Port Lincoln, Esperance and Kalgoorlie and then a quick stop off at home before heading north to find a good fishing spot on the coast to wait out winter. Then it will probably be back to Perth to work for a while and save up some money for doing a partial refit to the bus. After that, well we'll just wait and see.

#### **March 31<sup>st</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

Another drive up into the Adelaide hills today took us out to Birdwood and the National Motor Museum.

Although located quite a long way from the city, this museum is one of the best we have seen on our travels. Surrounded by gardens and including the Old Mill Museum it is very good value.

There are so many different types of vehicles here that I can't even begin to list them but probably some of the most famous are Peter Brock's racing cars (4 in all) and a reconstructed truck originally used in the Adelaide to Birdsville postal run and driven by Tom Cruise - no not the Hollywood actor, but never-the-less a film star in his own right appearing as himself in an early Australian movie and more recently being part of the documentary made for the ABC about the mail run, the film and the reconstruction of this wonderful old truck.

On the way back to Adelaide we stopped off at Woodside and Melba's Chocolate Factory. This is not just a tourist attraction but a working factory where you can see all the confectionery being created.

Unlike the rip-off joints we went to in Queensland (where they are only interested in Japanese tourists anyway) this place had very reasonable prices and as a result we ended up with a couple of kilos of goodies to take home. Located in the same complex is a good arts and crafts shop, a cheese factory where you get to sample the cheeses (Thursday-Sunday) and a dried fruit shop. All in all a good spot to visit up in the Adelaide Hills. You can easily combine the National Motor Museum and Melba's in a day's drive.



Birdwood

#### **April 5<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

Work ran out of steam again today so I was home by about 10.30am. As my trusty old Pentax 105r camera finally packed up last weekend I went out shopping for a new camera and came home with a Pentax MZ50 SLR with a 28-80 lens. At \$499 it was a bit more than I had wanted to pay but it does now give me the advantage of being able to fit bigger zoom lenses than the old 105r. The old camera can still see some use as it is working at zoom rates of 90-105 but below that it loses focus.

With a trip the Yorke Peninsular looming next week (Easter) I definitely had to have a stills camera so there goes most of the money I managed to put in the bank last month.

#### **April 13<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

Easter was our last chance to do a bit of extended exploring in South Australia before starting the long haul back to Perth in just over seven weeks time. We decided on the going down the Yorke Peninsular and staying at the Innes national Park right on the tip.

To be honest most of the peninsula is bleak windswept farmland with nothing special going for it but the area encompassed by the National Park is most spectacular.

Camping costs \$6 per vehicle per night and there are seven campsites through out the park. The main campsite at Pondalowie is the largest and cost more than the others (\$15 a night per vehicle) but for the extra money you get hot showers (well if the solar system keeps up with demand) and flushing toilets - but don't count n lights at night. There are 75 sites here and they are all quite large. I would think even big rigs would have no problems finding a suitable spot here. The sealed road ends at Pondalowie and heads on to bush campsites at Surfers, Shell Beach and Browns Beach.

Surfers is a small crowded site without much room to move, as is Browns' Beach but we were told that Shell beach was the best small campsite and was very quiet, so that was the one we opted for. It only took one group of noisy pigs with car stereos to dispel the 'Quiet campsite' myth. The first night when the noise continued past midnight I finally got fed up and told them to shut up, which eventually they did. I cannot understand why people have to make so much noise in lovely quiet locations and ruin things for everyone else. There are a total of 8 campsites at Shell Beach and 5 were happy to sit back and enjoy the peace of the bust, one group of 3 couples who occupied the other three campsites made it their business to ruin the peace and quiet for everyone else.

We spent our first morning exploring the park and found some very pretty coastline and some historic ruins at Inneston which once produced chalk. The settlement was set next to a small lake and is a great place to photograph and look for wildlife. There are even a couple of buildings you can hire and stay in but I have no idea of rates. There are a number of buildings around the park that can be hired out but the pick of them all is at Dolphin Beach.

After complaining about the late night noise at Shell Beach to the Ranger our second night was still heading the way of the first so we gave up on trying to get any sleep at the campsite and took our sleeping bags up in to the sand dunes near the beach and had an uninterrupted nights sleep. We even had an unexpected bonus as the air temperature at the beach was 4-5 degrees warmer than the freezing air at the campsite.



Innes National Park

#### **April 14<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

We decided that life at Shell Beach wasn't going to get any quieter and packed up the tent. Before leaving the park we left a written complaint at the office and are now awaiting the return of our camping fees. Why National Parks can't provide some small camp grounds with a curfew at 10.30pm and a complete ban on radios is a mystery. Surely we have just as much right to have a nice peaceful spot at the yobbos seem to have to make as much noise as they want.

Leaving early was a pity as the park is one of the most enjoyable scenic attractions on the peninsula. For anyone wishing to visit the park my advice would be to do so out of holiday season and you will love the place. There is a small fishing village which operates from September to May at Pondalowie Bay and a walk down the centre of 'town' at night is a treat for anyone who wants to see a small settlement as close to a pioneering town as you will see today.

Other areas to visit include the ruins at Inneston, Cable Bay, The Gap, Ethel Beach (very little sign remains of the wreck of the Ethel), Dolphin Beach and Shell Beach. There are a number of walks in the park and information on them can be obtained from the Ranger's Station as you enter the park at Stenhouse Bay.

As we still had some time left we turned north when we got back to Highway One and headed for Pirie. There was the chance that Belle may have been able to catch up with her brother Mike again (which as things turned out didn't happen) and we knew of a campsite at Telowie 13km north of Pirie. The campsite isn't much but it is situated on the beach and we spent the rest of our time relaxing here before packing up and heading back to Adelaide.

#### **May 5<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

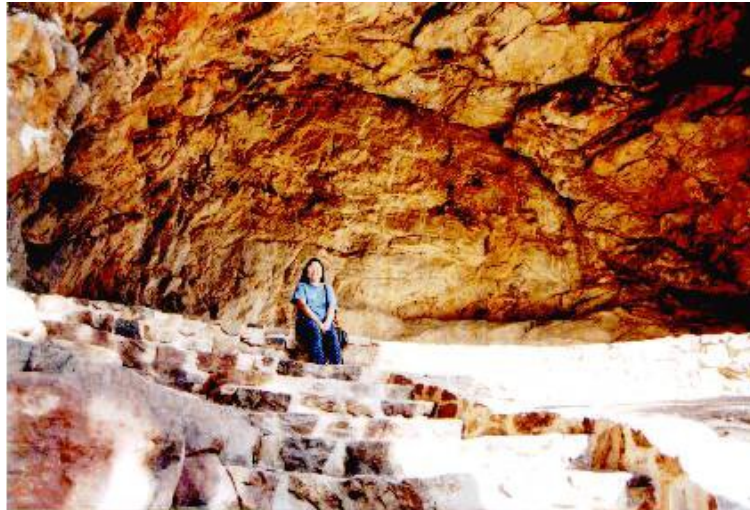
Only 4 weeks to go before my contract finishes and we can get on with the trip across the Nullabor. We hope to stop in Pirie briefly and take the car up to Wilpena Pound then come back and head down to Prot Lincoln to catch up with Blue and Skeeta. With a little luck we will then head up to the Nullabor and across to Balladonia and catch up with my good friend Dave (who happens to be known as Max out there). Then its on to Norseman and south to Esperance for a quick look round before going back north to Kalgoorlie. All this will probably take a couple of weeks and then is will



be back to Perth for a brief stop before running north along the coast to hide up in the warm north west until Perth's cold winter gives way to spring.

Work is really dragging out at the moment and it doesn't help that I am getting research jobs instead of proper programming work, but we need the money so I just have to stick at it for these last few weeks.

We are looking for final places to visit round Adelaide before we go and today we discovered a real beauty at Morialta Conservation Park. The park is north east of the city and there are some lovely walking trails and several water falls. We made our way along the easy track to First Falls and stopped off to look at Giant's Cave. The canyon near the falls reminded me of some of the gorges we have seen up north but the falls weren't all that big.



Giant's Cave

**May 13<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Time drags on as we near the end of our stay in Adelaide. With little left to do now but prepare the bus even the weekends seem to be passing with un-natural slowness. A quick test of the generator yesterday confirmed that even after six months of inactivity it is still working well. I'll replace the spark plug anyway but hopefully it will keep up with our power needs as we head west.

**May 20<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Another week closer to getting back on the road and now we are starting preparations in earnest. The bus is booked in for servicing on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June and with luck we should be away the same day. We scouted the area where the workshop is yesterday and found a spot to sit over Sunday night which is only just round the corner. The reason we do this is to avoid fighting our way through rush hour traffic on Monday morning.

Hopefully we will have most things packed away this weekend and have next weekend to finish getting spare parts and do any final checks around the bus.

We have made a brief plan for the journey which mostly for my own reference I have put in here as well. It will be interesting to see how closely we are able to stick to it. I estimate 19 days to get back to Perth.

STOP AT	Actual Stay	Planned stay	DISTANCE KMS
Port Pirie	2	1	228
Baroota	1	0	
Port Augusta	0	2	90
From here we intend to go up to Wilpena Pound in the car which is a round trip of about 300km.	Didn't go to Wilpena		
Whyalla	0	1	73
Tumby Bay	1 (north)	0	
Port Lincoln	5	2-4	262
Walkers Rocks	1	0	
Streaky Bay	2	1	296
Haslam	1	0	
Penong	1 (west)	0	
Yalata	1 (west)	1	321
Eucla	1 (west)	1	281
Cocklebiddy	0	1	348
Balladonia	1 (south)	1-2	178
The reason we may stay here 2 nights is a very good friend of mine works here and if he is not too busy we may have time to catch up.			
Norseman	1 (north)	1	188

Esperance	Didn't go	2	202
This is a side trip and will depend to some extent on the weather.			
Norseman	1	1	202
Kalgoorlie	3	2	206
Kellerberrin	1	1	296
Perth			253

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This is a total of 3424 Kms not including the car trip to Wilpena and is the longest distance we will have attempted in one go. If all goes well a few days after reaching Perth we will be back on the road and heading another 1400 Kms back north to Cleaverville.

#### **May 27<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Our last full Sunday in the caravan park and we have already made one small move. We are now down in the tourist area as our 'charming' neighbours in the long term section have started playing up again and kept us awake last night until 12:45. We have complained about their selfish behaviour before with no results so to avoid any further conflict (which was rapidly approaching as my patience had almost run out) we have moved the bus to another site.

We were hoping that the TV reception might be better at the new site but if anything it is worse. Considering that this is supposed to be a 4 star park, the owners have done nothing to make sure that people can watch TV. We are lucky to get one channel clearly.

That combined with the lack of effort by the park owners to deal with our ex-neighbours and make sure we weren't constantly kept awake late at night has really down graded my opinion of Brownhill Creek Caravan Park. The park itself is really lovely but if management isn't prepared to step in and resolve problems then I can't advise other travellers to stay here. (Management has since changed in this park)

I am not looking forward to the last week at work as I feel I have pretty much been 'hung out to dry' and sidelined from the main focus that I was employed to work on. The tasks I am being given are boring, thankless dead-ends and very demoralising. Still there are only 5 days left and the money I get paid is still the same so I'll just have to put up with it.

After lots of running around each weekend we are getting close to having everything ready but there are still some outstanding items to buy and orders to pick up next Saturday. With luck we will have everything in place in time to move out on Sunday morning.

#### **June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

Well we are almost at the end of our time in Adelaide and are now just waiting for Monday so the bus can be serviced and we can be on our way.

I spent yesterday putting new lights on the back of the bus and doing some re-wiring but I still have some electrical problems that still plague the bus. They won't stop us from moving on but they are a big nuisance. The last week has also been busy catching up with the friends we have made here and saying our final goodbyes. Its amazing how few friends we had in Perth after living there all that time and how many good friends we have made while travelling.

Adelaide has been a great place to stay and even if we never come back this way it will remain one our favourite memories of this trip. It still retains some of the old world dignity and courtesy that has long been lost in the other Australian cities. In general the drivers on the roads are the best we have come across in Australia, most showing lots of patience and courtesy. The only minor faults are the tendency of some to 'go to sleep' at traffic lights and not notice green filters when they come on and an inability to turn left without almost stopping first. Compared to places like Perth and Brisbane these are eminently forgivable faults.

I will miss our weekend drives up in to the Adelaide hills and our Sundays at one or other of the terrific markets around the city. I will miss the lack of traffic on the roads compared with other cities and I will miss Adelaide's beautifully kept historic buildings. Long may the city stay as it is and I urge South Australians not to follow the path of modernisation which has led to the destruction of almost every heritage building in Perth.

#### **June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

We moved out of Brownhill Creek about mid-morning and made our way through the surprisingly heavy traffic to a fuel station on South Road that was large enough to handle the bus. After filling both main fuel tanks and all the Jerry cans (at a cost of \$164.08 we moved on to a large parking lot we had scouted out earlier which was close to the workshop we were booked in to on Monday morning.

#### **June 4<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Monday)**

Due to very heavy traffic we were awake quite early but still had to wait until nearly 9am to take the bus down to the gas service workshop. The gas service only cost \$35 (what a relief) but there are still a couple of other jobs that need doing including the flange gasket and carbi float level. These will get done when we get to Port Pirie.

After what seemed like a very long drive we arrived in Pirie about 3.15pm and just managed to get the bus into Mike and Helen's back yard after taking the car and trailer off. Belle cooked dinner for the three of us. Wayne and Bev turned up in the evening and had a squiz at the bus before I collapsed into an exhausted heap around 10pm. After not driving the bus for the last 6 months it is taking some getting used to again.

#### **June 5<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

We have found a local repairer (Kent's Bus Service) who can fix the remaining problems with the bus and with luck we will be back on the road sometime tomorrow. We enjoyed the day relaxing at Mike and Helen's and stayed up late again watching movies - although we were outdone yet again as Wayne, Bev and Helen stayed up until about 2am while Belle and I collapsed just after 11pm.

**June 6<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Wednesday)**

The bus went in around 9am and wasn't ready until mid afternoon. The repairs cost \$252.10 and involved replacing the jet in the carbi which had collapsed. Hopefully the fuel economy will improve a bit from now on. As there wasn't much time left for driving we only made it a few kilometres past Port Germain before pulling off the main highway and driving in to the Baroota Rodeo grounds where camping is available all year for the very reasonable sum of \$5 per vehicle.

The grounds are on private property set back away from the noise of the highway and have toilets, cold showers and shelters available. At this time of year it is best to check on the condition of the ground as you go in but even with our heavy rig there wasn't a problem. In the warmer weather this would be a top spot to spend a night or two.

Big rigs should detach the bush gate next to the main gate if they think they will have trouble getting in as the main gate may be a little narrow.



Baroota

**June 7<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

The weather has really closed in now and we have been driving all day in high wind and rain. With no reason to stop in Port Augusta now we moved on to Whyalla to have a look at the Corvette which was dragged from the sea and now sits by the side of the main road in to town. The entrance fee of \$6.60 wasn't too high and apart from a tour of the ship (which in itself is probably worth the entrance fee) there is also a maritime museum to wander through.

There were no good refuelling stops in Whyalla so we pushed on to Cowell and then just kept on rolling until about 4pm when we stopped for the night at a big rest area 25km north of Tumby Bay.



Tumby Bay

**June 8<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

After a brief stop at the very pretty little town of Tumby Bay we pressed on to Lincoln. There are a number of good rest areas right on the coast between North Shields and Lincoln but I can't comment on the attitude of local authorities to anyone wishing to use them for overnight stops.

We drove on through town to the caravan park at Kirton Point. Although the view may be wonderful you will be VERY hard pressed to find a level site at this park. Other than that and the fact that they use commercial size taps instead of domestic ones it is a pleasant place and the sites are all drive through.

Blue and Skeeta came down to say 'Hi' and invited us to their home for dinner. We spent the better part of the day with them and enjoyed a terrific meal. There aren't many people who I think can cook as well as Belle can but Skeeta s certainly among those who can.



Port Lincoln

**June 12<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

Yesterday despite the wet weather we went across the peninsula to Coffin Bay. If we ever manage to come back this way I would like to spend some time fishing around there as it looked very promising. We also went back up the east side to Louth Bay to have a quick look at the free campsite located there. (For details see the camping guide).

Today we have to arrange to have the replacement water pump put in to the bus but I don't expect to get it done until later in the week.



Coffin Bay

**June 13<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Wednesday)**

The bus went in to the workshop before 8am and was there until 1.30pm. All that time wasn't worth while as when I checked the coolant level when we stopped for the night we had lost over 6 litres. Lincoln Auto Service charged us \$136.40 for the work and the problem with loss of coolant is now far worse than it was before they got their hands on it. Needless to say I won't be recommending them to anyone else.

The stop over for today was at a roadside rest area 93km south of Elliston. It is a nice little spot with some trees and table and set back a little way from the road. We had a very quiet night with little if any traffic passing.

**June 14<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

Starting the bus this morning was a bit of a problem as the starter didn't want to turn the engine over properly. After a few attempts it did get going but it is yet another worry as we face the haul across the Nullarbor.

After a short run up the coast past Elliston we stopped overnight at a terrific little campsite on the beach at Walkers Rocks. It is 3km off the main highway but the road in was in very good condition. At \$5 a night it is good value as there is water, a shower and toilets. When the fish are running this would be one of the best campsites on the coast.



Walkers Rocks

**June 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

The bus didn't want to start AGAIN today but finally did after a couple of attempts. We had a quick look at Venus Bay which would be another top fishing spot in season but then went on the Streaky Bay where we will spend the next couple of nights. We caught up with David Robinson and his better half Heather (his bus Bedford Motel is on the web site in our MY BUS section) and were very impressed with the interior design of his 1968 bus. It is the same size as ours but the design includes a shower/toilet/laundry area at the rear and plenty of sitting room in the living area.

Our trailer is showing signs of damage on the draw bar welds so we have dropped it off at a local repairer to have some extra plates welded across the cracks that have started to appear.

Streaky bay has an odd assortment of television stations with the ABC broadcast coming from Adelaide, Channel 7 coming from Queensland and Imparja (Channel 9) coming from Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The caravan park here is one of the most expensive we have been in at \$20 a night and the tap water here is to be avoided at all costs. We found out (too late) that it has an unpleasant salty taste so it is best to fill your drinking water tanks from the rain water tank near the toilet block.



Streaky Bay

**June 16<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

Today was spent mostly touring the area around Streaky Bay including Hallys Beach and Back Beach which are a few kilometres away by reasonable dirt road. We also went north along the coast to Perlubie Beach (a reasonable campsite with toilets and shower) about 20km along the coast and then to Haslam another 20km north.

Haslam is one of the best campsites on the coast with flush toilets, shelter, seats and power all for only \$5 per night. (Maximum stay 14 nights). There was also a jetty which we tried squidding from without any success. Had we known about Haslam prior to reaching Streaky Bay I think we would have stayed there 3 nights instead of the expensive caravan park we ended up in.

**June 17<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

After picking up the trailer (the welding only cost \$25) we hooked up and headed for Haslam with the bus. There were no visitors here yesterday but today there are two caravans and another bus. Finally we had a chance to catch up with some other travellers and quiz them about conditions and campsites on our intended route.

After only a short time we had acquainted ourselves with the other travellers and discovered two new campsites at Cactus Beach and Fowlers Bay. Both are a bit off the main highway via dirt roads but apparently Cactus Beach is easy to get to.



Haslam

**June 18<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Monday)**

After leaving Haslam quite early we went on through Ceduna and then foolishly made the decision to turn off from Penong and have a look at Cactus Beach. The road in had been described to us as very good with no potholes, but at least half the 21kms was rough going. Cactus Beach is on private property and the charge for camping is \$6.60 per person per night. This is just profiteering so after a quick cast off the beach hoping for a passing salmon we turned round (not easy in this campsite) and headed back down the 21km dirt track back to the highway.

There are NO facilities at Cactus Beach and the lack of signage makes it hard to find as there are lots of different tracks in the area. Having seen the place I would now not advise big rigs to go down to the beach.

We found a good rest stop not too far along the highway where we spent the night.

**June 19<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

After Yalata Roadhouse (no autogas) the highway really flattens out and a few kilometres on there is a turn off the Head of the Bight. Entry fee is \$8 per head but we couldn't miss the opportunity to have a look at the whales since we were passing at the right time of the year.

We weren't disappointed with several southern right whales frolicking in the waters of the blue bay. We sat for some time filming and watching for most of the afternoon before finally heading back to the highway. We continued on towards the Nullarbor Roadhouse and stopped at a large truck stop within sight of the roadhouse's lights for the night.

**June 20<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Wednesday)**

Today was all about driving so we set to it early and just kept on going. We gained an hour and a half as we crossed the border into W.A. and settled down for the night at a large shady rest area 104km east of Madura.

We are taking longer than expected on this leg of the journey but with the bus dropping coolant and us having to stop every 50km or so it isn't all that surprising. We hope to get somewhere near Caiguna tomorrow and then hopefully catch up with my fiend Dave at Balladonia the next day.



Nullarbor Rest Area

**June 21<sup>st</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

On, and on, and on we go. The drive today took us up the Madura pass, which in itself wouldn't have been too bad if they had had the sense to locate the petrol station at either the top or the bottom of the hill, but NO! they put it part way up so you lose all momentum and have to go back down to the station and then start the steepest part of the climb with no speed at all. I don't know what dill put the roadhouse where it is but they obviously didn't drive a heavy underpowered vehicle.

As it turned out we reached the top ok without resorting to the crawler gear and then went on past Cocklebidy and Caiguna and are now resting at a big rest area about 145km from Balladonia.

I am hoping to find that Dave is at Balladonia tomorrow but if he isn't then we will press on to Norseman.

**June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2001 (Friday)**

We arrived in Balladonia on schedule and managed to catch up with Dave who we hadn't seen for nearly 4 years. As he still had to work we decided not to stay overnight and pushed on to a good rest area about 30km up the road. We have been struggling to get through the long evenings so tonight we built a good campfire and sat out until well after dark enjoying the warmth.

**June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2001 (Saturday)**

Despite some worse than usual problems with the cooling system in the bus I have managed to rig up a big tank (my old beer fermenter actually) which joins up to the overflow pipe of the radiator. This forces water down into the radiator when the air isn't bubbling out and thankfully we managed to keep going much longer than usual. We are now in a large rest area 2km south of the Kambalda turn off and only 80km from Kalgoorlie.

Finally we have managed to catch up with some other travellers as Jack and Margaret pulled in with their caravan after noticing our bus parked in the rest area. We have just spent a most enjoyable evening chatting about all sorts of things. They are on their way back to Melbourne after spending some time up in Broome - Half their luck.

We have more or less decided not to press on to Cleaverville this year but to take an overseas trip instead. There are all sorts of reasons for this change of plans but the main one is the bus cooling system problems that have plagued us since Port Lincoln.

**June 24<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

We arrived in Kalgoorlie in the early morning and have booked in to Prospector Caravan park for 2 nights (\$20 per night.) and almost immediately rushed off to have a look around. Being back in W.A. means almost nothing open on a Sunday so we did the good tourist bit and went off to see Hannans North Tourist Mine. At \$16.50 it is quite expensive but it includes an underground tour, gold panning and gold pouring as well as having some interesting mining exhibits to wander around. It took a couple of hours to have a good look around and then we went off to the Super Pit Lookout. The size of the pit can't really be put into words, it is probably fair to say that it is a man made imitation of the Grand Canyon - although admittedly not anywhere near as long.

We will have a good look round Kalgoorlie today and even have a meal at one of the local pubs at dinner time then I hope to get out and explore some of the old ghost towns north of here tomorrow.



Exchange Hotel

### **June 25<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Monday)**

Our itinerary today included a visit to the Boulder War Museum (entry by donation) which although small was very interesting and included a small collection of vehicles. Then we went over the Kalgoorlie to see the Goldfields Museum (entry again by a suggested donation of \$2) which was bigger than the War Museum and included a good lookout from the huge head frame which dominates the northern end of Hannan Street.

In the afternoon we decided to go and have a look at the 'ghost town' of Kanowna. Why the inverted commas? There is no ghost town. After a 20km drive out of town all you see is a series of signs which tell you where the building once stood. No foundations, no bricks, no corrugated iron, nothing, nada, zip remains of the actual town itself. To think they charge tourists to take organised tours to this travesty of an attraction. We were quite speechless and very glad the only money we spent was on the petrol getting out there. Calling it a ghost town is the single biggest con I have ever come across.

### **June 26<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

We were all packed up and ready for the final leg of our journey when, during the regular check I do each time we set off I found the radiator had completely emptied of coolant. As this was the first time this had happened we took the bus in to a radiator specialist who confirmed that the head gasket had gone and that coolant was leaking out. For whatever reason the coolant and oil were not mixing and the leak was external so in an attempt to fix the problem we put in some leak fixing solution. The cost of all this was \$80.

We left the radiator and headed out of town and almost immediately had more problems. While running on gas the bus would lose power and then start up again so whenever I put the accelerator down it would start to jerk along the road. We pulled over and had a look at the engine and it was then I heard the sound of escaping gas. By now all we wanted to do was get home and were not prepared to sit another night in a workshop. The bus was still running on petrol but we couldn't take the chance of breaking down miles from anywhere so arranged for a transporter to take the bus back to Perth. This cost \$660 for 570 kilometres which considering some of the other tows we have had in the past was quite cheap.

We hooked the trailer up to the car and took off mid afternoon trying to get as far as we could. We reached Kellerberrin before stopping the night in a motel where we had dinner \$101 all up.

### **June 27<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Wednesday)**

We left Kellerberrin early and reached Welshpool at about 10.30am and after parting with our money we picked up the bus and took it on the final few kilometres home.

The rest of the day was spent unpacking and looking at the damage done to our house by my niece and her boyfriend. We also found that all our storage boxes had opened and the contents removed. Items we had packed up together have been moved around so that it is difficult to locate anything. There are a lot of items missing and we are now in the process of compiling a list to give to the police.

It was heartbreaking to come home to find things like this but we do intend to take the matter as far as we can.





Back in Perth

**June 28<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

It is finally beginning to sink in that the trip is finally over. We have enough left in the bank to enable us to take our time before looking for work but I have already been contacted about a 3 month contract so may be working again sooner than I anticipated.

Hopefully we will be able to fix the bus up over winter and have her available again for a few short trips once the rainy weather starts to clear. We are a bit disappointed about not making it to Cleaverville but then there is always next year.

**CONCLUSION**

As a way of trying to assist others make up their minds about how to travel I have decided to ask myself a series of questions that I think others contemplating a trip round Australia may need answers to.

Q. What was the single hardest thing to do in preparing for the trip?

A. Basically the hardest thing to do was to make up our minds to do it. Once we had managed to get over the fear of giving up our jobs and taking on an uncertain future, everything else was just a matter of planning and hard work.

Q. Why did you decide on a bus instead of say a caravan?

A. We wanted something that was going to be big enough to live in on a long term basis without having to tow a huge van. Most caravans aren't really big enough to live in for years at a time and those that are require a big vehicle to tow and are quite unstable. The bus gave us plenty of stability, heaps of room and the ability to tow a small second vehicle behind.

Q. What were the disadvantages of having a bus?

A. Firstly a bus is very BIG and big vehicles are hard to move when they break down. On a trip like this you have to expect to have mechanical problems at some stage and you just have to prepare as best you can to deal with it when it happens. The other thing about having such a large vehicle is that it won't go everywhere you want it to and not all caravan parks will take buses.

Q. What about the second vehicle, is it really necessary?

A. In our case yes it was essential as once the bus was set up in one location with the annexe out we could not move it. The car allowed us to find work more easily as well as to get around to areas the bus wouldn't go. A small 4wd would have been better but our little Barina did manage to get us into all sorts of interesting places. I think it would be very difficult to get along without having a second vehicle of some kind. Many people do manage and some other bus people will buy a second vehicle and then sell it before moving to the next area to save towing. We didn't mind towing as it gave us the extra security of being able to drive somewhere for help if the bus had problems in a remote area.

Q. How about the choice of engine when buying a bus?

A. Having had a dual fuel bus (gas/petrol) I would now say that a diesel engine would be my choice if I had to do it all over again. The Bedford 300 6cyl engine in our bus was far too underpowered and a diesel would have given us much better performance climbing hills. We usually travel at 60-80kph but the speed can drop to as low as 50 if we have strong headwinds or long sloping hills to climb. It would be nice to have a vehicle that could at least sit on 80kph all the time.

Q. What sort of fridge is best?

A. I can only comment of 240v or Gas fridges as we didn't have a 12v compressor type, but we found that a normal house fridge (ie. 240v only) was easier to cope with and produced far less heat than a gas fridge. The main thing is to get the biggest fridge you can afford or fit in. The smaller the fridge the more susceptible it is to outside temperature changes. We met many people with small gas fridges that would not cope with the high temperatures in the north but

the gas fridge we had at that stage was large and coped very well with the temperature - although it made the bus far too hot.

Q. What about a power source?

A. As we started out with a gas fridge and a 500w generator we were quite self sufficient but the 500w generator proved to be too small and eventually we gave up on the gas fridge because it kept on breaking down. We finished up with one 120w 7.1 amp solar panel, two 75 amp hour deep cycle batteries, a 20 amp regulator and a 1500w inverter. We also now have a 1kva (read 800w) generator. With this we can remain self sufficient for an indefinite period. If we didn't want to rely on the generator at all then we would need two more deep cycle batteries and another solar panel. Of course this set up will not run very high energy items like air conditioners or heaters but it is quite enough for us to get by on. It basically runs our 240v fridge, 4 fluoro lights, video, TV and stereo system. I also have a 240v trickle charger which charges the batteries whenever the generator is running.

Q. Should I take a boat?

A. Although we have hardly used the 11 foot dinghy we have in most places we have been, it has given us the opportunity to get out to where the fish are when we have been in a good fishing spot. As we both love fishing it has been worth while even though we haven't used it as much as we would have liked. If you like fishing then a small dinghy is worthwhile, if not then don't bother.

Q. If you had the chance to do the trip again would you?

A. Well this question could be taken two ways and I would give two different answers. If the question means would I do the trip from scratch for the first time the answer would be a definite yes. If the question means would I go round again after going the first time then the answer is probably no. We have enjoyed the last three and a half years immensely and despite the problems that we have had from time to time it has all been very worth while, but I would not want to do the entire trip again. Perth is just SO FAR AWAY from everything else I don't see myself doing all that driving although having said that I still want to get to Uluru and Alice Springs one day.

Q. If you could start again knowing what you know now what would you change?

A. Well the first thing would be to try and have much more money available when we started. We had about \$10,000 in the bank and despite finding work we almost ran out of money twice. We have done it the hard way because we still have our house in Perth and that has been a big drain on our finances. Without that we would have had an extra \$7-10,000 per year to enjoy ourselves with. Having said that, the house was also our safety net so if everything went wrong we always had something to come back to.

Other things I would like to change would be:

- 1)A bigger generator, 3-5kva.
- 2)A swivel seat in place of the bolted down passenger seat in the bus.
- 3)A more powerful engine in the bus.
- 4)A small 4wd as a second vehicle would have been nice.
- 5)If I had the money I would have liked to have a digital video camera instead of the analogue one(s) I ended up with.

Q. What is the best thing about coming home?

A. Without a doubt the best thing is an inside toilet and shower. Although I got used to using caravan park facilities it was never something I was comfortable with.

Q. What is the worst thing about coming home?

A. So far the worst thing was finding our home vandalised by people we trusted and then finding lots of things missing. If that had not happened then the worst part for me would be the feeling that the last three years and seven months were a dream and if it wasn't for the bus in the driveway (now dripping oil) and the photos, it would almost seem as though it never happened at all.

Q. Will you travel again?

A. Yes. Once the bus is repaired we will take trips around W.A. to places we haven't been for a long time like Esperance and Broome and of course Cleaverville and Exmouth to catch a few decent sized fish. We are both far from finished with our travels and are already thinking about where we will go on our first (next) trip.

## **EPILOGUE July 31<sup>st</sup> 2001**

Well we finally got the house straightened out and have started fixing some of the damage done by Kate M\*\* and Jamie H\*\*\*\*\*. There are a lot of things missing and we are still wondering what to do about it but we have other things (like finding work) to press on with so we have to put most of our efforts into that now.

We had only been back two weeks before heading off to Phuket to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. After 14 nights enjoying the tropical paradise and pigging out on lovely Thai food we are finally back home and settling in to suburban life again.

While we were away some kind soul decided to let down two of our trailer tyres and remove the top from the brake fluid container and remove the petrol cap from the bus. I suspect that after the recent heavy rains the petrol tank is going to be full of water. We certainly know we are back in Maddington - home of Australia's most useless people. As a result of this we have taken to sleeping in the bus again in order to protect it from the human garbage that live in this suburb.

With regard to the house and the damage we found when we got back my advice to anyone thinking of leaving your home in the hands of someone else is to consider the following list that we have compiled. These things were done by relatives who were staying in our house rent free so it is essential to be very careful about letting anyone, family or strangers into your home to 'look after it.'

#### Lounge

- 1)Odd coloured paint used on wall - we have attempted to rectify this ourselves but it is far from satisfactory.
- 2)Cracked window in lounge.
- 3)Standard lamp damaged and shade destroyed.
- 4)Flyscren missing from one window.

#### Kitchen

- 1)Cabinet from kitchen left out in the rain - completely destroyed.
- 2)Dish washer no longer working. It was working when we left.
- 3)Kitchen draw damaged front pulled off - since repaired.
- 4)Cooker left coated in dirt and oil - since cleaned. Grill top missing.
- 5)Kitchen bin missing
- 6)Electric frypan controller and skillet missing.
- 7)Food processor (which was stored in the locked room) used and left filthy.
- 8)Freezer temperature knob broken (this fridge was brand new when we left).

#### Dining Room

- 1)Damage to curtains in dining area - ripped by dog - curtains since replaced by another party.
- 2)Damage to dining room table - left out in a garden shed and was water damaged.
- 3)Odd coloured paint used on wall.

#### Main bedroom

- 1)Damage to wardrobes in main bedroom - door still broken
- 2)Carpet in main bedroom left in a filthy condition - requires steam cleaning.
- 3)Bed headboard left out in the rain - destroyed.
- 4)Main bedroom walls have been covered with some sort of white wash and will have to be re-painted. No permission was sought or given to re-paint this room. The room will require re-painting.
- 5)Main bedroom door damaged..
- 6)Pink Light shade missing.
- 7)An attempt has been made to remove the air conditioner from the window.

#### Bedroom 2

- 1)Damage to fly screen on front bedroom window
- 2)Rabbits had been kept in the second bedroom. Carpet left in a filthy state. Has now been shampooed.
- 3)Light shade missing

#### Bedroom 3

- 1)The locked storage room where we keep our own possessions has been broken in to, the hasp latch has been cut. Items are missing from this room.
- 2)Rear bedroom door partially pulled off hinge.
- 3)Light shade missing.
- 4)Items stored in this room in boxes were all removed from the boxes and put back in a different order. Many items are still missing

#### Hall

- 1)Hallway door damaged - holes poorly patched. Looks like holes caused by punching the door with fists.

#### Toilet

- 1)Severe damage to paint work in the toilet.
- 2)Blue toilet brush and stand missing.

#### Laundry

- 1)Damage to walls in laundry.
- 2)Clothes Drier not working. (was working when we left).

#### Bathroom

- 1)Tile broken in shower.
- 2)Bathroom door damaged.

#### Outdoors

- 1)Damage to seat in front courtyard - chewed by dog - now repaired at our expense.
- 2)Huge pile of rubbish left in garden and down the side of the house.
- 3)Pool left untreated with pump not operating - this has since been rectified by another party.
- 4)Patio roof damaged sheets bent and holed.
- 5)Meter box door broken off.
- 6)Coach light in front area has top missing.

Apart from this there is a list of missing items with a value that now exceeds \$2000.



**This is some of what we found  
when we went home.  
Done by people we  
trusted with our home  
No one has EVER  
apologised**



**Paintwork**

**Ruined**

**Nothing has EVER  
been fixed  
and somehow it is all now  
OUR FAULT???!**

It took us at least six months to get over the anger and heartache of all this, but finally we started making plans to get on with our lives again.

#### A New Beginning?

##### **September 18th 2001 (Tuesday)**

Yesterday we had new floor covering put in the bus. It was expensive and considering the fact that we are both still out of work the \$550 we spent on having it done my seem a little excessive. After nearly 3 months back in Perth we are very unhappy. The neighbourhood has deteriorated (if such a thing is possible) since we were last here and this sort of life is not appealing at all.

Today the bus went in to CVM Trucks in Canning Vale to have the head gasket fixed and a few other jobs done. Thankfully our new friend Andy runs the workshop so we have no worries about the work being done properly. Andy and Pam are flat out preparing their own bus for the big trip next year so they know all about buses and the problems that can arise.

##### **October 13th 2001 (Saturday)**

We got a call from Andy today to say the bus is ready so we immediately shot off down to the work shop to pick it up. Belle still had a job application to complete so when we got home she went on preparing that while I rushed around all day loading up the bus for a trip down to Heron Point. Knowing our usual luck I expect that work won't be far away now we have the bus back and can start enjoying it again, so we are going down tomorrow before something comes along to stop us.

##### **October 14th 2001 (Sunday)**

We left in the early morning to avoid any traffic and I was amazed at how much power the bus now has. I know the work we had done was expensive (over \$2000- I haven't got the final account from CVM yet) but they obviously know what they are doing as we did the whole trip at about 80km an hour - even up the hills. On the flat I can hold the accelerator half way up instead of having my foot flat to the floor. I estimated the trip would take two hours but we were there in under an hour and a half.

Heron Point was just the same as we remembered it - but it is still too early for the crabs so we just sat back and enjoyed the peace and quiet.

##### **October 17th 2001 (Wednesday)**

As I predicted - as soon as we are able to go off and have a good time work turns up. Well we do have to go back and we have had four nights away so I can't complain too much. Belle has an interview at RPH on Friday so we will be off home again tomorrow. We have really enjoyed the few quiet days here just relaxing and talking to some of the other travellers who are on their way through.

##### **October 26th 2001 (Friday)**

Nothing came of the job Belle was asked to interview for and there's nothing around for me still. We are going back down to Heron Point this weekend to see if the crabs have turned up yet since there isn't anything much else to do.

**October 28<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

Not many crabs around yet but we did manage to get two legal sized ones. We caught several others but all were undersized so they had to go back. I have been trying out the new 'hot water' system in the bus this weekend and it has worked reasonably well. I will have to set something up so the water tank can be positioned on either side of the bus so it makes the most of the sun, but otherwise it seems to work as intended and holds enough water for about six showers.

The 'hot water' system consists of a large storm water pipe with capped ends. In one end is a tap and on top are two screw off caps. This allows water to be poured in easily and the whole thing has been painted black to attract the heat. It is hung off one side of the bus roof rack (although it swings back in when we are travelling) and provides quite good gravity fed pressure. Since our submersible pump broke down last time we were here the gravity feed is very handy.

The bus has had quite a bit of work done on her recently as I have been fixing up cupboard catches and doing some repainting, but there is still plenty to do.

**November 5<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Monday)**

The bill from CVM arrived today - oh the pain - I had expected around \$2200 but it has ended up being \$2487.39 - Argh! I'm not sure how they end up charging \$96 for coolant - I could buy a hundred litres of the stuff from Kmart for that amount and I know the radiator doesn't take 100 litres! If we stick it all on the credit card on the 10<sup>th</sup> we can at least hang on to the cash for another month. There are still several items that need fixing on the bus including a re-set of the rear springs, front and rear brakes, Tailshaft centre bearing, Diff pinion seal and new king pins. Added to this the engine needs re-tourquing at 1000km. As if that wasn't enough I got a speeding fine for \$100 today - talk about kick you when you are down. The fine originates from the DAY WE PICKED THE BUS UP from CVM - sigh... sometimes you just can't get a break.

**November 12<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Monday)**

Having nothing to do but wait for replies from potential employers we decided to go to Heron Point again to see if the crabs had turned up. When we arrived there was no space for the bus but the caretaker told us that a big bus and two coasters would be leaving soon and we could park up and go crabbing while we waited.

We went out only to find the crabs still hadn't come in and when we got back to the bus it didn't look as though the group occupying the only space for large vehicles had any intention on moving - despite being told by the caretaker that we were waiting to get in.

We waited and waited, 8 o'clock came and went, then 9 o'clock and by 10 we were getting a bit fed up. We had another word with the caretaker who said the other vehicles would be pulling out in a few minutes. We went back to wait in the bus some more only to find that the whole group had taken chairs and were sitting under a tree with no sign at all that they were going to move out. When 11 o'clock came and went we gave up, got our money back and left the site.

The vehicles concerned were all parked the wrong way and were taking up all the available space for big rigs. Fair enough for the big bus which may not have been able to park east-west but the coasters had no business being where they were - taking up the only room for other big rigs - when they had plenty of other places to go. The ignorance of some people knows no bounds. Despite the fact that these people knew we were waiting to get in and the coasters could easily have moved 20 yards to another spot, they sat there for hours and deliberately stopped us from moving in. If the people responsible ever read this I would like you to know you are the biggest pricks I have ever met on the road and I wish you all the bad luck possible.

We went down to Preston Beach to have a look at the facilities there but the caravan park is miles away from the beach so we went inland again intending to head for Lake Navarino. We turned the wrong way at Waroona and ended up going to the caravan park at Logue Brook Dam. This is up a pretty steep incline but was worth the drive. The caravan park is much bigger than we had thought with huge unpowered bush camping areas. The setting under the trees on the lake is very nice but a little expensive at \$18 a night for powered sites.

Hoffman's Mill is another 11km up an unsealed road from the caravan park turn off but we decided that being a hot day we would prefer to have the Air-conditioner on. Considering the number of March Flies around (horse flies) we would not have enjoyed sitting around outside in any case.

**November 13<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

We left the caravan park mid-morning intending to fuel up at Coolup and then (perhaps) have another go at Heron Point. As we pulled in to the Coolup Roadhouse we found radiator spewing out of the top of the radiator somewhere. Is it just me or do we have rotten luck? \$2487 to have the engine fixed and now after less than 700km we have problems again! I just can't believe it!

We limped up to Pinjarra but no one was interested in helping so we had to carefully make our way back to Perth. The bus will have to go back to CVM to see what has happened. NOT HAPPY JAN!

**November 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

It turns out that now the bus has a leak in the top of the radiator but we don't have the money to do anything about it. It is very depressing that after spending nearly \$2500 on repairs we still can't get full use out of the bus.

**November 20<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Tuesday)**

We got fed up with suburbia again today and packed the camping gear in to the car and took off to the Gooralong campsite near Jarrahdale. This is a great spot under a group of pine trees, there is a stream at the bottom of the hill and there are toilets, cold showers, BBQs and tables. The disappointing thing is the amount of damage being done to the facilities by stupid ignorant thugs. There are very few tables that haven't had some parts removed to burn in fires, the toilet sinks have been vandalised and many trees have had bark removed.

I don't understand WHY people have to do these b&\*&#y stupid things, a bullet in the back of the head would be far too good for them. Luckily we had the place almost to ourselves and spent three nights out in the tent just veging out and enjoying nature.



Gooralong

**December 10<sup>th</sup> 2001**

Only a couple of weeks to Christmas and nothing much has changed. We are both still out of work and there doesn't appear to be much on the horizon. We now have to start planning 'worst case scenarios' and may have to put the house up for sale early in the new year. What a mess! We came back to look after Mum only to find we would have been much better off staying in S.A. at least I would have had work there.

Of course if we lose the house Mum will have to look for somewhere else to live as well so this isn't going to be a very happy Christmas for any of us.

**December 26<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Wednesday)**

Christmas is over (thankfully) for another year and we have come down to Heron Point to look for crabs again. There isn't much around still but we remain ever hopeful.

**December 27<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Thursday)**

Finally we have managed to get a few crabs. There aren't too many here yet but at least we caught 10 today so Belle is blissfully happy. We also have Zoe (Mum's Staffordshire bullterrier with us as Mum is off to Albany for 10 days). Zoe loves being in the bus and is enjoying Heron point immensely.

**December 30<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Sunday)**

We have moved up to Gooralong Park at Jarrahdale today, not that we really wanted to but time at Heron Point is restricted these days. The bus took the hills well but we still have the leak in the top of the radiator so I have to keep my eye on that.

**January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

Last night was, as expected, very noisy but considering the number of people out at the campsite everyone behaved themselves pretty well. There isn't even that much rubbish around this morning - now that is a nice change. The weather is heating up and despite being surrounded by trees the bus gets pretty warm during the day. The other problem we have is that the solar panel isn't getting enough light to charge the batteries properly so we are short on power at night.

**January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

After a nice week away it is time to get home and start trying to find work again. We are both pretty disillusioned at the moment as most applications don't even result in a reply.

**January 11<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

There have been a few more jobs appearing on the internet lately and today I managed to get an interview at the RAC. I don't hold out too much hope as I think they are looking for someone with more Universe admin experience than I have but at least things are starting to move in the right direction again.

Belle has applied for 5 jobs in places ranging from Bendigo to Geraldton so we will sit back and await the results of those as well.

#### **January 14<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

We are back at Heron Point for a couple of nights and are going on the theory that we might as well enjoy it while we can. We have the mobile phone with us and have brought the car in case Belle gets called in for an interview. Perth is about 100km from here but we need to be prepared in case something comes up and one of us needs to go back quickly.

Heron Point is deserted at the moment - LOVELY! Apparently on the weekend it was packed and very noisy. That's the main reason we try to come down here on week days.



Heron Point

#### **January 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

Belle was worried about coming down to Heron Point as she was expecting a call from one of the employers she has applied to. Me, being the pessimist I am, said no-one will ring if we take the car. We took the car and guess what? I was right! Do you have to bribe someone to get a job these days?

46 crabs later (yes we finally caught a few) we are heading home. There are still not that many crabs around (although we choose to put females back) and you have to walk a long way to find them. Yesterday morning we were out for nearly 4 hours and only brought back 20.

We have been cleaning the crabs and extracting the meat and freezing it - apart from what we eat that is. This way it takes up much less room in the fridge and it gives us something to do in the mornings.

Luckily we only had one hot day as there have been thunderstorms brewing all week. One came right over us when we were out crabbing and we had to make a dash back in to the bus. It isn't wise to be the tallest thing out on the water when there is lightning around.

#### **January 25<sup>th</sup>- 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday-Monday)**

We are off to a CMCA rally at Pinjarra today. Belle had another job interview on Wednesday but since she won't know anything more until the end of next week we have decided to make the most of it and head off for a few days.

The rally was at Pinjarra Park Racecourse which was a great venue as there is plenty of space and a nice shady grassed area. We had the use of showers and toilets and a lit area at night.

We caught up with George and Kathleen who we met nearly 4 years ago at Cleaverville; also with Mark and Lucy who we met at the 1997 Perth Wanderers wildflower rally and another couple who we met when we originally went to Heron Point. Our friends Kevin and Lesley came down for a couple of days as well. The rally was quite enjoyable but geared more to the older set, even so we enjoyed the weekend.

We also met Graham and Jane who have a huge completely converted bus that Graham has done himself.

#### **January 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

As the Pinjarra rally was only a few kilometres from Heron Point we have come down again to look for a few more crabs. The long weekend seems to have knocked the stuffing out of crab numbers here and we only managed to catch three this morning.

The weather is quite warm and we are back to bringing out the camp beds (the ones we bought here almost 4 years ago) and sleeping under a nice shady tree during the hot part of the afternoon. Looks like it will be 32-34 degrees all week.

On a sad note, it was 4 years ago today that was lost dear old Sam. We have recovered from that now but we think of Lucy and Sam often so they will never be forgotten. We still have their picture on the fridge in the bus so in a way they are still travelling with us.

Graham and Jane have come down here as well with their little dogs Punky, Cassie and Willy. They introduced us to a type of packet ice cream and yoghurt from NZ that comes in powdered form and you simply add water. Looks like a good idea for travellers.

#### **February 16<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

Finally a little bit of luck has come our way. Belle has got a part time job and although it isn't going to be enough to see us through in the long term it will help a bit while I am laid up after my hernia op. Belle will be working just 2 days a week doing practical lessons at Curtin Uni.

This time next week (if nothing goes wrong) I will still be in hospital recovering from the operation. I am really not looking forward to that, especially since it's in Royal Perth Hospital - what a dump.

We did try a short term experiment by taking in a couple of borders, but it didn't work out and after 3 weeks we have the house to ourselves again.

#### **February 21<sup>st</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

I have my second hernia operation tomorrow and I can't say I'm too thrilled about the prospect. Operations always carry some risk and I haven't been feeling all that happy about this one. Will there be another journal entry? Time alone will tell..... stay tuned....

#### **February 24<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Much to my great surprise (and no little relief) I was out of hospital just one day after the operation. People may complain about our Public Health system but I have nothing but praise for the way I was looked after by the staff at Royal Perth. Compared to my last hernia op in Darwin this has been almost a pleasant experience. I was off pain killers within the first 12 hours and I am already able to get up and around - something that took many days last time.

I had one little scare not long before I was due to be discharged. The drain tube was removed and the resulting spout of blood that followed it was quite spectacular. Even my nurse Kaye said she hadn't seen anything like it in 21 years of nursing. Being me I immediately went into shock with the classic symptoms of nausea, sweating and feeling cold but that soon passed. I could have done without the thick red sauce on the chicken that turned up for lunch just afterwards but the bleeding soon stopped and I was still allowed to go home, whew!

I am very surprised by the lack of pain caused by this operation. In Darwin I was in a great deal of pain for many days afterward so I think the surgeon I had this time here must have been a lot more gentle. I have strict instructions not to do ANY lifting for 8 weeks but it will be nice to be able to move around this time and not be stuck in bed for days on end.

#### **March 16<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

Time plods on and my hernia op wound is still bleeding - that makes over three weeks since the operation and it still hasn't healed. I have to see my doctor every 2<sup>nd</sup> day which is becoming tiresome. Belle had a blood test which showed very alarming levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (14 and 21 respectively). That means medication and more tests - getting old is starting to be a real pain.

I have been keeping an eye on prospective employment and applying for the odd jobs that do pop up but so far no replies. Centrelink with their usual efficiency and compassion are hounding me to look for work when just getting up causes my wound to bleed but have been told quite firmly to go to hell until I am better.

As we are still in the process of going broke we are planning to head back to Adelaide once Belle's work at Curtin comes to an end. I see that as the only chance of me getting back into work in the near future. It is a gamble, but there is just nothing going in Perth and no-one replies when I apply for work in the east. Australia stops at the WA border as far as the eastern states are concerned.

#### **March 17<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Went down to Rockingham today to catch up with Graham & Jane who we first met at the Pinjarra rally a few weeks ago. Graham has converted his bus and put in some big slide out sections. He has made a first class job of it and after looking at what he has done it has given me some ideas for our bus.

We were due to have a BBQ and at first it looked as though play would have to be abandoned due to rain, but eventually the skies cleared and we had a lovely day. A lot of people from the caravan park joined in and it was almost as though we were back on the road again. The worst part of the day was having to drive home again.

We have booked in for 10 days from April 19<sup>th</sup> so we should get to enjoy it down here for a while before Graham and Jane head north.

#### **March 24<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**



Down to Rockingham again today. Graham has sold a couple of camping books for me so we are going down to drop them off then to go out fishing with Graham in his boat.

Caught some herring, butterfish, reef fish and best of all a few King George whiting. A very pleasant morning with the sun shining and the temperature in the low 20s. Graham has a 15hp Honda 4 stroke engine on his boat. This seems to be the way to go as it is smooth and very quiet.

My hernia op scar is still bleeding, but there's no way I was going to let it spoil the chance to go fishing.



Sunset at Mangles Bay

**April 5<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

Belles friend Edith and her husband Adi (from Adelaide) arrived today. We will spend the next couple of days showing them round Perth before they are off down south to have a look round our corner of the world.

The hernia op wound is still not healed but it is at least showing some signs of progress. My main concern is that it is pretty well fixed by the 19<sup>th</sup> when we head down to Rockingham for a few days in the bus.

**April 19<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

Finally the day for us to take the bus down to Rockingham has arrived. As my op. wound is STILL not healed I had to go and see my doctor before taking off so we were late in getting away. By midday we had the annexe up and were thinking about fishing.

The afternoon was fine so we got the boat ready and went out. We picked up a couple of nice sized bream, which surprised me as I have been fishing in this area for years and have never caught bream here. Graham, who brought his boat out as well was only fishing a few metres from us but didn't pick up any legal size bream.

It is so nice here that we have booked in for an extra week. Belle will go back to Perth for 3 days when she is working then come back down again. This means no internet access for me for a while but it will be a good break.

**April 20<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

We went out fishing twice today and picked up 13 bream, 4 in the morning and 9 in the afternoon. Some are very large so we are quite pleased with how things are going. (These 'bream' were actually tarwine.)

**April 21<sup>st</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Fishing again in the morning but we only picked up 1 size bream. Kevin and Lesley brought their boat down and the Edith and Adi turned up so I took our boat out so Adi could do a bit of fishing. We took off expecting Kevin and Lesley to catch us up as they have a big boat with a 40hp engine. They didn't turn up and the fish were biting so we decided they must have had engine trouble and stayed out catching what we could.

After picking up 4 good sized bream, 1 herring, 2 Skippy and some smaller fish for bait we went back in only to find that Kevin & Lesley's boat engine had actually caught fire when they were a couple of hundred metres out and they had to drift back in using just the wind to push them along. They were lucky to put the fire out as when they looked for their extinguisher it was missing.

The variety of fish here shows a pretty healthy eco-system in the Cockburn Sound. Apart from the bream, herring and skippy there are whiting, wrasse, slimy mackerel, cobbler, garfish and of course some nuisance fish like trumpeter and blowies.

Three days here and five fishing trips so far so I certainly can't complain. The trick is to fish all the time in case the weather closes in and we can't get out.



**April 25<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

Monday was wet and windy so we spent some time with Edith and Adi. They fly back to Adelaide today and only really had enough time in W.A. for a very quick tour of the south west.

The past couple of days have been fine so we have been out fishing much of the time. The variety of our catch continues to grow as we are now catching some blue mackerel and garfish. Today isn't looking that good so far as the wind is up and we are expecting rain this evening.

**April 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

The weather fined up after ANZAC day so we have been spending most mornings out fishing. We have added to our catch with yellowtail (which we mostly throw back or give to the terns) and flounder. The variety and quantity of fish here continues to amaze us. The bream came back on the bite today and we brought three very big ones back. The mackerel are really picking up and are delicious smoked so we are bringing in a few of them every day as well.

Belle has to work tomorrow and Thursday so she has gone back today and will come back down after work on Thursday. I am not used to her being away for long periods but even after a few short hours I am already suffering separation anxiety.

**May 5<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

The weather went sour again during last week and the two days we did manage to go fishing turned out to be pretty lack lustre. We always managed to catch a few to bring in but nothing compared to the week before.

We were due to go home tomorrow but we have now decided that we would like to stay another week (possibly 2) and I will work on the bus down here. When Belle goes back to Perth to work I will go up too and take the computer so I can catch up with everything on the net.

Graham re-tourqued the engine yesterday so that saved us at least \$200 and now we don't have to take the bus in to a workshop before we leave. That is a great relief.

We only have three weeks before Belle finishes work at Curtin Uni. so I have to get started painting the bus roof and fixing the leak in the petrol tank. Once that is done we should be ready to go. I have added catches to the under-floor bin covers so they can be held up when open and I have put new seals round the entry door.

**May 16<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

Time seems to be flying at the moment. There is only just over a week left before we are due to leave for Adelaide and I am still working hard on getting all the work done on the bus that I planned to do.

So far I have managed to fix a leak in the petrol tank inlet, put new seals on the front door, put new linings on all the cupboard shelves, put hooks up for the under floor bin lids (so they don't hit me on the head when I'm getting things out from underneath), make a new slide on shade for the windscreen and apply new (thermal) paint to the roof and one side of the bus. Weather permitting I will do the other side in the next day or two. The paint was supplied by Gecko Motor Homes (544 Beaufort St. Mt. Lawley (08) 9328 8541) who are highly recommended by Graham.

Fishing has been a bit on the quiet side but when we do go out we are still managing to catch enough for a feed and still let some go so we certainly can't complain.

**May 20<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

After 4 weeks and 3 days enjoying our time in Rockingham with Graham and Jane we reluctantly made our way home to start packing for the long haul back to Adelaide on Sunday. The radiator still drops coolant when we turn the engine off and it looks like we have an oil leak to find and fix but with luck we will be away on time.

No more waking up in the chilly morning air and rushing off to fish, or walking along Mangles Bay in the evenings watching the boats bob about as the sun goes down.<sigh>. For the three days before we left the weather was perfect and we managed to 'get on' to a good spot for catching King George whiting. On Sunday morning the wind came up but we still managed to bring in 7 whiting and 12 herring.

We will miss Graham and Jane but with luck we will catch them up somewhere on the road. As for my op wound - believe it or not it STILL hasn't finished healing but I am past caring about it now. It will do so when it is good and ready I guess. Of course Stupidlink (alias Centrelink) wants me to go and do intensive assistance training just as it wanted Belle to go and do job search training while she already had a job and wasn't getting any assistance from them. They even threatened to cut off the non-existent assistance if she didn't turn up. God how I long to be out of the clutches of those D\*\*\*\*\*S!

#### **May 24<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

D-Day (that is departure day) -2 and we are almost ready, at least as ready as we are ever going to be. Paul and Penny, recently arrived from Africa, dropped in to say 'Hi' and pick our brains today so we asked Graham and Jane (also ex-Africa) to drop by as well. Although they had never met in Africa they knew many of the same people and of course shared an abiding love of the 'dark continent'.

I am sampling the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> glass of Chardonnay that Paul and Penny brought over (Cheers!) so my typing is suffering dreadfully; just as well I can correct it before I post it on the web site or no-one would be able to read it.

I have to admit that whatever happens to us from here on in, it can't be as bad as spending another minute in Maddington. I long to get away from this rat (human rat) infested sewer.

#### **May 26<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Well we are off again. For better or worse we have rolled the dice and are now waiting to see what comes up. This time we are much worse off financially than we were at the start of the first trip. With only about 5K in the bank and no real assets behind us we are hoping to find work quickly and praying that nothing dramatic goes wrong. We had to leave Mum again, but she seems to be pretty fit and has a good support network of friends to keep her occupied, so hopefully it won't be too traumatic. Since I have been back in Perth there has been virtually no work in my line and Belle just hasn't managed to get back into work in the labs so we have to try something else while we still have enough money to do so. It certainly isn't without risk, as the fuel alone to get the Adelaide will cost over \$1000, but we have to try something or the bank will repossess the house.

We drove about 280km today and are staying at a nice big rest area 12km west of Katanning. The peace and solitude are just magic. Wagin had run out of autogas so we went on using petrol and will get more gas tomorrow at the BP in Katanning.

The bus still drops coolant when we stop and started to get a bit hot so this rest area came up just at the right time. The repair I did on the rocker cover bolt seal didn't hold so we are losing a bit of oil as well. If I keep a close watch on it we should be ok as not much is getting out.



First night out on the second trip

#### **May 27<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

On through Broomehill, Gnowangerup and Jerramungup. We have only done about 180km today but found a good rest area (Jacup) on the highway so have set up camp early (noon) and will stay here the night. The bus travels better in the cool of the mornings anyway so I'm not going to push her too hard.

The roads between the Albany Highway and Jerramungup were a bit tiring with plenty of dips and bumps to cope with. It is good to be back on a major road now which doesn't pull the bus around as much.

#### **May 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

A very misty morning had us heading for Ravensthorpe and the very unexpected and VERY steep descent to the Phillips River. I didn't see any sign saying 'trucks use low gear' but there certainly should be one here, especially when approaching the river from the west. A hair raising ride down the hill and a big haul up the other side didn't cause us any problems in the end, but be warned, this is a VERY steep and unexpected descent and if you are in top gear going down you have to rely totally on your brakes.

Ravensthorpe was just a quick gas refuelling stop (BP is the only one with autogas) and then a steep hill down the east side of town (which does say use low gear) and off towards Munглиnup. The only good rest stops from Ravensthorpe to Munглиnup are on the south side of the highway about 4km east and just opposite Fence Road (north side of road) 41km east.

Munглиnup itself is a good rest stop with toilets, water, phone etc. From here we travelled 4km further east to Fuss Rd. and turned south. Fuss Road is mostly single lane bitumen and goes for 10km before you turn west into Springvale Rd. The sealed road eventually turns to gravel then it is about 4km to the turn off to Munглиnup Bay. This section of road was pretty rough.

Munглиnup Bay is a good campsite and at \$2 pppn won't break the bank. There is limited drinking water, drop toilets and (sometimes) bore water showers. No problems turning round here and nice sheltered campsites right near the beach. (2003 update. We have since heard that this site is being taken over by a caravan park – WHAT A JOKE! Another wonderful spot is going to be ruined!)

There are supposed to be fish in the sea here but we didn't see any signs of them.



Munглиnup

**May 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

Another misty morning and the chance to explore the coast. We headed west to Starvation Bay which is very pretty and quite sheltered. There are toilets and cold water showers as well as a boat launching area for those with 4wds. The road in from Springvale Rd. is a bit corrugated but otherwise in good shape.

The camping area by the beach is ok but only has one site for big rigs. There is another section further back where big rigs may fit in but that area is not at all level.

From here we went west again down the upgraded road (shows as 4wd track on maps but was ok for 2wd) to Mason Bay. Here there is another good campsite which is perhaps better suited to big rigs than Starvation Bay. The last few kilometres in were very corrugated but the area really does rate a visit.

From Mason Bay we continued west via Springdale Road to Hopetoun but sadly didn't go on to the national park just west of town. This really looks like it is worth exploring and I hope to come back and have a good look round one day. We decided to take the sealed road back to Munглиnup Beach so passed through Ravensthorpe again and turned off at Coxall Rd. This is an alternate route to Fuss Rd. and turned out to be very smooth for an unsealed road.



Mason Bay (John & Lyn's Mazda)

**May 30<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

A rest day today, tidy up the campsite and prepare for the run in to Esperance tomorrow, then a little fishing in the afternoon and a chat with our new neighbours John and Lyn who pulled in yesterday in their Mazda. John has patched up the faulty seal on the rocker cover so we are hoping that the oil leak is now a problem in the past tense.

**May 31<sup>st</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

Much as we have enjoyed our short stay at Munglinup Beach we have to head into town and start looking for work. We pulled in to Bushlands Caravan Park near the Pink Lake (\$15.95 a night) and had a quick look round the area. We were last in Esperance about 20 years ago and remember nothing of what it was like.

Esperance is a very pretty town and the coastline along what is now called The Great Ocean Drive is almost beyond description. On the down side there don't look like being any free campsites close to town (in mobile phone range) so our time here will be limited if we can't find work.



Great Ocean Drive

**June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

A quick back-track to have a look at the campsite at Quagi Beach left us somewhat underwhelmed. The turn off to Quagi (Farrells Rd.) is about 61km west of Esperance and from there it was approx. 10km down a good gravel road to the beach.

The campsites are set around a ring road which we thought would be too narrow for the bus and individual sites are widely scattered and not all that large. This site is better suited to smaller motorhomes and campervans and we were glad we didn't decide to try and bring the bus down.

A day use area near the beach was quite boggy looking so in general this isn't a place we would recommend to everyone. The beach is pretty enough but the campsite is poorly designed for big rigs and there is obviously no concern for those who visit and don't have 4wd vehicles.



Quagi

**June 5<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

After spending time applying for about 12 jobs in various places and searching the net we went for a quick trip out to Cape LeGrand today. The National Park is about 52km from Esperance via a sealed (if somewhat narrow in places) road. The entry fee of \$9 is standard for WA National Parks but we regard it as too high.

The camping fees of \$12.50 a night make staying in the park MORE EXPENSIVE than staying at a commercial caravan park like Bushlands which includes electricity. (\$96.50 a week in the National Park and only \$92.50 a week at Bushlands). Would someone at CALM please explain to me how it costs them more to provide a campsite than it does for a commercial park that has to pay rates and power bills and end up with a profit at the end?

Having had my gripe about CALM's excessive GREEDY fees, I have to say that the campsite at Lucky Bay was not only spectacular, but there are some good facilities provided including gas cookers and BBQs and HOT WATER showers. Even though this is one of the best campsites we have seen \$10 a night would be more than enough and the entry fee should be included as part of the first night's charge.

Unlike most other National Parks, the roads at Cape LeGrand were mostly sealed. Just like most other National Parks, the roads that weren't sealed were about as corrugated as it is possible to get and they shook the car about without mercy.



Lucky Bay

**June 6<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

Kevin and Lesley arrived today. Their original plan was to come down and go back to Perth but I think they may change their minds and head east from here.

Kevin (who is an Auto Electrician) hadn't been in town a day when he was offered work. It sure pays to have picked the right line of work and have a trade rather than useless jobs like those we go into.

We are waiting for the windy rainy weather to clear before moving on, so we could be here a day or two more than we planned. Kev & Lesley will be here for a while now as the chance to earn some money was too good to pass up.

**June 8<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

Still in Esperance and waiting for the weather to break. It looks like it may do so today but I have decided to stay in the caravan park one more night just to make sure.

**June 9<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

The weather has finally turned and we set off this morning hoping to make the Bromus Dam campsite south of Norseman in the early afternoon. Only 50km out of Esperance we lost power on LPG and try as I might I could not re-start it. We couldn't find anywhere to stop for the next 15km and when we did a big cloud of smoke came out from under the engine cover. After determining that we had now a more severe oil leak we decided to head back to Esperance.

We pulled in to the Rotary Lookout rest area on Norseman Rd. (7km north of town) and settled down for the night. Despite the fact that there were houses nearby we weren't chased away and spent a peaceful if chilly night.

The rest area has quite a small turning circle so isn't really good enough for big rigs. We had to back out as there was no way to turn round. There are no facilities here but there is a lookout on the road that runs round the edge of the hill.

**June 10<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

After getting the gas system fixed (a new controller \$129) I had another look at the engine and tightened up a loose bolt holding the oil filling assembly in place. We refuelled and set off again.

After 25km we pulled in (at the only place we could turn around) to check on the oil leak and found that it had got worse. Once again we turned round and returned to Esperance. Are we being told something?

A mechanic had a look at the engine and the diagnosis was the rocker cover gasket had gone. We ordered a new one (actually 2) at Repco and are currently waiting out the night at Bandy Creek boat harbour.

The local Ranger drove in, in the afternoon, had a look at us and drove out again without saying anything. As it is now 8:15pm we assume that it is ok to stay here the night. There are toilets, showers, washing water, shelters, seats and tables here. It is easy to get in and out and is a top spot to spend a night.

There are lights on at night (inside the toilets too) and there is a boat launching ramp. Kev & Lesley came down for dinner and we threw in a line but didn't catch anything.

We hope that tomorrow we will finally sort out the problems and be on our way at last.

**June 11<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

HOORAY! we finally made it out of Esperance. Not that Esperance is a bad place but I was getting very fed up with driving up and down Norseman Road.

To save money I replaced the rocker cover gasket myself (I am finally learning a little bit about engines) and we have made it as far as Bromus Dam (a huge campsite 32km south of Norseman).



Bromus Dam

**June 12<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

We arrived in Norseman quite early and found that there was work going at the BP roadhouse but the person we need to see isn't back in town until tomorrow so we will stay overnight and see if anything turns up.

As we were exploring the town we also heard that there was a job about to be available at the local Telecentre and as I ran one for 6 months in Halls Creek I have decided to see if anything eventuates in that area as well.

Norseman is bigger than I expected but there are quite a lot of closed or closing shops in the main street and plenty of unoccupied vandalised houses in town.

We were driving around town when we spotted a bus motorhome parked in front of one of the local houses so Belle being Belle told me to stop while she went in and said 'Hi'. It turned out that the bus was owned by Alan and Christine who had been travelling around for about 13 months and had come back to Norseman. They were very friendly (aren't all bus people?) and Christine made a few phone calls to find out what was going on at the Telecentre.

It turns out there may be some local politicking going on so I will contact the Telecentre Support Unit in Perth to see what the story is.

With a bit of luck we may both be back in the workforce soon but we have learned not to count our chickens.

#### **June 13<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

No chickens, I mean no luck on the job front again. Belle went in and was told that the job had already been given to someone else - strange then that they asked us to stay overnight and come back in today. The Telecentre is a huge mess with everyone connected with it resigning so it doesn't even have a management committee. Looks like we weren't meant to stay here.

So it's off to the east we go. We passed Balladonia and are camped at a large rest area on the 90 mile straight tonight. The weather is closing in and getting stormy but the wind is behind us for a change. The only negative thing about a following wind is there is very little air to cool the engine and it is running a bit hotter than normal.



Rest Area east of Balladonia

#### **June 14<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

On past Caiguna, Cocklebiddy and Madura (the most expensive roadhouse on the trip) and we chop this huge country up into bites of 2 or 3 hundred kilometres.

This time last year we were on the way back to Perth and staying at Walkers Rocks. A whole year gone and not much to show for it.

#### **June 15<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

The bus started backfiring on LPG today so I have been switching back and forth to petrol in the hope of keeping going. So far we have been ok and are camped about 60km east of Border Village right near the cliffs of the Great Australian Bight.

I will change the rotor button over and see if that improves things, as I know the rotor button has caused similar problems in the past.

There was no LPG at Eucla as their pump had broken down so we filled up at Border Village and just to be on the safe side we filled the petrol tank as well. I should be able to reach Ceduna now without re-fuelling again.

#### **June 16<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

The wind last night was blowing like crazy across the Bight. We parked head on in to it but it still buffeted the bus all night so I resorted to a couple of sleeping pills to get some sleep.

Thankfully the wind is blowing with us, I would hate to be heading west into it, or even worse north or south exposing the side of the bus. Caravans must have lots of fun in this sort of weather.

We have pushed on to a rest area about 18km west of Penong and should be in Ceduna tomorrow. We may spend a couple of nights in a caravan park there resting up and cleaning up before the last section of the trip across the top of the Eyre Peninsula.

The bus (touch wood) hasn't been backfiring like she did yesterday so changing the rotor button may have solved the problem - let's hope so as we are getting pretty close now.





The Great Australian Bight

**June 17<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

We arrived in Ceduna at last. We will spend one night at the Beachfront caravan park (\$18) before the last haul down to Adelaide. The bus engine smells like it is burning oil when we are going up hills. I hope there isn't anything drastically wrong. We still have over 700km to go so we don't want any last minute problems.

When we filled up at Nundroo Roadhouse the LPG bowser seemed to be putting far too much gas into the tank - more than I thought would fit. On checking last years records I found that from Ceduna to Nundroo we were supposed to have used over 100 litres. This year when we filled up at Ceduna we only managed to fit in 57 litres after refuelling at Nundroo (where I didn't even let the pump 'finish' filling the tank.)

There is a definite problem with the pumps there despite the fact they claimed they had 'just been checked'. I suggest NO ONE fills up at Nundroo as there is some sort of scam going on and it has apparently gone on unchecked for at least the last 12 months.



Ceduna

**June 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

We departed Ceduna wishing we had picked another caravan park as the Beachfront is a very noisy place to stay and our sleep was constantly interrupted.

After driving about 250km across the top of the Eyre Peninsula we have been singularly unimpressed with the towns and rest areas on this route.

The towns are little but run down ramshackle places which owe their continued existence to the huge grain silos that dominate them. The rest areas - most are just laybys - are far too close to the road and most are quite small.

We have stopped at the best area we have found to date (Goyder's Line Monument rest area) about 19km east of Kyancutta. We had planned a stop at Polkdinny Park in Kyancutta but it was right by the highway and far too small for the bus. We hope to pass through Port Augusta tomorrow and spend our last night on the road for a while somewhere north of Port Pirie.

**June 19<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

We had a think about heading directly for Adelaide but then decided to try a campsite north of Whyalla that we hadn't seen before, called Fitzgerald Bay. We missed the turn off and went down to Point Lowly instead and were sadly disappointed as there is an industrial complex out there and it is very unattractive.

We eventually found the turn off to Fitzgerald Bay that we missed and went up over the hill to find quite a steep descent going down to the bay. Going down in 1<sup>st</sup> gear was fine but still intimidating as there is a T junction at the bottom and the water just on the other side.

After turning left along an unsealed section of road we found a small camping area next to the beach. When we drove in we realised we couldn't turn around and had to take the trailer off in order to do so. Having got ourselves round we decided to stay for a while and later that day another Bedford bus pulled in (thinking it was ok to get round when they saw us).

After surveying the situation John eventually did manage to turn round even through he was towing a much bigger trailer than ours. A lesson in being able to back a bus and trailer for us I guess.



Fitzgerald Bay (Our bus and John and Josie's bus)

**June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

We are still at Fitzgerald Bay with John and Josie but they are pulling out tomorrow as John has found work in Pt. Augusta. Being a Plumber he is in greater demand than people with useless jobs like us and we will be sad to see them go as we have had a good time fishing, crabbing and sitting round the campfire having a good chin wag at night.

We have been out fishing 3 times. The first was discouraging as we only caught one garfish, but John caught about a dozen and quite a few squid. The next day was better as we picked up 3 King George whiting (In S.A. the legal size is 300mm and we didn't like throwing the 280-90 ones that would be legal in W.A. back.), we also caught a squid, Belle caught a big flounder and we got three blue swimmer crabs on fishing line - unusual at any time but more so at this time of year.

I went out on my own today and was about to give up after only catching one garfish when I noticed quite a few crabs gathered underneath the boat. After dropping in a crab net I managed to pick up 9 legal sized ones so it has been a good couple of days.

We will stay here a few more days as I can get free internet access at the Whyalla info centre and we can (just) get mobile phone service here. We will get the newspaper from Whyalla and apply for work from here as it doesn't cost anything to stay at the campsite. There is also a water source at the main campsite just up the road plus a toilet and shower (cold Brrrrr), so all in all it is a pretty good spot.



Blue Swimmer

**June 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

We have been at Fitzgerald Bay 9 days now and Blue and Skeeta came up for a couple of nights from Port Lincoln to visit us. As they were staying in a tent I think they may have been a bit uncomfortable as the weather has been far from perfect in the last few days. They headed home today but it was very good to catch up with them again.

We are thinking seriously about moving on to Eden Valley as free camping is not much fun in winter. I also think it may be easier to find work if we are closer to Adelaide.

The fishing here has gone right off, and the few attempts the weather has allowed us to make have not been at all successful.

**June 30<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Having given up on fishing due to the bad weather we packed the boat up and almost as soon as we had finished the wind dropped to near zero and the sea looked like a glass mirror. It was almost as if someone had flicked a switch. There really are times when I feel like I'm being 'got at'.

We have come in to the Foreshore Caravan Park at Whyalla for one night to get cleaned up before heading across to Adelaide. The caravan park is \$18 a night and for once it is a 'foreshore' park that is actually right on the beach. Having said that the beach leaves a bit to be desired but the view is lovely.

The ablution blocks here are good and spotlessly clean and there are plenty of sites big enough for buses. All roads in the park are sealed and there is plenty of grass and tress to make it a really attractive spot.

**July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

After taking the road through Crystal Brook and Clare Valley yesterday and winding our way through the hills, we finally arrived at Eden Valley early this morning. We spent the day looking around the local area and registering for work at the local job agency in Nuriootpa. Word is that grape vine pruning is running late this year and we may have arrived in time to get work clipping vines. That would certainly do until we are able to find something more substantial.

At \$5.50 a night on a powered site, the Eden Valley sports complex is very hard to beat value wise. It is a bit off the beaten track but since it has toilets, hot showers and now has a laundry we will be happy to stay here until something better comes along.

The drive down through Clare was very tiring in the bus, but it is a beautiful area. We will head back that way in the car one day to take some pictures and explore. Eden Valley is well situated for exploring both the wine country and the Murraylands to the east.



Eden Valley – Well named.

**July 4<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

After a couple of days exploring the local area we got a phone call tonight asking us to come in and start work pruning grape vines at 7.30am tomorrow. At \$13 an hour we should be able to put a few dollars back into the bank if we manage to handle the work, the weather and the early starts. Another novel experience awaits. If nothing else the exercise should do us both good.

**July 7<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Grape vine pruning was called off due to some pretty awful weather on Friday so we are due to start tomorrow morning. At least now we are better prepared as we both have good wet weather gear.

We caught up with a few of the CMCA Mt. Lofty Bushies this weekend as they had a small gathering at Eden Valley. Only four vehicles turned up but at least we had some company for the weekend.

Weather-wise the weekend has gradually improved but the forecast is for more rain during the week so we can look forward to a cold wet start to work.



Hard to prune vines

**July 8<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

The good news is that the day was fine and sunny, the bad news is that we lasted 3.5 hours before being politely asked to 'go and get some training'. There are lots of vines that need pruning here so we spoke to the local job agency again and they put us on to another contractor and we have another job to start tomorrow. As the day was fine we spent the afternoon driving down to Birdwood where we bumped into John and Lyn who we last saw at Munglinup Beach.

**July 9<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

Arghh! I can barely type this as my poor arm feels like dropping off. We spent a full day pruning this time in what was to start with very cold, wet and windy conditions. The weather cleared up in the afternoon but the ground was wet and soggy so I spent at least half the day with wet cold feet.

My back started acting up but I did manage put in a full eight hours. The is no way I will be able to do this 5 days a week so we will start looking for a contractor who will let us work one day on, one day off.

We have at least managed to recoup the money we spent on wet weather gear but if I do any more pruning work I will need a good pair of work boots and we are expected to buy pruning snips that cost about \$80 each. That is too much for us to spend at the moment so we will wait and see if we can get part time work before forking out any more money.

Surprisingly the day passed relatively quickly, but we are both exhausted. It is only 7pm and Belle is already fast asleep in bed.

**July 10<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

It was a beautiful morning, with the forecast saying clear skies until tomorrow, so we decided to go back to the Clare Valley by car and do a bit of exploration. We woke to find frost covering the ground and the car (Brrrr) but as soon as the sun came up it melted away.

We drove north through Kapunda and then on to Tarlee and straight up to Clare. It took us a couple of hours to reach the town which made it lunch time so we stopped of for a meal at the Taminda Hotel. I think the is only the second meal we have had out in the last year so we figured it was well overdue. The food was good and very plentiful and at only \$7.70 each it was cheap as well. There are three hotels in Clare's main street and all do weekly lunchtime specials so it was just a matter of selecting the one that appealed most.

After scouting around Clare we went south again to Sevenhill to see St. Aloysious Church and the surrounding vineyard. From here we took the road out to Mintaro - a charming historic town and then found Martindale Hall. This two storey mansion is reminiscent of English country manors but the \$6 per head entry fee was a bit too much for us to fork out at the moment.

By this time it was late afternoon and we had to head back to Eden Valley, which was sad as there was still so much to see around this area. I would love to be able to come back an stay in the area for several days as there is just so much to explore. The scenery changes around every corner from ruined farm cottages and well preserved farm buildings to stunning vistas of the flats and valleys as you crest the rolling hills.

It has to be said that some of the roads could do with improvement - especially those off the main highways, but this area has so much to offer I would love the opportunity to tour round it for a week or more.



**July 14<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

With another clear morning we set off to explore Swan Reach and Walker Flat to the east. The road leading out of the hills from Keyneton was quite steep and winding (a place I would not like to take the bus down) but once on the flat we made good time and arrived at the Swan Reach ferry after about a 30 minute drive.

On the west bank of the river (before reaching the ferry) is a large parking area which looks like a god overnight rest area. Once across and in Swan Reach there is a large rest area with toilets but overnight stops are not permitted.

Between Swan Reach and Walker Flat there are two rest areas with lookouts over Big Bend in the Murray River, both would make excellent overnight stopping points.

At Walker Flat there is another rest area / lookout on the east bank (again before crossing the ferry) and a small rest area near the shop once you make the free trip across the river.

From here it was only about 50km back up in to the hills to Mount Pleasant. I never tire of driving through this area with the undulating hills and endless variety of rural scenes.



Swan Reach

**July 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

As it was our 21<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary today we decided to go down to Handorf and re-visit the buffet at the Old Mill where we used to go when we were in Adelaide last year. At \$11.95 a head it didn't break the bank and after 21 years I thought we deserved to do something we would both enjoy.



Hahndorf

**July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

We keep applying for work but have had no responses yet. We are going to have to make some decisions shortly on whether we can hang on to the house in Perth or if we need to put it on the market and try to get the best price before our savings run out and the bank just takes it away leaving us with nothing.

The problem is that I think the house would sell best in Spring (it's just that sort of house) but we need to get some painting done, doors fixed (thanks to my scumbag relatives) and guttering fixed, but there isn't any money spare to get the work done. The house may not sell quickly once we do put it up for sale, so we are in the impossible position of trying to guess what the future holds without losing everything.

**July 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Another week gone but we are seemingly no closer to finding work. We keep applying but get no responses at all. It does get very depressing when you know how much you can contribute but don't even get a chance to try.

**July 31<sup>st</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

After visiting the Mt. Pleasant library and applying for a couple of jobs via the internet (Tanunda, Nuriootpa, Angaston, Mt. Pleasant and Lyndoch all provide free internet access) we went south to have a look at Bridgewater (quite a pretty spot) and then east to Murray Bridge and along the Murray River to Mannum. A nice easy drive in the car but some of the hills we passed over were quite steep and would make life difficult in the bus.

We passed by the Monarto wildlife park but didn't go in as entry was too high at \$15.50 a head... far too much on our budget at the moment.



Angaston

**August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

We started our 4 week course on arc welding at Nuriootpa TAFE today. It was the first time either of us had tried welding and I had some problems to start with as I couldn't see anything through the shield filter, even when the arc started.

Eventually Dale, our tutor, found me a suitable lens and I managed to start doing straight lines. My first attempts looked like worms on speed. Belle did much better than I did and has started to get a good technique. We both enjoyed learning something new and hopefully it may come in useful at some stage.

**August 5<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

After our regular sojourn down to Nuriootpa to get on the net and apply for work, we were on our way back to Eden Valley when we saw what I first took to be a wombat crossing the road. As we got closer we found it was actually an echidna, the first wild one I have ever seen. We stopped the car and had a closer look but didn't manage to get any pictures as this was the first day in weeks that I didn't take the camera out with me - typical!



Near where we saw the echidna

**August 10<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

There is just a chance that we may be moving on soon so we decided to take a run up to Burra and have a look round in case we aren't going to be in Eden Valley much longer.

Burra is about an hour and a half's drive from the Barossa and the route via Eudunda passes quite a number of roadside ruins. The road is reasonably good with only a few small hills to cross. Once past Robertstown the road improves dramatically and becomes at least as good as most of the major highways.

Burra itself is a fascinating place with many historic buildings and a heritage trail to follow which takes you to all the important sites. You can get a 'passport' from the local tourist office (Currently \$15 a head which is a bit too expensive) which gives you access to a number of locked sites and buildings in and around the town.

Of most interest are Redbanks Gaol (where Breaker Morant was filmed), the police stables and lock up, the old brewery, the mine site and the miner's dug outs. There is plenty more to see around the town and accommodation ranging from \$35 a night for an on-site van in the caravan park to \$65 a night to stay in the old miners cottages.

I would rate Burra very highly on my list of places to see in S.A. so if you are planning to pass through this area try to make Burra one of your stops.

20km south of Burra on the Robertstown road is Burra Creek Gorge. There is an excellent campground here with plenty of space set in a very attractive setting.



Monster Mine - Burra

**August 11<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

We came back from Burra via Saddleworth which gave us the chance to see a bit more of the beautiful countryside. As we passed through Kapunda we had a quick look at the historic mine site there. There is a 1.5km walk trail round the mine and although there aren't as many buildings left here as at Burra, it was still a very interesting walk and with the wattle all in bloom along the path it was even more enjoyable.

**August 20<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

Good news, bad news, worse news time. The good news is that Belle looks like getting work in Angaston in the very near future. I won't jinx it by saying any more about it at the moment. Bad news is that if she gets it the hours will be 3.30pm to 11.30pm at night - but that is at least bearable. Worse news is that the car is finally giving up the ghost. Graham told us all the way back at Mangles Bay that we might have a problem with the head and that has finally been confirmed. We are crossing our fingers that it will keep going until one of us gets work and we can afford to get it fixed.

I have also been put up for a job in Adelaide but haven't heard anything back just yet. Things are starting to look a little more promising but I know I have said that before only to have it all fall in a big heap.

Spring is nearly here and the wattle is in full bloom through out the Adelaide hills. Other trees are also blooming with all shades of white, pink and red. What a wonderful time to be living in this area.

Otherwise things are a bit slow. We have had the odd motorhome pull in to Eden Valley, but surprisingly not that many. It does get a bit lonely out here in the sticks but it is certainly a peaceful almost stress free existence - if only we had a bit more money.



Angas Park dried fruit factory

**August 21<sup>st</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

Probably against all good sense, considering the current state of the car, we went out for a ride to Berri today. The road out through Sedan to Swan Reach we were already familiar with but it is a further 95Km across the Blanchetown



plains until more interesting country is reached near Loxton. The trip across to Loxton is rather boring and there are no rest areas until you are just 7Km out of Loxton itself. The road was in good shape, but it is a long drive and there is a definite need for a couple of good places to stop on this road.

Loxton was quite a lot bigger than we expected and we stopped for lunch down by the Murray River. There is a good rest area near the boat ramp where public toilets are available. We didn't see any 'NO CAMPING' signs here but as there is a caravan park just down the road I suspect anyone staying overnight won't be made all that welcome.

I would like to have had more time to look around this area but this was a one day trip so after lunch we followed the road north to Berri and the Berri retail outlet (very cheap fruit drinks here) on the Renmark road. We picked up some fruit from local suppliers (look around there are some real bargains here - we bought mandarins for just 50c a kilo.) and then started to head west again, this time towards Barmera.

Lake Bonney has some likely looking spots along the shore for overnight stops but be warned this place has a couple of caravan parks by the lake as well so it might be an awkward place to get a freebie. There is an excellent place by the ruins of a hotel at the north end of the lake which would be the best place to overnight if you can get away with it.

From Lake Bonney we followed the Morgan road to a short diversion at Overland Corner. Here there is a historic pub and a good campsite at nearby Heron Bend (or Corner). Back on to the Morgan road you will pass a couple of good rest areas the best being the second one (heading west) which is set well back off the road on the north side.

At Taylorville we turned south to Waikerie and crossed the river again (by ferry) before getting back on the Sturt Highway and heading to Blanchetown to have a very quick look at the lock on the river. There is a nice rest area at the far end of the road that passes the lock but overnight stops aren't allowed here.

As the light was fading by this time we made for home turning off the highway to Sedan then back to Keyneton. As a one day trip this was far too quick to see the area around Loxton and Berri. Hopefully we will get back up that way for a longer stay as there is plenty to look at.



Berri

#### **August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

Belle had an interview with a company in Adelaide this morning but it turned out to be only 4 hours a day which would not have enabled us to survive if we moved in to the city. We went down yesterday and stayed overnight to avoid an 80km trip in the early hours of the morning, so that was another \$45 wasted. At the same time we were there we hired a car for Belle to get to work while ours gets fixed next week. God knows how much that is going to cost but we must have a vehicle that works properly. We are already out of pocket over \$200 so the car repairs are really going to hurt.

#### **August 25<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Our award for 'Rip Off Merchant of the Year' goes to Chateau Tanunda for selling the FREE Barossa Secrets booklet which is available from any tourist office for \$2. Not only that but their wines were way over priced.

Well looks like I did jinx it by mentioning it before, Belle didn't get the job she applied for at Angas Park either... what do we have to do to get back to work????



**August 26<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

We won \$35 on Saturday Lotto so treated ourselves to another lunch at the Old Mill in Hahndorf today. The news regarding our car isn't so good. We had hoped that it would turn out to be the head gasket but instead it is the head itself that is damaged. This means \$650 + GST to fix it.

**September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

The Canon printer I bought not long ago has given up the ghost and the print head isn't covered by warranty. The cost of getting another head is almost as much as getting a new cheap printer so it looks like that is the way I will go. I have to get used to the 'throw away' society where it's cheaper to buy another one rather than fix the old one. We have no choice but to buy another one as we need it to apply for work.

Another bus pulled in yesterday, a big Denning. We quickly made friends with the owners but they are off pruning vines. I need to find some work soon or I'll be going troppo again like I did in Townsville.

**September 4<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

Things have gone from bad to worse. I have been trying to put off the decision to sell the house as long as possible but I think if I wait any longer we could run out of money so it is now crunch time and we have had to contact a real estate agent and start the process before the bank takes the house away.

The real problem with selling the house is that my mother still lives in the unit at the back and at her age having to find somewhere else to go is going to be very difficult. She does have a fairly good support network around her so hopefully they will work something out but that doesn't make life any easier.

As we still have our furniture and most of our personal items in the house and can't get back to Perth to sort things out, it looks like we will have to try and sell most of it with the house and who knows what will happen to the rest of it.

**September 10<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

We went down to Adelaide again today as Belle has a job interview at Flinders Medical Centre. She is very keen to get back in to her field but the work is only part time so it won't be enough for us to get back on top of things. I have applied for work at Burra Telecentre but if Belle is offered the job at Flinders then I will have to withdraw my application.

**September 11<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

Belle has just finished a couple of very hard weeks work at Angas Park (a dried fruit factory in Angaston). She has worked long hours and been very badly paid. Considering the cost of getting the car fixed, having to rent a car and buying a new printer for \$259 yesterday, she has basically just been working to try and clear the bills.

The good news is that she has got the position at Flinders. The bad news is that it probably won't pay more than about \$260 a week which is nowhere near enough for us to survive. That means I will still be on the dole until I manage to find something and even that will be cut down to only about \$100 a week. Taking into consideration the higher caravan park fees (\$105 a week instead of \$45) we are going to still be going backwards until I manage to find something.

We are doing this because we hope it will lead to a better future but we have no way of knowing what will happen and we could even end up worse off. It's a strange world where you are worse off working than being on the dole.

**September 13<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

We are almost packed up and ready to leave Eden Valley, and I will be very sad to leave this lovely area and head off into the city, but we have to go where the best chance of work is.

I always check a planned route with the car before going along it in the bus and that's t we did today. I was planning to go back through Angaston and then to Sturt Highway abut after looking at the route through Springton and Williamstown I think I may just decide to take that route on Sunday.

After going as far as Gawler we went out to the coast to have a look at St. Kilda. The tramway museum was closed (only opens Sundays) and the mangrove walk costs \$6.50 a head Hah! South Australia seems like it is full of very greedy people. You get charged to park up in the hills in the botanic gardens, you are charged to park at Mt. Lofty, most of the good land is locked up in farms with 'NO TRESSPASSER' signs on them and you have to pay to go in to many of the few remaining natural bits of bush that are left and now they expect us to pay just to walk along and have a look at a few tatty old mangroves that you can see free on mangrove board walks in W.A., N.T. and Queensland.

What we know as just 'the bush' in W.A. is called a Conservation Park in South Australia because the farms have wiped out all but a small percentage of the original bushland. If we were charged for having a walk in the bush near Perth there would be riots. NOTE TO THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE FEES AND CHARGES IN S.A. : Stop being so b&\*\*#y greedy! Other states provide many of these facilities FREE, if you have to charge an entry fee make it something people can afford. \$6.50 per head to walk along at look at a few mangroves is ludicrous! A gold coin donation would be more than enough.

After leaving St. Kilda, which by the way, charges people to use the boat ramp (surprise surprise!) we had a look at Port Gawler. This is a little further north along the coast and access is partly unsealed. I don't know where the 'port' was ever situated but all we saw was a very shallow river, mangroves and a very seedy looking campsite located by a mangrove swamp. Following the road straight instead of going right) at the end of the sealed section will take you to a pleasant spot by a mangrove lined river. There were people fishing here but we didn't see anything caught. The area is a possible overnighiter for smaller rigs if you turn up late in the day. Big rigs could get in but would probably block the turning circle for others.

From here we went further north to Middle Beach where the access road is almost all unsealed. Again there isn't much to see and when the tide is out there is no water. There might be the chance of grabbing a free overnight stop at either St. Kilda or Port Gawler (near the boat ramp) but at Middle Beach there is a caravan park and the 'NO CAMPING' signs are out in force along the beach. Another sign of greed exists here as the so called 'Sapphire Trail' which is just a track along a very unattractive mangrove lined creek, is another place you have to pay to have a walk.

If you do bother to comer down and have a look at Middle Beach (I would suggest you don't waste your time) the main oddity in the area is the 'Gorilla House'. I won't say any more about it except that I can't work out why anyone would have gone to the trouble of doing it?????

#### **September 14<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

Our last day at Eden Valley. We have been here nearly two and a half months and have really enjoyed the time out in the countryside. What a magic area this is.



Eden Valley Lutheran church

#### **September 15<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Last night we found out that there was a fun run tomorrow morning in Adelaide that would go directly across the route we wanted to take to get to Belair. To avoid and road closures we woke at 4.30am and took off in the dark. The brakes on the bus need re-lining and aren't all that good at the moment so the journey down was a bit on the stressful side despite the light early morning traffic.

The worst part of the trip was the haul up Sturt Rd. to Blackwood which was done mostly in first gear. Having finally got in and settled down I really don't think I want to move again for a while. There was a job Belle was going to apply for in Alice Springs but I think we will try to hang on here and try to get something substantial in Adelaide.



Belair National Park

**September 16<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

Belle gave the Alice Springs phone number a call today and was strongly encouraged to put in an application, so despite feeling that we were going to be in Adelaide for some time, yesterday, we may even find ourselves heading off to the red centre if she is accepted. What a strange life we lead. At least it never gets boring - well not for long.

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

I had a job interview today and not long afterwards got a phone call about a 3 month contract working in my own field. From recent experience I'm not going to hold my breath, but something has to turn up sooner or later.

The caravan park we are in is right next to Belair National Park. We are lucky as we can take the bikes and go riding through this very attractive place. Thankfully the caravan park is fairly quiet (once you get used to the hum of the traffic and the birds waking you up) so even if nothing happens with regards to Alice Springs, I think I would be quite happy to stay here.

**October 13<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

We have been at Belair for 4 weeks now and not much has changed. We are still hoping to get work in Alice Springs but there hasn't been any information forthcoming about our chances. The two interviews I have had since getting here have come to nothing and things are getting a bit depressing to say the least.

The weather (to coin a phrase) 'sucks!' Cold, wet and windy just about sums it up. Because we don't know yet if we will be staying here long term we can't set up the annexe and everything just feels cramped and uncomfortable. We have to stop using the heater now as well as we start paying for power separately as from today. The way the weather is going we are in for a few chilly weeks before the warm weather finally arrives.

**October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002 (Monday)**

Finally some good news. The application Belle put in for the job in Alice Springs was successful and we are now in the first stages of getting ready to move. We are looking at the possibility of freighting the bus up by train and will do some checking tomorrow to see if it is feasible. We want to get there without any hassles and as the bus isn't 100% at the moment it would be best to freight it there if it isn't going to cost too much.

It will be a bit of a shock to the system going up into 38 degree heat from the chilly weather down here but we have wanted to get out into the outback again and the chance to work there is too good to pass up.

**November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2002 (Sunday)**

Finally the day to head north has arrived and our first hurdle was getting back down the hill to Adelaide but after the addition of a bit of extra brake fluid a couple of days ago the brakes were back to normal so I needn't have worried.

Following the route we took last year on the way home to Perth we travelled up South Road to Pt. Wakefield Road then north along the coast to a stop off at Port Germain for lunch. Port Germain is only a couple of kilometres off the main road but it is a nice place to relax by the sea, and we will be seeing precious little of that for a while.

Then it was on through Port Augusta and north into the wilderness. We had intended to stop somewhere north of Port Augusta but when I tried to switch back from LPG to petrol the engine refused to run. Thinking we might need some assistance we kept heading north but fatigue got the better of me and I had to pull off for a rest.

Checking the obvious things like, did we have a hole in the petrol tank? and was there petrol in the fuel filter? didn't help so I had a look for a bad connection of some sort and found very quickly that a small electrical connection had come loose. Once it was back in place the engine fired up again and we decided to make for Pimba / Woomera.



Port Germain

#### **November 5<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

We started off quite early yesterday but had only gone about 50Km when trouble struck. Without warning the bus lost all power and all attempts to re-start her failed. Having been through something like this before I replaced the rotor button and checked the contacts in the distributor but still nothing. After checking the spark and finding there was none I tried to trace the spaghetti wiring but it was impossible. Not knowing quite how far we had come I got the car off the trailer and headed for Glendambo (against the boss's instructions I have to say). It turned out that I should have gone back to Pimba as that was where help came from in the end - something else for me to live down I suppose ☺

Not long after we got back to the bus Harry and Graeme (Graham?) came out and set to work finding out what the problem was. It wasn't long before Graeme found that our coil had failed but after replacing it there was still a problem of some sort and the engine still wouldn't start. Deciding not to try and sort out the spaghetti wires Graeme simply connected a new wire from the ignition switch and we were on our way again. Harry and Graeme were a real pair of 'outback types' with a great sense of humour. They were our own personal heroes and we were very thankful that they came to our rescue. Being stranded on the side of the road out here isn't a nice experience.

We pulled in to the Bon Bon rest area about 150Km further on but when I tried to switch over to petrol (as I usually do at the end of the day so we can start up the next morning) the engine died and refused all attempts to re-start. After some fiddling around involving the air filter I finally managed to start it again and we decided to stay at Bon Bon for the night.

The silence of the outback has to be experienced to be believed. We are so used to noise, even if it is only the sound of birds chattering in the trees. Areas in the real outback are so silent the feeling is almost overwhelming. I love it, I could stay out here forever.

Today we made our way the last 180Km to Coober Pedy. It is a very interesting little town and despite its remote location it has plenty to offer travellers. Sadly our funds are so run down at the moment that we weren't able to afford any of the mine tours or other paid attractions but as many of the shops are built into the hills we were still able to go 'underground' and see how the buildings here are constructed. Basically it seems to be - find an unoccupied bit of hill and start digging in.

The temperature is gradually rising as we head north and so far it is a real relief to be out of the miserable cold and rain of Adelaide. We even managed a swim in the caravan park pool today, despite the locals saying it is far too cold for them - it is a mere 35 degrees C. We are now just over half way to Alice.



Coober Pedy

**November 6<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

Started early but only got as far as Marla. The bus is playing up when switching back from gas to petrol and it won't start on gas so we have a bit of a dilemma. There seems to be some sort of problem with the carbi or the timing but as we are now less than 500Km from Alice we will keep pushing on in the hope we get there without breaking down again. If not then we will have to get the bus towed in.

(Later – It turned out that this problem was a loose bolt holding the carbi down. Air was being sucked in the side and reducing suction through the top. It was easily solved with a spring washer. Even better I found the problem and fixed it myself YAY!)

Marla isn't a bad spot to stop but it will be better soon when the pool they are building has been completed. Today is another warm one about 34C and the bus doesn't like high temperatures. We will start early tomorrow and hope to get to Eridunda before the temperature starts to get up into the low 30s.



Another Bedford at Marla

**November 7<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Thursday)**

Replaced the spark plugs this morning as the old ones were very dirty. The bus started up Ok but she is still a bit iffy when switching back from Gas to Petrol. We started off about 5am (SA time) and arrived in Eridunda around 10am (NT time). Eridunda is the biggest rip off joint we have come across so far. \$24 a night when all the other caravan parks on the way up have been \$17-18. It isn't anything special either despite calling itself a 'resort'.

201Km left to Alice and with a little luck we will be there tomorrow.

**November 8<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Friday)**

As we decided to go back and look at Ayres Rock later in the year, we pushed on to Alice Springs. As Eridunda doesn't start providing fuel until 6:30am we didn't get on the road as early as we would have liked. Once the petrol station did open we were told that autogas wasn't available until 7am when the day time generator was switched on. As we had enough fuel on board we took off without refuelling.

The scenery really started to improve as we went further north with ranges of hills and plenty of trees. It reminded me a little of the Kimberleys between Halls Creek and Kununurra.

We arrived in Alice about mid morning and after dropping the bus off at a caravan park went into town to see what we had let ourselves in for, for the next six months (minimum). Despite the 38C heat we were very pleasantly surprised finding a modern town with every possible amenity. Supermarkets include BiLo, Coles, Kmart, Woolworths, Foodland and IGA. There are dozens of specialty stores and prices are (in some cases) lower than Adelaide.

Fuel is expensive here, \$1.05-\$1.11 per litre but most other things seem pretty reasonable. We are enjoying the warmth after the chilly winter spent down south and if first impressions are anything to go by, I think we should be quite happy here.



The Alice

**November 12<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

We have selected a caravan park and settled in. Initially the temperatures were high but yesterday and today there have been some good downpours of rain, so instead of 39C it has been more like 31C during the day. I expect now we have arrived there will be a bumper wet season as we always seem to bring strange weather where ever we go.

We are just about broke with about \$900 in the bank and \$800 owing on VISA so tonight we went mad and blew our last hundred on a slap up meal at the Outback Steakhouse. Horribly irrational thing to do considering our circumstances but if you have to go broke you might as well do it in style.

Belle starts work tomorrow and we still have enough left on the credit card to keep us going until she gets paid but we are now technically broke.

We have been struggling with the mortgage ever since we have been on the road and it has kept us from doing a lot of the things we would have like to have done. We have kept it going simply because Mum lives on the property but we have come to the decision that we have had enough of trying to do the right thing. My family has done everything they can to make our lives miserable and even Mum has been caught out tampering with our mail and generally making life difficult.

We got the real estate agents in to see if we could rent the main house but they told us that Mum made it clear she was not going to let the main house get rented out if she could prevent it. This makes our financial position more difficult than we are prepared to tolerate so we have finally decided to walk away from the house and start earning some money for ourselves for a change.

Letting Mother fend for herself at her age probably seems heartless but I just can't take the strain of all the bickering and lies any longer. She has two daughters who are doing nothing now, so it is about time they did something to help instead of causing trouble all the time. In any case I want nothing to do with any of my family again.

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

My prediction about a bumper wet season seems to be coming true. The last few days have seen a number of heavy downpours in the evenings and even the locals are saying the weather is a bit unseasonal. The Todd River isn't exactly flowing yet but there are a few pools of water in it and there was virtually nothing when we got here.

It will be interesting to keep an eye on the areas around town and see how much water actually collects.

Belle is enjoying her work and is getting on well with her co-workers. I have put in about 25 job applications and had two interviews but nothing concrete has happened so far. Something will turn up sooner or later- it HAS TO! There's no way I can sit around here doing nothing for months on end. If I have to I will even do some voluntary work if it helps me get something paid later on.

We haven't seen much of the areas around Alice but that has been mostly due to the weather. To date I have only been out to Simpsons Gap, Emily Gap and Jessie Gap. All of these are within 17km of town. I am looking forward to getting out further to the gorges and permanent water holes.

Alice still seems like a good place to be, plenty to see around the area and no lack of comforts in the town itself. Hopefully we will settle down here for an extended period.

We have been asked to house sit over the Xmas period and so will be having a break from the bus. That will be a nice change. We will also be looking after a dog this time so we will both enjoy that. Speaking of Xmas, it's less than a month away, how time flies. Belle has volunteered to work Xmas day so we won't be celebrating it much this year, but then it's such a big commercial con these days anyway who really cares?

Oh! I almost forgot to mention Stewie. He has moved on now but we met him the day we moved in to the caravan park and he was travelling around Oz in his car. How he does it I don't know but he has a couple of fold out chairs and he sleeps in the back of the hatchback car at night. Quite a character! He was from Cronwall in England and we swapped a few yarns while he was here.



Todd River flooding Heavytrees Gap

#### **November 30<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

I know I'm probably going to cop some flak from various quarters for saying the following (and yes I have) but I just have to comment to the state of the Aborigines around Alice Springs. While they are constantly given hand outs and various 'programmes' are set up to try and get them out of the state they are in, I have to say that from what I have seen they make no effort what-so-ever to improve their own lives.

There are exceptions, but the majority of them seem to have the main ambition of sitting around in the river bed (when it isn't flooded) or under a shady tree all day. They have no desire to do anything except just sit around. Government policies with regard to these people are very obviously failing to make any changes. In order to operate in Australia today they need to be able to converse in English. It may be all very well to go on about preserving their culture, but the hard fact is you can't get on in modern Australia without being able to converse effectively. They refuse to send their kids to school and so the cycle goes on generation after generation.

Basic education - especially with regard to personal hygiene - appears to be non-existent. Approaching within 20 feet of many of the 'locals' carries with it the need to hold ones breath. To put it plainly THEY STINK LIKE DEAD KANGAROOS! and they seem to either be proud of it or totally unaware. The education programs have plainly failed to get across even the most basic information about washing and cleanliness. As a result they suffer from diseases that the rest of the population don't generally get and because they are in the main malnourished - not from starvation but from eating the wrong types of food - their immune systems are very ineffective.

The sad thing is the Aborigines don't even seem to care - although this is probably more a state of hopelessness. I don't know who is more to blame, the Government for not being able to communicate with the Aboriginal people after 200 years, or the people themselves for their total refusal to accept the advice and assistance offered. They seem to suffer from the forlorn hope that things will somehow go back to the way they once were when it is plain that they never will. To say that things are bad in Alice itself is one thing but I am quite sure that conditions out on some of the communities must be horrific indeed.

What really makes me sick is that when anyone does bring any of this up they are called 'racist' and treated like a leper. The only way anyone is going to solve these problems is to bring them out into the open and work out the best way of resolving them. One of the worst problems is booze. No one has the guts to ban booze from the Aboriginal people as that would be 'racist'. Instead we just let them go on poisoning themselves, bashing their wives, committing crimes and getting locked up - all due to drinking alcohol. How can anyone tell me that's not racist? To put it plainly the Government is either too gutless to make the hard choices or they live in hope that Aboriginal people will eventually die out as a result of substance abuse. Either way the whole situation from both sides of the fence is a total shambles.

Note: as I have had at least one Email complaining about these comments I will state for the record that I am fully aware of the absolutely dreadful things that have been done to Aboriginal people since colonisation; from general mistreatment to poisoned flour, massacres, 'dog licenses', Palm Island and on and on. Anyone reading Alphabetically Australian will note the section devoted to what the Aboriginal people have suffered and the ways their lives are still affected. For the record I have repeated the text below as there are things contained in it that I believe EVERY Australian should know about. There are problems from both sides and more focus needs to be placed on the future instead of a continual harping on issues long past. I am personally convinced that the only way Aboriginal people will ever be truly equal in their own land is through education - teaching and recognising in schools what has happened in



the past and good education in schools to provide Aboriginal people with a decent chance for the future. My comments on what I saw in Alice Springs and other places are comments on the state of affairs as I saw them at the time, they are not meant to deliberately upset anyone, they are meant to promote some level of thought and questioning about an issue that many people simply ignore.

The person making the complaint managed to get rather personal and attempted to be insulting, the problem being that I have copped so much abuse and name calling in my life that insults have no effect on me at all. The problem with that sort of reaction, is that it is purely emotional and tends to stifle debate. Thanks to the new 'politically correct' world that has been legislated for us many people put issues like this in the 'too hard basket' and that way can safely pretend that nothing bad ever happens. All this does is ensure that nothing will ever be done to fix things. A climate now exists that to criticise any 'minority group' for anything is somehow racist or bigoted - that is the surest way to ensure that the population in general and politicians in particular, will just bury their heads in the sand.

COPY OF TEXT FROM ALPHABETICALLY AUSTRALIAN

### **SOME FACTS ON ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA**

The treatment of Australian Aborigines since European settlement first began has been little more than appalling. Initially they were shot, poisoned, imprisoned and forced to work as slave labour. Today they are at best treated as second class citizens in their own country.

#### IN THE PAST

- ⇒ On arrival the Europeans declared that Australia was 'terra nullius' that the land belonged to no one.
- ⇒ Aboriginal people were segregated from whites with separate schooling, denial of access to main hospitals, separate carriages on trains and even 'natives only' toilets and seats in parks.
- ⇒ Identity cards (known as 'dog licenses') were issued and had to be produced on demand.
- ⇒ Aboriginal people needed permission to move from one area to another.
- ⇒ Aboriginal people were forcibly evicted from their tribal lands and thus denied their spiritual and cultural identity.
- ⇒ Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and fostered out to Europeans in a deliberate attempt to destroy Aboriginal culture.
- ⇒ As late as the 1950s Aboriginal children were still being excluded from state schools.
- ⇒ In some states Aboriginal people were denied the right to vote until 1962.
- ⇒ In 1967 Aboriginal people working on stations were finally given the right to equal pay. The station owners responded by driving the Aboriginal people off their land. This directly led to the appalling conditions that many Aboriginal people face today in many outback towns.
- ⇒ The Aboriginal Heritage Act which protects Aboriginal sites was not declared until 1972.

#### TODAY

- ⇒ Aboriginal unemployment rates are over 35%.
- ⇒ Death rates are 3 times higher than the national average.
- ⇒ Life expectancy is 20 years less than European Australians.
- ⇒ Infant mortality is 4 times that of 'white Australia'.
- ⇒ Hospitalisation is 3 times the normal average.
- ⇒ Aborigines are in general poorer and have less education than other Australians.
- ⇒ Imprisonment is twice the national average.

By any standards, this record of abuse and neglect brings a great deal of shame to 'white Australia'. The new catch cry of 'reconciliation' has a hollow ring to it when you visit the state's north and find people with no running water, no electricity and no shelter from the elements. Too many people fail to realise that many Australian Aborigines (especially in the north) only speak English as a second language, and although their basic needs of food water and shelter are the same as ours, their cultural and spiritual needs are tied to their land and while they are denied access to what was stolen from them they remain incomplete as a people.

No I am not a redneck racist, I am aware of the many complex issues involved with this but I will still continue to comment on this issue as I see fit and do not apologise for doing so. White Australia has much to acknowledge about the past, but it is in the end, up to Aboriginal Australia to set the direction for the future, to stop complaining about a past that nothing can be done to change, and to get on with making things better for themselves now.

### **December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2002 (Tuesday)**

A new year on the road dawns. November 28<sup>th</sup> 1997 was D Day for us on our first trip. Five years have gone by in the blink of an eye, it is astonishing just how quickly time rushes by.

As usual I'm not having much luck in the job market, things in Alice are winding down as everyone heads away for the holidays so I don't expect much to happen until the new year. I will keep an eye on the papers and the touch screens but I am not going to hold my breath.

I have several applications still active so there is a small chance one of them might prove fruitful. If nothing turns up in the new year I will enrol at TAFE and bring my computing skills up-to-date.

Meanwhile I am working on getting a new re-vamped web site ready for launch about mid-way through December. I will be trying to make money from it but in a different way to the old site. It will cost around \$270 to set things up as we want our own domain name this time, but I hope to recoup that outlay fairly quickly.

The weather has turned hot again after a week or so of low 30s and rain. It was interesting to see the Todd flowing but now it has retracted to a series of rapidly diminishing pools.

### **December 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Wednesday)**

We are now installed in the house we will be looking after for the next 5 weeks and are enjoying the change from the confines of the bus. I managed to get the new web site up and running over the last weekend and I think everything is running correctly.

The weather has been HOT, 41C+ for the past few days but it looks like it has cooled off a little today.

Christmas is rapidly approaching but as Belle is working we won't be doing any celebrating until the following Saturday. I made up some home made advocaat last night and will be making some Baileys Irish Cream in the next day or so. The recipes for any one who is interested follow: (They are very good!)

Advocaat:

24 egg yolks  
2 cans of Nestle condensed sweetened milk  
1 bottle of brandy

Put it all in a blender, whiz it up for about a minute, bottle and put in the fridge. You can drink it straight away but it is best after about a week. (because of the quantity you'll have to put half the ingredients in a blender at a time.) If you blend the ingredients too long the cream (below) will thicken and ruin the drink.

Baileys Irish Cream:

600ml fresh thickened cream  
200ml thick chocolate sauce  
2 cans of Nestle condensed sweetened milk  
1 tablespoon of vanilla essence  
1 bottle of whisky

Same method as above.

For around \$50 you end up with 2 x 700ml bottles of each. Not bad. Buy the cheapest brandy and whisky you can find, quality doesn't matter.

### **December 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 (Saturday)**

The weather has continued in the high 30s/low 40s and Christmas has come and gone for another year. As Belle was working over the 'Christmas break' we are celebrating today, but apart from a roast lunch it will be pretty low key.

Another few days and we will have been here for 2 months already. I am looking forward to the cooler weather so we can do a bit more exploring.

MENU for 'Christmas Day' 2002

Breakfast:

Peeled prawns  
Seafood dressing  
3 cans of Guinness Stout (me)  
Apple juice (Belle)

Lunch  
Roast pork

Roast spuds  
Roast carrots  
Roast pumpkin  
Bottle of Maison (no alcohol grape juice)  
Expensive ice cream

Dinner  
Cold roast pork and cold spuds  
Home made Advocaat and Baileys Cream.

Nibbles for the day  
Cashew nuts  
Pistachio nuts  
Camembert cheese

It doesn't sound that great but we enjoyed it anyway. (I did all the cooking so Belle could rest after having to work on the real Christmas day and on Boxing Day.).

#### **January 6<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

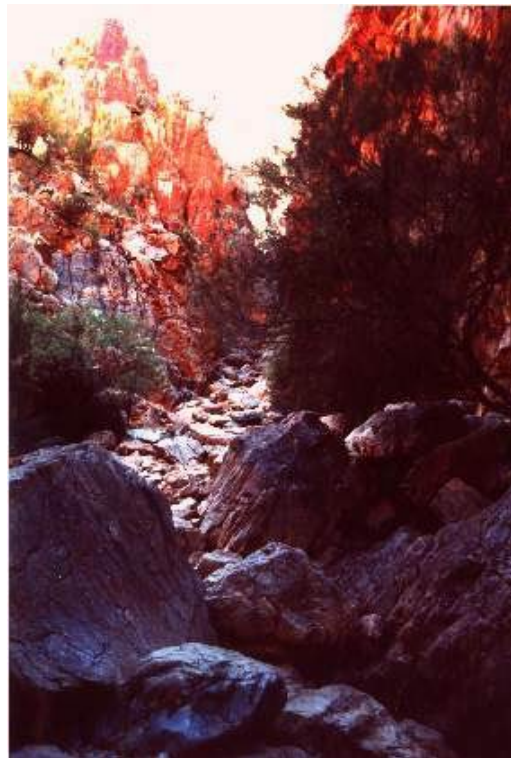
New years eve was a bit more interesting than usual as we were invited out to a party with some of Belle's work colleges. We enjoyed the evening although I have to admit I was worn out by midnight as I just don't stay up that late any more.

Belle has been working all weekend and doesn't get a break until next weekend. Then she is working 12 days straight. I really don't think that sort of schedule is good for people either physically or mentally. The way the rosters at her work are done it is entirely possible to only have 2 days off in a period of 26 days. As she only has the option of taking pay and not time off in lieu, she has no time to rest.

If I can find something in the next week or so it will take the pressure off her a bit and she would have the option of leaving if it got too much for her.

On the 'exploration' front I have been out to have a look at Stanley Chasm west of Alice Springs. There is a \$6 admission fee which is a bit high but the walk up through the gorge to the chasm was very interesting. The walk starts off easily enough but the further you go the tougher it gets. It is possible to go on past the narrow chasm but that involves a clamber up over some pretty big boulders. I managed to crank off almost an entire roll of film there so I am hoping to have some nice pictures to put on the site soon.

The drive out to Stanley Chasm is easy as all the roads are sealed. I expect some of the places we want to see while we are here may be a bit harder to get to.



Standley Chasm

#### **January 18<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

We moved out of our first house sitting house today and back to the bus for one night before going to the next house tomorrow for two weeks.

We were supposed to go out to dinner with Belle's friend Ingrid (from work) and some of her friends but it turned out the buffet we had been intending to go to isn't on until tomorrow so Belle and I went off to HJ's got some videos and a beer or three which ended up costing almost as much as the buffet would have.

**January 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Made it to the buffet tonight and enjoyed the evening with Ingrid and some of her friends. The buffet was at Rydges Resort (Balloons Restaurant) and the food was very nice. The usual price is \$28 a head but due to a promotion we got the meals for \$28 for the first person and \$5 for the second, a total of \$33 or \$16.50 a head. Very good value and the food was both plentiful (well it was a buffet after all) and top quality.

Belle was exhausted after working all weekend - she seems to work longer on Saturday and Sunday than on normal week days. She worked a normal full week, then Saturday and Sunday and now she has to go back for another full week tomorrow. As usual employers are not putting enough staff on to do the job and over working those that are unfortunate enough to get stuck there.

I am not being any help as I haven't got a job and I'm feeling pretty useless. At least If I could find something Belle would have the option to leave if it got too much for her. As her contract only has 3 months to go I am staring to apply for work elsewhere as Belle has no intention of asking for an extension.

So much for our ideas of being in Alice for 2-3 years but then our plans seem to change all the time so there's no use in worrying about it.

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

Our final day house sitting after 7 weeks in two different houses. We enjoyed the change but are always happy to go back to the bus when it is all over. The major thing I will miss is daily internet access. Now I have to rely on the library again and only one or two hours on the net each week.

After a long hot spell it is finally cool today, just 31C. The Todd River was flowing again after some heavy rain but it only took a day for it to stop this time.

**February 5<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Alice Springs is beginning to test my patience at the moment. I have just made another 30+ job applications but on past performance I am not expecting to get any response. The weather is still STINKING HOT and there is nothing to do. It probably won't start cooling down for at least another six or eight weeks and my enforced imprisonment in the bus is maddening.

We received a bunch of boxes from Perth with most of our last bits and pieces from the house, actually most of it is Belle's and we will have to sell it off at the local markets as there just isn't anywhere in the bus to put most of it.

Our immediate plans are still to get hold of a campervan and sell the car but even that seems to be a long way off at the moment. I tried to start the bus over the past few days but she is refusing to go. I checked the spark and that's ok so it is probably fuel problems. We had difficulty switching from gas to petrol on the way up from Adelaide so it might be a fuel blockage or fuel pump trouble. We knew it had to be looked at before we left Alice in any case so it isn't a surprise.

I was hoping to do a programming course at TAFE but they don't have anything going so I might even have to consider doing some voluntary work just to relieve the boredom.

**February 10<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

Ever since we got back to the bus I have been trying to get the engine to turn over as it hasn't been run for a couple of months. I began to suspect fuel pump trouble so I tried an experiment and emptied part of the fuel from the fuel bowl section of the pump. After taking off the gas mixer/air filter and putting some petrol directly into the top of the carburettor the engine did eventually start so my original diagnosis may not be correct. I am due to call Graham tonight so I'll get his opinion.

I am certainly learning about engines; at the start of this trip I couldn't tell the difference between a condenser and a distributor and now I am pulling bits off the engine and playing about with them and even managing to get the desired results! I have learnt that if you have spark and fuel the engine should start but it is getting spark and fuel to the engine that sometimes causes the biggest headaches.

The weather in Alice continues HOT HOT HOT, 38-41C most days. Now that we have passed the half way mark here time is starting to get stretched out again with each day seeming longer than the last.

**February 17<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

The last two days have been a great relief as the temperature dropped to about 35C. Today it is only 33C and so much cooler than it has been.

Over the weekend we bought our first big item since we have been in Alice; A large chest of draws which replaces the two small bedside units that we have been using since we first left Perth. It gives us some badly needed extra storage space. While I am on the subject of purchases I will write a new 'wish list' of things we would like to get in the not too distant future.

Finally got it in:

- 1.Campervan (Perth)
- 2.Satellite dish and decoder (Perth)

3. New computer & scanner	(Computer – Rockingham)
4. 2 deep cycle batteries	(Alice Springs)
5. portable solar panel	(Karratha)
6. replace the outboard motor with a short shaft 4 stroke 9hp	(Karratha - 9.9hp 2 stroke)
7. service bus and fix oil leak	(Alice Springs)
8. new curtains and curtain rails for the bus	
9. bigger fridge	(Rockingham)
10. bigger generator (5kva)	(Karratha 2kva)
11. fish finder for boat	(Karratha)
12. GPS	(Carnarvon)

Now all we have to do is win Lotto. (It took us a while and we didn't win Lotto but we finally got all but one of these items)

### **February 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

Caught up with Marg and Geoff (who we haven't seen since Halls Creek) and Marg shouted us a very nice dinner at Oscars Restaurant. They have been working down at Yulara for a while and we hope to catch up with them again before leaving this area.

### **February 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Job interview at Battery World. Not too sure if I should really take the job if offered as it involves heavy lifting and with my history of hernias and a bad back I might be better off without it. The only trouble is I am so bored I might just take it in the event that it is offered.

### **February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

Went out in the evening with James and his wife, Ingrid and Sandra to the Points Club for dinner. Not a fancy place but very cheap compared to everything else in Alice Springs. Belle and I had fish in beer batter with salad and chips for \$750. The fish was fresh and tasty so it was good value.

### **March 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

The weather seems to be aware that Summer is officially over as the temperatures have fallen steadily over the past week. Today we are down to just 30C so we decided to take the opportunity of a drive out towards Glen Helen.

The first stops would have been Simpson's Gap and Standley Chasm but we had already been there so our first area to explore was Big Hole/Ellery Creek. The short road in was unsealed and a bit rough but we made it ok in the Barina so everyone else won't have a problem getting in. On a warmer day this would make a good swimming hole but today it was too cold. (Strange how quickly 30C feels cool when you have been used to 40C for a couple of months.) There is a campsite here and fees are charged. It would be a good stop off for a night if we had more time.

From here we stopped in to check on a good rest area that could be used as an overnight stop. The rest area is located on the south side of the road and is up a small incline. Access is sealed and even big rigs should be ok as there is a ring road that makes it easy to get in and out. There was a shelter and tables and also a water tank. As the rest area is set up on a small hill there were some nice views of the hills stretching west and east.

The next area on the road was the Ochre Pits. They might not sound too exciting but turned out to be worth the sort walk. The short access road in was sealed but it might be a difficult spot for big rigs to get in and out of. The ochre can be seen in bands on a cliff by a stream bed. It is very crumbly and is almost like pastels.

The next area to check on was another rest area very similar to the first but located up a small sealed road. Again big rigs should get in without much hassle but if in doubt walk the first section of road that goes up the hill.

Ormiston Gorge was the next stop and the highlight of the day. It is located 8Km off the main road but again access is fully sealed so no need to worry about getting in and out. We were lucky enough to see the area soon after some decent rains so the creeks were flowing and everything was very green and alive.

There is an excellent campsite at Ormiston with showers and toilets. Fees are charged for camping but there is plenty to see if you take the walk to view Ormiston Pound. We didn't have time but have had some very good reports about this spectacle.

The final stop was Glen Helen Gorge which was a bit of a disappointment. The 'resort' spoiled the look of the area and access to the gorge was along a very rough creek bed. The flies (which had been a nuisance all day) were at their worst here and we were quickly driven back into the car by the incessant swarms.

The only spot we missed on this drive was Serpentine Gorge where we found the unsealed access was just too rough for the little Barina. It would have been better to do this drive over two or three days as we would have had more chance to explore the sights and camp out. As it was the day was quite tiring but really enjoyable.



Ormiston Gorge

**March 6<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

A quick visit to a couple of the local tourist attractions in town today. Firstly to the Transport Hall of Fame. This is a surprisingly good exhibit located a few Kms south of Heavitree Gap just west of Stuart Hwy. It is located next to the Ghan Preservation Society Museum (See below) and to my mind it would make more sense to combine the two attractions and charge one entry fee.

The main exhibit is located in a large shed (best visited when it isn't too hot.) There is a good selection of old commercial transport vehicles to look at and some memorabilia and a small library of magazines and books to browse through.

There are a number of vehicles awaiting restoration in another shed behind the first so taken as a whole the museum is worth the entry fee and should be one of the places on your list to see when you are in Alice Springs.

Although there is probably a little more to see at the attraction above, The Ghan Preservation Society Museum is just as interesting and has the bonus of a video viewing area and some first class documentary tapes to watch.

You can walk through the carriages that are still used on the short 22km section of line that remains and you can also get aboard the older carriages that took people across the continent in days gone by. I have to say that I was intrigued by the feelings I had when sitting in a carriage that had carried people across the desert in the days when it was still a real adventure.

The exhibits in this museum and in the one listed above are of high historic significance so visiting both museums should be done at the same time.



The Old Ghan

**March 12<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Having completely failed to find work in Alice Springs I am feeling inadequate and very depressed at the moment. We were lured here by the promises of the Pathology Lab Manager (Judith Mills) who told us that 'the Northern Territory Government endeavours to help spouses of employees to find work.' This turned out to be a blatant lie and one I won't be forgiving in a hurry. Anyone who is thinking about coming to Alice Springs to get work had better beware of the lies that are told in order to trick them to come out here.

With eight weeks still to go on Belle's contract I am at a complete loss as there is simply nothing for me to do. Thinking about the money we have lost on the house in Perth doesn't make it any easier. None of the plans we had when we got here have eventuated and it even looks like we may miss out on seeing many of the sights around Alice as we may not be able to afford to hire a 4x4 (\$160 a day) to get out to them. The only ray of hope when you hit rock bottom is knowing there is nowhere to go but up, the trouble is how do you know how far down rock bottom is???

(As it turned out the Northern Territory Government is only out to cheat it's employees. Belle worked 2 days less than 6 months and as a result was paid only 5 months leave – no pro-rata for the final month. Wages were deducted for a statistical anomaly that happens only once every 12 years and she has NEVER to this date – April 2004 – received any information on superannuation that was supposed to be paid out. The NT Government is about as crooked as they come.)

### **March 16<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Today was full of activity as we took a whole bunch of things that were sent over from Perth down to the Todd St. Markets in order to try and get rid of some of them before we leave (and are forced to dump them as there is no room for them in the bus). The fee for setting up a stall is \$20 (which we think is too high) and after 5 hours we made only \$120. Minus the \$20 for the stall and we ended up with very little to show and we still have far too many things to get rid of. We will try again closer to Easter as that is apparently when most of the tourists start to turn up.

Taking our hard won gains we blew \$44 on dinner and drinks at the Windmill Restaurant which is next door to the caravan park. Wednesday and Sunday are buffet nights but the food was fairly plain and choice of dishes was a bit limited. Taking into account the other prices we have seen here \$15 a head for a buffet isn't too bad but the food could have been a bit more interesting. For those who like good plain cooking without much in the way of spices it is a much better proposition. It is certainly popular with others who live in Alice.

### **March 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

Time to bite the bullet and start working on the bus engine. I have collected a new ballast resistor, coil and air filter so today I decided to pull off the engine cover and put the new parts in. The ballast resistor and coil turned out to be very simple to replace but the air filter (a straight forward job on most vehicles, involved pulling off the gas mixer (2 bolts and one clamp) then taking a bottom plate off the mixer (6 bolts) replacing the filter and putting it all back together.

Much to my great surprise when I started the engine she fired up straight away. I still have an oil leak in the top of the engine somewhere but as the engine needs a full service and tune I will get a mechanic to look at fixing that before we leave Alice.

The diff oil leak seems to be pretty slow as there is still plenty of oil in there so no need to worry about that just yet. The biggest job we need to get done (sometime) are the brake pads which all need replacing. This will certainly be the most expensive job as well.

### **March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

A little more exploration today with a trip out towards Ross River. The only areas we could explore with the Barina were Corroboree Rock and Trepkina Gorge. The road out as far as Corroboree Rock is good dual lane bitumen but between the rock turn off and Artunga turn off it is single lane bitumen which means dropping off into the dirt each time you meet oncoming traffic. Other than that the road is very good.

Trepkina Gorge is reached by a turn off north from the main road. The first 4Km section in is sealed but the next 4Km is pretty rough gravel road. We still made it to the gorge but the turn off to John Hayes Rock Hole is 4x4 only so we gave that a miss. Trepkina Gorge was bone dry so wasn't as impressive as it could have been but it comes a close second to Ormiston Gorge as one of the best gorges around Alice Springs.

There are two campsites at the gorge, the first (Bluff Camp) is only for tents. The second up next to the gorge is for anyone who can fit in but big rigs could have problems here - especially if it is crowded.

There are no designated rest areas along this road but stop offs are possible at Emily and Jessie Gaps close to Alice and there are one or two places that could be used by the side of the road.

For what ever reason Ross River Homestead and campground was closed and we have no idea if there is any intention to re-open it. Although we were unable to get to Artunga (33Km of gravel road from the turn off) we did see a sign that said the campground is open from March to November (although there was another sign stating that the pub IS CLOSED - CURSES!)



Corroboree Rock

**March 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

It really comes to something when you apply to work on a volunteer basis and you are STILL ignored. I have been so bored I had decided to look for a volunteer job, at least for the next 5-6 weeks to help time pass a bit quicker. I was told that the Alice Springs Desert Park looks for volunteers on a regular basis so I contacted them and was sent a letter detailing what the conditions were and the numbers to contact. I rang last Friday and left a message offering my services for the next few weeks and got no reply. Belle rang again twice and still we have not received a reply.

The obvious question is, if I can't even get a volunteer job, what hope have I got of getting paid work? It really seems odd that a business is so well catered for that it isn't even interested in free assistance.

Even though we still have at least seven weeks here I have started slowly packing things away. It is a good feeling to know that soon I will be shaking the dust of Alice spring from my feet for the last time and heading off down the road.

Alice Springs is nice enough, very modern compared to what I expected and very well catered for in the way of shops and services, but it certainly isn't a place I would want to get stuck in for a long time. 'Nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there' I think the saying goes. To live here for years takes a certain type of mentality (a STRANGE ONE) and it just isn't for me. Much too far from the sea. Perhaps if I had found work here my opinion of the place would have been less harsh but after seeing all I can (but not all there is to see) I am more than happy to move on and have no intention of looking back.

The area surrounding Alice is very much like parts of the Kimberleys and having already seen that I suppose the effect on me was less than it might have been. To those flying in and seeing this kind of terrain for the first time the impact of the stark and ruggedly beautiful ranges must be quite memorable.

In the end Alice Springs is just too far away from everywhere else. It would be better if there were a sealed road from the west to the east coast passing through here, but as it is it is too isolated.

We still have two main areas to explore, Hermannsburg and Uluru/Kings Canyon. Hermannsburg we will try to do in early April but Uluru will have to wait until Belle finishes her contract in May. It is disappointing that we will miss some of the 4x4 areas, especially Palm Valley, Arltunga and Chambers Pillar but there's the breaks.

**March 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Bought 2 new deep cycle batteries today plus a couple of heavy duty cables. All up it cost \$467.98. Hopefully over time the 'house' system will pay for itself as we get free energy from the sun and have to use the generator less. Now we have a total of 368 amp hours of power. Now if I could only work out how much we use I might be able to find out if it is enough.

**April 6<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

After a week of spending more money on bits and pieces for the bus I am almost out of things to do. The weather turned hot again for a few days and we copped 35-38C weather that we hoped had gone away. As a result we cancelled a planned trip out to Hermannsburg yesterday. We are due to try the markets again this coming weekend and then the following weekend is Easter and the plan is to go down to Ayres Rock for a couple of days.

I have been testing the new upgraded solar energy system and it looks like it will be able to handle the demands of the fridge quite well. At the moment we are under trees and the solar panel doesn't put much back in to the batteries but once we are out in the open we should get enough energy to keep the fridge running without having to resort to the generator unless it gets cloudy.

Five weeks to go! I can't wait!

**April 11<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**



For ages we have had the problem of adjusting the outdoor TV ariel every time we stop in a new place. I have finally managed to fix the problem by purchasing a small lockable access door and cutting a hole in the rear perspex window of the bus. This will finally allow me to adjust the ariel as I am looking at the TV. No more signalling to each other by banging on the roof and finding the signal is still awful when I climb back down and come inside.

The caravan park has started filling up over the past few days and finally the lights are being put on again at night so we can stop tripping over things in the dark on the way to the shower or toilet. Despite the fact that the park must be more than half full now, the second amenities block remains closed - the people who run this park don't like spending money on having it cleaned I suppose. If they are cheap enough to turn all the lights out for 5 months then I shouldn't be too surprised.

The weather is managing to stay hot, we are expecting 36C today. Hopefully it will drop a bit over the weekend as we have to set up a stall at the markets on Sunday.

#### **April 16<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

After getting some shopping for our upcoming trip out to Ayres Rock I stopped in at the Alice Springs Reptile Centre just south of Billy Goat Hill.

For overseas tourists flying in to Alice Springs this is probably worth while. There are quite a few snakes and lizards to look at and if you visit during the guided tours you will get the chance to get 'up close and personal' with some of the exhibits.

Surprisingly there is even a saltwater croc called Terry on display, but my favourite was a large male Perentie called Bob that managed to bite 'The Croc Hunter' Steve Erwin when he visited and mishandled the reptile. I hope the gave Bob a big reward for that!

For Australians who are already familiar with snakes and lizards there isn't much new to see here but if you are looking for a way to pass an hour or so I guess \$8 isn't all that much to spend these days. Just over the road is the RFDS base where another tour awaits.

As a purely tourist based attraction this is going to leave a number of people quite disappointed. After a very short video (the whole 45 minute video isn't shown but should be) you get a five minute talk which only skims the surface of the real role of the RFDS. You then get look through a small museum which is moderately interesting but could be a lot better.

Having said this and given the RFDS 'tour' only 2/5 I still have to encourage people to go. The RFDS isn't about tourism, it is about saving lives and the organisation survives on grants and fund raising. By visiting you are helping to provide some much needed funds. So even though the 'tour' isn't that good, go along anyway and think of it as a worthwhile donation.

After I picked Belle up from work and we were on our way back to the bus, a Toyota 4x4 pulled out in front of us at a round-a-bout and I had to brake hard to avoid smashing right into the side. The 4x4 then proceeded to plough into the back of a car turning right not far down the road and then took off at high speed. Thankfully we got the license plate number and reported it to the police so the maniac responsible should get caught. It is one thing to have an accident but quite another to run from the scene without even finding out if someone has been hurt. There are some real turds in this world.



The Perentie that nailed the Steve Erwin – Good Boy!

#### **April 17<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

Final preparations for the trip to Ayres Rock and Kings Canyon today. I have been waiting for a very long time to get out and have a look at The Rock, I just hope it lives up to all the hype I've heard about it over the years.

#### **April 18<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

A 360Km drive got us to Curtin Springs which provides free unpowered campsites. Curtin Springs is about 80Km east of Ayres Rock and we chose it as our base for the weekend for several reasons. Firstly, and most importantly it is FREE (powered sites cost just \$11 a night) while un-powered sites at Yulara are a ludicrous \$26 a night. Secondly it is part way between Yulara and the Kings Canyon turn off and lastly we didn't want to pull the tent down every night and set up again somewhere else the next night.

Although we ended up doing a fair bit of driving, staying at Curtin Springs turned out to be an excellent choice. The toilets and showers provided aren't the cleanest you will find but they are functional and the showers (\$1) have nice hot water.

The campground itself is just red dirt but there is some shade and a reasonable amount of room. Curtin Springs has fuel supplies, a pub and a restaurant so it caters for the needs of most travellers.

As our only aim for the day was to get to Curtin Springs, once we had the tent set up we settled down to just relax for the rest of the day.

Kilometres travelled for the day: 360



Mount Conner

**April 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

I wanted to get some shots of Ayres Rock as the sun came up so this meant waking at 4.30am and heading off in the dark (driving very slowly in case of animals on the road) and arriving at Yulara just before 7am when the sun put in its appearance for the day. As we were meeting friends (Marg & Geoff) later that day and Geoff who works for National Parks was going to take us into the park free we didn't want to pay the \$16.25 a head just to get in and take some sunrise shots. As it turned out we could have slept in because the entry station where you pay to get in is situated so far from the rock you can't get close enough to get any good shots. (The fee to get in to Ayres Rock is due to go up to \$25 a head next year.)

We were treated to a cooked brekky at Marg and Geoff's and then spent the rest of the day being chauffeured around the National park in Geoff's 4x4. Although Ayres Rock is quite a sight I have to admit that it didn't quite live up to all the hype. Perhaps after seeing Mount Conner (near Curtin Springs) which covers 3 times the area of Ayres Rock, the rock looked a little less impressive.

If the rock was less than I had expected then the Olgas 40Km away were far more. The Olgas are the real show here even though Ayres Rock gets all the publicity. The massive sculpted red domes were glowing in the bright sunlight and as a pure spectacle were much more impressive than Uluru (Ayres Rock).

It turned out to be a loooong day as we went back to Marg & Geoff's for dinner and only arrived back in Curtin Springs about 9pm. The mattress we were using in the tent had seemed a little uncomfortable the night before but this night it had unexpectedly become as soft a duck down - or was it just that fact that we were worn out? In any case we got a good night's sleep until a large pack of dingos began howling nearby about 5am.

Kilometres travelled for the day: 282



No prizes for guessing what this is.

**April 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Our time was limited so instead of a rest day - which would have been nice - we took off at 8am and went back 52Km east to the Kings Canyon turn off. From here it is another 167Km to the canyon where less than sufficient parking was available.

There are two walks at the canyon, the rim-top walk for the ultra fit (or crazy) people takes about 3.5 hours, and is done in full sun (take plenty of water if you do this walk). The canyon walk for the lazy and un-fit (ie. us) takes only an hour and goes through a lovely tree lined canyon with lots of shade. Not having done the rim walk we can't really comment on what you see but the canyon walk was good enough for us.

We had heard tourists referring to Kings Canyon as Australia's answer to the Grand Canyon in the USA. This is only true in the imagination of some myopic tourist brochure writer. The canyon is nice and reasonably spectacular but it doesn't even compare to the canyons in the Hamersley Ranges in W.A. let alone the Grand Canyon.

The good news is there is (at least at present) no entry fee charged. The bad news is there isn't any free camping nearby so unless like us, you are prepared for a long drive in and out again the same day, you will have to stay at the nearby resort or at Kings Creek Station.



Camel ride at Curtin Springs

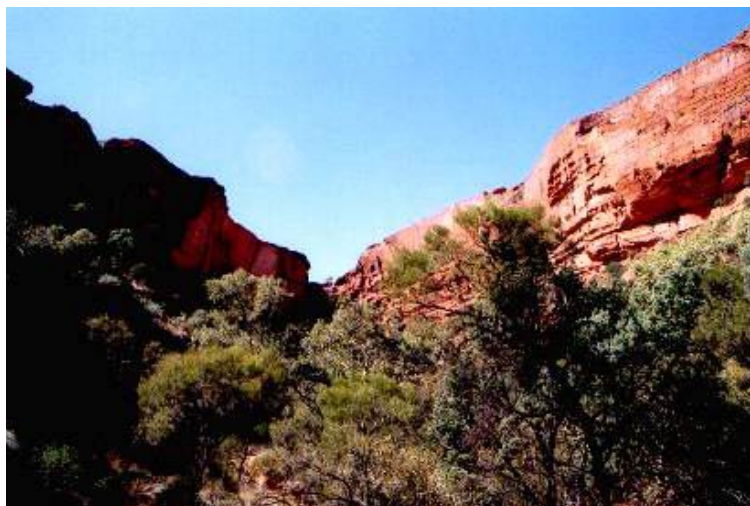
After the long haul back to Curtin Springs we rested for a couple of hours before going on a sunset camel ride to view Mount Conner. At just \$30 a head this was 'cheap as chips' and the ride took 90 minutes. Mark, our guide has been working with his camels at Curtin Springs for 10 years and gives a very informative and interesting talk on camels, their use in Australia and just about anything else you care to mention.

Camels have obviously had a bad rap over the years as we found our mounts (Ned Kelly and Lazy Daisy) were very placid gentle animals who didn't bite, spit or even smell. Mark assured us that this was a result of the excellent way they were treated.

If you have never ridden a camel and are out in the centre then these are the ones to ride. Prices of camel rides at Yulara are around \$80 a head and at Kings Canyon \$50 for one hour. In any case the camels at Curtin Springs are the best looking ones - so Mark says anyway.

After sitting and chatting round the campfire with some CMCA members we met at the site, we eventually collapsed exhausted and drifted off into blissful slumber dreaming of riding camels through the desert as the sun slowly set over a massive flat top mesa - or was that what had really happened? Surely not, it all seemed to be too good to be true.

Kilometres travelled for the day: 438



Kings Canyon

#### **April 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

After slowly packing up the camping gear and saying goodbye to our CMCA friends we made our way back to Alice Springs with a brief stop off at the Finke River rest area to have a quick look at the deep pool which was still evident by the bridge.

We were back in Alice just after lunch time, completely tired out but more than satisfied with our latest adventure.

The roads on this trip were all sealed and all in very good condition. The best spots to stop off would be Finke River about 130Km south of Alice on the Stuart Highway, a big rest area 5Km east of the Mount Conner Lookout on Lasseter Highway and the pick of them all, Curtin Springs.

Kilometres travelled for the day: 360 Total trip from Alice Springs return 1440 Km.

**April 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Our last weekend opportunity for exploration took us 130Km west of Alice to the historic mission at Hermannsburg.

Having seen adverts for this place on TV I expected to see just the historic precinct and not the small town that surrounds it. The 'modern' town site is populated mostly by Aborigines and does detract somewhat from the historic area but once inside the small cluster of buildings that make up the old settlement, you can happily ignore the dilapidated houses of the newer section of town.

The entrance fee is reasonable and you can spend an hour or more looking through the buildings constructed by the German missionaries who founded Hermannsburg in the 1860s. Hermannsburg is about 130Km west of Alice and is an easy day trip. There is more to see on the Glen Helen road but you should come and see Hermannsburg as well.

Of course those with 4wd vehicles will get much more out of the trip as you can go on to Kings Canyon (with a permit) from here.

The drive out to Hermannsburg is easy, but as with the eastern MacDonnell Ranges the road becomes single lane bitumen for about 30 kilometres (75-45Km east of Hermannsburg.)

Near Hermannsburg is Palm Springs but as we only have a 2wd vehicle we were unable to go out to have a look. We went down as far as the second Finke River crossing but decided to turn back rather than attempt to cross unsealed river bed.

We thought about visiting Wallace Rockhole on the way back but that road was also unsealed and 20Km long. We started down it but as it was quite rough we gave up and went back to Larapinta Drv.

There is only one rest area on this section of road and that is 55Km east of Hermannsburg. A second parking area exists at a monument 4Km east of Hermannsburg but considering the high barbed wire fence around the nearby campground I think I would rule it out as a possible overnighter.



Hermannsburg

**April 30<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

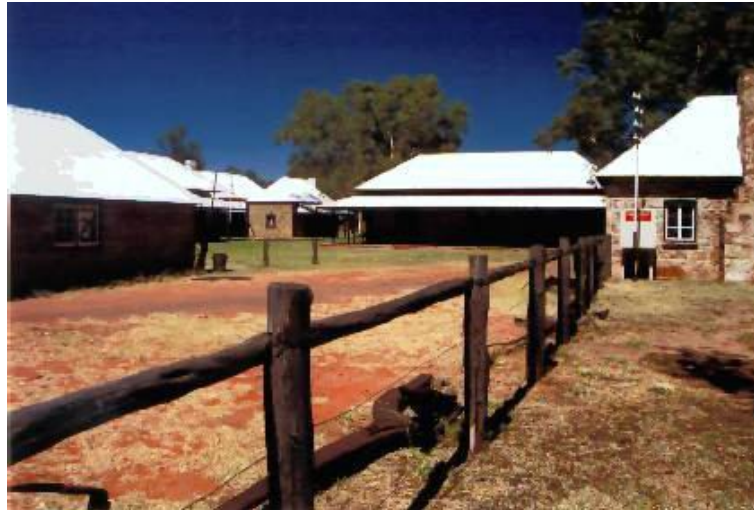
As I have been having trouble with my computer's CD ROM for a while I decided to replace it today and managed to pick up a CD-Burner for just \$99. Finally I can back up some large files easily and move a whole load of things off the hard drive to free up some much needed space.

**May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2003 (Saturday)** The final week in Alice begins.

Yesterday was the start of heritage week and the telegraph station hosted some free activities including horse shoeing, shearing, slide shows, arts and craft demonstrations etc. It was a good opportunity to have a look round the inside of the station without paying so we went along and amused ourselves for a couple of hours.

We still have a few things to see this weekend including the old gaol, old courthouse, old school, RSL museum and a look around inside Adelaide House and The Residency. As today is ear marked as 'the big shopping day' we will leave Sunday open to see the few things we haven't seen yet.

Monday is a public holiday and from 11am is the Bangtail Muster parade through Alice so we should have enough left to keep us from getting bored this weekend.



Telegraph Station

**May 9<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

The final full day in Alice Springs - HOORAY!

Hopefully I have managed to remember everything and all the work that needs doing has been done. I had to buy a new starter battery for the bus on Wednesday (\$130) so now we have 3 new batteries which should make life a little easier.

Now all I have to do is wait a few more hours and we are off again. (tick, tick, t i c k, t i c k, t i c k.....)

**THE CENTRE - FINAL COMMENTS**

The 'dead heart' is not dead at all but is full of life and many differing landscapes. Better named the Red Heart its over-riding impression is of red rocks, red sand and blue, blue sky.

Alice is more modern than I had imagined but it is an excellent base to explore the myriad of interesting attractions that surround it. If we had a 4wd then we would have been able to see far more, but even with the limitations of the little Barina we were still quite satisfied.

True, Alice is a b#%!!&r of a long way from anywhere else, but I am very glad we had the chance to come to the area and see what it has to offer. Territorians are a bit rougher than other people we have met on our travels, but they are generally a friendly bunch.

The places I enjoyed visiting most would have to include Ayres Rock and the Olgas, Ormiston Gorge and Hermannsburg. The hardest thing to deal with is seeing the state of the local Aborigines and the general hopelessness and degradation of their lives. In some respects it is difficult to feel sorry for them as they bring much of their troubles on themselves, but then again it is almost impossible not to feel sorry for people who are in the state they are. What ever your own ideas on the subject, it is impossible to come here and not be shocked to some extent by the way many Aborigines live.

We know now why most people avoid coming to Alice in the Summer - IT IS B&\*&#Y HOT! We are leaving just at the time when the weather is perfect for exploring the area but then again we have seen just about all we can, given our limited mode of travel, and once you have seen all there is, it is certainly time to be moving on. At least we saw the country side turn green for a while and we saw the Todd River flowing.

I certainly didn't enjoy sitting here for 6 months without work but that is something I just have to deal with. The centre is certainly different and although I have enjoyed exploring it, it isn't my intention to pass this way again.

We don't have much money, hopefully about 5K by the time we leave, so we are hoping for a trouble free trip.

**TRAVEL ITINERARY (PLAN A)**

Night	Place (nearest to stop)		Distance	
	Actual	Planned	Actual	Plan
1	Devils Marbles	Devils Marbles	402	402
2	Elliott	Newcastle Waters	374	399
3	Mataranka	Mataranka	330	291
4	Kuwang	Timber Creek	353	386
5	Kununurra	Warmun	259	409
Unplanned 1 week stop in Kununurra				
6	Spring Creek	Mary Pool	253	266
7	Mary Pool	Willare	212	427
8	Willare	Broome	407	177
9	Broome		167	
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2757</b>	<b>2757</b>

STAGE 2 after a weeks rest in Broome

1	Cape Keraudren	Port Smith (depends on road)	463	142
2	Yule River	Cape Keraudren	202	342
3	Cleaverville	Port Hedland ?	175	
4		Cleaverville		358
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>842</b>
STAGE 3 after some time at Cleaverville				
1	Barradale	Onslow	404	337
2	Quobba	Exmouth	340	359
3	Bush Bay/New Beach	Quobba	106	396
4	Galena Bridge	New Beach	365	106
5	Greenough River Mouth	Galena Bridge	124	365
6	Seven Mile Beach	Coronation Beach	42	91
7	Perth	Cliff Head		134
8		Rockingham		463
		<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2251</b>
		<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>5822</b>

**May 10<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

We were away about 8.15am and as soon as I put my foot on the bus brakes I knew we had a problem - no brakes. The only way to try and fix it was to pull out 4 batteries and all the associated wiring and put some brake fluid in one of the most inaccessible brake fluid reservoirs I have ever seen. As we only had three sets of lights to get through before getting on to the open road I just crawled through town and got on with getting away.

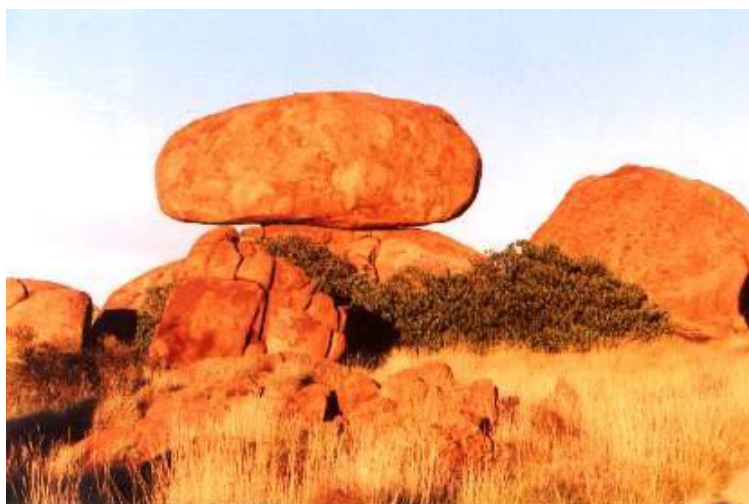
Just north of Alice Springs is one of the most hilly sections of the trip to Tennant Creek, but the hills aren't all that big so no one needs to worry about them. The road is rough in places but driving conditions are generally quite good. We passed Colyer Creek rest area (too close to town to be of any use to most people) and then the Capricorn rest area that we had visited once before when it was boiling hot.

From here on it was just a long slog, it turned out to be 7 hours drive (409Kms) which is slow even for us but I had to keep the brakes in mind.

Gas prices ranged from 76c at Alice to 84c at Wycliffe Well - another Penola where you have to turn the pump off before it drains your life savings by charging for gas it isn't putting into the tank.

Some time after 3pm we pulled in to the Devils Marbles. The formations here are very impressive and there is lots to see and places to walk around. The campsite is via an unsealed road and sits behind most of the formations. There are 2 pit toilets, fire pits, an information station and plenty of room.

It was a LONG drive and not in distance but time-wise and after not driving the bus for 6 months I am knackered! My shoulders are discovering many new muscles and they all ache. Thankfully the Devils marbles (\$3.30 is the camping fee for adults) more than made up for any aches and pains, it is a lovely campsite.



Devils Marbles glowing in the morning sun

**May 11<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Having not had brakes all day yesterday I had to do something about it so all the batteries and wiring had to come out first thing in the morning. The brake fluid reservoir isn't just buried under the bus floor, and under the place I have put a bank of 5 batteries, it is also next to a bunch of old angle iron that used to be the old battery bay so it is a total pain in the bum to get at. It took about an hour to get everything done but at least it was worth it as the brakes started to work again.

We have been surprised at the heat this far north of Alice as it was getting quite cool before we left. Last night we found it difficult to sleep and today the bus has been running a bit hotter than usual - and that makes her hard to start.

The road has started going over a series of long low ridges and small hills but driving is still relatively easy. The only problem we have is that each ridge we go up causes the engine to work harder and the temperature gradually goes

up a notch each time. By the time we stopped for lunch at Renner Springs the bus became quite uncooperative and it took several goes to get her going again.

Although we had planned to get to Newcastle Waters today we stopped 25Km short at Elliott as we enjoyed the caravan park here last time and wanted a shower. (If the truth is known the real reason we stopped is that X-Men is on TV tonight and Belle wanted to see it).

So far my main comment about the drive is that there are too few good rest areas and too many of them are situated too close together to be useful. There are plenty of places alongside the road that you can stop in an emergency but getting back away from the road is another thing entirely.

We did reach a milestone on our travels today when we passed the Three Ways turn off and so completed our main circuit around Australia. Of some concern now - on an unrelated topic - are our rear springs which have to carry all the junk (sorry - make up, perfumes, art supplies and other assorted essentials) that Belle has loaded the bus up with. The right hand rear spring is starting to sag alarmingly, I just hope it doesn't get much worse until we reach at least Karratha.

#### **May 12<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

As the bus gets too hot in the afternoon we were off before sunrise today and arrived at Mataranka not long after lunch time. The road north of Elliott is pretty rough and an attempt has been made to widen it. The result is a section of road like a gutter which traps the wheels and drags heavy vehicles off to the side. Even though this was only a 300Km day it was a very tiring drive. The enormity of the distance we are travelling on this trip is starting to dawn on me, 1092 Km down and about 1600 to go before we even get to Broome and the coast.



Roper River

#### **May 13<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

I can't believe that I said that NT roads are good when I first came up this way. The roads we have been over in the past few days are awful and they are getting steadily worse.

We passed through Katherine without stopping (mainly due to the fact that the 3 service stations we saw were all too small to accommodate the bus easily so we pushed on to Victoria River who got the award for RIP OFF MERCHANT OF THE YEAR for charging 93.9 cpl for auto gas (although this award was to be quickly outdone the next day by Timber Creek who were charging 98.9 cpl - what the hell is the Government letting these crooks get away with this for? There is simply no excuse for prices like this, I don't care how far out they are. We are rapidly reaching a point where people won't be able to afford to travel round Australia so what will the crooked little b\*%#\$ds who own these roadhouses do when they price themselves out of business?

Having driven for 7 hours we were looking for one of two rest areas that we had seen near Victoria River when we first came this way. Both rest areas were no longer available thanks to the NT Government's policy of removing ALL rest areas within 50Km of roadhouses. We were then forced to keep going even though I was exhausted and the bus was an accident looking for a place to happen. Eventually we found Kuwang Lookout with its NO CAMPING sign. As I had no choice other than to get off the road and rest we stopped the night. Just as well no rest area Nazi (Ranger) came along and tried to get us to move or they would have been given the ear bashing of a lifetime.

NOTE FOR NT GOVERNMENT: Your policy of removing rest areas from public access IS CRIMINALLY STUPID! Recent research shows clearly that fatigue is the BIGGEST killer on our roads and you are taking away the one thing that the driving public needs in order to reduce fatigue. Going into roadhouses IS NOT the answer. It is not always possible or even convenient to stop, even if people can afford it.

Until this policy is overturned and more rest areas are put in place we have no choice but to recommend that people planning to travel Australia give the Northern Territory a miss. Your lives will be put at risk if you travel on NT roads because of the irresponsible behaviour of the NT Government.

#### **May 14<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Safely back in W.A. we reached Kununurra around 11am - 11am promptly became 9.30am as we turned our clocks back an hour and a half. As our favourite caravan park in Australia is in this town we booked in to Kimberley Land for two nights (which later became a week) and hopped into their lovely pool.

Although we don't have a great deal of money, there are some things we didn't do here last time and as we really don't plan on coming up this way again we have decided to try and do some of them now. Our first choice is the Triple J Tours cruise along the Ord River. At \$100 a head it isn't cheap but a number of people we have spoken to have given it glowing reviews so we have bitten the bullet and booked a tour for tomorrow.

A little later when we went shopping in town we joined a check out line at Coles only to find we were standing behind Sister Sarah whose house we had looked after in Halls Creek four years ago. She invited us over for dinner and it really felt like we had come home.

#### **May 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

The cruise was excellent. It runs from Lake Kununurra along the Ord River to the base of the Ord River Dam at Lake Argyle. Pickup is around 10:30am and the tour finishes after sunset (around 5:30pm.)

The boats average about 50kph and have a top speed of 80kph. They are fully covered although it isn't possible to be in full shade all the time so hats and sun screen are a good idea. The tour covers about 110 kilometres and includes a light lunch (basically cold meats, salad, cheese and crackers and cool drinks.) and afternoon tea (coffee, tea, scones and cake.)

It is very hard to find fault with the tour but it is quite expensive. There is plenty to see along the way including gorges, birds, fish, turtles, fresh water crocs, wallabys, some bush tucker and of course the Ord itself.

Our tour guide (Jeff) was a founding member of the business and has taken tours along the river for many years. His knowledge of the area and wildlife is encyclopaedic and he is very keen to share his knowledge with anyone who is interested.

We had been told by a number of people that this was the boat trip to do in Kununurra and having done the trip we have to recommend it to anyone coming up this way.



Ord River

#### **May 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

As the bus has been a bit unhappy about the heat and the engine was running on a bit when turned off I changed and reset the spark plug gaps today in an effort to forestall any problems in the next part of the journey. We will be off again on Wednesday and I can't say I'll be sorry to go. We like Kununurra and the view we have across the lake is beautiful but it is still quite hot up here (35C) and it is very sticky compared to Alice Springs.

Since we saw most of the sights around here last time we came through there isn't much else to do and I am looking forward to getting back on the road.

It's funny how perceptions of a place change depending on where you were last. The first time we came to Kununurra it was from HORRIBLE Halls Creek. Kununurra seemed like a vast improvement (which it really was) but this time we have come from several months in modern Alice Springs and the rather small Kununurra seems to have lost the



sense of civilisation it held for us the first time around. Not that our opinion has changed, we still like the town and the area around it, but this time it seems smaller and less impressive.

**May 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Our first stop out of Kununurra was at Spring Creek. Ordinarily this would be a good stop off point as it has plenty of shade and a good turning circle. This time, however, the turning circle was full of caravans. It turns out that Spring Creek is used as a good place to leave your caravan while you take your 4x4 off into the Bungles and have a look around.

The road from the Wyndham turn off to Warmun leaves a bit to be desired. A long section passes through hills and is still (four years after we first saw it) still unmarked. (ie. no centre lines etc.) The road surface is a bit on the rough side. From Warmun to Halls Creek the hills continue and the road is a bit narrow for big rigs but at least the surface improves.



Spring Creek

**May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

This meant leaving much later than usual as we had to wait for several vans to leave before there was room for the bus to turn around. We passed through Halls Creek very quickly stopping only for fuel. Having worked there for 7.5 months four years ago, we had no great desire to hang around.

By mid-afternoon we reached Mary Pool (118Km SW of Halls Creek) and this turned out to be the best rest area on the trip to date. The camping area is huge and located over a causeway across the Margaret River. There was still plenty of water although it had stopped flowing. The bird life around the large pool in the river was prolific and we spent the afternoon watching the antics of hawks, corellas and assorted other avians.



Mary Pool

**May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

After passing Halls Creek the road improves greatly being flat, wide and for the most part smooth. 20Km East of Fitzroy Crossing it becomes rough again but gets better about 50Km west. All the way from the Wyndham turn off

almost to Broome there are a series of one lane bridges where you have to watch for oncoming traffic and stop to let big rigs and those closer to the bridge cross.

The number of rest areas and laybys located in the Halls Creek shire is amazing. I don't think we have ever driven another stretch of road in Australia that caters so well for the travelling public.

After leaving Mary Pool we had planned to stop at one of two rest areas listed between Fitzroy Crossing and Willare Bridge. We now entered Derby Shire's jurisdiction and the change was immediately evident. We had expected to see the laybys we had become used to in Halls Creek shire continue, but we were sadly disappointed. When we reached the first designated rest area we found it was closed for maintenance and so had to press on to the next one listed about 70Km away. Imagine our disgust after driving the extra distance only to find that the second rest area was also closed for maintenance. This time I had no choice, the bus was getting hot and I was exhausted and to top it off I had to stop and put more petrol in from the jerry cans we carry.

After removing the 'road closed' sign and pulling in I could not resist adding a note on the sign to the idiots who had closed off the only two rest areas on a 215Km stretch of road at the same time. I doubt the nutter responsible for closing these rest areas will ever get to read this but if they do here is a personal message just for you - you are a DICKHEAD!

I know I get carried away about rest area availability but it isn't until you have to drive a heavy slow vehicle that hates the heat that you start to realise just how vital it is to have good stopping places every 25-50 kilometres. Driving a car 215 Kms is a doddle, driving our bus is not.

After stopping at Willare to shower and re-fuel we only had another kilometre to go to reach a small rest area near the river (full of crocodiles). The only area we could fit was near the road but small campervans could get further along the tracks to an excellent picnic spot right close to the water. Although the picnic area is listed as day use only it is only suggested that you consider camping at Willare roadhouse so we considered it and then decided against it.

We spent a rather sticky night before pulling out before sunrise and making the last dash 170Km to Broome and the coast.



Near Willare

#### **May 24<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

HOORAY! HOORAY! the sea at last! Beautiful Broome! Now I know why so many people rave on about Broome. After driving all that way with no sight of the sea, this wonderful azure sea by the red rocks is just Heaven on Earth. Last time we came to Broome (1995) we came along the coast and the impact was not nearly as great. This time after no catching a glimpse of the ocean for over 7 months the effect was breathtaking.

Broome has certainly changed since we last came here. Now there are big modern shopping centres, Action, Coles, Target and so on. Lots and lots of development but still the magnificent coastline.

Getting our priorities straight we headed for the shops to stock up on bait and fishing gear. Fishing will have to wait until later in the day as at the moment it is VERY HOT.



Gantheaume Point

**May 29<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

Our holiday and our time in Broome is drawing to a close as we will be back on the road on Saturday. Today we took the opportunity to visit Malcolm Douglas' Crocodile Park out near Cable Beach. Being a long time fan of Malcolm's I had hoped we might find him lurking in the shrubbery somewhere around the park but sadly he isn't at the park all that often.

We arrived at the park before the 3pm feeding tour was due to take place and so did about a hundred other people. The one thing that will leave some people disappointed about the 3pm tour is that too many people take the tour and some will see nothing but the backs of others when the feeding takes place. There is probably a good reason for only doing one tour a day but I have to admit that more tours would thin the numbers down a bit.

The park is interesting and you can watch some of Malcolm's documentaries in an outdoor viewing area before you go for a wander around. (Remember to take some insect repellent as the croc park has lots of pools where hungry mosquitos tend to breed.)

Having been to a croc park in Innisfail we had (to be honest) been hoping to see Malcolm rather than the crocs but as there were several species of crocodile on display (as well as a few kangaroos) there was more to see than we had expected. South American Caiman, New Guinea Crocs, American Alligators, Freshwater and Estuarine crocs make up the collection and it is worth coming to see what each species looks like.

We were almost finished looking around when Belle spotted a couple of ladies emerging from an area at the rear of the park and asked if they were related to Malcolm. They turned out to be Malcolm's wife and his daughter Mandy. We spent a few minutes chatting and found that Malcolm was suffering from a nasty bout of the flu, but we did get to meet Boondi who accompanies him on his travels through the Kimberley. We even got to take some photos of Boondi atop a model of a croc that will appear soon in the slide show section of this site. It was very interesting meeting the people behind 'the legend' as Malcolm's family haven't appeared in any of his films as far as I can remember.

Boondi of course was 'the star' of the meeting and seemed to relish having her picture taken while standing on top of a big fibreglass croc. She certainly knows what a camera is for. Not long ago we read a book written by a cameraman who worked with Malcolm on one expedition. The cameraman did a real 'hatchet job' which resulted in a court case that I am happy to say Malcolm won. We wish Malcolm a speedy recovery and hope he is planning to make more films soon. A special thank you to Malcolm's wife and daughter for stopping to talk with us and for being so charming, as I am sure tourists and travellers like us can become a bit of a chore at times.



Boondi & Belle

**May 31<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

On our way south west again. We passed Roebuck Plains (stopping to top up the autogas which was 85.5c as opposed to 76.5c in Broome only 34Km away) and turned right and on to the final stage of the journey before what we hope will be an extended stay in the Karratha area.

The first major rest area we passed (Goldwire) was closed for maintenance and we were expecting more of the stupidity we encountered in Derby shire where the only two rest areas were closed. As it turned out East Pilbara Shire is not as crazy as Derby and the Stanley rest area 56Km further south west was open. We stopped for the night and were soon joined by a number of other travellers including Tony & Roz who we had spoken to via Email a few times. They invited us over for dinner and after a chat about the road and various other topics we all joined a group that had gathered around a campfire. I can't remember all the names of people who were there but I do remember Brenton and Kay and their big 36' Leyland National (Oscar) that Brenton had fitted out (very nicely) himself. Another face in the crowd was Carl who really wanted us to take a picture of his motorhome and put it on the web site so I am hoping the shot I took in the early morning light comes out so we can put it up for him.

A very enjoyable evening reminded us of what life on the road was all about. travel, interesting experiences and good company around a campfire.



Oscar

**June 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Back on the road in the early morning and heading for Cape Keraudren (I have been spelling this name incorrectly until now) we got as far as the Sandfire roadhouse only to find the autogas pump was out of action. I feel sure if the

diesel pumps or unleaded pumps were out of action the roadhouse would not be standing very long. One thing that is guaranteed to make me see red are broken gas pumps or out of autogas signs. As we had stocked up on petrol in Broome I refilled the tank and we kept on going to Pardoo who thankfully did have a working pump.

The road down to Keraudren is about 13Km and unsealed. Parts of it are pretty rough but it is straight until you reach the Ranger's station so you can put your foot down and reduce the effects of the corrugations somewhat. There is currently an entry fee of \$10 per vehicle and a camping fee of \$5 a night. If you stay a week this works out to \$40 so that is what we decided to do.

We have heard (as yet unconfirmed) rumours that Cleaverville has been closed again so we wanted to stop and do some fishing here. We will put off having anything to do with Centrelink until we are ready to start looking for work again.

Keraudren has 4 campsites. The first is off to the right (Cootenbrand Creek) as you drive in. It is more suited to 4x4s and campers and the track in can be a bit soft. The next area is near Sandy Beach (a bit misnamed as it could equally be called Rocky Beach) and is the one best suited for buses. This is where we chose to stay. The other two sites (Mosquito Creek and the Boat Ramp) are good for caravans and are generally the most crowded as they are closest to the boat ramp. They also have lovely views over a big blue bay (well it is blue when the tide is in).

Keraudren has pit toilets and bins but no other facilities. Water and other supplies are available from Pardoo Roadhouse.



Keraudren

#### **June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

Our first chance to do some fishing. The horrible little Mercury engine which has for so long caused us nothing but trouble has finally given up the ghost so I had to row out and fish from about 200 yards off the boat ramp. Fishing was pretty poor and we saw nothing but garfish. As these are excellent bait for bigger fish we caught a few and put one out. Not long afterwards the line took off and I brought up a small shark. It got off as it came up under the boat but at least I got to see what it was. Some time later the same line took off again and I expected to see another shark but this time I landed a broad barred Spanish mackerel which made my day.

Dinner was marinated mackerel (Soy sauce, tomato sauce and lime juice) and chips, yum!

#### **June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

Fishing again but no luck today. We managed to hole the boat yesterday and the trip out today was only saved by a piece of chewing gum which acted as a temporary seal for the small hole. (Anyone who goes out fishing in small boats should always carry a packet of chewing gum in the fishing box as it is very good as a temporary patch for small holes.)

#### **June 4<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

A rest day today to get the hole in the boat properly sealed. Time to clean some of the red dust out of the bus and perform some long overdue chores. Tried fishing from the beach in the afternoon and caught a saw fish and a shovel nose ray - both released.

#### **June 5<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

The dreaded easterly winds are back today and stopped us going out fishing in the boat. Too windy to fish off the beach as well so another unplanned rest day.

#### **June 6<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Wind still around today but took the boat out into the bay. No fish at all today!

**June 7<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

Since the fishing here is lousy at the moment we are packing up today and preparing to move on tomorrow. The good news is that Cleaverville hasn't been closed down so that will be our next major stop. Once there we can start looking for work in Karratha.

**June 8<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Stopped in at Yule River rest area. Nice spot by the river and the chance of a swim in the river. Locals say crocs have been seen in the area from time to time and sharks are sometimes in the river but as a horde of local kids had been swimming all day and none had vanished we figured it was safe enough to risk a somewhat chilly dip.

Yule River suffers from one thing above all others - DUST - there is clouds of it. Every time a new vehicle pulled in a huge cloud of fine dust covered everything in the area. That combined with two big rigs disgorging a bunch of noisy children made us think better of staying the night so we packed up and spent the night at a layby only a few kilometres south.



Yule River

**June 9<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

HOORAY HOORAY HOORAY! we are finally back at Cleaverville. It took us most of the day to set up camp but were pleased to find many of the people we made friends with 5 years ago are still coming up here. The road in is pretty rough and badly needs grading but at least we got here. Despite some misinformation about prices I can now state that they are; \$5 a night, \$30 a week or \$100 a month.

Everything here is just as we remember it and we have been told that the fish and crabs are running pretty strongly so we are expecting to do well.

**June 12<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

After catching only one legal sized bream (which we let go again) at the creek and not finding anywhere near the number of octopus on the reefs at low tide we are a little worried about the conditions here but we won't really find out what things are like until we get our new engine for the boat either tomorrow or Monday.

We have opted for a Yamaha 9.9hp 2 stroke which at a changer over price of \$2300 is more than I wanted to pay but we do really need a good reliable engine. The Mercury 5hp we had was as reliable as a 2 bob watch and we have heard nothing but complaints about Mercury engines from other people who have them. The Yamaha should give us plenty of extra power to get out to fishing grounds more quickly.

The next thing to spend money on will be a new generator as the old Honda em1000f is now burning lots of oil - a sure indication that the rings are worn. We would like to get a generator big enough to run the air conditioner if we need to but it will all depend on price.

As we have enough money to keep us going for a few weeks we have decided 'b#%!!&r Centrelink' and 'b#%!!&r looking for work' we can do that when we go further south. We are just going to do some fishing and enjoy ourselves. Centrelink are such a huge pain in the arse anyway it isn't worth getting the piddling little sum of \$150 a week they pay for unemployment benefits anyway.

The easterly winds came back today with a vengeance so no fishing from the shore or at the creek.



Cleaverville Sunset

**June 17<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

The easterly winds are still blowing so no chance to get the boat wet yet. We went down to 40 Mile campsite yesterday and found the access road to be in much better shape than the one to Cleaverville. 40 Mile turn off is about 55Km west of Karratha and then a further 12Km over unsealed (good) road to the campsite by the beach. It is more exposed than Cleaverville but is equally large and has plenty of room for anyone who wants to get in there. Facilities and charges are the same as Cleaverville.

As our power system hasn't been performing to expectations we bought 2 new solar panels yesterday which gives us a total of 200w or just over 12 amps. The new panels were 40w each and cost \$900. We have also purchased a 20 amp battery charger (\$217) and are expecting delivery of a 2kva Honda Eu2000I (\$2170) on Thursday. Hopefully this will solve our lack of power for good.



40 Mile

**June 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

The good news: the new generator arrived today and we can use several appliances in the bus at the same time without the lights going off. The bad news: the wind IS STILL blowing and now a thunder storm has been forecast for the weekend so fishing gets put off yet again. Never mind we are still enjoying life in the campsite and getting to know everyone here quite well.

I have finally managed to get to the local library and update the web site but it cost \$8! Alice Springs gave free internet access but here it costs \$4 per half hour. It really would be nice to make enough money out of the site to at least cover my costs. (ADVERT: Don't forget you can buy the entire contents of this site with some extras on CD-ROM for JUST \$40... beg, plead, grovel).

Oh well, I was never meant to be rich.

**June 24<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

The weather is finally coming good after a long spell of strong winds. We had a thunder storm on Sunday night which dumped quite a lot of rain. Thankfully we are parked in a sandy area and the stream running past the front of the bus was quickly absorbed. Never letting a chance for fresh water pass us by we had all the buckets out and collected over a hundred litres in about 20 minutes.

Yesterday was the first chance we had to get out in the boat and Belle was sea sick. There was a bit of a swell and it didn't take too long before there was some extra berley in the water. We caught a few fish but none were 'keepers' so we came back empty handed.

Today was much better and we brought back 3 NW Snapper and 2 Spanish flag. When it came to eating the snapper we were very disappointed as they had a very strong chemical taste. We think there may be a problem with some sort of pollution in this area as the fish tasted awful. Having caught this species here before we know what to expect so there is something very wrong with the water in the bay.

We were only out fishing for about 3 hours but saw a pod of dolphins, a shark, a couple of turtles and a sea snake which came up to investigate the boat. I also caught a large remora (sucker fish) which was put back as they aren't much in the way of an eating fish.

Soon after we got back to shore a thick fog rolled in and stayed around until almost 5pm. This could have been a real problem for anyone a long way offshore who didn't have an electronic navigation aid but thankfully everyone here looks out for each other and people were sounding car horns and flashing lights to get everyone back to shore safely.

If the weather holds we will go out again tomorrow and this time we will go around the back of the island and hope we catch fish that aren't affected by whatever is making the snapper in the bay taste so bad.

The new generator is doing a wonderful job and makes me wish we had opted for a bigger generator in the first place. Now we can switch on the fridge and the TV and not have the lights go out. The battery charger is also working much better and is putting 20A into the deep cycles for 4-5 hours a day. Finally we have a system that seems to be self sustaining even though this means using 2-3 litres of petrol a day.

#### **June 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Fishing again this morning yielded two good size snapper and three Spanish flag. We also dropped some crab nets out on the sand but had no luck there. We caught far more fish than we kept but we keep a bucket full of water and let smaller fish go as we catch larger ones. This means replacing the water in the bucket several times but at least it gives the smaller fish a chance to get bigger. We are hoping that these larger snapper don't taste like the ones we had yesterday. They don't seem to have the same pungent odour so we will just wait and see. (Later - the big fish were ok.)

The weather is very humid at the moment so nights are uncomfortable and sticky. Even paper in the bus is damp and limp.

#### **June 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

This morning we went crabbing but after several hours only managed to pick up 4 crabs. Belle was happy as this is enough for her to make her Singapore chilli crab dish and since I don't bother much with crabs it is enough to keep her going for several days.

We went in to Wickham to do some shopping in the afternoon and were very happy to discover that the road has now been graded so we weren't shaken to bits in reaching the main road.

As we were leaving the shops Belle suggested we check the local notice board and we found an advert for a collapsible boat trailer. We had been thinking about buying one but didn't like the prices much as new ones are around the \$1700 mark. We went to have a look at the trailer (a Bulldog) and ended up buying it for \$900. Once folded up it fits neatly into the back of the car. I hope this is going to alleviate the back pains I get when launching the boat from the beach.

#### **July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

The last few times we have been out fishing haven't produced any good results. The water has been very cloudy and it has been difficult to find the reefs. As a result we decided to buy a cheap (cheap?) echo sounder which has now been installed on the dinghy. It is a Navman 4100 (made in New Zealand - \$350) and seems to work quite well. At least we will be able to find out what the structure of the bottom is like now and with a bit of luck we will get a few more fish. We have also added a pump up front wheel to the boat trailer that cost us \$95. I hope we don't have many more things to buy as we have spent too much money lately.

The wind has come up again over the past two days so we are waiting for it to stop so we can get out and enjoy ourselves again. Days stuck in camp pass quickly enough as there always seems to be something to keep me busy. I used to wonder what we did here that made the time pass so quickly but I now remember that it was all the small jobs I had to do to keep things organised.

Example: Today.

Woke early and had brekky.

Fix cable in boat that had come loose.

Re-rig fishing rod.

Re-stock boat fishing box from main fishing box.

Fill shower tank with water.

Fill drinking tank with water.

Fill generator with fuel.

Check oil in generator.

Clean camp gas cooker.

Clean and set up charcoal grill.

Sort out and organise stuff in boxes under the bus.

Empty and clean porta potty - yuk!



Make new batch of porta potty chemicals \*  
Clean rubbish out of car.  
Sharpen fillet knives.  
Re-charge power pack.  
Write up generator and outboard usage figures on computer.  
Take rubbish up to the bins.

All this and it is only 2pm. No wonder we never seem to have much time to get bored here and this is a non-fishing day. If we went fishing I would add: Make berley, clean engine and boat.

#### **July 4<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Managed to get out fishing near the creek today despite the wind. We started off catching nothing but catfish but Belle managed to hook 3 nice mangrove jack which were served up as tonight's dinner so all was not lost.

Our power system seems to be holding up well and the batteries are even close to full charge now. This system is still a hybrid solar/generator system but for anyone interested the details are as follows:

1 x 120w 7.1a panel fixed to the roof  
2 x 40w 2.5a panels which can be moved about  
1 x 20a regulator (Dick Smith cheapie)  
2 x 109ah deep cycle batteries  
2 x 75ah deep cycle batteries  
1 x 1500w inverter (modified sine wave)  
1 x Honda eu20i generator  
1 x 20a battery charger

This all adds up to a 'pretty penny' but it now seems to be self sustaining if we run the generator 3-4 hours each night. The cost of running this system is about \$4 a day maximum - not cheap but at least bearable. I will be working out more exact figures over the next few weeks and I am hoping that this initial estimate will drop a bit.

The appliances we run with this system are mainly the 4 x 13w fluoro lights, the fridge (a standard 240v house fridge), the TV, videos, stereo and the computer. The biggest draw on the batteries is the fridge which pulls up to 20a. As a result we set the fridge thermostat on the coldest setting and run it for 2 hours in the morning, 1.5 hours at lunch time and then whenever the generator is turned on at night. Everything inside stays cold overnight as it isn't being opened. We can easily make ice in the freezer with the fridge is working to it full capacity for just 7-8 hours a day. The fridge is controlled by a timer so it turns itself on and off for the two cycles on the inverter automatically.

Around us all the people with only solar power are having nightmares as there has been plenty of cloud and their batteries are all running out. I think we will be happy to stay with our hybrid system as it covers the days when the sun refuses to come out.

We were given a twin tub washing machine today but our neighbour (Thanks Alan) and that is yet to be factored in to the power use but as it is just a once a week job it will probably get done using the generator so there will be a minimal impact.

#### **July 7<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

During the last three days fishing things have got steadily better. The first of the three was a bit of a disaster as we launched off the beach using the trailer just after a 4x4 had got bogged and dug the beach to bits. We didn't have much luck fishing but got on to a good school of big fat gardies just before the wind came up very strongly from the south west. We came back in to shore as it looked like the wind was in to stay but the minute we had the boat back up on the trailer again the wind dropped to nothing.

Sunday was better as we went to the creek and picked up some cod, Trevally and a grunter. We kept the cod and gave the other fish to Alan as his motor has been in the repair shop and he hasn't had a chance to get out fishing yet.

Today we did even better at the creek bringing back 3 yellowfin bream, one big black bream, three cod and a good sized mangrove jack.

Tomorrow will be a rest day but we need to go into town and do some shopping and various other tasks including getting the boat re-licensed as it lapsed some time ago.

#### **July 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

Yesterday we were fishing in the creek again and managed to catch 5 bream. I did catch a large cod as well but have decided that I won't be taking any more of them. Two main reasons for this, first is they are very hard to kill quickly and I don't like them to suffer any more than necessary and secondly, even big cod seem to yield very little meat compared to their overall size.

Today we went back into town for supplies. Our inverter is playing up and I have ordered a new one but that won't be here until later in the week. We have to start watching our money now as we haven't had an income for 2 months and we need to have enough money left to get us at least as far as Geraldton.

Alan (our next door neighbour) has just purchased a wind generator and everyone in camp is waiting expectantly to find out how well it works once it is set up. Power generation is a frequent topic at 'happy hour' and any new means of getting energy into the batteries generates (pardon the pun) lots of interest.



Cleaverville Creek

**July 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

The last few days have been both eventful and stressful. On the 16<sup>th</sup> we went fishing again in the creek but we weren't far from shore when Belle asked about all the water in the back of the boat. I looked around to find that we were RAPIDLY sinking. As I had no idea where the water was coming from and it was already about 6 inches deep all I could do was run the boat up on to a mud bank and begin bailing like crazy.

I finally reduced the water to the point where I could see the leak - it was a patch I had put on using Sikaflex and the whole thing had come off. If we had been any further out we would have been in real trouble. After getting most of the water out and holding the plug of Sikaflex down firmly with one hand, I started the engine with the other hand (no easy thing to do) and motored as fast as I could back to the launching area.

We took the boat straight into town to get welded but it couldn't be done until the 18<sup>th</sup>. The 18<sup>th</sup> was also our 22<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary so I had intended a trip into town in any case. The thing that really cheesed me off was that the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> was almost perfect fishing weather and we had no boat.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> I went into town to pick up the boat (\$85) and also to pick up a present for Belle. In the evening we were invited over for dinner with friends (Les & Dawn) and were treated to one of the best meals we have ever had. Crayfish, prawns, crabs and different types of fish were just some of the things on the menu and we had a great evening.

Today we took off to the creek with the boat again expecting everything to be Ok. As soon as the boat was in the water we found we had problems again. This time the side seams of the boat had split (mostly due to the pounding it gets from corrugations every time we go to the creek) and yet another days fishing was lost.

My temper can boil over at times and it did today as I managed to break an oar over the boat in pure frustration. We have now decided that launching here is just too hard unless you have a 4wd so we are packing up and heading off to 40 Mile sometime next week. 40 Mile at least has a proper boat ramp and you don't have to drive over 5km of rough road to get to it. I have patched the seams using Sikaflex (tempting fate?) and am hoping that the next time we launch the boat will stay dry on the inside at least.

We don't know much about 40 Mile so it will be a new experience to stay there for a few weeks.

**July 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

We haven't gone to 40 mile (yet) as the weather is continuing to blow a gale and 40 Mile is even more exposed than Cleaverville. The weather is supposed to improve over the next couple of days so we will give this area one more go before we pull up stakes and move. We are half packed up at the moment so we can be on the move within a day or two if we feel we want to get going.

**July 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

The wind finally gave up today so we took the boat down to the creek expecting more problems but we managed to get out and actually do some fishing. The catch for the day was 3 black bream, the biggest 33cm. We caught a couple of undersized yellowfin bream but let them go. Belle didn't have much of a day as she caught nothing but butterfish - which despite the name are not good eating even if they are big enough.

**July 28<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

Fishing yesterday and launching from a new location brought little reward but we did catch a couple of Spanish flag (one at 35cm was good size) which was enough for dinner. Today we went back to the creek again as the wind is back up and despite watching assorted fish swimming around under the boat the only catch was a yellowfin bream which we let go.

The wind is supposed to be up again tomorrow so we may give fishing a miss and get down to cleaning up the bus which is long overdue.

#### **July 29<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

The wind wasn't as bad as expected to start with this morning but Belle was fed up with going out and not catching anything so asked our neighbour Alan if he would like to go out. Alan has a small inflatable boat but hasn't managed to get out since he got here. We tried the creek to the east today and were lucky enough to come back with 4 big mud crabs, 3 big bream, a cod and a catfish. As Alan hasn't had much fish and we still have some in the freezer, he had the fish and Belle cooked up some chilli crab which we all enjoyed for dinner.

This is probably the best day out since we got here and Belle missed it. The trip back in from the creek was very lumpy as the wind had picked up to about 20 knots. Even so it was well worth the effort.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Wednesday)**

Finally today was a perfect fishing day. We went out early (7am) and because of the tide we were out until about 1pm. The winds were light and the fish were hungry. We came back with a very good feed of Spanish Flag, or to give them their correct name, striped sea perch.



Striped sea perch (Spanish flag)

#### **7<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Thursday)**

Another full day fishing today as the tide kept us from getting back in until about 2.30pm. Things started very slowly as we moved around to different spots on different reefs. We caught a couple of Spanish Flag and I brought in a small shark which we let go. The highlight of the morning was watching a large school of very big mackerel (about 30 or so) swimming lazily along the edge of an outer reef. I didn't have a float line out at the time so there wasn't any chance of catching one but it was good to see the big fish coming back into the area.

After catching a good sized snapper close in to shore we went along the coast to Cleaverville creek and fished a small gully as the tide began to rise. The first fish I caught was a small catfish which I unhooked and was putting back in when it wriggled and fell down onto my left leg. Catfish have 3 long sharp spines with serrated edges and I found myself wearing a wriggling fish as one of the pectoral spines punched into my leg down to the muscle. There was no option but to grasp the fish and rip the spine out quickly (the spines are also coated in some sort of poison) which left me feeling very queasy. Anyone who has been spiked by a catfish will sympathise with the pain I was in for the next hour or so while the poison slowly dissipated. The side of my leg was swollen for the rest of the day and even a day later there was considerable pain around the sight of the wound. All I can say is thank goodness it was only a small fish.

I have always been taught that the best fishing is 2 hours before and two hours after the high tide, but I am beginning to have second thoughts. The best fishing we are having up here seems to be around low tide and today was no exception. The bream were very much 'on the bite' and we caught 3 legal sized ones plus a finger mark bream. There were a number of other catches including trevally and smaller bream which we put back.

It was a very long day (8-9 hours) and even though we only came back with 7 fish, a bit of a sunburn and in my case a very sore leg, it was still another good day out.

#### **9<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Saturday)**

Alan and I took the boat out this morning with the hopes of catching a feed of crabs. As it turned out the wind was well and truly up and we couldn't get out of the creek mouth so we made the best of it and dropped the nets up in the creek itself. As this area is pretty well fished (and crabbed) out we only caught one mud crab and a couple of fish (bream and whiting) but at least we didn't come home empty handed.

Tomorrow is shaping up to be the same sort of day - lots of wind. I'm sure it wasn't as bad when we were up here last time but then you can't rely on the weather.

#### **14<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Thursday)**

We are finally getting ready to move on from Cleaverville. The wind this year has made getting out to fish very difficult and it doesn't look like getting better in the next few days so it is time to move on. We have decided to give Onslow a miss again as most people we have spoken to reckon it isn't worth the 160Km detour.

We plan at this stage to stop off at Quobba for a couple of weeks before heading for Geraldton where we hope to stop and explore the area for a couple of months at least. We have always given Geraldton no more than a cursory glance as we passed through so it is about time to see what the area has to offer since it is only about 400Km north of Perth.

**16<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Saturday)**

We are now at Quobba and have initially booked in for a week. The journey down from Cleaverville was uneventful except for auto gas not being available at the Karratha truck stop (broken pump) and then at Fortescue who have removed their auto gas tanks. Kleenheat have a lot to answer for when it comes to making sure the travelling public can get gas when they need it.

Last night we stopped at Barradale which we were told was a better stop than Lyndon River. Having now seen both I would have stopped at Lyndon River if I had the choice.

I grudgingly filled my tanks at Minilya (they have been responsible for the ban on overnighting at the nearby rest area) as I had no choice, but others who can make a choice may want to think about how profits are being put before safety by this business.

Today we spent time just settling in and finally having a nice shower. Tomorrow we will see about fishing.

Quobba is VERY much more crowded than it was when we were here in August 1997 and fees are currently \$5 a night. Last time we were here it was practically deserted and now there are camps everywhere making it impossible to get anywhere near the beach.



Quobba

**18<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Monday)**

The campsite has emptied out here a bit since the weekend and we have managed to move into a site with a sea view. The weather isn't that great and like Cleaverville we are being harassed by strong winds. The urge to go fishing just isn't there when the wind is up so I spent yesterday cleaning up the bus which was getting into a real mess.

Quobba is a long way off the highway (58km sealed road) and not being able to do much in the way of fishing makes it a bit boring. There are nice walks along the coast but I think a week here will be enough before we head down to Bush bay some 30Kms south of Carnarvon.

We are planning a trip into town (82Kms) on Wednesday to stock up before we move on.

**21<sup>st</sup> August 2003 (Thursday)**

Alan (from Cleaverville) drove in this afternoon and decided not to stay as the weather reports are for rain tonight and access to Bush Bay may get difficult. As we were going to Bush Bay tomorrow anyway we hastily packed up and headed south. We arrived at Bush Bay not long before the rain and were buffeted by strong winds all night.

**25<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Monday)**

We have had virtually no respite from the wind which howls in from across Shark Bay. We did manage to go out fishing for a very brief period but caught nothing useful. The water here is VERY shallow for a LONG way out. The average depth in the first couple of miles out would probably be little more than two feet. There are some channels around and one we found dropped from three feet to twenty feet in a matter of a few yards so once the cursed wind gives up we may actually have the chance of catching some fish.

**29<sup>th</sup> August 2003 (Friday)**

The wind continues to howl and there is no chance to get out and fish. Alan isn't catching much in his set net but he is at least getting some fish. We keep hoping for a calm day so we can at least get out for a couple of hours. We are stuck in Carnarvon until Belle manages to get some blood tests done and the further south we go the colder it will get anyway so we are just sitting it out and waiting for the weather to get better.

**31<sup>st</sup> August 2003 (Sunday)**

We have managed to get out fishing over the past two days but aren't having much luck locating any good fish. Yesterday we went along the coast to a small creek which took over an hour as we had to motor along with the engine on maximum tilt to avoid all the sandy shallows.

Apart from seeing a big sting ray and a turtle we didn't catch anything and moved back off shore to try and find some fish in the channel that runs away from the coast. The wind came up before we had a chance to do much so we went back out again today.

Following the channel out we found a deep 20' hole and fished there as the fish alarm on the echo sounder was having a fit. I did bring in a snapper but it was undersized. Apart from hooking a shark which quickly bit through my line, we caught nothing but trumpeter (rubbish fish) but it was a bit of fun after being out of the water for so long.

Last time we were in Carnarvon I bought Garmin GPS12 (\$470) and have been working out how to use it. Now with the echo sounder and GPS, if we ever find a good fishing spot we will be able to get back there and fish it again. The trouble is finding a good spot in the first place.

Alan and Joe picked up a dozen or so mullet in their nets today so there isn't any shortage of fish to eat. Earl has seen plenty of squid along the beach but they haven't been that interested in attacking the jigs. At least it gives us some confidence that when the weather finally does come good this should be a good place to be.

The wind continues to give us problems but we don't have anywhere else to go until the weather warms up a bit.



Looking out of the bus at Bush Bay

**8<sup>th</sup> September 2003 (Monday)**

The wind finally stopped today and we managed to go out fishing for the first time in a week. After catching nothing but trumpeter fish we were about to give up and were pulling the lines in when I suddenly felt a very heavy weight on the hand line I was pulling up. At first thought it was a shark and it took quite some time to see some colour in the water but when I finally did I couldn't believe my eyes. I wasn't sure what sort of fish it was but it was certainly the biggest one I have ever hooked.

The fish was pulling the boat round from side to side as it swam underneath and I was worried about the line being cut on the sharp edges on the bottom of the boat. It seemed to take for ever to get the fish up to the side of the boat but when I did the line parted company with the trace and I was left holding the end of a line with no fish attached.

Belle had brought along our dab net (which we usually don't take out) and she quickly placed the end of the net over the fish's head before it had time to realise that it was free to swim away. I grabbed the tail and together we hauled the huge fish over the side of the dinghy.

The fish was a mulloway (also known as a black jewfish in W.A.) and at 110cm long it weighed in at around 25kgs. This isn't that big for mulloway, which grow to 61kgs and over 2 metres long but it was the biggest fish I have ever landed and it certainly made our day.

The fish had taken a very small hook with only a small piece of octopus as bait. We found out later that the fish's stomach contained a whole large trumpeter so snacking on a tiny bit of octopus turned out to be a fatal bit of greed.



Mulloway

**9<sup>th</sup> September 2003 (Tuesday)**

As the weather was still good for fishing today we went out again, even though we don't need any more fish yet, and motored out to the same place we were yesterday. Even though the echo sounder indicated some big fish in the area they weren't biting but the sea was calm and the sun was out so we didn't mind at all that we came back with nothing today.

While fishing we have seen dugong, turtles and plenty of sitting rays. There are also some big sharks in the area (well this is called Shark Bay after all) and people coming here would be well advised NOT to go wading in the shallows after sunset.

**11<sup>th</sup> September 2003 (Thursday)**

Today we went for a trip into Carnarvon to pick up water and supplies. As the unsealed road to Uendoo Creek was finally open we went that way to check on what the creek was like but weren't very impressed with what we saw. We will go back later on to check the area out in more detail. On the way back from Carnarvon Belle was driving and I remember thinking that perhaps I should warn her to check behind for following vehicles as the turn off to Bush Bay isn't all that clearly marked and someone following behind might not be fully paying attention and may not expect us to stop and turn right on what looks like an ordinary straight stretch of road. I dismissed the notion as pretty unlikely and thought no more of it.

We approached the turn off as usual, Belle slowing the car and signalling. As we started to make the turn to the right I saw a large vehicle flash across in front of us and there was a loud BANG as it swiped across the front right side of our car. Much to my surprise, what I had thought about no more than 20 minutes earlier had actually happened. Thankfully no one was hurt but our poor little Barina has now got a very squashed front right fender and no front right-hand lights. The bumper is hanging off but at least there doesn't seem to be any major structural damage and we can still use the car to get around.

We had in fact been hit by a Toyota Troop Carrier Camper driven by a couple of tourists from Germany. As there isn't any doubt about who was responsible for the accident I expect their trip 'down under' is going to cost them somewhat more than they expected. Their Kea camper is insured with Lumley who are also the insurers for our bus. We have dealt with Lumley in the past and they have always been very good so we are hoping the fact that our car is uninsured isn't going to complicate things at all.

The other couple were very good as they stopped and followed us back to the police station in Carnarvon to make an accident report. It will be a big enough pain for us to get our car fixed but having an accident like that while you are in a foreign country is another kind of nightmare.

The frightening thing is that if we had started to turn a fraction of a second earlier the Toyota would have impacted flush on the side of our little car and I wouldn't be sitting here writing this now. Incidents like this tend to bring life into a much sharper focus and make you appreciate all the good things you have. I had in fact been a bit miffed as tomorrow is my 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday and Belle hadn't got me a birthday present. After the accident I told her that I DID have a present after all, that she wasn't hurt in the accident and that was all the present I would ever need.

The wind is up again and we can't go fishing but after today we are just happy to be able to still hear the wind.

A note for overseas visitors:

Although Australia has plenty of long flat straight roads, it is absolutely essential that you don't let the wide open spaces lull you into a false sense of security. Animals can wander across the road at almost any time and people will turn off the main road in a myriad of unexpected places. It is vital that everyone pay attention to what is in front of

them at all times. The lady driving behind us made a mistake, but it was a mistake that could so easily have cost lives. If a vehicle slows down dramatically in front of you then it is likely that the vehicle is going to turn off the main road. (In our case the fact that our brake lights and indicators were on should have helped.) Don't let impatience get the better of you, slow down and wait to see what happens, you are much more likely to get safely to your destination that way. In a country where daily drives are measured in hours a few seconds delay will cost you nothing.



A lucky escape for us but not for the poor Barina – this was to be its final undoing.

**September 18<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

The wind has finally won and after 4 weeks at Bush Bay we are packing up and moving on to Geraldton. Out of the 28 days we have been here the wind has been howling across Shark Bay for 26. It has finally worn us down and despite the one excellent fish we caught here we can't hold out any longer.

Hopefully we will be back on the road on Saturday and in Geraldton by Sunday.

**September 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

We had hoped to get away early but packing up is getting more difficult as we collect more bits and pieces. The Little Bulldog boat trailer proved to be a bit of a headache for a while but we finally managed to chain it on the back of the car trailer under the back of the car.

Our target for today was Galena Bridge which is a trip of around 350Km. The drive down through this area can sometimes be a bit tedious but at this time of the year it is an absolute joy. Although this year isn't the best as far as wildflowers are concerned it is still one of the best natural spectacles that I have seen anywhere. The sheer variety of colours and flower species is astounding.

To cap it off today was one of those days when everything is just right and it really feels good to be alive.



Galena rest area – the next day – how the weather changes things

**September 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

Back to civilisation - well almost. Although we are only 10Km from the centre of Geraldton there is NO mobile phone reception at Greenough River mouth. Having my first hot shower in literally months (I hasten to mention I have had plenty of showers, it's just they were all cold to luke warm at best) was nice but I really don't like being back in a caravan park after so long in bush camp surroundings.

I did originally intend to stay in the Geraldton area until after Christmas but I am having second thoughts. We need to get the car repaired but that could just as easily be done in Perth as here. There is plenty to explore around this area so any decision on what we do next needs to be made once we have had a good look round.



Greenough River

**September 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Despite the foul weather we did some exploring today. The first stop was Coronation Beach about 33Km north of Geraldton. We have passed the turn off to this site many times but have never gone down to see what it was like. The road in was in reasonable condition with the first 5 of 8 kilometres being sealed. There is quite a steep descent to the campsite which is located quite close to the beach. There aren't that many campsites and big rigs could have problems here if the area is crowded during peak season. Charges here are currently \$5 a night.

From there we went north to Northampton and Horrocks Beach. The drive through this area was similar in many ways to the lovely countryside around Adelaide and despite the intermittent rain and strong winds it was a nice drive.

We then took the turn off to Nabawa (almost too small to be called a town) and then went south west through the Chapman Valley. This area is really beautiful at this time of year with fields of yellow and blue flowers stretching for miles around. Just north of the Chapman River bridge on Chapman Valley Road is a good rest area with seats and tables with some spectacular views surrounding it.

Back in Geraldton we had a look at the new museum which is a good place to spend a couple of hours browsing and looking at films in the theatre. The good news is that admission is free.

The weather here really sucks at the moment with sudden fierce squalls coming in from the sea. From what we have seen so far I think our original estimate of a few months here was wildly optimistic, I think perhaps a few days will see us on the road south again. There are probably two more day trips to make before we exhaust what the area has to offer.



Coronation Beach

**September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

After a morning running around town sorting out various bits and pieces we went for a drive to Ellendale Pool in the afternoon. This campsite can be reached by taking the turn off the highway just south of Greenough Hamlet and then following the signs from Walkaway. Access is sealed for all but the last 7km and there is a steep descent just before the road becomes unsealed.

The pool sits at the base of a large cliff face and is quite picturesque. Swimming in the pool on a hot day would be nice but we are at least a couple of months too early for that. The campsite isn't huge but big rigs could get in if there aren't too many others here. There is a time limit of 3 nights at this site.





Ellendale Pool

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

A full day out today exploring the coast south of Geraldton. We found a nice spot on the beach at Seven Mile (north of Dongara) and then went further south to the coastal tourist drive which follows the coast towards Leeman.

There are only a few sites along this road which would be any good for camping (actually there are several good sites but most of these have no camping signs plastered all over them.) and the only one we found that would be big enough for our bus was at Cliff Head North. There is another site a little further south at Little Freshwater but it isn't big enough for us.

After stopping at Leeman to have a quick look around we took the road to Eneabba and had a look at Lake Indoon. Currently there is a \$5 per person charge here but the camping area isn't all that big and is further restricted for big rigs by overhanging branches on big gum trees. There are toilets and HOT showers here as well as a boat ramp. It would make a nice stop off for a few nights but we have more or less decided to head back to Perth this weekend.

We passed Greenough Hamlet on the way back to the bus and anyone who hasn't yet made the effort to stop in and have a look round, should do so as it is very interesting. There is a small fee but that goes towards the upkeep so is money well spent. If you do stop here remember to follow the sealed road on the other side of the highway and have a look at Grays store and the small church next door.

There are a large number of heritage buildings in this area, it is just a shame that they are so widely scattered. If they were built closer together it would be a much bigger tourist draw card that it is.



Seven Mile (the last night the bus ever spent on the road ... quite sad...)

**September 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

A busy day today saw the morning taken up with a ride in the boat up the Greenough River followed by an abortive attempt to catch fish. As the weather was getting better as the day wore on we decided to go for a drive out to Coalseam National Park. This is accessible from Mingenew, Mullewa and Walkaway. We took the road from Walkaway (a round trip of nearly 200Km) up across the hills.

Coalseam is a gem of a place to go and see at this time of year as the wildflowers are in huge abundance through the park. Entering from the northern end we first came across the campsite on top of a large hill called The Breakaways. This area is large but has no facilities for campers. There is a better and more popular campsite down the hill at a place called Miners Picnic Site. Strangely there are no toilets at either camp ground but there are toilets at the S Bend picnic site.

There is also a lookout and another picnic site (Fossil) in the park but camping is only allowed at the sites already mentioned. Coalseam is where coal (duh!) was discovered but the quality and quantity were not enough to keep a mine operational. After rains the Irwin River runs through the park but most of the year it is just a dry river bed.

If you are planning to come out this way then DO IT IN AUGUST OR SEPTEMBER. You just have to see this place when the wildflowers are out; there is little else to compare with it anywhere else in Australia.

Unusually for a National Park the roads were very good and (at least when this was written) no fees are charged for entry or for camping.



Coalseam

**September 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Despite being booked in at the caravan park tonight we decided to up stakes and move on early. Mostly because we were told about a big group coming in who would not arrive until about 10:30pm and would be noisy. Being the grumpy old fart that I am, I hate noise, so we took off mid morning and went about 40Km south to Seven Mile Beach 10Km north of Dongara.

Having tried wetting a line and coming up empty we just relaxed for the afternoon enjoying the fine weather that has turned up over the past couple of days. The forecast is for rain developing on Sunday so we are hoping to be off the road early and starting to settle in to a long term stay.

It's funny how quickly a trip comes to an end, one day you are travelling and exploring and the next everything is over. If all goes well, two days from now we will be back in Perth and learning how to settle down again - at least for a while.

May 26<sup>th</sup> 2002 (16 months ago), the start of this latest trip, seems an age ago now. Things have certainly changed since then. The house and contents have gone - to be honest this was a blessing in disguise - our little Barina is bent, battered and worn out, the bus is getting old and very tired and so are we. Time now to rest up a bit before planning what to do and where to go next, for we hope there will always be just one more trip to do.



Dongara

**September 27<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

Impatience got the better of us and after arriving at the Moore River rest area around mid-day we couldn't wait any longer and decided to make the last push down into Perth. So ends our second big trip, Like our first trip, now we are back in familiar surrounds it almost seems as though it never even happened.

The highlights of this trip were the months we stayed in the Barossa Valley and our exploration of the centre. We were very lucky and had few problems with the bus. The worst was the coil failing between Pimba and Glendambo and the problems with the fuel systems at Esperance. We managed to see most (but not all) of the areas we wanted to see and have generally had a great time.

We are looking forward to finding a campervan and starting to plan our next adventure.

**September 29<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

I have often wondered how long it actually took us to drive around Australia, i.e. the number of days we spent travelling from one place to another, so today I sat down and worked out the figures. In the two trips we have done so far we travelled a total of 33,627 kilometres over a period of 121 actual days spent driving. This works out to an average of 278 kilometres a day. Our longest distance covered in one day was 620 kilometres and the shortest was only 20 kilometres.

We spent a total of \$10,166 on fuel which is an average of \$84 a day. Obviously travelling such a huge country is not cheap (even though most vehicles are a bit more fuel efficient than our old bus) so anyone thinking about going round in a few months needs to have quite deep pockets.

**October 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Finally we had a chance to get out and do a bit of fishing as the wind and rain have gone. Although we only caught three KG whiting we also brought back some mussels which we will have for dinner. The only sour note was that the Navman echo sounder packed up and it had to be taken back to a dealer and sent off for repairs. As it is only 2 months old I can't say that we are all that impressed.

The last couple of days were spent arranging quotes to repair the car and sorting out other bits and pieces like a post office box so we will have a permanent address.



Mangles Bay

**October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

We took a trip to Perth today to look for a campervan. We have settled on a 1990 Mazda from Dove which is going to cost \$16,100. This is \$1,100 more than we had hoped but the choice of campers here is quite limited and I didn't want to get anything older than 1990. We need to sell our tandem car carrier in order to come up with enough money to buy the camper so hopefully that will happen soon.

Going in to Perth was VERY tiring. We just aren't used to the traffic and stress any more. I am glad we are staying away from all the hustle and bustle.

**October 12<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

We picked up the campervan on Thursday and have already found that the fridge doesn't work. We will contact Dove tomorrow and see if they will do anything about it. The fact that dealers are no longer required to provide warranties on older vehicles means that there isn't much we can do (except let people know) if no action gets taken to fix it. There are some other minor problems with the van but so far we haven't found any serious mechanical defects.

Today we took the van for its first country run down to Mandurah and then on to Heron Point. The van ran well but the weather was lousy. After a week or more of fine weather the rain came back with a vengeance today.

So far I haven't done much to the van except install a couple of deep cycle batteries. Although it came with a dual battery system, the second battery was only a heavy duty, not deep cycle. I have taken the two newest deep cycles from the bus and put them in the van. The 12v lights in the van are wired up to the starter battery for some strange reason, so we will have to be careful how much they get used.

After spending \$16k on the van we had to go out and buy a new fridge for the bus yesterday as the LG finally gave up the ghost. This time we have gone for the biggest fridge we can fit into the bus and we can finally say goodbye to the pile of junk we have been stuck with since Darwin.

The biggest problem with a campervan is space, or should I say the complete lack of it. I have been spoiled by the bus as there is always somewhere to put everything, but I am struggling to even find a position for the inverter in the camper. We plan to get an enclosed trailer so that will enable us to take the boat and camping gear when we go away, but space inside the van is always going to be at a premium.



Mazda Campervan

**October 14<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

I am looking forward to the first time we are able to go away in the campervan. It is certainly going to be a very different experience from the bus. We have to be VERY selective in what we take and it will probably take one or two short trips to work out what we need and what we don't before we start to plan anything longer.

I have been busy getting the van ready, installing a proper power system with a big inverter and two of the solar panels we were using for the bus. I need to get a voltage gauge to keep an eye on how well the system operates.

We contacted Dove yesterday and they have asked us to drop in when we are in town so they can have a look at the fridge and try to work out what is wrong. I suspect gas as there is plenty of gurgling going on which indicates that the heating element is working.

I have also installed flyscreens on the siding and rear doors. To do this I have put long strips of velcro around the door frames and sections of velcro on two large pieces of flyscreen. The hope is that this will enable us to have the big doors open to let the breeze in, without swarms of flies and mozzies as well.

We have been amazed by how time operates differently in different places. When we were free/bush camping we didn't have all the distractions of nearby shops but somehow time passed much quicker. Even on the long windy days at Bush Bay, the day seemed to slip by so quickly that evening was upon us almost before we were aware of it. Back in the 'big smoke' time is going much more slowly despite the fact that we still have plenty to do; strange.

**October 16<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

We found a trailer today that is both within our price range (\$600) and has been set up with several different compartments so that it can be packed easily with all the bits and pieces we want to cart around with us.

A campervan on its own is far too small to use for extended trips, so a trailer is a must for the longer trips we want to do.

Although we are getting closer to planning our first trip in the camper there are still quite a few things that need to be done (or bought).

1. New ariel.
2. Small CD/Cassette player.
3. In line water pump.
4. Fix (or replace) 3 way fridge.
5. Install 12v light inside trailer.
6. Paint trailer.
7. New front tyre for camper.
8. New sleeping bag.
9. Gas hose extension.

**October 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

The trailer has been re-painted now with 2 cans of fish oil and five cans of white spray paint. The only problem is that as I painted it white, all the dents now show up all too clearly.

The camper now has a DVD and shelf stereo in place of the microwave but we are still at least a couple of days away from the first short test trip, which thanks to the fridge will have to be done with an esky and some ice.

The weather has been a bit hit and miss and fishing has been lousy so I will grab any chance I get to take the camper out for a test trip in the next week or so.

**October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

We are finally away on the first test run with the campervan. This is only a short trip to Heron Point (where else?) but already we are finding that there are lots of things we need to do and get to make using the camper more comfortable.

The first - and MOST important - is to get a good mattress. The cushions that come with the camper are far too soft and I was unable to sleep until about 2am when I resorted to taking a couple of sleeping pills.

Next we need to put some sort of shade on the side of the van. Having somewhere outside to sit it going to be essential when we go away for longer trips.

We also found that the original water tank leaks and the way the pipes have been put together, the second tank will half empty out as the water runs down to (and out of) the original.)

Lastly we need a 12v water pump. Having to jiggle a handle up and down for five minutes to get water is a real pain. The bus has always had a water pump so we are used to a more civilised method of getting water up from the tanks.

Apart from these four major changes there are all sorts of little things that we forgot to bring. Things like a strainer, wooden spoon, set of mixing bowls, alfoil, cling wrap and a host of other bits and pieces that we are going to need for long term trips. We did plan to come away for two nights but with the sleeping arrangements as they are there was no way I was going to stay out a second night and be so uncomfortable.

#### **October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

On the way home we took time to check out a couple of places we haven't been to before. The first was a rest area south east of North Dandalup off Del Park and Wittackers Rd. Wittackers Road is unsealed and the ascent to the rest area is VERY steep. This is no place for big rigs or even caravans. Others may find the drive up worth while as there is a good turning circle at the rest area (which is situated right on a bend in the road) and excellent views. It may be a good spot for smaller vehicles to overnight and there is a short (steep) walk trail that leads up to an old gold mine.

The next place we went to was Dandalup Dam which involved going back down the hill to Del Park road and then up the hill to Scarp Road (unsealed part way to the dam). There is a very pretty day use area at the foot of the dam wall but again I would advise only those with smaller rigs and campervans to use this area. There are plenty of shelters and free BBQs as well as toilets next to a small lake. This would be a top spot to a barbie and maybe even a swim in the warmer weather.

After arriving back home at the bus we shot off to order a new foam mattress (\$149) and then found a canvas works to order a slide on side shade (6 feet x 8 feet) which will cost \$200. I already have some sail track and have attached that to the van.

The water tank problem has been solved by re-plumbing the van and removing the old tank from the system entirely. I may do something about it later on but with the new water tank we have about 45 litres and can carry more in the trailer if we have to. We now have (thanks to Alan) a 200 litre drum that can be put in the trailer when we go north again but we shouldn't need it around the south west.

The campervan is certainly a very different proposition to the bus. Lack of space to put things and no room to move are two of the biggest hassles. I expect it will take us quite a few test trips before we sort everything out.



North Dandalup Dam recreation area

#### **October 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

Sadly I had to make the decision today to start charging for Camping Australia again. We have made the guide available free for almost a year and in that time have contacted hundreds of businesses to find out if they would be interested in placing paid advertisements. Sadly, despite over 5000 copies already being downloaded from our website, not one single business has been bright enough to see the potential that the guide offers.

This is very depressing as putting all the information together has taken literally hundreds of hours and uncounted dollars. The only way we can continue to afford to keep the web site going is to start charging for the guide once more.

**November 7<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Last week I finally bit the bullet and bought a new computer. It had to be a laptop as there is no room in the camper for anything else. My budget won't stretch to an up-to-date system but I have 10x more storage than I have with the old system and a much faster machine.

Caught up with Dave this week, he was only in town for a couple of days so we only saw him for a few hours but it was good to catch up again after so long. Last time we saw him was when we passed through Balladonia on the way to Adelaide.

Graham ordered a bunch of things for us and picked them up today. We now have a new 12v fridge for the camper and I installed it this afternoon. We also got a fluoro light for the trailer, a coupling lock for the trailer (will have to get another for the boat trailer) and a pump for the water tank in the camper.

I am exhausted after spending time this afternoon getting it all installed.

We are getting close to having everything ready so we will be able to get away from Perth again. The wish list still has a few items on it but most will have to wait until we can save up for them. These items include:

1. Digital video camera that will take stills and can download to a computer using a USB port.
2. Small solar recharger for the battery in the trailer.
3. Seat covers for the van.
4. Switch for the water pump.
5. New front tyre for the camper.
6. Gas hose extension.

**November 10<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

We have been house sitting again for the past week and will be here until this Saturday. This time we are looking after two delightful little dogs (Alfred and Amy), a cat (Susie), a guinea pig, two birds and two goldfish. We always like to find a house to look after that has pets as living the way we do we won't have any of our own for the foreseeable future.

**November 18<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

We had planned to go to Wittacker's Mill today and then on to Heron Point but the weather has turned foul so we have abandoned the idea for the time being.

The camper is very close to being ready for a test trip and the only thing stopping us now is all the wind and rain.



Wittaker's Mill

**November 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

The weather is beginning to fine up again so we are off to Wittacker's Mill (east of North Dandalup). Access is from Del Park, Scarp and then Wittacker's Rds. There is about 5Km of good dirt road once you turn off Del Park Rd.

There are several areas to the campsite with the best for big rigs being up the hill after the 'water' sign. It is a beautiful, peaceful site with plenty of shade (not always a good thing when you have solar panels) There are toilets but the water referred to on the sign is a pool which is of questionable quality.

From here we went south to Dwellingup and located another campsite at Marrinup townsite. Marrinup is a large cleared area in the forest only about 5Km NW of Dwellingup. Again there are toilets here and lots of room for big rigs. Access is either from the Williams Rd. or from Del Park Rd. at the golf course sign.



Marrinup

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

We moved on to Heron Pt. again to see if there were any crabs about yet. Sadly this looks like another poor year in this area as we saw none around.

We have set the tent up to give us a bit more space. Living in the camper is very cramped but hopefully we will get used to it in time. At least getting around is easy enough, as well as cheaper and faster than the bus.

**November 28<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Back from our three night outing with yet more work to do before we consider anything more adventurous. We have decided that the freezer in the fridge will be too small for any extended trips so we will need a small 12v portable fridge (40 litres or so) to use as a freezer. That means setting up a power system in the trailer.

New 12v plugs have gone in so that the solar panels can be easily moved from the van to the trailer, and an adaptor made up to allow recharging from the generator.

While we were away we set the tent up to see how much easier that would make things and found it was very useful. It gives us that extra room we need that isn't available just in the campervan. We have come to the conclusion that the van on its own would be ok for a weekend away but we will need all the other gear if we are out any longer.

We are still to go away with a 'full load' which will include the boat and all its associated junk. The van is quite a challenge but we are confident that eventually we will get a system sorted out that works well. We certainly appreciate the bus more when we get home now.

**December 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

We are almost ready for the first extended trip away. We have managed to get a small automatic washing machine and a 12v freezer which will help us to stay away from towns for a bit longer. The van has been serviced (by me) and tuned (by Graham) and with a bit of luck we will be off sometime tomorrow.

The plan is to head south along the coast to the Margaret River area and explore that before going inland and across to Pemberton. After that we will head for Walpole and then make our way back on an inland route west of the Albany Highway. We want to be away over the whole holiday period which means coming back sometime after new year.

**December 16<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

After a brief stop off at Mandurah to finish our Christmas shopping we went on to have lunch at Belvidere Campsite at the end of Buffalo Road. (Off the Mandurah-Bunbury Road). The campsite is good and includes toilets, BBQs, seats and tables and unusually there is also firewood provided. It is too expensive at \$5 per person per night and the road in is very corrugated. Dogs aren't allowed at this site as it is a conservation park and big rigs would have real problems with overhanging branches on the campsite ring road.

After lunch we continued south to just north of Margaret River where we turned off into Osmington Road, the on to Canebrake Road and finally arrived at Canebrake Pool. Fees here are also \$5 per person per night and for an unpowered site this is just too expensive. The pool is beautiful and an excellent place to swim. There are also LOTS of marron in it but marroning isn't permitted. Generators can't be used at this site and the camping bays are too small for big rigs. Again facilities include toilets, tables, chairs, BBQs and firewood is provided.



Canebrake Pool

**December 17<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Today we refuelled at Margaret River (LPG was 55c as opposed to 34c in Perth) and refilled the water tank – a water hose had touched the muffler and melted so we lost all our water yesterday – then we headed back up the Bussel Highway towards Yallingup. Our first stop was at the cheese factory where we picked up some brie, camembert and a delicious port flavoured cheddar cheese.

We continued to Yallingup which is a favourite haunt of surfing types and had a quick look around before having an early lunch at Canal Rocks. From here it was south again to Prevaly and on the way we stopped in at a winery or three for a couple of taste tests. We don't actually buy wine in this area anymore as it is priced far too high. Ports which are only half decent cost \$27-\$50 a bottle. Anything we used to really enjoy like Sandalera is now only available to those with more money than sense (\$95 for 500ml is way out of our league.)

On the way back to refuel at Margaret River again we found a farm shop selling venison products. Thinking that they would also be way over priced we stopped in anyway and found that the smallgoods and meats were quite reasonable and you could even sample before making a purchase. So in WAs premier wine growing area we ended up with cheese and smallgoods but no wine.

Our campsite for today is Chapman Pool which has been renamed Warner Glen Recreation area. We had visited this site once before to see if the bus would fit in but on finding it wouldn't we didn't look around and never came back. Facilities and fees are the same as for Canebrake Pool. The river here is also a good place for a cool dip, or in our case an easy way to clean up even if it is without soap.

At present most of the campsites are empty but after this weekend we expect to see more and more people filling up the South West as school holidays start. We are hoping to find somewhere remote and quiet to get away from the crowds that are due to descend on the area.



Chapman's Pool

**December 18<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

We were away quite early and went exploring in the Nannup area to see some of the campsites we have heard about. The first place we tried is called Cambray but the track in is VERY rough and narrow. We almost got bogged and decided that enough was enough so as soon as we could we turned round and got back to the main road.

Turning back towards Nannup we took Morven Road and the Barrabup Pool Road and found an excellent day use area at Barrabup Pool. This is a no camping area but about 1km further back along the track is Workers Pool where camping is allowed. The facilities and fees are the same as for all sites we have listed already.



There are only 5 campsites here but it is such a nice area we decided to stop exploring for the day and stay for the night.



Worker's Pool

#### **December 19<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

Our journey today took us into tall timber country which starts about 30Km north of Pemberton. The first stop was Beedelup Falls which were less than awe inspiring and the \$9 entry fee is far too much.

We stopped off in Pemberton to pick up water and also to get an all parks pass (\$51) from the local visitor's centre. This allows entry into all national parks and will save us a lot of money over the course of the next year.

After consulting our maps we decided to camp in the Warren national park a few kilometres south west of Pemberton. Turning off Northcliffe Rd. into Old Vasse Rd. we travelled on good gravel to the turn off into Heartbreak Trail. The road is well named as it would have been a heart breaker for those constructing it. Big rigs and caravans are banned on this track due to steep descents and slippery surface.

The campsite we have stopped at is quite large and has one of the most lavishly appointed camp kitchens we have ever seen. Stainless steel bench tops, BBQ plates and pot burners scattered around under a huge roof make it look more like the kitchen of a 5 star hotel. With all the vandals about I wonder how long it will stay in the nice condition it is at the moment. It really is a bit overdone for a camp kitchen and probably goes some way to explaining why CALM is charging \$10 a night for unpowered sites.

As this area is fairly remote and is going to be one of the lesser known (and accessible) places on our journey we have decided to set up a full camp and stay for a few days. This means putting up the tent, shower and van awning.

#### **December 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

Woke this morning to rain (typical weather around Pemberton) so we are very glad to have all the facilities of a tent and the camper. The shower water is VERY COLD but I can't go a day without showering so there isn't much choice.

We were visited by some friendly possums last night as we sat around the camp fire. Files and bities aren't too bad here but we do keep the mozzie coils burning all the time to discourage those that are around.



Drafty's Camp

### **December 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 (Sunday)**

As we had settled in for what we thought was going to be a few days in one place we decided to celebrate Christmas today and just relax around the campsite. Alas it wasn't to be as soon after opening our presents I found that the new 'freezer' was doing anything but freezing. Most things inside had started to defrost and there was no sign that the compressor was coming on.

It took around 90 minutes to pack everything up and take off, heading for Northcliffe to get some ice. We did briefly think about heading home but we are so far south now we couldn't face turning around and heading back to Perth.

After looking at the other (Warren) campground and finding it only had about 4 sites, we were happy to have stayed at Drafty's Camp which has all the facilities and plenty of room. Further along the track was a good lookout which really shows off the beauty of the Warren River. A quick back-track to the bi-centennial tree to have a look at this 75 metre climbable fire lookout tree and then we took off for Northcliffe.

A brief stop at Northcliffe to pick up ice and we were heading south again towards Windy Harbour. Never has a place been so well named. Windy Harbour is very WINDY and only just has shelter enough to call itself a harbour. A bunch of beach shacks and a camp ground with no caretaker in sight so we moved on to Salmon Beach for lunch. Due to the 'freezer' situation we had chicken fillet, bacon and onion sandwiches for lunch. (Every cloud has a silver lining, or so they say.)

The road in to Salmon Beach was a bit bumpy but it was worth the effort but the best spot was the lookout above the cliffs. Then it was back to Northcliffe where we refuelled. Aaargh! \$45 for 43 litres of petrol. That hurts when you are used to filling up with LPG for about \$12. (No auto gas in Northcliffe.)

Our selected campsite for the night was Shannon, just off the South West Highway. After reaching our destination and plugging the solar panels into the trailer, surprise surprise ! The freezer started working again. Is this just good luck, a coincidence or does the freezer need more than 12v to start the compressor? Only time and experimentation will tell.

Shannon is a large campsite and only one of a very few in this area that has sites large enough for buses. It is EXPENSIVE at \$12.50 a night for unpowered sites but has the single saving grace of having HOT SHOWERS. Really this doesn't make up for the rip off price but then anyone travelling WA will soon learn how greedy CALM is.

### **December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003 (Monday)**

Called in at Fernhook falls (Turn off 30Km SE of Shannon) to find sites are quite small and all on a sloping hillside. Facilities are the same as for all other CALM sites we have visited and fees here are \$10 per night for 2 people (still too much). Access to this site is via 6km of good gravel road but at this time of year the falls are a bit lack lustre.

From here we went on to what we had planned to be our campsite for the night at Broke Inlet. This is located SW of the SW Highway along 8km of reasonable gravel road. The area at the end is mainly taken up by shacks and there isn't much room to camp or turn around. We settled down but were soon driven out by hordes of bush flies which made life intolerable.

Back on the highway we went south east again to Crystal Springs. Nice name, same about the crappy campsite which was also crawling with flies. After some difficulty finding the correct campsite and having to take the trailer off to turn around when we took the wrong road we took one look at the camp and headed off again.

We finally ended up at one of the most scenic caravan parks in WA at Rest Point. The \$22 fee hurt but we were fed up, tired and dirty so this was our only real option.



Shannon Campsite

**December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003 (Tuesday)**

From Walpole we went 12km east to the Valley of the Giants turn off. From here it was a short 6km ride to the Tree Top Walk (\$6 per head) which is worth the money and something that should be on your 'to do' list if you are down this way. The spans reach 40 metres (only about half the height of the tallest fire tree you can climb in this area) but the view from the top is interesting.

There is also the Ancient Empires walk which although along the ground I found MORE interesting than the tree top walk. From here we continued through what is left of the forest (much of it was turned into farmland many years ago) back to the highway and then down to Peaceful Bay. Nice area but we didn't linger as we had quite a few kilometres to cover.

Next stop was Parrys Beach (\$5 for tents \$10 for everyone else) which again was just a whistle stop. Then on to the main scenic attraction of the day; William Bay. This is a National Park and so is restricted to those without pets but it is a REALLY beautiful place. I remember swimming here many years ago as a child and it hasn't changed at all.

After a quick lunch and refuel at Denmark it was a long drive up the Denmark-Mount Barker Road, west through Rocky Gully and on to our final destination for the day; Muir's Bridge on the Frankland River.

Although this is really just a rest area by the river, if you have a small vehicle like a camper you can follow a track down to a campsite right next to the river and this is where we decided to stay for the night. After a week on the road we had some dirty clothes to clean so it was a good chance to test out the little washing machine. With the generator and our 12v shower pump we (I actually) were able to do 3 loads of washing which really helped in the 'I need something to wear' department.



Ancient Empire

**December 24<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Wednesday)**

Another Christmas is here, and thank goodness this one won't be spent melting away in Alice Springs.

Since we have had the bus, our Christmases have been spent in Perth, Halls Creek, Townsville, Adelaide, Perth, Alice Springs and now somewhere between Manjimup and Pemberton – although this year we are in the camper not the bus. We are camped up at Big Brook Arboretum which is a small site in the forest not far north of Pemberton. Nearby is Big Brook Dam which is a wonderful swimming spot so we have decided to put up the tent and stay a couple of nights. With the new rotisserie Belle wanted for Christmas (which we tested out for the first time at Walpole) we will even be having (if all goes well) a traditional Christmas roast lunch. The rotisserie was only about \$40 from Big W and has a 3 year warranty so we are looking forward to many roast dinners that we would otherwise have had to miss out on.

The only stop-off of note today was Muirs Lake where a new bird observatory has been constructed. For those without powerful visual aids (this is not some sort of disease), the birds will be a bit hard to spot but it is a useful site for travellers as there are toilets, seats and tables near a large parking area.

Toilets are becoming quite a focal point now we aren't travelling in the bus. We still have the same porta potty but it is travelling in the trailer (after a VERY unfortunate accident when it turned UPSIDE DOWN IN THE VAN!) and getting to it and finding secluded places to put it is turning out to be too much of a hassle.

**December 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Thursday)**

Christmas lunch worked out very well. As the small oven isn't exactly built to do full roast dinners we had to cook the potatoes first and then did the pork which was delicious. The day was spent lazing around camp and having an afternoon siesta after too much to eat for lunch. A pretty typical Christmas day – except that we are out in the bush.



Big Brook Dam

**December 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Friday)**

The weather is hotting up a bit today so we are thinking about cutting this trip short and heading home tomorrow. We still had more campsites to check out around Balingup and Collie but that can wait until next year when things start to cool off again.

**December 27<sup>th</sup> 2003 (Saturday)**

The weather has turned VERY HOT today so we are off back to Perth. High winds, hills and the weight of the trailer caused the van to work very hard and after a fuel stop at Harvey she refused to start for about 20 minutes. (Another vehicle that hates the heat.)

The trip has been quite successful in both a research sense for Camping Australia and as an evaluation sense for the campervan. There are still some things to sort out as the power system isn't set up to charge the batteries in the trailer when we are driving. That caused real hassles when the frozen food all defrosted but it is something we should be able to sort out. I have decided to take the 120w panel off the bus and mount it on the trailer but how exactly I will do that has to be worked out before we go north again.

This trip lasted 11 days and took us 1651 kilometres. The van (pulling the trailer) used did an average of 4.79 kilometres to the litre at a cost of \$0.13 to the litre. This is a substantial saving over the bus but as the bus weighs more than 4 times as much as the van it isn't surprising.

The overall cost of fuel for the van has been \$0.11 per kilometre and mileage figures of 4.72 kilometres to the litre.

**January 16<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

Having got the campervan to a point where we thought we were ready for a big trip we have now had a change of heart. Because there was some overheating when we towed the trailer (which didn't have the boat and all its associated gear at the time) we have decided that something with a bigger engine would be better.

After two trips up to Perth today (the second with Graham who came up with us to check out the vehicle) we have bought a short wheelbase 1978 Coaster. It will give us the extra space to make travelling comfortable and the extra power to pull the trailer with the boating gear packed on it.

This means we are flat broke until we can sell the campervan, which will be our next major task.



The Coaster

#### January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004 (Friday)

We picked up the Coaster on Monday and while Belle brought the van home I had the daunting task of negotiating Perth traffic in a vehicle I was very unfamiliar with. Driving a manual again after four months in an automatic was traumatic enough but fighting my way through the mass of other vehicles was enough to turn my hair grey.

Thankfully we arrived home safely and over the past few days we have been starting to fix things up around the new vehicle. The first major task was replacing one of the water tanks. We now have 120 litres in two tanks.

The coaster's details are as follows:

- 4.1L petrol gas engine.
- 5 speed gearbox.
- Toilet/Shower
- Hot water system.
- Range hood.
- Security alarm.
- Enclosed annexe with solid or shade cloth walls.
- Plenty of storage space including a large boot.
- Roo bar and tow bar.
- Spot lights.
- CB radio.
- CD player and good sound system including a large amplifier.
- Security screens.
- Air conditioner.

It came with a small 300w Honda generator but as we already have a new 2.0 we will sell the 300w with the van. There were also lots of other odds and ends like table, chairs, BBQ, butane cooker, plates, cutlery etc.

So far we have installed a fire alarm, fire extinguisher and a new water tank but there are quite a few other jobs to do including some mechanical work. All of this will have to wait until we can sell the van. Being flat stony broke is a pain but we just couldn't miss out on the Coaster. At under 9K it was a very good buy.

There is a small amount of rust to remove but overall the paintwork is excellent, tyres (apart from one) are good and so far – at least – we are very happy with the vehicle.



All three vehicles

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Sunday)**

We have to take the Coaster over the pits tomorrow to get it checked out prior to licensing. This is going to cost \$108 (as it is classed as a medium rigid vehicle.) We recently got a weighbridge certificate and found that fully loaded it weighs in at 3.5 tonnes. As we have to go to Mandurah get the inspection done we decided to spend the night at Heron Point and have a look for some crabs.

It turned out that there are no crabs around in daylight hours but we did catch a few at night. I am never too happy about wandering around the inlet at night as you never know what might be lurking or hunting. We did see a big fin during the day but it turned out to be a dolphin, even so, if a dolphin can get up into the estuary there is no reason why a big shark can't get there too.

**February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

A STINKING hot day but at least the Coaster passed the mechanical inspection.

**February 4<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Finally got the Coaster licensed (\$465 !) and now have WA plates on. I have installed the fridge/freezer from the trailer, put in 2 x 12 volt power outlets, a UHF CB, and a 1500w inverter. The Coaster is almost ready for a test trip which we will take once the weather cools down a bit.

We have had 3 enquiries about the campervan but nothing solid as yet. Once we sell it we will have the money to fix a few minor faults on the Coaster, replace the air conditioner and replace the 3 way fridge.

**February 12<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

Belle's 45<sup>th</sup> birthday. Weather turned very hot again today. Not much that is newsworthy at the moment. Still waiting for the campervan to sell.

Wish list for when the camper sells:

- Wheel alignment for the Coaster.
- Mechanical work on Coaster.
- Air conditioning for Coaster.
- Edging for Coaster cupboards.
- 12v fridge for Coaster. (April 2004 - Swapped campervan fridge)
- Coleman camp kitchen (Exponent) (April 2004 Got cheapie from WA Salvage)
- Satellite dish and decoder.
- Combined TV/DVD/Video player
- Scanner or printer/scanner
- Digital camera
- Block out curtains for bus.
- New fire extinguisher.

I am expecting the bill for this lot to be around \$6k.

**February 5<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

We have spent the past few days house sitting again and expect to be here for another week in March. The weather has been very warm so a break from the bus is like a holiday.

The campervan is proving difficult to sell (but that could be because we originally set the price too high – can't be blamed for trying can we?) We need to sell it before the end of April so there is still plenty of time.

Despite a lot of hits on the site we are getting precious little feedback these days, perhaps we have been around too long and the info is being taken for granted – a bit disappointing considering the effort that has gone into putting it all together.

#### **March 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Got bored and went down to Heron Point for the night. This time we took the boat, which was just as well as very few crabs are being caught by wading now. We caught 12 which was enough for us and we are planning to come down again this Sunday with Alan as he wants to test out the caravan he bought recently.

Our camper is still on the market and we are starting to advertise it more widely in the hope of getting it off our hands.

The only item of note with regard to getting the Coaster ready for our trip north is that I installed a fan underneath the fridge to push cool air in and drive the hot air out. As the 3 way fridge works we will stick with it until we have to change, then we will put a 12 danfoss compressor fridge in its place.



#### **March 14<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Sunday)**

Took off to Heron Point for a few days with Alan. This will be a short test trip prior to heading north in a few weeks. Time to sort out what works and what doesn't. Also time to work out what we have forgotten to pack.

#### **March 17<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Back in Perth as we had a couple of calls about the campervan. The Heron Point trip was a good one. Managed to catch 23 crabs – most of which were eaten before heading home. The weather is supposed to turn hot again this weekend (38C) so being back at the bus is a must.

One thing we learned from the trip was not to use cat food tins as crab bait. We have discovered that they stop working after about half an hour so we will go back to using bones or fish which we used to use.

#### **March 31<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

After another few nights at Heron Point (yes I know this gets boring as we haven't been anywhere else for a while) we have decided that it is time to pack up the boat and start to do some serious planning for the trip north. The short trips we have been on have been useful (as well as enjoyable) in working out what we need to do with the Coaster and what we have to still get.

We have decided that most of the cooking will be done outside (or in the tent) so we purchased a camp kitchen from WA Salvage. These are fold out tables with a sink and plenty of space which usually cost \$189 but can be found on special for as little as \$149. Coleman make a very similar model but it is very expensive so we decided to go with the cheap Chinese copy and spray it with fish oil when the rust starts.

Another item high on the list of things to get is a GOOD camp stove. The 3 burner stove we have been using on camping trips since we were first in Adelaide is almost useless as the gas jets cannot be adjusted very well.

Another change in direction was the decision to remove the new 12v fridge from the campervan and swap it over with the 3 way fridge in the Coaster. This has now been completed and I am very happy with the results. Most people who have looked at the campervan wanted a gas fridge (very silly) instead of the 12v so I was more than happy to oblige. 3 way fridges need to be level and don't do well in temperatures over 35C. They also chew up gas, create too much heat and if used on 12v will eat batteries alive. The 12v fridge we bought runs happily from 2 x 2amp solar panels so our refrigeration will be effectively free.

As the camper is STILL for sale we will give it 2 more weeks before getting prices from dealers and then we will take what we can get for it. Everything we originally put in except the seat covers and fly screens has now been taken out again to minimise the loss.

The crabs at Heron Point have almost gone but we did manage to catch 19. We have found that the springs on the annexe guy lines make an awful groaning sound when there is any kind of wind. This transmits and amplifies into the Coaster so on the last night I had to drop the annexe before going to sleep. This is a problem we will have to solve as it makes sleeping very fitful.

The Easter school holidays end around May 9<sup>th</sup> so we will start planning to leave Perth on the 10<sup>th</sup>. That gives us just over 5 weeks to get the camper out of our hair and get everything else sorted out.

Things to do / get:

Coaster

- Fix centre bearing (done May 2004)
- Wheel alignment
- Fix LPG problem (done May 2004)
- Fix trailer plug wiring (done)
- New Air-conditioner (not urgent)
- Sail track for driver side

To get:

- Heavy gauge wire
- Annexe strainer poles & clips (Got May 2004)
- Annexe patches
- 12v light for annexe (Got May 2004)
- Long gas lead (Got May 2004)
- Gas cooker with good jet adjustment (Got May 2004)
- Sealant (done)
- New ratchet tie downs (done)
- Combination TV/DVD/Video (Holding off on this one)
- Uni Solar panel or wind generator. (Done June 2004 - solar)

Other:

- Service generator (done May 2004)
- Get spare spark plugs for Yamaha
- Get inner tube for boat trailer jockey wheel (done)

It's difficult to believe that six months have already passed and a new diary section looms. The lack of entries in this bi-annual section highlight the lack of any real adventure. Hopefully the next six months will be a little more interesting.

#### **April 7<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Time marches on as they say. We are already a week into April with no progress on the sale of the campervan. One more week and we will have to start taking it round to dealers and see what we can get.

Easter is approaching rapidly and we have no plans to go away. We can't see the point in being on the road at the same time as the hordes that pour out of Perth for the last real holiday of the season.

#### **April 14<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Another week gone and we aren't any closer to getting ourselves organised for the trip north. The camper is still on the market, now at the lowest price we can afford to sell it for (\$13,990) which means we will lose over \$2000 if it sells. I haven't got a clue why it has taken so long to sell as it is a nice vehicle at what we believe is a reasonable price.

The weather has turned cold and rainy so the sooner the van sells the sooner we can get away to warmer weather.

I have more or less decided to take the inland route, turn off at Auski and visit Wittenoom again, then cut through Karijini to Tom Price and go back to the coast road before making for Karratha. We haven't been along the inland road since 1995 and I want to have a first hand look at the rest areas and campsites on that route.

We are still planning to get away in early May, which is only 3 weeks away so we are really hoping that the camper will sell VERY SOON.

#### **April 15<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

We have started packing the Coaster and the trailer in earnest now. I spent some time today moving heavy items (fuel, water containers etc.) from the trailer to the boot of the Coaster. The trailer is an unknown factor and I don't even know how much it weighs. I will rectify this before we leave as there is a public weighbridge on the South West Highway near Mundijong.

I have also been thinking about the lack of internet access and realised that as we are on a Telstra free hour plan, it may be worth investigating connection to the net via our mobile phone. I will look in to it and see if it is feasible. For those who aren't aware, Telstra have a free hour plan where you get a free hour every day (you select the hour) and you can make calls of up to 20 minutes free in the designated hour. If we can use that to access the net it would be a great improvement over our current situation.

We used to be with AOL but their pricing structure is too inflexible and we can't easily ramp up our use when we get the chance to go on line. We are currently trying Dodo (what an awful name) who have a more flexible rate of \$9.90 per month which you can ramp up and which has a cap of around \$24. Dodo's marketing slogan is 'internet that flies' so which guru dreamed up dodo (an extinct FLIGHTLESS bird) as a good business name is a mystery. Despite the questionable name we have been happy with the service to date.

#### **April 16<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**



With all the packing going on we are having to come to grips with the lack of space. God knows how we would have coped if we had tried to do a long term trip in the campervan. We will manage fairly well with general items of clothing, with camping gear, fishing gear etc. but the biggest headache is food.

In the bus we have a huge 337 litre fridge, a big pantry cupboard and plenty of under seat storage, not to mention a cupboard dedicated to all Belle's cooking sauces. The Coaster is a whole new kettle of fish. The fridge is only 113 litre and the cupboard space is much less than half of what we are used to for food. As the bus will be off power and in storage we have to completely empty the big fridge and we have to try and take all food that will be required for a 2-4 month trip.

We are finding this the most difficult thing to deal with at the moment.

The oddest thing about the Coaster is the lack of a cooking stove inside. I hope to rectify this before we leave but we have a good camp kitchen now which will go in the tent once we are set up in one area for a long stay.

A few minor milestones (or chores) are out of the way. The spare water containers are full, the gas bottles are full and the jerry cans are full. We had to buy a tyre for the campervan as one of the rear tyres blew a valve yesterday. \$50 we hadn't intended to spend which will only go un-noticed if the van finally sells.

#### **April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

Another week gone and still no progress with selling the camper. The only thing of note that happened this week was a good downpour of rain. Packing continues slowly and that's about it.

#### **April 29<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

A couple of small steps forward in the past two days. Yesterday we got one of the springs on the trailer reset (\$150 which seemed a bit much) and today we bought a 2 burner cooker with grill which at \$415 is a bit expensive but we wanted one that would do a good job. The Coaster is booked in to get the centre bearing attended to next Tuesday but we have also had fuel problems on both gas and petrol so repairs could end up being a bit more than we had hoped. Another expense will be putting light truck tyres on the trailer as it is a bit on the heavy side. We won't be doing too much driving off sealed roads but it is much better to be safe than sorry.

We have almost given up any hope of selling the camper before we leave so it will have to go into storage until we get back. We have dropped it down to \$12,990 but it simply isn't worth dropping it any lower as it is a nice vehicle and will sell at a reasonable price eventually.

The weather has cleared up and we are enjoying temperatures in the high 20s. Forecasts are for that to continue for the next 10 days which suits us fine as that is just about the time we are expecting to leave. Bearing previous trips in mind I wouldn't mind betting that the day we do actually go it will decide to pour down.

#### **May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

A sad day today as I took the number plates off the Western Belle. Once we hand them in it will really mean that her life of travels has finally come to an end. I really would like to keep her licensed but we just can't justify the \$450+ licence fee each year if she is just going to sit in one place from now on.

Although we are looking forward to new adventures in the Coaster, leaving the old girl in Perth and no longer having all our gear with us as we travel will be a little difficult to adjust to.

The Coaster goes in to have the mechanical work done on it tomorrow and then we put new tyres on the trailer on Wednesday. After that we will do some final shopping, pack up the bus annexe and then we should be ready to go.

Predictably the weather forecast is for rain as we start to pack up and head off just as I had expected.

#### **May 4<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

The mechanical work on the Coaster cost just under \$300. Now we have to spend a further \$150 on trailer tyres and we should be ready to go.

The bus annexe is down and packed away so there isn't much to do now but re-direct our mail and get the final shopping done.

#### **May 5<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

It looks like we may have sold the campervan at the very last minute. We got a phone call this afternoon and as we were due to head off tomorrow we didn't really have any hope at all that the van would sell at this late hour. We had resigned ourselves to putting the van in storage until we get back around October.

The end result is that we have agreed to sell the campervan for \$12,750. It represents a loss of \$3350 but it will be nice to have the extra money in the bank just in case we need it. The sale isn't finalised yet and I have learned not to 'count my chickens' so the van will go over to Alan's and we will head off tomorrow anyway and cross our fingers that everything works out ok.

Updated wish list / jobs list  
Digital camera (got in Karratha)  
Wind generator (still pondering)  
Coaster wheel alignment  
New scanner (Got in Karratha)

Fix/replace Coaster air conditioner

**May 6<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

Left around 10am and took the freeway through Perth then cut across from Wanneroo Road to the Great Northern Highway. A long hard slog through the hills to our first refuelling stop at Dalwalinu. There is NO autogas between Bullsbrook and here.

The road surface on this section of the drive is AWFUL. Very bumpy and hard driving up and down the multitude of hills. There is no significant improvement until you get past Miling.

We went on past Wubin to Wubin Rocks. This is a good site with reasonable space 3km off the highway on good unsealed road. It is signposted. There is a nice view and being up relatively high, means you get any breeze that is going.



Wubin Rocks

**May 7<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

Up around 6am but early morning fog kept us off the road until after 7am. On to Payne's Find (crappy little roadhouse with NO LPG!) On again to Mount Magnet where the fortified shops attest to what life can be like there. Refuelled LPG at BP and was cheated as their pump was not properly calibrated.

After a quick walk around town we headed 7Km north to The Granites. This is a large area with several parking spots and as we weren't in much of a hurry the lunch break soon became the stop for the day.



The Granites

**May 8<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

Passed through Cue after visiting the historic mining area at Day Dawn. Not a lot to see here as mining has recommenced and most areas are blocked off. The old mine office is a most impressive building but it is falling into disrepair. Very sad, as it is a substantial structure and should be preserved. A real shame the local community aren't doing more to make something of it.

After another quick stop at Meekatharra we pressed on to a nice rest area at Gascoyne South Branch 110Km south of Kumarina. This is one of the few places you can get right back away from the road. There was even some water here which surprised us as the dry season in this region has just ended.

**May 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Sunday)**

Rip off of the trip so far: Kumarina road house charging 92cpl for autogas.

Today we passed through Newman. We had intended to do a bit of exploring around this area but as the tourist bureau doesn't bother to open on weekends we couldn't get any info and decided to keep going. No shops open on Sunday and nothing else to do in town – as it is primarily a mining town it is obvious they don't care much about travellers sticking around.

We stopped for the night at a nice rest area well off the road about 100Km north of Newman. That makes today the longest drive of the trip to date with around 470Kms covered. The rest area has plenty of shelters, chairs and tables. It also has a toilet, which is very scarce along this road. There once was an emergency phone but – you guessed it – some total ass wrecked it and all that remains is the pole that once housed it.

The bane of the trip has been hordes of flies that have kept us inside the vehicle most of the day. This is the first day we have been able to sit outside and enjoy the fresh air as fly numbers are dropping as we get closer to the coast.

After we had settled down Belle decided to have a shower and as she did a dingo turned up and started pacing up and down looking longingly at the water coming out under the Coaster. I know feeding dingos isn't a good idea as they can develop a dependency and get too familiar with people, but I thought giving it a drink of water would be Ok. I put a dish out a fair way from the Coaster and the dingo had a small drink then promptly tipped the water out and ran off with the dish. So much for being nice.



The Governor

**May 10<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

We pushed on to Tom Price today (119Km off the main highway but all sealed road) and decided to stay the night in the caravan park. The only real reason was that the final episodes of Survivor are on today and as we have been following it all the way through we wanted to see how it ended. Pretty lame reason but there you are.

Tom Price (the highest town in W.A.) is pleasant enough. Fairly green at this time of the year and quite attractive. The only major store in town is Coles so we stocked up on a few odds and ends.

The caravan park is only average at best. Toilets are grubby and the layout of the park is a bit strange. There is a camp kitchen but if there are a number of people wanting to use it there will be a long wait as there is only one gas burner and one BBQ. For \$22 a night for a powered site it is really a poor choice – but it is the ONLY choice for caravans and motorhomes who want to stay in town.

LPG was available at the Shell garage which was a relief as we seem to have a petrol leak somewhere near the carbi and I am trying to stay on LPG all the time until we can get it fixed.

**May 11<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

After a noisy night at the caravan park we left Tom Price and headed back to Karijini. The western entrance is unsealed and leads 40Km to Weano Gorge. This end of the park has a new camp site called Savannah (\$10 per night per person) where there are toilets and showers. The roughest part of this road was after the Dales Gorge turn off.

After checking out Weano, Red Gorge and Savannah Camp we went back to the Dales Gorge Road and Joffre Falls. This is one of the most scenic areas in the park and this was the time the video camera chose to pack up. I have had so much trouble with this Panasonic camera I will never buy another one.

There used to be a campsite near Joffre but this has now been closed down. The unsealed road goes another 20Km east to the new (very expensive looking) visitors centre. The only sealed road in the park goes from here to the park HQ (surprise surprise). It would have been better not to waste money on the visitors centre and seal more roads.

With the Coaster and trailer full of red dust we left the park and returned to the highway. After running on LPG most of the day I switched to petrol only to find the engine just died. The rough roads in Karijini had knocked out our fuel pump. Another victim of CALM's money wasting schemes. FIX THE ROADS YOU MONGRELS!

We made it to Auski Roadhouse without any dramas and filled up on LPG before heading west to Wittenoom. We had been there only briefly in 1995 and sadly the Government has been hell bent on destroying the town. The old pub, the hospital, the fuel station and many other buildings have all been demolished and removed. It appears that the Government wants to wipe Wittenoom off the face of the Earth in an attempt to make people forget what went on there.

There are still about 15 residents in the town and travellers can camp free without power or just make a donation if they need power. Anyone coming near this area should make the effort to get to Wittenoom Gorge before it is too late and the road in becomes impassable. Vehicles with high clearance can still get through but ordinary cars can only get part way down the gorge now.

This is one of the most special parts of Australia and the Government is doing all it can to discourage people from coming here. There used to be an asbestos risk associated with the town and the end of the gorge but with the passing of years that risk is far less than being struck by lightning.

The area is too beautiful to be neglected so do what you can to support the town if you get a chance to go in and have a look around.

We found a beautiful campsite near a crystal clear billabong in the gorge. After a refreshing swim we settled down for one of the most peaceful nights rests we have had on this trip.



Joffre Falls

**May 12<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

With the petrol system out of action we were forced to make a detour to Port Hedland in order to get enough fuel to get us to Karratha. We were a bit worried as our estimated range on autogas is around 250Kms and Port Hedland is 261Kms from Auski. With some VERY economical driving we got there with 15 litres to spare.

We found a reasonably nice spot to stop at a boat ramp near the main port. The main item of interest was watching the huge bulk ore carriers being shepherded to and from the loading wharves by the attendant tug boats. Another possible overnight site is a little further east at the Spoil Bank. We decided against it as it is closer to the Yacht Club which can be a popular 'hang out' for the locals and we thought it may be a bit more noisy.

**May 13<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

After a quick look around Port Hedland (which is a much better place than South Hedland) we made our way to Karratha to do some last minute shopping and to stock up on our water supplies.

One big surprise was seeing the Maitland River Bridge washed out as we headed from Karratha to 40 Mile. The floods up here this year must have been huge.



Maitland Bridge

We arrived at 40 Mile sometime after 1pm and it took at least 4 hours to get the campsite organised. Compared to the luxury of the bus this way of travelling involves much more work. There are two big buses camped nearby and we both looked at them with a great deal of envy. We really are going to miss the old bus while we are on the road.

The trip up was a little under 2000Kms (including side trips) and fuels costs were about \$540. This is a little higher than I had hoped.

**May 14<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

Getting settled in to the campsite today. As usual the wind is up so no hope of fishing just yet. Put the tent up, did the clothes washing and generally sorted out bits and pieces. Otherwise an uneventful day.

**May 15<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

Windy – need I say more.....

**May 17<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

Finally the wind and tide were kind enough to allow us to get out and go fishing. The wind wasn't entirely calm so we didn't go far off shore and were only in about 9 feet of water. After putting out a berley trail we did start catching a few fish but most were undersized. The catch for the day was 3 sharks, 1 Spanish Flag, 1 very small snapper, 1 grass tusk fish and 1 trumpeter. We took one shark in to eat (but I'm still not a great fan of shark I catch myself) and let the rest go.

40 Mile has a boat ramp but the area is full of rocks so you have to be careful and even with an echo sounder we tend to motor along very slowly just in case.

**May 18<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Windy... again..... Ken (our neighbour in a Bedford bus much like ours) gave us a mud crab which was very much appreciated.

**May 20<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

Only managed to get out fishing for a very short time as the wind came up and made life difficult. Caught a bottom feeding shark and a small stripey. Neither was any good for eating so they both went back into the sea.



Ken & Barbara's 73 Bedford

**May 21<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

Finally a chance to get out and do some real fishing. Things didn't start off too well as we tried several spots without success. Finally we moved out into deeper water (27') about 2.5Km off shore and ended up with 3 grass tusk fish (which we gave to our neighbours Ken and Barbara) 2 spangled emperor and one stripey.

Queenfish are being caught around this area but we haven't seen any ourselves. There are also plenty of bait fish around which is a good sign.

Ken and Barbara came over for dinner and we had an enjoyable evening.

Until.....

Earlier in the evening a group moved in to the area right behind us. Everything was Ok until about 11pm when after consuming much alcohol, they decided to start spotlighting the windows of all the campers around them. After putting up with this annoyance for about half an hour I told them to cut it out. Being typical morons this was the signal to start being a bigger nuisance and eventually I went outside and yelled at them. Things quietened down for an hour or so but then the lights started again and soon afterwards the first rock hit our vehicle. This time I went ballistic and went into their camp and made several threats thinking they would have the sense to back down and go to sleep: no such luck.

Eventually we went over and had to wake up Ken and Barbara as they have a CDMA phone and were able to call the police. The police responded by saying they didn't have anyone available and couldn't come out...WONDERFUL! So we spent the rest of the night (3am-dawn) awake with the lights on to discourage any more attacks on the vehicle.

**May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

Finally about mid-day a council ranger arrived to find out what had gone on the night before. After hearing all the details he checked the area and left some sort of message on the offenders cars. After coming back from fishing all they did was laugh at the note... we were in for more of the same.

On queue almost as soon as our lights went out, the rocks started landing on the vehicle. Confrontation obviously hadn't worked before so we went over to see the caretaker to get something done about it. As we left rocks were landing all round us and bouncing off the tent and the Coaster. The police and ranger were contacted and even though another camper accompanied us back to the Coaster and we now had a witness, the rocks still kept on hitting the vehicle. Some people are beyond 'thick'.

AT LAST about midnight the police arrived with the Co-ordinator of Ranger Services in tow (or was it the other way round) anyway the rock throwing was stopped FINALLY and we managed to get some sleep for the first time in about 48 hours. The idiots responsible were thrown out of the campsite and told not to come back. Apparently they are facing some fines but action should have been taken MUCH EARLIER by both the police and shire. It was only when I threatened to defend my campsite with a weapon that the police finally seemed to take note of the seriousness of the situation.

The gutter scum responsible should have been thrown off the campsite after the first night and I even told the ranger that if they were allowed to stay that I was sure we would be attacked a second time. I am far from satisfied with the late response from the police and the damage that occurred to our Coaster and tent on the second night could have been avoided if they had sorted things out after the first attack.

**May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004 (Sunday)**

With the trash removed things in camp returned to normal and we even took the boat out to do some fishing and get our minds off the trouble. Fishing wasn't that great as we only caught a few garfish for bait and one and a half

Spanish Flag. One and a half? Yes that's right. A monster of a shark nailed one of the flag on its way up to the boat and all I got was the head.

We went over to Ken and Barbara's for a delicious dinner and another enjoyable evening; this one even more so as there were no rocks landing on the Coaster later in the night.

**May 24<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

Our first trip into town and we had to drop the annexe. Not too much effort so we may end up going in once a week after all. Our first nice surprise was to find that the campervan HAS FINALLY SOLD! YAY! And our bank account was a little healthier than before. Although we ended up losing over \$3k it is good to get it out of our hair and it is one less thing to worry about when we get back.

Having some extra money always means getting a few things we have been waiting for, for a while so we replaced our old decrepit fishing rods and reels and I finally got myself a digital camera. (Fuji Finepix S3000 \$399 from Retravision.) Very easy to use and quite impressive. The S5000 would have been nicer but the extra \$200 couldn't really be justified.

We managed to sort out a few things in town, do the shopping, get some water and refuel. All this took the whole day and we weren't back in camp much before 4pm.

The only sour note of the day was the 20amp charger failing and the fridge in the trailer going off so there were no cold drinks when we got home.

I still have to get another solar panel and we will look at that next time we go in.

**May 25<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Would have been a good day to go fishing but there was a pile of washing to get done and that took all morning. Other camp chores needed doing so a bit of a work day ensued.

**May 31<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

Back into town again to try and get something sorted out about the fuel pump. Strangely no one seems to want to have anything to do with it. I think they have so much work up here they really don't give a stuff about anything that might be a little difficult.

We did order a solar panel (Unisolar 64w \$695) which should be here by the time we come in again next week. Also got my hands on a Cannon scanner/printer which at \$199 was quite good value. Did the usual water collection and grocery shopping and didn't accomplish much else.

**June 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Finally got to go fishing again as the wind has given up trying to blow us into the sea for a while.

Caught sharks, NW Snapper, Cod, Flag, Trevally, and Spangled Emperor but only kept 3 fish to eat. Most flag were too small and Spangled Emperor were undersized. It hurts putting 33cm fish back as they are good plate size. (Spangled Emperor minimum legal size up here is 41cm.)

**June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Woke early to a very calm looking sea. Went out in the boat but it soon became clear that the wind wasn't planning to stay away. As we are running short of bait we moved around the point out of the wind but came up empty anyway. As we were sitting in the shelter the weather worsened so in the end I dropped Belle off on the beach by the mangroves and took the boat round the point on my own. It was a very rough ride but I got the boat in Ok.

Later in the day Andy & Deb arrived in their big silver eagle. It's good to see some more familiar faces turning up.



Andy & Deb's Silver Eagle

**June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

Went out on to the reef at low tide to see if we could find any bait but there was no sign of octopus (as I expected due to the recent floods). I did catch a few small rock crabs that can be good bait for snapper and bluebone and Andy speared a couple of eel tailed catfish.

I was walking back towards shore when I spotted a movement in the sand and to my great surprise a large mud crab popped up and started waiving its claws at me. In short order it ended up in the bucket and the small crabs I caught for bait were thrown out.

Crossing a sandy area we also found a few big blue swimmers which went into Andy & Deb's bucket. Everyone had an unexpected treat for tea. The mud crab was the biggest surprise as it was only a matter of a hundred yards from the boat ramp and several kilometres from the nearest creek.



Mud crab caught near the boat ramp.

**June 4<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

The day started with no wind and the sea was flat so we dashed out (along with several other boats) in the hope that the wind would stay away. No such luck, we had just dropped our lines in when the wind started to pick up. At least we managed to catch a few bait fish for when the wind really goes away.

In the evening we had a very low tide and went looking for crabs again. We caught 5 (one caught me for a while) and 3 got away in the murky water. We (Belle actually) caught a large squid in the shallows by scaring it into a bucket. That takes care of bait for the next fishing trip.

**June 5<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

A near windless day at last and everyone with a boat went out fishing. We went back to the spot 2.5Km out that had produced for us once before and caught a variety of fish including: Spangled Emperor, Grass Emperor, Sucker fish, Trigger fish, Trevally, Spinefoot, Grinner, Northern pike and we had a number of bite offs by bigger fish. The line on both reels is going to be upgraded before we go out again.

In the end we brought home 2 snapper and one trevally. The fish for everyone to remember is the spinefoot. These are also referred to as Happy Moments. If you are pricked by any of the many spines you will NOT have any happy moments for a while. Be VERY careful handling these fish. The best advice is to cut them off and let them go.

In the evening we had an invite to a sausage sizzle which turned out to be very enjoyable. It's always nice to get to know others around the campsite a little better.





Spinefoot or Happy moments.

**June 6<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Sunday)**

Beautiful fishing weather, shame the fish didn't co-operate. Only caught grinders and a few small fish.

**June 8<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Went with Ken in his Suzuki up to the point to try some fishing off the rocks. Didn't catch anything big but got a few small fish for bait which we sorely need at the moment. Everyone is complaining about the lack of interest fish are showing in baits over the past few days.

**June 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Out fishing again but all we managed to get was bait in the form of 16 garfish.

**June 12<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

We picked up the solar panel in Karratha yesterday and now we finally have the freezer working as it should. That will make life a little easier (and will help us keep our bait fresh longer.)

Today the morning was very still, so we made the decision to go out to the closest island (7.3km). We were glad we did, not because of the fish we caught but because of the beautiful coral reef we could see and the myriad fishes that inhabit it. In the end Belle caught one good sized Spanish flag which we had for lunch. The only minor problem was that we had gone out on a falling tide so pushing the boat back up the beach on the trailer was a bit more strenuous than usual.

**14<sup>th</sup> June 2004 (Monday)**

After an almost record breaking period of good fishing weather the easterly winds came back today.

**23<sup>rd</sup> June 2004 (Wednesday)**

Great lack of activity during the last few days as the winds have been up again. Apart from one trip into town on Monday when we finally got the fuel pump problem sorted out (\$228) we have been waiting patiently to get out in the boat again. We have tried fishing from the rocks and did manage to catch a few bream but today we did get out in the boat and ended up catching a 62cm morwong. Sadly it looks like the winds are going to be back tomorrow so we will go into hibernation again. (Turns out the 'morwong' was actually a painted sweetlip.



Painted sweetlip (also called morwong or slate bream)

**29<sup>th</sup> June 2004 (Tuesday)**

Tried fishing yesterday and today but the wind keeps coming up and spoiling things. Yesterday we caught 2 flag a cod and some weird reef fish but nothing was worth keeping so they all went back. Today we got up extra early but caught nothing and had to come back quickly when the wind built up too soon.

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 (Wednesday)**

Managed to get out fishing for a few hours. Caught a big cod, a Spanish flag and sweet lip emperor.

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2004 (Thursday)**

Into town to pick up supplies.

**2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004 (Friday)**

Finally some reasonable fishing weather. Although we didn't bring any fish home we did catch remora, spinefoot, tusk fish, flag, perch and assorted other unidentified fish. With a little luck we may get another good day tomorrow.

**3<sup>rd</sup> July 2004 (Saturday)**

Another fishing day which started out rough but gradually calmed down to perfect weather. Although we caught 11 different types of fish there were none worth bringing home which was a little disappointing. (Fish caught: 2 types of cod, long tom, garfish, trumpet, grunter, flag, dark tailed perch, unidentified reef fish, tuskfish, whiptail.) Even so 'a bad day fishing beats a good day at work' as the saying goes.

**6<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Tuesday)**

A good fishing day weather wise and after going 5km out we initially thought that it would be a good day fishing wise as well. Every time we put the lines down we got a bite but every fish we pulled up was either not an edible variety or was an undersized NW snapper. 80% of the fish we brought up were snapper and all were between 25-27cm, just under the limit and VERY frustrating. In the end we brought back 2 jobfish to eat as we hadn't tried them before.

**7<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Wednesday)**

Went fishing again and this time instead of going straight out we turned right and headed across towards the next point. After a bit of searching I found a passage through the offshore reef which dropped from 14' down to about 21'. It turned out to be the best fishing spot we have found at 40 Mile so far. We caught plenty of stripey, moose perch and even red tail perch (which some people mistake for mangrove jack). We came back with a mixed bag of 8 perch and things brightened up considerably.



Red tail perch

**11<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Sunday)**

Wind and rain and COLD!

**15<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Thursday)**

Our trip into town this time was to Wickham not Karratha. The reason for that is that so many people have told us about Moby's Kitchen in Point Samson we decided to combine lunch there with a shopping trip. As it turned out we weren't as impressed with Moby's as others have been, average would be about the nicest thing we could say about it.

As we were in the area we diverted to look at Cossack and Settler's Beach again. This is one of the most interesting and pretty places in this area so I was glad we went back after so long to see it again.

**17<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Saturday)**

Wind and rain and COLD! Continues unabated.... CURSES!

Because the weather has been (or at least seems to have been) so awful, I have been contemplating packing up and going back to Perth. To check and see if it is really as bad as it seems I checked the stats for the times we have been here before and found that the first time we were up this way we had 10 good fishing days in the boat out of 3 months, last year we had 17 good days out of 2 months and so far this year we have had 14 good days out of 2 months. This makes a total of 41 days out of 7 months or 19% of all days up here are good fishing days.

If this is an average then staying here an extra month may mean that we have another 5-6 days fishing to look forward to. Now the question is: is it worth it????

Every Saturday night a group of campers get together to prepare a meal. Tonight we had Christmas I July and it was the best yet.

**19<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Monday)**

The wind has finally got to me and I started packing up the boat today. We will finish packing tomorrow and then head on to Onslow as we have been past the turn off many times but have never taken time to travel the 82km off the main highway to see what it is like.

**20<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Tuesday)**

Arrived in Onslow mid afternoon. The wind at 40 mile made packing up the tent this morning a real headache but once we were on the road it practically blew us all the way to the Onslow turn off.

Onslow is smaller than I expected. Pretty much a one store town which means prices are very high. The town caravan park looked very crowded so we went along to the one at Beadon Creek only to find that it was also full. Thankfully the lady we spoke to found us a spot behind the function room and only charged us \$12 for the night. It is a nice change to be met by someone in a caravan park who is pleasant, helpful and who isn't trying to part us from our last dollar.

As it turned out Beadon Creek Village was an excellent choice as there is a nice covered area with BBQs as well as a function room (with free pool table), a swimming pool plus campers kitchen and all the other amenities you would expect. Having seen the other caravan park I think Beadon Creek was by far the better choice.



Termite town - Onslow

**21<sup>st</sup> July 2004 (Wednesday)**

Took time in the morning to have a look around Onslow and found a small laid back place in a lovely setting. There are creeks east and west and (when the wind isn't blowing) plenty of ocean right on the doorstep.

On the way out of town I took a couple of pictures of what should be called 'termite city'. There are more termite mounds per acre here than we have seen anywhere else on our travels. It is an eye catching sight and it isn't really publicised that much. The pictures I took really don't do the area justice.

Because the weather is bad and getting worse we didn't get a chance to go out and look at the campsite at Three Mile Pool. The turn off is 20Km south of town and then a further 17Kms to the campsite. With rain threatening we didn't fancy getting stuck so we returned to the highway and turned west planning to head back to Perth.

As we reached the Exmouth turn off I decided to make a detour of around 150Kms. We haven't been to Exmouth since before cyclone Vance hit the area (1998) and we thought it best to check out the rumours we have been hearing about the unfriendly attitude of the local council to camping in the shire.

As the day wore on the weather got worse until drizzle became rain and we found a rest area 68Km south of Exmouth and pulled up for the night.

**22<sup>nd</sup> July 2004 (Thursday)**

An early start saw us arrive at Learmonth jetty eager to do some fishing. The first disappointment was the rough sea but the second disappointment was even worse. The lovely wide, solid wooden jetty that we have so many fond memories of fishing from in years gone by has been replaced by a horrible metal and plastic 'safe' jetty with railings all round which get in the way of fishing. It was like a sacred site had been wantonly destroyed.

Seeing no chance to drop a line in we pressed on into town where we found a very changed Exmouth. The sleepy old place has now been 'discovered' by the tourists and as a result it has changed almost beyond recognition. It is a shame that places like this always seem to succumb to the power of the dollar and questionable 'progress'.

After refuelling we went round the cape to Mesa campsite in the national park where we may stay a few nights. The weather is easing a bit but isn't exactly idyllic yet.

**23<sup>rd</sup> July 2004 (Friday)**

Last night we collected around 130 litres of fresh water courtesy of the rain storm that hit soon after dark. Good rain is always welcome when we are out in the boonies and we will have enough now to stay here a few days longer if we feel so inclined.

Today the rain cleared and we ferreted out the fishing gear. As it is too difficult to launch the dinghy here we are stuck with beach fishing and even though we didn't get any 'keepers' today we did catch 3 dart, 1 bonefish, 1 whiting and a flathead. At least that is promising.

We caught up with Jim & Kiki in Utopia II. (Utopia I burned to the ground at Barradale after an oil leak caught fire.) We first met them in 1997 when we attended the CMCA wildflower rally.

**24<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Saturday)**

Last night we had more rain, not as bad as the night before but another chance to collect water. Fishing today only produced 2 dart but who cares when you get to stand and bask in the beauty of this place.

**25<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Sunday)**

What an appropriate day for the weather to improve. Today the clouds vanished and we have full sun. Finally we can get the clothes washing done and the batteries won't be struggling to keep the fridges going.

With the sunshine Mesa campsite has turned from a rather nice spot into a veritable paradise. The sparkling turquoise waters of the Ningaloo Marine Park are right on our doorstep and we are thinking about staying here longer than we had originally planned.



Mesa and the turquoise blue of Ningaloo– Is this paradise? YES!

**26<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Monday)**

Sunny again but very windy. We decided to move on tomorrow so went fishing for the final time here and caught 3 threadfin, 1 flathead and Belle caught 2 whiting that were too small to keep.

After packing most things up we decided to take a drive down to Yardie Creek but when it came time to start the Coaster there was nothing but an ominous click, click. After checking the starter battery (which was ok) and giving the starter motor a couple of whacks (which sometimes releases sticky brushes) we came to the conclusion that the starter motor has packed up. We will try rocking the Coaster tomorrow to see if that unsticks the starter but failing that we will need to get a tow start.

**27<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Tuesday)**

We got started with the help of another camper who had a 4wd. While heading to Exmouth I found that the petrol gauge had started to malfunction, as the LPG gauge was already on the blink this was a nuisance but as we had plenty of petrol and were going to fill up with LPG it wasn't going to be a problem.

As I disconnected the LPG the gas started pouring back out of the cylinder – not good – so I shut the valve off and allowed the gas left in the filler pipe to escape. After a bit of fiddling round I managed to clear the valve and when I turned the valve back on everything was ok. Quite a relief.

357Kms later we arrived in Carnarvon. The first repairer we tried was too busy to do the job and the second (Auto Pro) was also busy but said they could get the starter and we could leave the Coaster with them. (As I had stalled it and it wouldn't re-start there wasn't a choice in any case.) We are in the RAC and have the Plus package so we contacted them and after confirming the repairs would take a couple of days they arranged a motel room and hire car for two days. This is the first time we have had to use the Plus options but it turned out to be very worthwhile.

The car we have the use of is a new Commodore with everything that opens and shuts. Automatic windows, automatic mirrors, digital readouts and the dash, central locking, automatic aerial, cruise control, you name it, this vehicle had it. Belle got in and started looking around at all the gadgets and I think the lady from Avis thought we were a couple of real bumpkins.

We visited the local shops and picked up supplies for dinner and settled down to a comfortable night at the Gateway Motel.

**28<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Wednesday)**

As we have the use of a nice bright shiny new Commodore we cruised around town for a bit before heading down to the tackle shop near the small boat harbour. Here there is a large assortment of fishing and boating gear to browse through and the prices are usually very competitive. This time we found enough goodies to spend nearly \$200 including a voltage adapter so we can run our 12v freezer from 240v. Very handy but expensive at \$99.

From this experience we can thoroughly recommend the following businesses to other travellers.

- Auto Pro Carnarvon (Rob)
- RAC Plus Roadside Assistance.
- Avis Car Rentals Carnarvon (Lyn)

Gateway Motel Carnarvon

Each of the people we dealt with was friendly, helpful and efficient.

**29<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Thursday)**

We picked up the Coaster with its nice new starter motor, fuelled up, put more oil in the Coaster, dropped off the hi re car and headed south. It didn't take long to discover we had another problem; the petrol system supposedly fixed by K&B Electrics in Karratha failed AGAIN! Then we found we were unable to get the Coaster into 5<sup>th</sup> gear. As we had enough autogas we kept going but when we reached Northampton we found the pump refused to put more than about \$10 worth of gas in the tank.

By this time it was around 3:30pm and we had had enough for the day. We didn't know how much autogas was left in the Coaster as the gauge is stuffed, we had a full tank of petrol but a petrol pump that was knackered again and it was too late in the day to go looking for help. We booked in at the Drummond Cove Caravan park for the night (\$55 for a unit as the Coaster looks like a bomb has gone off inside)

Drummond Cove, what a nice name. Pity that the sea is not exactly close and the caravan park is right on the VERY NOISY highway. The unit we are in looks like it was last decorated in the late 1960s – purple, pink and bright orange are the dominant colours. The bed 'mattresses' are nothing more than thin bits of foam and are totally useless to sleep on. The floor looks like it hasn't been cleaned in years and the sliding door rattles in the wind. Otherwise the cabin is more or less what you would expect.

The park surrounds are nice enough (if you can ignore the traffic noise – which you can't) and the toilets are modern and clean. There is at least good quality toilet paper in the toilets. Powered sites are \$20 a night (too much) and the park is well lit at night. The staff member we dealt with was friendly and helpful but nothing can really compensate for the terrible location of this park.

**30<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (Friday)**

I removed and cleaned the autogas inlet valve but that didn't help the leakage problem. Now in order to fill up I have to undo the inlet shut off, fill the tank and then close the inlet shut off again. This is a bit of a pain in dry weather but as it is wet now crawling under the back of the Coaster each time we fill up is a real chore.

Well we are finally home. I have to admit that it is a great relief to be back in the bus – all that room! We didn't get away without another mechanical scare today. As we reached Midland there was an awful noise coming from the engine. I stopped briefly on Roe Highway to have a look but couldn't see exactly where the sound originated. Once we got home and I had more space I checked the engine and found it was simply a pipe that had come loose.

Things to fix on the Coaster:

1. Petrol pump (again!)
2. Gas inlet valve
3. Fuel leak near carbi
4. Wheel alignment
5. Gas gauge not working
6. Find out why 5<sup>th</sup> gear can't be used
7. Service & tune
8. Grease & oil
9. Radiator flush
10. Brake light switch needs replacing
11. Hand brake needs adjusting
12. Horn not working

At least we are back in one piece and under our own steam.

Reflections on almost 3 months in the Coaster:

Honestly I don't know how anyone lives in a Coaster long term. They are simply too narrow and too small (well SWB ones are) to be comfortable in. The weather up north didn't help. Most days were either too windy, too overcast for the solar panels to work and in the end too wet to be enjoyable.

It is impossible to go anywhere once the annexe is up so if you are in one place for a long time you become a prisoner of circumstance.

Anyone who does live long term in a Coaster style vehicle has my undying admiration. Three months was all I could stand and I couldn't wait to get home to the bus.

**31<sup>st</sup> July 2004 (Saturday)**

Dropped in to see Alan today and found he has already put his Coaster up for sale and has bought a caravan and a Commodore wagon to tow it. I guess we weren't the only ones to get fed up with life in a small bus.

We have to get the Coaster checked out to see if it is worth keeping. If it is then we will still go ahead and look for a small caravan to tow behind it.

**6<sup>th</sup> August 2004 (Friday)**

A couple of nice days during the week where we did nothing but clean things up (especially getting the red dust out of the Coaster and trailer).

The weather is very much on and off at the moment, typical spring weather but it is still winter.

A bunch of cows from the paddock next door jumped the fence last night and much mooing ensued resulting in a great lack of sleep on our part. Lucky for the cows I don't have a rifle.

### 13<sup>th</sup> August 2004 (Friday)

The Coaster went in to get some work done the other day and we are hoping it will be ready for collection today. Other than that we haven't done much as the rain has kept us inside for the past few days. No luck yet finding a suitable caravan but there are a few to look at in the next few days so we will just keep on looking.

The Coaster still needs more work done (apparently the carbi is stuffed) so the \$665 this lot of work is going to cost us isn't the end of our expenses. In any case we will pick it up tomorrow and work out where we go from there.

On a totally unrelated subject, I have been scanning in some of my old photos and saving them off in high resolution but when it came to comparing them to the shots I have taken with the new digital camera, the scanned analogue images are quite a disappointment. The digital photos look so real you feel you are looking out of a window at the real scene, whereas the scanned analogue ones always seem to look like a photo. Perhaps this is just a result of the scanning process but whatever it is I am very glad we now have a decent digital camera.

On our travels I estimate that I have taken well over 2500 photographs at a cost (for developing and film) of something exceeding \$1200. With the digital camera it is possible to take as many shots as you like for nothing and check them on the spot and re-take them if something is wrong. I really should have bought one of these cameras a couple of years ago. It would have paid for itself very quickly.

The only problem now is limiting the shots I take so I don't end up with thousands of them that I really don't need, but then again they can always be hived off to CD-Roms.

After experimenting it turns out that the digital camera (and software) is also very good at stitching photographs together.



This shot was stitched together from three single exposures. This is home base.

### 28<sup>th</sup> August 2004 (Saturday)

After looking around for a caravan ever since we got back we have been getting more and more disheartened as we drive out to see yet another van that according to its owner is in 'very good condition'. Good condition compared to what? is what I would like to know. We saw one van priced at \$5000 that I wouldn't have towed away even if it was FREE!

Our original budget of around \$4500 has gone out the window. Vans around that price are basically no more than old clapped out junk. In the end we have gone to a dealer (ABBA Caravans in Rockingham) and have put a deposit down on a 1984 Viscount Aerolite. It is 14' with a ply floor, aluminium chassis, front kitchen, 4 burner stove and oven, range hood, 4 seasons hatch, TV, video, TV ariel, near new annexe, 2 way fridge, wind out windows, 2 single beds and a lot of cupboard space. It looks like it is in fairly good condition with no sign of leaks. The things against it are a silly small gas bottle and a carpeted floor. The gas bottle can be easily sorted out but the carpet will need some sort of protection to keep it in good condition.

Although it isn't perfect, it is very close to what we were looking for. At over \$2000 more than we wanted to pay we have to give up any ideas of getting a Suzuki 4x4 that we hoped we could afford if we found a cheaper van. Hopefully in the long run, buying a better quality van will mean we get most of our money back if we ever decide to sell it.

We pick it up on Monday so I will be fidgeting about impatiently until then.

### 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004 (Wednesday)

We picked up the van as planned and have now started modifying it to suit our needs. A 12v battery system has gone in to run the lights (one thing I was unaware of is that most caravans run off the car battery through the trailer plug connection) and a solar panel has been hooked up but is yet to be installed on the roof. We have replaced the microwave (there is already one in the Coaster) with a small stereo that we originally bought for the campervan.

As the TV that came with the caravan was an older model that doesn't have automatic tuning we have swapped that with one from the bus. Auto tuning is important if you move around a lot because channels work on different frequencies in different areas.

We have been testing the 2 way fridge which seems to work very well and the only thing that is a problem is a small radio cassette that was installed in the van. There seems to be no power to it and tracing the wiring would be difficult as it vanishes into the wall. It doesn't matter anyway now I have put the small stereo in.

So far we are very pleased with the van. I have started moving in so we can live in it for a while before we actually go away. Hopefully we will then be able to iron out any bugs easily.



1984 Viscount Aero Lite

#### **8<sup>th</sup> September 2004 (Wednesday)**

The weather has been pretty foul over the past week but it has begun clearing today.

We have finally got round to getting the Coaster [wheel alignment](#) done and at \$80 it wasn't as expensive as we had expected. For anyone in W.A. from Geraldton to Esperance the person to contact is [John Gibbons on 0408 599 146](#). As he comes out and does the work his number is a useful one to have for those with Coasters and especially big rigs who can't easily get into most wheel alignment centres.

#### **11<sup>th</sup> September 2004 (Saturday)**

The weather forecast is for fine sunny days increasing in temperature from 19-24 degrees so we have packed up the caravan and coaster and are heading off the Heron Point for a few days to do some real testing of various systems.

We seem to have been able to fit everything we need in and although our speed has now been cut down to about 80kph the Coaster seems to handle the caravan well without the use of sway bars.

#### **12<sup>th</sup> September 2004 (Sunday)**

I turned 44 today and I was lucky enough to do so at Heron Point in the most perfect Spring weather.

The caravan is working out very well. It is already clear that it will be easy both to do stop/start travelling and to stop in places for long periods of time. I have been debating whether to put solar panels on the roof or to keep them as mobile units and I have come to the conclusion that for security reasons it is much better to have them mounted on the roof even though that means losing some of their effectiveness. I will get that sorted out once we get home and then we will be ready to start planing our next trip.

One new item we purchased recently was a Gasmate space heater that fits on top of a 2/3Kg gas bottle. We have been using it here as the nights are still chilly and it has worked well. It cost \$49 and is supposed to consume 106g of gas per hour. They are not recommended for use inside caravans as the heating element can use up oxygen quickly and if you are not careful it is possible to suffocate.

We are using it with hatches and vents open and are very careful not to leave it on when we go to sleep. Using it for short periods just to take the chill out of the air should be safe enough but it is one of those things we have to be very careful with.

Just before leaving home we insured the van with RAC (\$286 for \$9900 cover). I hate having to pay insurance but with our luck we can't afford to be without it.

As the van has a carpeted floor we have put a carpet protector down, the only problem is it keeps crawling along the floor, we need to find some way to secure it and keep it in one place.

Work carried out on the caravan so far:

Installed 12v deep cycle battery  
Volt meter  
Ammeter



12v plug  
Trailer plug (female) for deep cycle battery  
Removed microwave  
Installed stereo  
Fitted sail track to right side for second awning.  
Put up alfoil/cling wrap dispenser  
Water inlet lock fitted  
Spice rack installed  
Put up fire blanket  
Put longer gas hose on  
2<sup>nd</sup> gas bottle added  
Put carpet protector down

Things still to do:

Install 85w solar panel and regulator  
Install smoke alarm  
Install water pump  
Fix carpet protector in place

#### **14<sup>th</sup> September 2004 (Tuesday)**

Back from our first quick test trip and all indications are that we will be very happy and comfortable travelling in the new combination of Coaster and caravan. Now we can get the final few jobs sorted out and then we can begin to plan a longer trip. We want to see Wave Rock at Hyden and then move on to Esperance (possibly for the Summer) but we will then be on the way east and crossing the Nullarbor again is going to look very tempting as we will already be 700Km closer to Adelaide.

#### **17<sup>th</sup> September 2004 (Friday)**

The last two days have been busy as I finally got round to putting the solar panels on the Coaster and caravan. The BP 85w is on the caravan and the Unisolar 64w is on the Coaster. The two BP 40w panels we will keep unmounted and move them around as we did before. I picked up two regulators today (\$89 for the pair) and have finished installing everything at last. I also learned a few things that I didn't know from the chap who supplied the regulators. I will note the things he told me here as they may be useful for others to know.

1. Unisolar panels are not self cleaning (one reason they are not used by Telstra) and dirt build up is the chief reason for problems with them. The way to clean them is with fresh water and a soft nail brush. Don't use detergent or abrasive cleaners.
2. If you drill holes in your panels for mounting (like I did yesterday) you void the warranty. (I wish I had known that sooner) This includes putting hinges on.
3. Monocrystalline panels are a little more heat tolerant than Multicrystalline.
4. Multicrystalline panels in normal use produce slightly more power than mono.
5. A solar regulator must have a float state where it reduces the voltage coming in from the panels when the batteries are charged otherwise your batteries can be cooked by regulators like the Super Solar 20 which is either on or off. (Oh goody that's what we have in the old bus.) What is a 'float state'? It simply means that when the batteries are charged enough the regulator restricts the amount going in from the panels to something like 300ma.
6. Cheap batteries are cheap because they are poorly constructed. You get what you pay for.
7. Batteries can last up to 10 years if they are looked after properly.
8. Batteries should not be discharged more than 80% (Until now we had been led to believe that you could discharge to 50% but apparently that will damage the battery.) That leaves precious little to use.
9. Use stainless steel rivets to fix panels not aluminium ones (like I did yesterday Sigh!)

Anyone looking at setting up a [solar power system](#) and wanting to find out more about solar setups can contact [Barry Edwards on 08 9336 2414 or 0412 880 506](#). He has heaps of practical and technical knowledge on solar energy and I wish I had his number when I was first setting up our systems.

Anyone in W.A. can make an appointment to see Barry and this is very worth while as he has all the gear set up so you can see a range of different panels, regulators, inverters etc. before you make up your mind what you need. As he isn't pushing one particular brand you can get some good unbiased advice that you won't get in most shops.

The Coaster still hasn't finished all its mechanical work. The gas system is still playing up and we need the gas meter fixed. Hopefully that will be the last thing for a while as we are running out of available funds.

Thinking of the future it is about time I made another wish list.

1. Fix or replace Air-conditioner in the Coaster
2. Get a satellite TV system.

Hmmm, that seems a bit short, but to afford to get them we will have to put the bus into storage again and go free camping to build up the funds needed.

#### **22<sup>nd</sup> September 2004 (Wednesday)**

The wish list is now down to just one item as we got a satellite TV system installed today. We would have liked something a little easier to transport but in the end cost won out over functionality. The decoder is a Humax and the dish is rather large at 88cm but apparently bigger dishes are required if you are in the north west. The whole setup including installation, squealer, decoder, dish and ground mount cost \$650 (roughly half of what it was just a year

ago). No doubt in 12 months time it will be cheaper still but we have put this decision off long enough. At least we should be able to get TV in most places we decide to stop.

One disappointment is that the major city channels are not available free by satellite so we still have to carry an ordinary antenna in addition to the dish. Channels that we can get aren't all that much better than normal TV but we don't have to worry about where we are in future when we want to follow a series like Australian Idol or Survivor.

The installation was done by Jamie from [Access Antennas](http://AccessAntennas.com) (0412 880 506). He is a good contact to have for motorhomers in the Perth area as he comes out, does the installation and shows you how to set the system up yourself.

#### **October 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

After only 2 months at home we are sorted out (I hope) and back on the road again. We are just going to Heron Point to start with but from there we plan to head out towards Hyden and then down near Esperance. What happens after that we don't know as we have no fixed plans.

#### **October 5<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

After 4 perfect days the weather has gone rainy today. A few CMCA rigs have pulled in after attending the rally in Waroona but everyone is keeping out of the weather at the moment. The long weekend wasn't all that bad and most campers were remarkably well behaved (what a nice change). We are sitting still for a while to let some money build up before moving on towards Hyden.

So far things have gone well with the Coaster/caravan setup and the solar panels are keeping both 12v fridges going during the sunny days. Today we are using the generator a lot but the clouds are due to start clearing tomorrow so hopefully we won't be wasting too much money on petrol.

Setting up the satellite dish and finding the satellite turned out to be very easy so we should have TV everywhere we go as long as we aren't in a valley or surrounded by big trees.

#### **October 6<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

A wild and windy night and we almost had the annexe collapse but in the end I managed to keep it from collapsing completely. Someone (who shall remain nameless) was snoring away in the Coaster while I was stuck holding the annexe up from the inside. Finally the nameless one woke up and came out to help but not until I had been standing hanging on to the annexe for a good 20 minutes.

I have been trying to work out what 'free camping' costs us and have come to the following conclusions:

Petrol for the generator costs between \$1-2 a day.

LPG for cooking and the gas fridge costs around \$2 a day. This is based on a price of \$28 for a 9kg cylinder that will last for about 10 days while we run the gas fridge. If we only use LPG for cooking then a 9Kg bottle can last up to 3 months. (That would drop the weekly cost to just \$2.15)

The big bus costs \$10 a week for storage so weekly costs for 'free camping' are \$14 petrol \$14 LPG and \$10 bus storage: a total of \$38 a week. So for campsites which charge \$5 a night weekly costs run up to \$73. That is only \$7 less than we pay when we are at home in the bus staying on a powered site. In order to save enough to afford the fuel to travel we will have to find mostly free sites. The costs are a little inflated as they are based on using the gas fridge as well as the 12v fridges and being in cloudy weather and running the generator up to 8 hours a day. Once we empty the gas fridge and can find some nice sunny weather the costs for energy production could halve.

So what does all this mean? Best case scenario 'free camping' costs us \$20 a week compared to \$80 we usually pay, and 'low cost' camping can cost up to \$73 a week depending on the weather and need to use a gas fridge. That makes low end caravan parks look reasonably attractive but it really makes house sitting the best choice if we want to stay in an area for an extended time and build up money.



First campsite of our 4<sup>th</sup> trip.

**October 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

A noisy night last night as some yahoos were about making everyone's life difficult playing loud music until 2am. Bearing in mind the trouble we had at Karratha I bit my tongue this time and let sleeping dogs (or should that be B\*%#\$#DS) lie. As a result I took a sleeping pill but still only got 2 hours sleep. I am waiting to see what the little horrors get up to tonight. At least they are supposed to be leaving tomorrow. After last night I don't think I'm going to worry about turning the generator off early.

One more advantage buses and coasters have over caravans is that they are much more sound proof. Although a caravan is way better than a tent it can't compare with a bus when it comes to keeping unwelcome sounds out.

**October 15<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

The past week has been dominated by lousy weather. Cold rainy and very windy sums it up nicely. For a couple of days we were the only ones at this campsite but the weather improved yesterday and several people have come in and set up camp.

I am getting itchy feet and thinking about moving on soon. We can stay here until the end of the month if we want to but I really want to get out and do some exploring.



Quindanning

**October 16<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

The itchy feet finally got to me and we packed up and moved on today. We went into the hills through Dwellingup and on to the Williams turn off just south of Boddington. There are no designated rest areas on this road but there were three unmarked possibilities on the north side of the road. The first (38Km SW of Boddington) looked about the best choice.

We drove south east through the tiny town of Quindanning where there is an old pub (good rest stop for lunch) and a historic church but very little else.

Turning north at Williams we followed the Albany Highway for a few kilometres to the Congelin turn off. 24Km from the highway (sealed for all but the last 2Km) is the Congelin Campground. This is a CALM operated site with the resulting ban on dogs and high fees (\$5 per head per night). There is a water tank, toilets and shelter and it looks like BBQs are being installed. Both the family and group areas have loop roads for turning but this isn't a good place for big rigs or even for big caravans.

#### **October 17<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Sunday)**

After driving back through Williams we turned east towards Narrogin which is the largest town in the area. Narrogin is a good place to stock up on supplies as it has a Coles Supermarket.

From here we continued east to Wickepin and we had intended to keep heading east to Kulin but on the spur of the moment we decided to go and check out Yealering (29Km NE). Yealering has a small caravan facility near the lake (\$6 unpowered \$12 powered) and the toilets and showers (hot) are clean and modern. As the price was right we decided to stop for the night before moving on towards Hyden tomorrow.

The odd ute passes by on its way taking the driver to see friends or family. The shops are closed and nothing moves in town. Everything is still and quiet. Blue bottle flies buzz lazily around the caravan windows. Only the bees are busy, collecting pollen from flowers in a nearby park. A faint breeze ripples the water of the salt lake keeping the temperature just low enough to be comfortable. The cricket oval is empty and the bowling green is similarly deserted. A lone pink and grey galah lies dying at the foot of a gum tree; the victim of a collision with a car or perhaps poison bait. Other birds sing in the trees, unconcerned about the galah's fate. This is Yealering on a Sunday afternoon in October 2004.



Yealering Caravan Park

#### **October 18<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

Packed up, took the toilet keys back to the shop and paid for the night's stay. Started to drive out of town and couldn't change gear. Thankfully I could change gear with the engine stopped so I put it into first and drove around to the local RAC repairer. Turns out the clutch has died so we took the caravan back to the caravan park set it up all over again and then took the Coaster back to the repairer.

The weather is starting to heat up and the rest of the day was spent in a rather warm caravan.

#### **October 19<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Knowing what small town businesses are like we booked another night in the caravan park for tonight but with a little luck we MAY be on our way tomorrow. It is starting to get too hot to hang around here much longer.

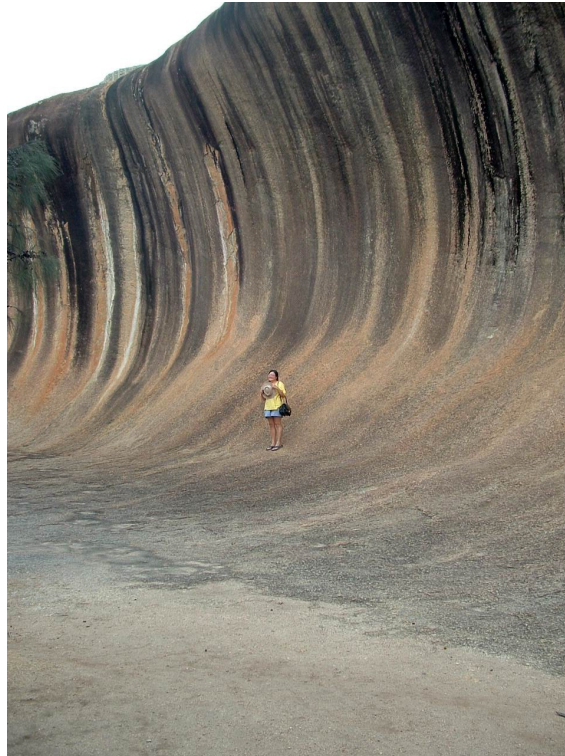
#### **October 20<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

Finally back on the road again and \$573 poorer. How I hate breaking down ! it is never cheap.

Passed through Corrigin stopping only to refuel, then on to George Rock where we stopped for lunch and walked up to see the rock and the pool. Sadly the historic hall located there is being vandalised and I looks like it won't be long before it is destroyed. Considering it has been on that site since 1920 it is a real shame to see our heritage being smashed up by stupid people.

A brief stop at Kondinin – a weird town with virtually no shops, we couldn't even find a fuel station – and a lot of modern looking houses. Very strange place to build, maybe it is all retired farmers who can't stand the thought of moving to a bigger town.

We finally arrived at Hyden and Wave Rock. There is an entry fee of \$7 per vehicle but a night at the caravan park costs \$20 which includes entry to the rock area. Since that seemed like reasonable value we stopped and went in to photograph the rock. I was more impressed than I expected to be and we still have some more exploring to do in the morning (when the hordes of flies are still asleep.)



Wave Rock

**October 21<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Thursday)**

Woke to thunderstorms and rain. When the power went off in the caravan park we decided not to hang around and packed up in the pouring rain. We seem to have developed a leak in the caravan but that may be because it was on a bit of a funny angle last night. We will have to wait and see. (It was)

The road from Hyden to Varley was quite good but from Varley to Lake King is got a little on the lumpy side. We continued driving with the only stop being at Pallarup Rock (no camping here now) and then at Ravensthorpe to refuel. Grabbed a couple of pies for lunch at Munglinup and then continued to Stokes Inlet National Park. Another CALM site with the associated charges but we have to admit that the site was very nice (despite the dead smelly frog in the toilet disinfectant). Even though it is a rainy miserable day, Stokes Inlet is a very pleasant place to overnight. If we had a boat with us we would consider staying much longer here.



Stokes Inlet

**October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

On the way back to the main road from Stokes Inlet I ran the Coaster on Petrol and found when doing so that the newly installed clutch began slipping badly. Once back on the highway I switched back to auto gas which dropped the engine power. The clutch was still slipping but not as badly. We called in to Dempster Holden (the RAC agent in Esperance) and they contacted Coxon & Co. in Yealering who agreed to cover the cost of having the clutch adjusted.

After the Coaster was finished and we picked up some supplies we decided to have a look at areas east of Esperance where we had heard there may be some campsites. Condingup was the first stop where we managed to confirm that it is possible to stay overnight at the local sports ground. There are toilets available and tank water but for everything else you need to be self-sufficient. You can get showers (\$2) in Condingup.

From here we tried to get to Alexander Bay but this turned out to be a 4x4 access area only. The same applied for campsites at Membinup Bch. at the end of Daniels Rd. There is a caravan park at Wharton (a beautiful scenic area on Orleans Bay) but we were told the charges were \$24 a night so there is no way we would consider staying there.

#### **October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

On the way in to town this morning the clutch began slipping again so we went straight into Dempster Holden. Dempster had a further look at the clutch and to our utter dismay reported that the clutch is now useless and another one has to be fitted. So the 'new' clutch lasted less than 4 days! As Dempster Holden did nothing more than an external examination I don't fully trust the complete failure diagnosis and as they are quoting figures like \$1000 for a new clutch I think we will be looking around at various repairers for quotes. The Bedford bus clutch only cost around \$850 so I can't see how a small Coaster clutch is going to be any more.

We contacted the RAC who want us to ring back on Monday and we tried to contact Coxons but being a Saturday there was no one about. I really don't like our chances of getting our money back from Coxons as we are hundreds of kilometres away and have no choice but to get another clutch fitted no matter what happens. As far as I can see Coxons should be responsible for paying for another clutch but whether they will or not remains to be seen.



Great Ocean Drive – Esperance

#### **October 25<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

We took the Coaster to the local Toyota / Ford dealers and were quoted similar prices to those at Dempsters. I was far from happy with the quotes so we called in to Repco who quoted \$204 for a heavy duty clutch. They referred us to Gary at Southside Autos who is an authorised Repco repairer. He suggested that fitting another clutch if required would take about 4 hours and so we gave him the go-ahead to pull it apart and see what had happened.

#### **October 26<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Tuesday)**

Well the clutch is back together with a new plate. The old one looks a little burned from the slippage but it is far from worn out. We don't know why it was slipping but we are out of pocket by another \$360.

#### **October 27<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

We contacted Coxons this morning and they asked us to send the old clutch plate back, as it was supplied by Coventrys and there is a branch in Esperance we said we would drop the old clutch plate in to save time. After speaking to Rob at Coventrys (who spoke with Colin at Coxons) we are feeling a little happier. It looks as though – once the paper work is completed – we will get the \$360 back. If so we will be very pleased with the final outcome. (As long as the clutch doesn't fail again but then that will become a Repco problem.)

As we haven't been able to do much but worry over the past two days we took a drive out to Wylie Head and Bay. A very nice spot just east of Esperance (off Bandy Creek Road). Very pretty scenery and a possible overnighter for smaller motorhomes.

From here we went west to Quagi just to check out the unsealed road before we take the caravan out there on Friday. Only a couple of vans there at present so we are hoping to get the site we would like – there are only 4-5 bays big enough for the Coaster and caravan to fit in. Quagi costs \$2 per person per night which makes it one of the cheapest sites left on the south coast. There is washing water, outside shower and toilets so we are hoping to stay there for a while.



Wylie Bay – Belle telling the useless mechanic at Yealering off!

**October 29<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

On the way out to Quagi the temperature gauge in the Coaster was reading rather high so we stopped in a rest area to check on coolant levels and the radiator fan. Both were ok and the temperature dropped when we stopped. Once we took off again the temperature went back up so the only thing I can think of is a stuck thermostat. It would be nice to go somewhere without a problem for a change as it gets rather tiring. I will also check the front of the radiator to see if there is any blockage but otherwise it will have to keep going until we get back to town.

**November 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

We are settled in at Quagi now and will try to stay here as long as we can. There are about 12 separate campsites here spread over quite a large area. The thing that puzzles me, is with all sites vacant except the one we are in, why have the last two lots of campers elected to stay in the site next to ours. Not that we are anti-social, but we chose this site as the furthest away from most of the others because we rely on a generator at night. For some weird reason some people don't seem able to be away from others and, like sheep, they have to herd together instead of spreading out. I have reached the decision that we will use the generator as and when we please and if people continue to camp right next door when there are so many other sites available, then that is their problem not ours.

This morning we tried fishing off the rocks but although we got a few bites, Belle only caught one fish which was far too small to keep. Like most places that look nice and are easy to get to, Quagi probably isn't much of a fishing spot. We have always found that the best fishing is in the most desolate and hard to get to places which have big sharp pointy rocks to clamber over.



Quagi Beach

**November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

A wild and stormy night last night with plenty of rain, thunder and lightning. We have managed to fill all our water tanks and the only problem was a pool of water collecting in the annexe after very heavy rain. This eventually drained away but left quite a mess.

**November 8<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Monday)**

The campsite has only just managed to dry out from the last lot of storms and we have been hit again with a thunder storm. At least this time it isn't as windy so we are hoping that our planned trip into town tomorrow won't have to be put off. We are seriously thinking about heading back to Perth and looking for house sitting there as it will probably be easier to find. The big worry at the moment is the Coaster overheating but we won't know what is causing that until we get back into Esperance.

**November 10<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Wednesday)**

We have decided to move on and have a look at Millers Point Reserve (near Bremer Bay) and then we will probably head back to Perth. The weather has been lousy with yet more rain and thunderstorms last night and high winds today.

People talk about the south coast as a place where there are four seasons in one day and it is hard to disagree. Last night we had thunderstorms and rain, this morning was clear blue sky, then clouds, then clear again, then clouds rain and wind and now back to clear blue sky at 6pm. Not an easy weather pattern to get used to. We will pack up tomorrow and move on, on Friday.

We met some Queenslanders yesterday who were complaining about the wind in W.A. They have been blown all over the place from the north to the south. There isn't much doubt about the wind over here, it blows like crazy for about 9 months of the year and can make the traveller's life quite miserable. You certainly have to pick the right days to travel or you will be buffeted and bounced all over the road when the wind is up.

Despite the storms we have had, there is a certain quiet satisfaction of sitting in the caravan watching TV and eating dinner in the middle of nowhere while the storm rages outside.

#### **November 12<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Friday)**

Left Quagi at 5:30am and battled our way against a fierce wind to Ravensthorpe and Jerramungup. From here we turned south west towards Albany and turned off at Gairdner to get to the Bremer Bay road. We got to Millers Point and dropped the caravan off.

Millers Point is a nice area set beside an inlet. There are some shacks, plenty of shade and camping fees are \$5 a night per vehicle. It is a very pretty area and people with boats were catching reasonable size bream. Access is via a 6km unsealed road but it was in good condition. There are toilets available but I could not recommend them. They are the VERY basic thunderbox type and were grotty and smelly.

After dropping off the caravan we went into Bremer Bay (about 60Km away) and had a look round the area. Some very nice beaches and spectacular scenery and a very neat tidy little town. For those looking for more facilities than are available at Millers Point, there are two caravan parks in Bremer Bay.



Bremer Bay

#### **November 13<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Saturday)**

We have decided to head towards Albany instead of going back to Jerramungup and then heading to Perth, as we haven't been along the Albany Highway for quite some time and have decided that now is as good a time as any to update the rest area information for that road.

We stopped briefly at Pallinup River but the rest area (although nice enough) was a little close to the highway. We kept going to Norman's Beach about 40Km east of Albany. We had been here once before but only in the car and had forgotten the small turning area at the end of the track. While trying to turn round the clutch in the Coaster began slipping again and we had to take the caravan off and (with the help of another camper – Trevor) we managed to get around and hitch up again. Now we had to face the climb back up the road and I had the sneaking suspicion that we might not make it out. No surprise then when part way up the hill we came to a very slow halt as the clutch got worse and worse.

Belle trotted off down the hill to seek help and shortly afterwards a 4wd came up the hill and parked in front of the Coaster. "I know you" said the driver, although I couldn't place his face. Turns out we had never met but we have spoken via email on several occasions. It was Gerry from [www.australiaoutdoors.com.au](http://www.australiaoutdoors.com.au) and we even have a link to his site on one of our links pages. Gerry rescued us from the hill and installed our caravan just outside his property. With the weight of the caravan off, the Coaster was just driveable and we managed to get set up back down near the car park.



With an invite for afternoon tea, we sat on Gerry and Ingrid's front porch and chatted with Trevor and his wife Rosalyn while we waited for the RAC to come out and have a look at the problem. With the clutch now adjusted we can get the Coaster back up the hill but I have my doubts about towing the caravan out as well. We will go into town when we need water and book the Coaster in to get the horrible thing looked at YET AGAIN. At least now we know what triggers the problem even if we don't know what the solution might be.

We are running true to form, breaking down in the most convenient places. Even though we have a problem to fix and we are stuck for a while, we are in a nice place with nice people to pass the time with. I guess if we have to have a problem then it might as well be in these circumstances.



Stuck half way

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2004 (Wednesday)**

After a few days of perfect weather the rain has returned. We are a little more sheltered from the wind than we were at Quagi and Norman's Beach is a more pleasant campsite. The real problem with this site is the lack of space, and that may be the reason that most people don't bother with it. All it would take is 3 or 4 vans here and there would be no more room. That plus the fact that the beach is a bit of a trudge up a steep very sandy track keeps most people from staying here.

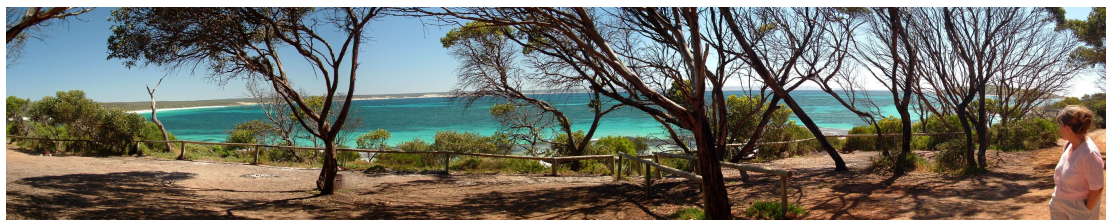
In fact if we hadn't had the clutch problem we wouldn't have stayed here either but now we ARE here I'm quite happy.

**20<sup>th</sup> November 2004 (Saturday)**

Gunter and his wife Brenda (fellow campers at Normans Beach) were going out to Cape Riche today and asked if we would like to go along. As we hadn't been there we gladly accepted and found that Cape Riche is one of the best campsites on the coast.

The campsite is operated by the Shire of Albany and is 18Km down a good unsealed road from the small town of Wellstead (east of Albany on the South Coast Highway.) There are flush toilets, bore and drinking water, cold water showers, beach boat launching and a lovely bay to look out on. The camping fees are reasonable (very reasonable considering the facilities) at \$5.50 per camp per night.

There are shelters and free BBQs right by the beach and the small shop in Wellstead (just 18Kms away) is well stocked. There is also fuel available at Wellstead and gas bottles can be refilled. This has to be one of the best places we have found anywhere on the Southern coast.



Cape Riche

**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2004 (Monday)**

Finally a trip into Albany to get fuel, food and water. Also a good chance to re-visit some of the campsites we first found here 7 years ago.

It is so hard to believe that all that time has passed since we first took off on the road. Another 6 days will mark 7 years exactly since we first left Perth and took off on an incredible journey of discovery. Despite all the hassles, hardships and troubles we have had over the past few years I wouldn't change my decision to adopt this lifestyle for a minute.

It has been the most rewarding 7 years of our lives and I hope we are able to keep going for many more to come. We are still finding new places and meeting new friends and generally having a wonderful life.



West Cape Howe

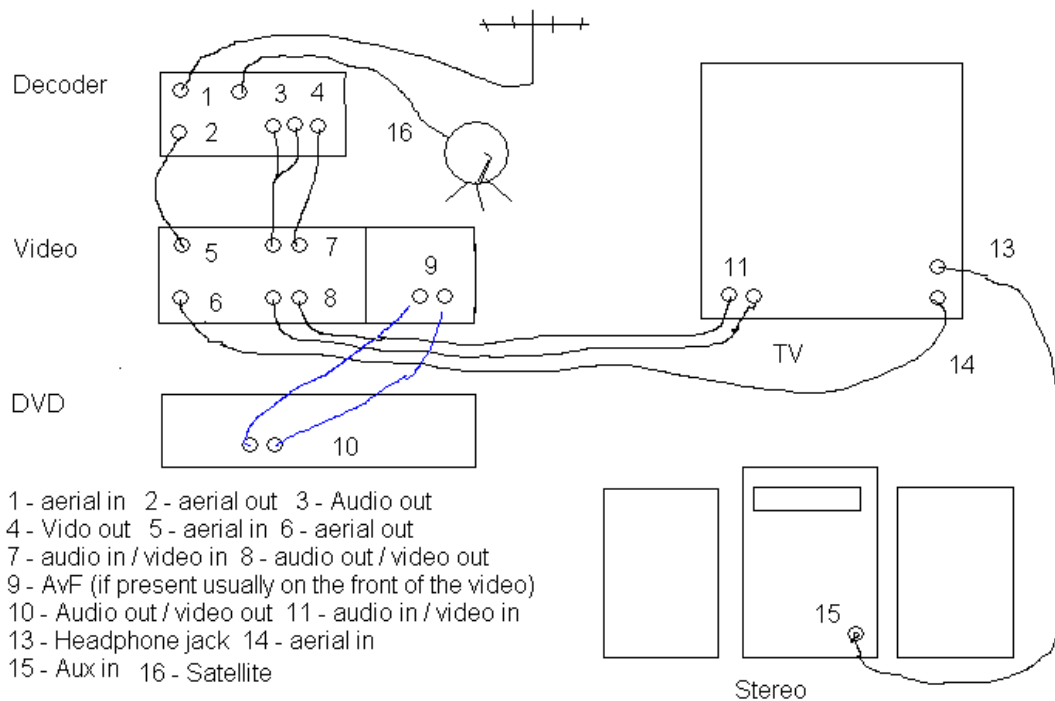
**25<sup>th</sup> November 2004 (Thursday)**

After a few very pleasant days at Normans Beach we decided it was time to go home to the bus and set about finding some house sitting for the summer. Thankfully we had no problems on the return journey (despite very strong winds slowing us up a bit) and got home to find three buses parked in the camping area. After introducing ourselves we sat around chatting about travel, break downs and buses for the remainder of the afternoon.

Michael (who should be in his GMC bus) is currently under canvas as his bus is away having the clutch rebuilt. I guess we aren't the only ones who have nasty expensive problems.

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2004 (Sunday)**

As we travel I have had many people ask about setting up satellite / video / DVD systems and how to wire them together. We have quite a complex system with videos and TVs at each end of the bus wired up to a DVD and stereo then with the addition of a satellite decoder. This is far too complicated for most people to bother with but I have put together a drawing that shows a very basic setup but includes all the elements you may need.



If your video player is stereo then connection 3 will go to two separate audio inputs. If like the example above it is mono then you need a special RCA adaptor 2F1M (2 female and 1 male plug).

The audio connection from the TV (13) to a stereo should come from the headphone jack (usually on the front) not the audio output RCA plug on the back. This ensures everything the TV puts out goes to the stereo. We have found that the RCA plug does not necessarily match sound with vision.

If you use RCA connections from the video to the TV (8) then the aerial connection (6) becomes largely redundant unless you want to record one program on the video and watch another on TV.

Usually videos have two sets of RCA inputs these days, one at the back (AV) and one at the front (AVf). If the AVf is not present then it is very difficult to connect a DVD to this system.

Hopefully this will be of some use to those who are having problems setting up this sort of system.

#### **11<sup>th</sup> December 2004 (Saturday)**

A slow time for interesting entries so it must be time for a new wish list.

- 1.Sort out the remaining mechanical problems with the Coaster. (done)
- 2.Get a new Air-conditioner for the Coaster (done Jan 2005)
- 3.Re-wire the house battery system in the Coaster (done)
- 4.Fix leak in water tank in Coaster (done)
- 5.Wheel balance for the Coaster (forget it)
- 6.Sort out a fridge for the caravan since the gas one gave up. (repaired gas fridge Apr 05)
- 7.New curtains for the bus (this has been on the list for ever!)
- 8.Work out how to carry the boat on the Coaster while it tows the caravan. (given up)
- 9.Figure out why battery in caravan isn't charging fully. (Swap battery)
- 10.Fit electric water pump for caravan. (leave it until we get a bigger one)
- 11.Replace broken 12v plug in Coaster (forget it)
- 12.Put 12v plug in Caravan. (Forget it)

No wonder I never seem to have any money or time.... (well time sure sorted out that list).

#### **16<sup>th</sup> December 2004 (Thursday)**

We tried taking the boat out crabbing for the second time today and although this time we did finally manage to get out, the wind came up yet again and we were forced back in after dropping only 3 nets. The weather forecast was for 8-13 knots but in reality it turned out to be more like 20.

We are just over a week from Christmas and to be honest I will be glad when it is out of the way and we can start working on what to do next. This time last year we were off for our first and only trip in the campervan, how things have changed since then.

We are thinking about getting a larger boat but then we have to think about how we will manage to get it up north with the caravan, so who knows what will happen next.

#### **18<sup>th</sup> December 2004 (Saturday)**

Having decided to sell the Coaster, then deciding to keep it, we have now gone back to plan A (or is it C or D?). There just doesn't seem to be an easy way to transport both the boat and the caravan while we have the Coaster so it looks like it will have to be a 4wd. We lose all the good things the Coaster has, especially the shower and hot water, so we will probably need to get a bigger caravan as well. Then we want a bigger boat, sigh! Does it ever end????

I will miss the Coaster when it does sell because it has so much going for it. If we sell the caravan we will have to fix the fridge first, thinking about it, we have to fix the fridge whatever we do so we now have to decide whether a gas or 12v model would be better. Gas means the cost of a 9kg bottle every 2 weeks, 12v means more batteries and added weight. I wonder why everything has to be so b&\*\*\*#y complicated.

The biggest pain is all the time and money we have spent getting the Coaster and caravan just the way we want them.

Given all the problems, hassles and changes of plans we have had over the years I wouldn't swap it for the troubles our new friend Michael is having with his bus. It cost him a packet to buy and he has already had major problems (costing many thousands of dollars to fix) and he only bought it earlier this year. We feel so sorry for him but can't do much more than offer moral support.

He has already been waiting over 3 weeks for the problems to get sorted out and had to move closer to the repairers to keep an eye on progress. All the heat of the last couple of weeks he had to sit out in a tent.

#### **23rd December 2004 (Thursday)**

We got a phone call from Michael last night, and at the time I was a bit hazy about the details but the gist of it was that he had injured himself doing something and had to go into hospital. He was very worried about his cat 'Babe' and needed someone to look after her while he was away. We shot over in the Coaster and by the time we got there he had already been picked up by the ambulance. As it was already late we decided to stay the night but about 1:30am Michael turned up again as the hospital had discharged him.

Now we got the full story of what had happened. Michael wanted to check under his bus and had jacked it up using two jacks and blocks of wood. While he was underneath, one of the blocks split in two allowing the bus to shift and

the whole thing came down squashing him into the ground. As the ground clearance is very low on his bus there wasn't really room for him to crawl underneath and he was lucky it happened over relatively soft ground or the end result could have been much worse.

This morning he had improved enough to get around and wasn't so breathless, so after taking him round to the local doctor to make an appointment we went home about mid morning. I expect Michael doesn't feel all that lucky at the moment but not many people get squashed by a bus and manage to walk away from it.

**26th December 2004 (Sunday)**

Christmas is over for another year and once we are past the New Year celebrations we will be thinking about doing a few short trips in the Coaster. Although we want to sell it we might as well make use of it while we still have it. We will install a new air-conditioner and get it serviced then I want to have a look around Collie, Bridgetown and later the Jurien area.

**29th December 2004 (Wednesday)**

Ordered a .5hp air-conditioner for the Coaster today (\$279). That probably means it will sell soon after I fit it, if not at least we will be able to get away for a while. Michael dropped in yesterday, he is still very sore (hardly surprising) but at least he is up and about now.

**25<sup>th</sup> January 2005 (Tuesday)**

DISASTER struck last week when the laptop computer had a hard drive crash and we lost a months worth of work. Murphy's law being what it is the crash happened just prior to the regular monthly backup. Now I have had a chance to work out just how much gets done in a month and have resolved to backup every week (no, make that DAY) from now on.

Some of the data loss will be permanent as there are things we cannot recover. It has taken several days to get the system back up to a point where it is useful again but by the end of the week I hope to have things back to a reasonably normal state.

A big section of the diary is missing but there have been some developments:

1. We purchased a Toyota Landcruiser HJ60 and are getting it mechanically sorted out.
2. I have started re-painting the Western Belle as she was starting to look a bit shabby.
3. We have a new annexe being made for the same reason.
4. The Coaster is now for sale.
5. We are not going north this year but have been booked as house sitters until September in 3 separate houses. (Well that was plan 'A')
6. 2 of the house sitting jobs fell through due to ill health of the owners so we are still in the bus until March.
7. Christmas was HOT and uncomfortable and we stayed home for a change.

**7<sup>th</sup> February 2005 (Monday)**

Hard to believe but the computer crashed AGAIN today. The data loss isn't so severe this time but we have managed to lose quite a few photographs which is a real pain.

**12<sup>th</sup> February 2005 (Saturday)**

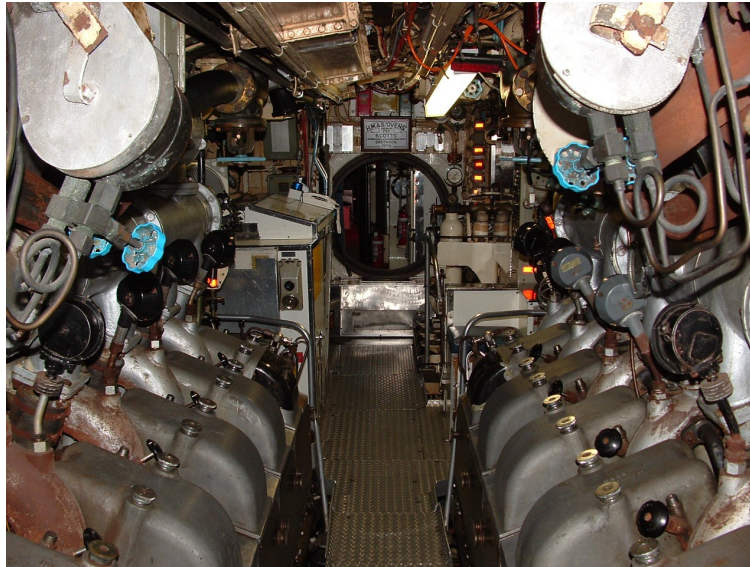
\$315 poorer today when a new hard drive went in to the laptop. \$270+ poorer yesterday when we put a new tyre and 2 inner tubes on the Cruiser.

**21<sup>st</sup> February 2005 (Monday)**

Took the gas fridge from the caravan up to Maddington to be repaired. It isn't easy to find a gas fridge repairer so if anyone in Perth is looking the ONLY place you can now get one fixed is at:

Caravan Fridge Repairs, Unit 8, 11 Malcolm Rd. Maddington.

After dropping the fridge off we went to Fremantle and finally managed to have a look at the Maritime Museum and get a tour through HMAS Ovens. The tour is reviewed in the attractions section of the web site but for the record: if you haven't been to see the museum and the submarine, then take time out and go, you won't be disappointed.



Inside HMAS Ovens

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2005 (Tuesday)**

Back to Fremantle to have a look at the old prison today. (Reviewed in the attractions section of the web site) Without repeating everything in the review the main points were the price is a little steep but the tour was worth while even though it doesn't cover all the prison.



Fremantle Prison

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2005 (Sunday)**

An eventful time over the last 2 weeks saw us go house sitting, sell the Coaster (\$15,500) and go shopping:

- 1hp reverse cycle split system air conditioner \$299
- New 34cm TV \$99
- Wheel carrier for 4x4 \$150
- Roof rack for 4x4 \$225
- Pop up shower tent \$89
- Pop up screen enclosure \$49
- Portable 12v TV \$50

Remainder of the latest wish list:

- Inner spring mattress for caravan.
- Video camera (maybe)
- Vodafone mobile connect card (need to look in to this more first).
- 12' dinghy with echo sounder
- Boat trailer with standard sized wheels
- Small break down boat trailer that takes standard sized wheels (later)
- Change boat motor for 8hp. (maybe)
- And some boring things like new eye glasses.

**29<sup>th</sup> March 2005 (Tuesday)**

A rather uneventful time lately as we have been stuck at home over the Easter break. We had planned to be away but found at the last minute that the new wheel carrier caused a problem with the trailer when turning left. We are about to get that fixed today with help from our friend Gunter. With a little luck we will finally be off towards Collie tomorrow but we will wait and see what happens.

**31<sup>st</sup> March 2005 (Thursday)**

Despite deteriorating weather, impatience got the better of me and we took off in the Cruiser with trailer attached about mid-day. Arriving at Waroona we first had a quick look at Drakes Brook Dam which I have always seemed to miss on previous trips. Despite being day use only, it is a nice place and has toilets, BBQs, shelters and would be an excellent swimming hole in the warmer months.

From here we went up into the hills just behind Waroona to Waroona Dam where there is a caravan park and a separate campsite further in next to the lake. The weather was steadily deteriorating and we decided not to stay as there are no facilities near the dam. We pitied the group of campers in tents who were all out in water proof gear. It was going to be a VERY cold night.

Our last stop for the day was at Hoffman's Mill (turn off 10Km north of Harvey) where we had been for a night in the bus back in 1998. Despite the 11km of dirt road, this is a reasonable site to take big rigs as there is plenty of room in the campsite and the road isn't all that bad. There are nice modern toilets (with disabled access) and there are tables scattered around the camp. All very nice in dry weather but by now the rain had well and truly set in.

We managed to back the trailer in close to the toilet block and cooked a very basic meal before retiring to the back of the Cruiser for the night. Cold and uncomfortable just about sums it up.



Hoffman's Mill

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 (Friday)**

April fools day and what a fool I was for coming away in this awful weather. With not much to pack we got away early but only made it to the top of the first hill before the engine started to get hot. Oh no not again! Why do we always have such rotten luck with vehicles?

The top radiator tank had split and we had to nurse the car back down the hill and on to Harvey where we found no one could fix it. Nothing for it then but to head another 45 kilometres to Bunbury where there was some chance of getting the repairs done before the weekend. In the end we did make it in to the bigger town without any major drama but had to wait round most of the day to get the repairs done. \$460 poorer we took off again at about 3pm heading for Ironstone Gully Falls between Capel and Donnybrook.

This is another site that we had been to in the bus back in 1997 and now there is a pit toilet, BBQ and seats and no indication that over-nighting isn't allowed. A nice spot but the parking area may be a little small for big rigs.

Our final stop for the day was at Grimwade, a new site for us as we have missed it on other trips. This turned out to be the best site so far with heaps of room and sealed road all the way in. There are no facilities there but it is very pretty with lots of shade and even a lake to swim in when the weather is hot.

We pitched camp for the night and finally the rain began to ease.



Grimwade

**2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005 (Saturday)**

After a VERY uncomfortable and sleepless night I decided to push hard today and get round to most of the sites I wanted to check on before heading home. This involved travelling to Bridgetown, Boyup Brook, Lake Towerinning, Collie, Australind, Mandurah and finally home. A long tiring drive but we managed to see all but 3 of the sites I had ear-marked for this trip. Not bad in just 3 days.

The best campsites were Hoffmans Mill, Grimwade and Lake Towerinning. All three can accommodate caravans and big rigs and we will try and spend more time at each of these some time in the future.

After all the rain, wind and expense we are happy to be home in the bus and we can now start planning our trip north which is only a matter of 5-6 weeks away.



This may be the first and last time we use this combination.

**3<sup>rd</sup> April 2005 (Sunday)**

Now preparations start for our trip north. Today was all about sorting out what we need to take and starting to pack the caravan. We have fairly limited space so there is no room for everything we would like to take. We have quite a few things to get done before we go including:

1. Strengthen the rear springs on the Cruiser.
2. Pick up the gas fridge and put it back in the caravan.
3. Get inner spring mattresses made for the caravan.
4. Get our eyes tested and get new glasses.
5. Get a 100 litre water tank.

**5<sup>th</sup> April 2005 (Monday)**

Picked up the gas fridge today and stopped off at Caning Vale markets. When I got out of the Cruiser I noticed oil had leaked from the rear left axle cover. Looking closer I noticed 2 studs had snapped off and one fell out in my hand as I

tested the other 4. We called the RAC who suggested we take it directly to a repairer and thankfully an Auto Masters was just around the corner. By the time we got there only one bolt remained – very scary stuff!

Now we are up for \$495 in repairs after just paying out \$460 for a new radiator, \$363 for the gas fridge and on Friday we are booked in to have the springs re-done and that will cost at least \$330. That is \$1648 IN ONE WEEK!

I hope nothing else goes wrong for a LONG TIME as we will be really struggling if it does.

**11<sup>th</sup> April 2005 (Monday)**

Ordered new beds for the caravan. Two singles for \$159 each. Hopefully they will be ready next week. We both had eye tests today and I have ordered new lenses (\$224) expenses never seem to end. Hopefully the only thing we need to buy now is a couple of 50 litre water containers. The Cruiser will need an oil change before we go and then it is just the cost of fuel to get up north.

**19<sup>th</sup> April 2005 (Tuesday)**

Well all the bits and pieces have been done (and all the money spent). We are packed up and ready to go. Now we just hope that we don't have any major hassles along the way.

There are a number of sites we want to re-visit on the way north including Sandy Cape, Cliff Head, Seven Mile, Gladstone, Bush Bay and then on to Karratha. As temperatures north of Carnarvon are still in the high 30s we will try and take about 2 weeks covering the first 900 Km and then do the final stretch once the temperatures start to come down a bit.

**20<sup>th</sup> April 2005 (Wednesday)**

Originally we planned to get going on Thursday but Alan (who is heading north as well) motivated us enough to go a day earlier. Turns out we were ready on time but he wasn't so we ended up going early and Alan will follow along and if we don't catch up with him on the road we will see him in Karratha.

By 2pm we arrived at Sandy Cape (just north of Jurien Bay). The shacks that were here when we first visited this spot 10 years ago have all gone which is a real pity but at least the area has been turned into a nice campground even if it is quite expensive. (\$14.50 per couple / \$11.00 pensioners / \$5.50 each extra person and \$2.50 for children) There are now toilets and the council plans to add cold showers but the prices are still too high.

There is room (during non-holiday season) for all types of motorhomes and caravans but it is best for big rigs to turn right at the T junction near the beach as there is a good turning circle at the end of that road. Our friends Andy and Deb brought their 40' Silver Eagle in here so smaller rigs shouldn't have any problems at all if it isn't peak season. If it IS peak season then give this place a miss as it gets vastly over crowded.

The area is a popular fishing and cray fishing site and there is a place to beach launch your boat if you have a 4x4. The caretaker (most of the time) is Brian who will be known to most people who have been to 40 Mile.



Sandy Cape

**21<sup>st</sup> April 2005 (Thursday)**

We waited for Alan to arrive but no sign of him. Either he decided to go on to Dongara or hasn't managed to get away yet. We will move on ourselves tomorrow.

**22<sup>nd</sup> April 2005 (Friday)**

Moved on from Sandy Cape to Cliff Head North just south Dongara. Very calm day and flat water, looked like a good time to get the boat out but it is a bit too much effort.





Cliff Head

**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2005 (Saturday)**

On to the rest area at Galena Bridge today. The weather gets warmer as we head north so we are trying not to go too far too fast. Alan has sprinted ahead and is already at Bush Bay. We may get that far tomorrow but that will be about as far north as we want to go until the end of the month.



Galena Bridge South

**24<sup>th</sup> April 2005 (Sunday)**

By the number of boats we passed heading south today I guess the fish around Exmouth have taken a hiding in the last couple of weeks. Thankfully Monday is the last of the school holidays (for a couple of months at least) and the yobs and the kids are all back in the city (Yay!)

We caught up with Alan today and arrived at Bush Bay. As Karratha is still hovering in the high 30s we will stay at Bush Bay for a week or ten days and hope that things further north start to cool off a bit.



Bush Bay

The pop up shower / toilet tent and the pop up shade house are proving to be very handy on this trip as setting up and putting them away takes only a few minutes. The gas fridge is still not as cool as I would like but there isn't much we can do about it at the moment. The only hiccup on the trip so far is a missing cover for the power steering fluid which has been temporarily sealed with glad wrap, tin foil and an elastic band.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> May 2005 (Sunday)**

After heavy rain was forecast for Carnarvon we quickly packed up and escaped Bush Bay just before the storms hit. Bush Bay is one of those areas where you can get trapped after just a few hours rain. We stopped the night at Lyndon River east and continued to Cleaverville the following day.

By the end of Saturday we had more or less finished setting up camp and started enduring the heat and sand flies that abound here until about the third week of May. We arrived early to get a prime position right on the beachfront but I made a big mistake in getting the caravan positioned and bogged it and the 4x4 in some loose sand. After spending an hour getting it out we finally managed to find a spot that was hard enough to take the van and hopefully catch any wind that might blow to cool us down.

The gas fridge is on the blink as usual and I will get rid of the useless thing once we get back to Perth. They just can't handle hot humid weather.

Once camp was finally set up we got the boat and fishing gear ready and spent a couple of hours fishing the reefs just off shore. We caught some sweetlips, flag and lots of undersized tusk fish that we had to throw back. As usual with the snags in this area we also lost plenty of hooks and assorted fishing gear.

Fishing books list sweetlip (or slate bream) as only two star eating but crumbed and put on the BBQ they were delicious. We caught enough for Alan and Kim and Maria (who we originally met at Bush Bay) to have a feed as well so everyone had a good time last night around (but some distance back from) the campfire.

[Fishing Info: Half moon, LT:8.22am 2.1 HT:2.50pm 4.0](#)

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> May 2005 (Monday)**

We decided to try and catch some mud crabs today and went round to one of the small creeks not far from the campsite. After going up and down for about two and a half hours with 10 nets we only managed to catch one crab. Luckily it was big enough to keep but rather disappointing as we expected to do much better this early in the season.

The wind came up while we were in the creek and we had quite a rough ride back round to point with waves almost going over the side of the dinghy on a couple of occasions.



Not bad for our first day out – a couple of different types of sweetlip.

**4<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Wednesday)**

We have been having all sorts of problems with the gas fridge and even the 12v hasn't been doing too well so we have decided to bite the bullet and spend some serious money on a 60 litre Engel fridge. Engel certainly have the best reputation of all the portable fridge makers so we are hoping to be able to report good things about them in the months to come.

After phoning around we found Retra-Vision in Karratha were cheaper than having a fridge shipped up from Perth (\$1599 as opposed to \$1698 + freight from CAMEC). As they had one in stock we went into town today and picked it up. We will sell the gas fridge when we get back to Perth and may sell the 40ltr 12v just before we leave here if we can.

The weather was horrible yesterday, about 90% humidity and no wind at all until a front finally came through in the evening bringing some very welcome rain. Today is much cooler as a result.

**6<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Friday)**

Yesterday we found that the solar panel on the roof of the caravan isn't working and we don't have the equipment here to take it off and see what has gone wrong. We are hoping that the Engel will survive using 2 x 40w panels and a 6 amp charger when the generator is on. If it can handle this then we won't need to buy another panel just yet.

The last two days we have been fishing from the beach and have caught 1 shark (released), numerous grass tusk fish (released) and some garfish and hardy heads which have gone into the freezer as bait. We have also managed to catch octopus on the reef at low tide so we shouldn't have to pay for bait any time soon.

**8<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Sunday)**

Went fishing today and didn't catch much (1 shark – released, 1 long tom, 1 monocle bream and a couple of undersized tusk fish) so no fish for lunch today. Bringing the boat up the beach the jockey wheel caught in some loose deep shale and the whole thing fell over on its side. The worst damage was to the engine cover which was cracked but it looks like everything still works so we were lucky.

The easterly wind arrived today which isn't exactly unwelcome at the moment as it helps keep the temperature down.

Lots of hermit crabs around at the moment, we see them at night as they scuttle around looking for scraps.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon, LT:4.37am 1.4 HT:10.35am 4.7](#)



Hermit crab – suffering flash blindness

**10<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Tuesday)**

Another trip into town yesterday and more money spent. A portable gas BBQ (\$69), a DVD/VCR (\$249) and a new LCD screen for the computer as the one on the laptop has given up (\$399 + \$99 extended warranty).

The **Toshiba** laptop has proven to be **very poor quality** and has had the following problems since the 1 year warranty ran out:

1. Power switch detached and fell off inside.
- 2.2 USB ports intermittently malfunction.
3. Hard drive died and was replaced at a cost of about \$300.
4. Key tops are starting to detach from the keyboard.
5. Add on card ejection button fell out.
6. Backlighting for LCD screen failed and has been replaced with an external screen at a cost of \$399.

Toshiba was once a quality brand in laptop computers but like all the 'name' brands that now get their computers made in China, it barely outlasts the woefully inadequate 12 month warranty. We have met others on the road who have Compaq laptops and they have all sorts of problems as well. No such thing as quality anymore, today it is all about getting you to buy a new machine once the warranty runs out.

**12<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Thursday)**

No luck fishing in the past few days. The weather is still quite warm (Mid 30s during the day and 20ish at night) but the night time temps have dropped by about 4C since we got here two weeks ago.

Still lots of sand flies and other biteys about.

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Tuesday)**

Last Friday we found the seam on the dinghy had split again and as soon as we were unable to use the boat the wind vanished and we were treated to three days of flat calm seas. No surprise then when we got the boat back today the wind returned. Only Alan was happy as his wind generator finally started to turn.

As we had to drop the boat off yesterday and pick it up again today we decided to have a look around Dampier and along the peninsula to Woodside. We hadn't been to the peninsula since 1998 but not a lot has changed. Hearson's Cove now has 'no camping' signs up but it still might be possible to sneak a night out there if you arrive late enough. There are toilets and shelters with BBQs.

Since the old dinghy has been a constant source of leak problems we have decided to get a new dinghy and have ordered a Stacer Seasprite 350. We really would have preferred a Savage Snipe but they turned out to be too wide for the roof rack. The dinghy won't arrive until June (it comes from Victoria apparently) so we will persist with the old boat until then. The cost? \$2125 .... Gasp. Why didn't we buy one in Perth before we came up here???



Dampier

**21<sup>st</sup> May 2005 (Saturday)**

We went fishing over the last two days and managed to catch enough for a feed. Mostly we are catching grass tusk fish, striped sea perch, cod (which we usually release), sucker fish – no good to eat and yesterday I caught a large flat head; the first I have ever caught in this area.

The old dinghy has been repaired and we will make use of it until the new one arrives. The weather is finally cooling off and nights are more pleasant at 19C than they were at 24C a few days ago.

We have already been away over 4 weeks and have been at Cleaverville for 3 of those.

[Fishing Info: Full moon-3, LT:3.00am 2.0 HT:9.00am 4.0](#)

**23<sup>rd</sup> May 2005 (Monday)**

Yesterday was very wet and cloudy. We are running short of petrol for the generator so decided to try and get in to town today and do some shopping. The track had other ideas and despite having a 4x4 we turned back after only about 5Km and by the time we got back to camp the poor Cruiser was just about coated in mud.

It has continued to rain today and more is predicted for tomorrow. As the track takes at least 3 days to dry out we don't expect to see town until next week.

To pass time we went fishing from the rocks just below the campsite and although we only caught two long toms it turned out that once filleted they are very tasty deep fried in a beer batter. The two I caught were about 2 feet long but I did hook one that was much bigger. Sadly it bit through the line before I could land it but it jumped a couple of times and it was the largest long tom I had ever seen.



Cleaverville

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Thursday)**

Too windy to get the boat out over the past two days but we did some fishing off the rocks. The result was 2 cod, 2 undersized bream and one undersized mangrove jack. (Undersized ones went back of course.)

The track to the highway is getting better according to reports from other campers so we will go in tomorrow and do the shopping we were going to do on Monday. At least we save money here when it rains.

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2005 (Sunday)**

The track to the highway is being graded AT LAST! So the ride to town won't be so bad for a few weeks until the corrugations come back.

We went [fishing at Cleaverville Creek yesterday](#) but only caught catfish and one bream. Very poor and no fish for tea. As compensation we cooked a beef roast so I can't complain too much.

The wind is still stopping us going out and fishing over the reef but then we are used to that up here now.



Cleaverville track drying out after rain

**June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

[Went fishing at the creek today](#) and caught some cod, javelinfish, catfish and a weird thing called a frog fish. In the end we only brought the javelin fish in as we hadn't eaten them before and had been told they are good eating. Turns out they are quite nice but we probably won't take any more as they aren't all that big.

The wind looks like it is finally calming down and everyone is predicting tomorrow will be a good day. We hope so as we haven't been fishing on the reef for a while.

Time has flown and it is hard to believe that it is over 6 weeks since we left Perth, 5 of those have been at Cleaverville. In that time we have only managed to get out fishing on the reef 3 times. No wonder people who only come up here for 4 weeks at a time get very disappointed at the few days without wind.

**June 4<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

Today was a perfect fishing day. We started off fishing at the reef between the campsite and Dixon Island but only managed to catch one NW Snapper and a few garfish for bait. After moving around several times and having no luck we decided to head out behind Dixon Island and almost as soon as we put the lines in we were hauling in snapper. A couple were undersized but most were between 30 and 41cm. We finally came in with 7 snapper which we will all be having for dinner. Gunter and Brenda were out as well and although they were only a few yards from us they didn't catch any snapper. They did catch a few perch so everyone went in with something.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon-3, LT:2.40am 1.9 HT:8.45am 4.1](#)

**June 6<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Monday)**

Yesterday we went crabbing but didn't do as well as we had hoped. We did get 14 (blue swimmers) in the end and everyone had a feed of crab at happy hour so it turned out ok.

This morning we went out early under darkening skies and managed to catch some NW snapper, a chinaman fish, flag and Belle got the catch of the day, a 53cm black spot tusk fish. As she brought it in on pretty light line she did very well and is very pleased with herself at the moment.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon-1, LT:4.09am 1.8 HT:9.28am 4.3](#)



**June 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

Out fishing again. That makes 5 consecutive days of good fishing weather. That must be close to a record up here. Our new boat has arrived so we will probably pick it up in the next couple of days and I shouldn't have to worry so much about our very low freeboard.

As we motored away from the boat launching area today I had a bit of a fright as I was motoring towards a big rock that I hadn't seen near the ramp before. Imagine my surprise when the 'big rock' started moving and then swam away with a huge swirl of water under the boat. I still don't know exactly what it was but Belle thinks it was a big fish of some sort. That I would be quite happy with but my worry is that it might just have been a croc. As they have been reported at Balla Balla just 100Km east it isn't too far fetched that one could turn up here.

Whatever it was it was BIG and it left a large swirling trail on the surface of the water.

Fishing wise we are starting to get more choosy about what fish we keep. As we now have a few days supply put away in the freezer we have started throwing back fish under around 32cm. Ones we would have kept now seem a bit small after the nice fish we have been catching in the past few days.

To date we have caught 1 fish over 40 cm and 3 fish over 50 cm. Today wasn't quite as spectacular but we did bring in 3 sweetlip emperor, 1 flag and 1 cod.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon, LT:4.46am 1.7 HT:10.42am 4.4](#)

**June 10<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

The new boat arrived yesterday so we went into town to pick it up. Now we have a boat that isn't in danger of being swamped by tiny waves. We did manage to get out for a short trip yesterday but the wind came up and fishing wasn't that great so we took it out to the creek today and tried again without much success. We did catch a mangrove jack and a bunch of small cod but nothing worth keeping.

The boat is bigger in every way than the old Savage and is 26 kilos heavier. That doesn't sound much until it is time to put it on the roof of the car, then I know how much more it really is!

**June 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Monday)**

We did go fishing yesterday and had a very frustrating time getting plenty of big bites but missing all the big fish. We caught plenty of smaller fish and two legal sized snapper but in the end we let them go and came back in when the wind started to come up. I did have a floating line over the side because some big fish were attacking schools of garfish but when the bait was hit only the tail vanished and the rest of the bait plus hook stayed where it was. We did get a glimpse of the big fish that came in and attacked it but not enough of one to identify it.

We went back to the same spot today and the bait fish were being chased about again so I set up a dedicated float line on the big rod and dropped the bait over the side. Only about 5 minutes went by before the rod bent over and the reel began to scream.

I quickly picked up the rod and set the hook and right away I knew I was in for a bit of a fight. Plenty of line had streamed off the reel and it took quite some time before we managed to see anything. By the time I saw colour I knew I had hooked a reasonable sized fish.

Belle got the gaff ready and I brought the fish along side, it didn't like the boat much and took off round the bow and immediately went straight round the anchor line. Belle managed to get the line loose enough for me to let some more out and the fish came away from the anchor rope only to go right back round again once it got the chance. By this time we knew it was a good sized tuna and when Belle hooked the gaff under the lower jaw of the fish we knew the fight was over. Up came the anchor rope, line and fish. We didn't weigh it but estimate it was around the 25kg mark.

Looking at the fish Id book we have, we believe it is a yellow fin tuna. (Turned out to be a long tailed tuna.) We put some nice thick slices on the BBQ and enjoyed tuna and fried rice for dinner. This was yet another fish that had one mouthful too many. When we cut it open we had a look at the stomach contents and found there were no fewer than 30 small fish inside. Even though its stomach was very full it just had to try and eat the hardy head I had in the float line.

[Fishing Info: Half moon-2, LT:7.59am 2.0 HT:2.10pm 3.9](#)





**June 16<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

The last couple of days have been windy as a high settles in the Bight and the wind swings to the east again. Today we have had some rain and again the wind has been up so no fishing for the time being.

**June 17<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

Managed to go out [crabbing](#) today and caught 17 so we had enough to feed everyone at happy hour again. An almost perfect day for boating but difficult tides that made it a bit awkward bringing the boat up from the creek.

**June 18<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

Another almost windless day but the tide is against fishing so we just sat around grumbling about it.

**June 24<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

After a week with no fishing and high winds we finally got back out again today. Things started off very slowly and we moved from spot to spot until the wind came up and pushed us back towards Dixon Island. This turned out to be a good thing as we caught 8 keepers and a few others we let go.

Last night we sold the old dinghy for \$500. Strange that we should have bought it here in 1998 and ended up selling it in the same place the same day the original owner turned up from Perth.

[Fishing Info: Full moon+2, LT:5.47am 1.5 HT:11.47am 4.7](#)



Cod, Chinaman, Flag, Blue Lined Emperor and Bream

**June 26<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

Well the easterly winds have come into full effect now and with the tides going off from Tuesday we aren't expecting to get out fishing again for at least another week.

**July 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

Tide and winds have been bad all week – no fishing.

**July 4<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Monday)**

Just when we thought the wind would never go away it dropped this morning and a flotilla of boats streamed out into the ocean. I have never seen so many dinghies out here all at the same time.

We caught a number of undersized fish and moved around a fair bit and in the end came in with 4 snapper ranging from 32cm to 43cm, so all in all we were quite happy. There is a small chance that tomorrow might be a good day as well so we are keeping our fingers crossed.

Today's dinner? Fish and chips of course...

12 days of good fishing weather so far out of 9 weeks and 4 days or about 18% of the time we have been here. Looking back at previous years, that seems to be about the average. As we might be here another 10 weeks we should manage at least that many good days again.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon-2, LT:3.00am 2.2 HT:9.00am 3.8](#)

**July 5<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

Another chance to get out and fish today but at 13-18 knots the wind was always going to be a bit dodgy. Turns out the fish were asleep and the wind wasn't.

**July 6<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)**

10-15 knots and perfect fishing weather today. The catch for today was 4 snapper, 4 flag and one mangrove jack. We did catch a coral trout but sadly it was too small and had to go back.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon, LT:4.39am 1.9 HT:10.34am 4.1](#)



Blue lined emperor, flag and mangrove jack.

**July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

Crabbing today but the wind came up and we only managed to get 8 before going in. Never mind it was enough for a feed. We went back to the creek to try for some muddies but no luck there. We did manage to catch a few gardies for bait and one large black (pikey) bream that we had for lunch.

We are getting fed up with the numbers of people coming up here to kill as many fish as they can. One lot has already sent 20kg of fillets back down south and already has another 40kgs ready to go. Why have people got to be so greedy? Even though the legal limit is 20kgs per person there is no need to take that amount just because you can. There are several people at Cleaverville who continually do this and some who even ignore the 20kg limit. I just wish fisheries would get off their backsides and come up here to catch the cheats. We even found someone today who still insists on taking 48 crabs when the legal limit is now 40. The ones who cheat always seem to be the ones with the big new vans and expensive 4x4s – we were taught that cheaters don't prosper – what a crock that was!

The fish we catch are enough for three or four meals, we aren't up here to fill huge freezers and rape the sea. Why can't everyone do the right thing and just take enough for their immediate needs.

**July 9<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

The wind has been up over the past two days so we decided to go down to the creek for a bit of fun and catch and release fish on light lines. We potted about for a while before getting a few decent bites and changing rapidly from light gear to heavier line. We were rewarded with 3 bream and a small trevally. Not bad considering our track record in the creek this year is pretty awful.



Trevally, yellow fin and pikey bream.

**July 12<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

Sunday was the wettest coldest day we have had up here this year. It rained all day without a stop but at least it filled up our water tanks that were almost running dry.

Monday the clouds cleared and we did manage to get out a do a bit of fishing. Nothing spectacular but we did come back with 3 NW snapper which did for last night and tonight's dinner.

Today was a b#%!!&r as far as fishing was concerned. The weather was good but we were looking for new fishing spots and spent half a tank of fuel and an hour and a half running round in circles getting nowhere fast. I did catch a 36cm snapper and a shark but nothing else and it turned out to be very frustrating afternoon.

Fishing Info: Half moon-2, LT:7.55am 1.6 HT:1.55pm 4.0

### July 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)

As we had run out of petrol for the generator (serious) and had run out of booze (disastrous) a trip into town was called for. After a visit to Taylor Marine we were suddenly \$400 poorer as we found a Two Zone addition for our Engel fridge. Now we can sell the Vitrifigo and only run one fridge motor for the same amount of fridge space we have been running two motors for.

It amazes me just how much we spend when we come away on trips like this. It also amazes me that Ben Yates, the CEO of Caravanning Australia (the mob that represents caravan parks), asserts (most incorrectly) that travellers spend only \$32 a day in local economies and less than that if they are not staying in a commercial caravan park. What a huge jackass! Since we have been in Karratha our average daily spending has been around \$120 a day (frightening!). Admittedly we have bought two big items – namely a new boat and an Engel fridge, but we bought them away from a major centre and have put money into the local economy. We have seen other people here buying cars, satellite systems, WAECO fridges, Engel fridges, wind generators and all sorts of other big ticket items.

In previous years we have bought all sorts of things as we travel around including; two generators, 5 solar panels, a new boat engine, a domestic fridge, a washing machine, two televisions, tree video recorders, one DVD, in fact so many things that when we look round our bus and caravan we can see dozens of items (including our bed) that we bought while we were on the road. In fact we have very little now that we didn't buy on the road.

As usual the old C.I.A., (Caravan Industry Association) that has given itself the much more user friendly name of Caravanning Australia, is pushing the 'close free campsites' band-wagon again. Don't these morons realise that the people who want to use free or cheap sites HATE CARAVAN PARKS! We do not want to be regimented into poxy little parking bays 6 feet from the neighbours, where there isn't room to swing a cat (even if you were allowed to have one). We want the freedom of the bush and the right to camp as we please, lighting campfires when it is safe to do so and soaking up nature. You simply cannot do that in a caravan park.

We had a 'happy hour' discussion a few nights ago about caravan parks and everyone agreed that even if the local caravan parks were FREE we would still choose to pay a small fee and camp out here where we feel happy. Caravan park owners have this stupid idea that if all the free sites in their locality were closed down, then all the people using the free sites would have to come in to their caravan park. WRONG! We would just move away somewhere else that welcomed us and nothing would change except that their local economy would suffer.

It is time governments and caravan parks woke up to the fact that some travellers (like us) do not want to be in caravan parks at all. If we wouldn't want to go to one if it was free, why on Earth would we want to be charged \$25 a night to stay in one.....Some people try to tell me that \$25 a night isn't that much to pay. \$25 a night is \$175 a week or \$9100 a year – I CAN RENT A WHOLE HOUSE FOR LESS THAN THAT, in fact I COULD PAY A MORTGAGE AND BUY A HOUSE FOR THAT ! \$25 a night for the use of a bit of dirt, a toilet and a shower and a maximum of \$5 worth of electricity! \$25 a night is b&\*\*\*#y ridiculous!

We don't need fewer free and cheap sites, we need far more of them. The baby boomers are only just starting to make an impact and things will escalate rapidly over the next few years. Sites like Cleaverville are already bursting at the seams and local councils have to seriously consider making more sites like this available before overcrowding becomes a major problem.

Plenty of people want to stay in caravan parks, but plenty, like us, can't stand them. We have been forced through circumstance to make use of them in the past, but given the choice I would never stay in one again if I could possibly avoid it.

As and exercise I have checked the items we have bought this year alone in Karratha (not including daily needs stuff like food, drink and fuel):

- 1.New boat \$2125.00
- 2.Engel fridge \$1599.00
- 3.Fridge cover \$150
- 4.Two zone fridge extension \$400
- 5.Video / DVD combo \$249
- 6.Bug light \$49
- 7.BBQ \$82
- 8.Computer screen \$399 + \$99 extended warranty
- 9.New transducer for the boat \$107
- 10.80 watt BP solar panel \$700
- 11.(later we also bought a Coleman water heater \$277 that isn't included in the calculations)

That is a total of \$5959! Shock horror! So much for \$32 a day.... We have been here 11 weeks so far and that lot comes to \$77 a day before we even start calculating food, booze, diesel, petrol and all the miscellaneous stuff we have bought. A friend of ours has bought a wind generator, a solar panel, a water heater, a battery charger, a regulator, a shower tent, a 220 litre 12v fridge and a bunch of other items. Multiply that by the 100 or so campsites here and another 80 or so at 40 Mile and the local economy is getting a huge boost from travellers.

Allowing for a weekly budget of \$100 for food, \$40 for booze, \$35 for fuel, \$50 misc and \$35 for camping fees the roughly 180 camps in the Karratha area that are here for around 3 months of the year put around \$621,000.00 into the local economy. The figures I have used are VERY conservative and the real figure probably exceeds \$1 million for the 3-4 months of the peak travel season.

Take this a step further: The CMCA has around 30,000 members. Lets say they all travel for around 3 months of the year (obviously some travel more and some less). Using the same rough budget those CMCA members are contributing a staggering \$103,000,000.00 to regional economies every year. Now add in the caravaners who outnumber motorhomers by around 5:1 (I suspect it is far more than this) and the real value of travellers to regional Australia would easily exceed \$621 million a year. That is a low estimate as well!

#### July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005 (Friday)

Kmart had 25% off all camping and fishing gear sale today and I have been waiting for one of these to get a Coleman water heater. They are normally \$370 but with the discount we got one for around \$277. The heater is very effective and you get instant hot water. We had our first hot showers since leaving Perth today and it was pure luxury.

#### July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005 (Saturday)

The forecast was for 18-23 knot winds so I started doing the clothes washing this morning with no expectation of getting out fishing. When the washing was finished and the wind still hadn't arrived we quickly got ready and were first out while everyone else was waiting for the wind to turn up. Of course as soon as we got out that started the ball rolling and boat after boat followed our example.

The only decent fish biting were flag and we must have hooked nearly 20 of them. We kept the biggest 9 and came back in on the high tide quite satisfied with our last minute decision to head out.

[Fishing Info: Full moon+2, LT:5.50am 1.3 HT:11.48am 4.6](#)

#### July 26<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)

I lost track of which day it was we went down to the creek again but as we didn't catch anything memorable that isn't surprising.

Today we waited all day for the wind to die down which it did around high tide (2pm). We shot [out round the island](#) to find large swells up to about 2 metres. Not a problem for the boat but a big problem for Belle who predictably began to feel sick soon after we dropped anchor. There was nothing for it but to motor all the way back in again and give up for the day.

#### July 29<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)

Despite awkward tides we went out fishing early (6:35am) and stayed out until the incoming tide (3:30pm) a total of around 9 hours. Despite the long day we didn't bring in that many fish. We caught plenty but let most go and only came back with some of the biggest we had caught. The fish didn't really come on the bite until around 12:30pm so we had a few hours to explore and find new reefs before the action started. The biggest fish for the day was a 48cm NW snapper which is the largest snapper I have caught to date.

[Fishing Info: Half moon+1, HT:3.40am 4.0 LT:10.22am 1.5](#)



A good sized blue lined emperor and some more flag

#### August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)

Thoughts are turning towards heading home now and we are probably looking at only a few more days of fishing before we start to pack up and take the long road south again. We are crossing our fingers that the wind will go away and we will get 3 or 4 more fishing days in before the tides go off again around the end of this week.

**August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)**

The first really good fishing day. I will say no more and let the pictures do the talking:

Fishing Info: Dark moon-2, LT:4.03am 2.1 HT:9.54am 3.7



Mangrove jack with emperor and flag



PLUS Chinaman and coral trout

**August 6<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

The wind is making it harder to get out to the reefs again so we took the crab nets down to the creek but without much hope of getting any muddies. As it turned out we did get a couple and even though the boat trailer got a flat tyre on the way back, it turned out to be a good day.



One on a fishing line and one in a pot

#### **August 10<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)**

With the wind holding off this morning we went back to the same fishing spot as on the 3<sup>rd</sup> but today we got nothing. As it looks like this may be our last fishing day it is a bit disappointing. Tomorrow we want to go crabbing and had to scrounge up some fish carcasses as we didn't get a single thing today.

[Fishing Info: Half moon-3, LT:7.37am 1.2 HT:1.30pm 4.1](#)

#### **August 11<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

We did go [crabbing](#) despite the wind and only managed to get 7 crabs. It was an expensive day as we lost a net in water that was too deep (Belle who was skipper has now been demoted to crab pot puller) and had another net demolished by a shark.

#### **August 14<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

Fantastic meal at Les and Dawn's last night. As always their parties are the best in Cleaverville. 17 people attended and the quantity and variety of food was amazing. Just a few of the mouth watering dishes were crayfish, mud crab, prawns, chicken, roast pork (we did that one), sausages, salads, pasta dishes, in fact just about anything you could think of and then some. There was so much left over we were all eating more today for dinner.

Looked like a perfect fishing day until the tide came up and the B&##Y wind just had to come up again. We are getting desperate to fit in a few more days fishing before we leave and so we went out anyway. We only went out about 4km and the fish were biting and even though we got about 10 flag and 2 snapper we decided to let them go again as it was getting close to happy hour when we came in and we couldn't be bothered filleting them – lucky fish!

We did lose our reef anchor and will have to duck into town to get another one tomorrow.

[Fishing Info: Half moon+1, LT:10.01am 1.6 HT:3.56pm 3.1](#)

#### **August 17<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)**

The anchor price was highway robbery at \$29 from K Marine. Reef anchors should be around \$10!

Our last day fishing started at 4:40am as the tide was very early and the only hope we had was to get out at daybreak. We weren't all that successful (at least by our standards) and landed two golden trevally. One we brought in as it had swallowed my last set of ganged hooks and I wanted them back. The fish had to be gaffed to get it in and wouldn't have survived if it was returned to the water. I did catch another larger trevally later but was able to get the hook out and let that go without gaffing it.

The weather today was lovely, very calm and flat out on the water but cloud cover made it sticky and even 4km out to sea we were attacked by sand flies. Time to start heading for home.

A bit of a fizzle to our last days fishing up here but then we really can't complain that much. Packing up will start tomorrow and I haven't a clue how I am going to fit everything in.

[Fishing Info: Full moon-3, LT:1.23am 2.5 HT:7.53am 3.5](#)



**August 19<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

We are on our way back to Perth. I have driven this route a few times now and it never ceases to amaze me at this time of year. The number and variety of flowers is truly amazing. There is nothing to compare with this spectacle anywhere in the world.

A dry seemingly barren land explodes into life and everything is green, red, yellow, white, purple and every other colour you care to mention. The Sturt Desert Peas are in such profusion this year that they look for all the world like a mass of red roses along the roads.

I think I have fallen in love with the Pilbara. I have heard Eastern Staters say it is a wasteland with nothing to see, if only they could see it now! It is a paradise and anyone who passes this way at this time of year and doesn't think so is CRAZY!

As usual our stop off is at Barradale. Tomorrow we hope to reach Galena and the next day with any luck at all we will be home.



On the way south again. Look at those rear springs !!

**August 20<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**



A long tiring drive down to Galena Bridge and after 4 months away we are close to being home again. The wildflowers in the Pilbara were incredible but this year the Gascoyne is rather poor. Even so it is quite a sight for anyone who hasn't seen it in a really good year.



**August 21<sup>st</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

Looks like we timed it just right and arrived after the worst of the wet weather in Perth is over. Around 600Km travel today saw us go from Galena back to Perth and we are exhausted. Now we have to spend the next few days sorting everything out and putting things back to normal. 4 months away have gone by in a flash. Almost unbelievable!

**September 6<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

Nothing much going on, just waiting for the rain to go away and the fine weather to appear. Typical Spring weather, wet and grey and the odd patch of sunshine.

**September 9<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

We are continually looking around for things to save money on and the latest was our caravan insurance. The RAC policy we have is about to run out and we have received a quote from C.I.L. for \$188 for the same amount as the RAC policy that cost us \$286 last year. The CIL policy has a \$100 excess as opposed to the \$50 excess on the RAC policy but over all the CIL one has much better conditions. [CIL Insurance](#).

The Cruiser is booked in for Monday to get the oil leaks fixed. Looks like a \$600+ job but it has to be done.

After that we are going away for two or three days to see if we can find a new home for the bus. The place we have been in for the past two years is changing and getting more expensive than it is worth so if we can get better facilities at a cheaper price – and we know we can – we might as well move.

**September 17<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

Ooooo! Did I say \$600+, well make that +++++. After taking the engine out there were a number of things that needed attention and it came to \$1742! B#%!!&r. At least the mechanic is allowing us to pay it off in stages. That hurts after thinking it would be around 6-700. The cruiser was in all week so I knew by the time we picked it up on Friday that the bill would have escalated. This always seems to happen when getting mechanical work done.

The weather over the last 5 days was good but today it has gone sour again.

**September 20<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

Took the caravan off today and went exploring the wheatbelt towns from Narrogin north towards Goomalling. So far the best site we have checked is Yornanning Dam 10Km south of Popanyinning. We have dropped the caravan off at the VERY TINY Pingelly caravan park. There are only 8 sites here and it is \$13.75 a night. I wonder where the 75c came from? (Weekly rates \$81.40 – those weird cents again!)

As usual the day we pick to go away is the one that rains and drizzles all the time. Typical!

Tomorrow we will head further north through Brookton, Beverley, York, Northam, Toodyay and finally we hope to look at Goomalling.



**September 21<sup>st</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)**

We made it to all but Goomalling which we decided wouldn't be worth the effort. We did have a look at a place called Kulyaling but it wasn't worth the effort either. We re-visited Gwambyhine – a top spot about 10km south of York – and we had a look through all the caravan parks along the way. The ONLY one really worth considering is Broadgrounds near Toodyay. This is a very nice park but it is badly let down by the ablution blocks.

The weather was wet and drizzly this morning but it did clear up a bit and stayed dry, if cloudy during the rest of the day. Tomorrow we hope to get to Boyagin Rock, Wandering, Boddington and then if we have time to the flora reserve east of Pingelly.



Toodyay

**September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

Our first stop was Wandering where we found a small campground operated by the shire. It was almost an option for us but in the end we decided it would not be secure enough to leave the bus when we go off on our travels.

Next we went to Boddington and found a small, quite expensive caravan park next to a very picturesque spot on the Hotham River. We ruled this out because you pay \$85 for the first 4 weeks (quite good) but then you start to add power which we were told could be as much as \$40 a week. They can forget that!

From here we back tracked to Boyagin Rock where we found a good potential overnight stop for small and medium sized motorhomes. Big rigs could have problems with the last 2 kilometres of track because it is narrow and has trees quite close to the road.

After a stop off back at Pingelly for lunch we headed east to the Tutanning Reserve which looks like a good place to explore in detail later on. Lots of tracks and wildflowers but few suitable spots for motorhomers to overnight.



Boyagin Rock

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

A drizzly wet morning as we packed up the van and took it out to the new place we are going to call home for a while. A group of caravanners came in during the day and asked us over for a chat and a drink around the fire.

It was a very chilly night but the fire and the booze thawed everyone out and we enjoyed their company very much.



Next to our new home is the Hotham River.

**September 24<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

We had originally decided to go back to the bus today but we have enjoyed it so much out here that we decided to stay another night before heading back to start the arrangements to move the bus out here.

Taking advantage of a bit of sun through the clouds we visited Dryandra Settlement, Fox's Lair (just west of Narrogin) and lastly Yilminning Rock east of Narrogin. All interesting places to visit, especially now with the wildflowers in full abundance.



Yilminning Rock

**September 25<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

A two hour drive brought us back to the waterski park and all the associated noise that seems to be getting steadily worse. After the peace and quiet of the bush it seems even more pronounced.

We now have to get things sorted out and arrange for the bus to go up on a low loader. With luck we will get everything sorted out and be able to move within the next two to three weeks. Although we will lose some of the conveniences of being near a big centre like Rockingham, we are moving to a very quiet, laid back place where we will get far more walking done than we do here. As we are both badly out of shape we are hoping to get slimmer and much fitter.

We left the caravan at our new home and will catch up with it again soon. I only hope we didn't leave anything inside that we will need in the next couple of weeks.

**October 9<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

The big move happens tomorrow and most things are now packed up and ready to go. The only snag may be the size of the low loader as the measurements we took this end and the ones they took at the transport company mean we literally only have a few centimetres to spare with the length of the bus.

Hopefully everything will go off without a hitch and this time tomorrow we will be out in the boonies enjoying the peace and quiet of the bush. (crosses fingers).

**October 10<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Monday)**

Well for better or for worse we are now 'out in the boonies' again. We did have a small problem getting the bus up on to the low loader as the tow hitch dug into the ground but after backing off (rather scary with no brakes) I 'gave it heaps' and just made it up on the second attempt. Stopping once I was up was simple, just crash into the 'neck' of the low loader!

For anyone moving around constantly, putting a bus on a low loader must seem a crazy way to travel but as we don't really want to move the bus anymore, if we do have to move then a low loader makes perfect sense. In fact it is cheaper than keeping the bus licensed (\$450+ a year) and maintained and spending money on fuel. This move of around 200 kilometres cost \$460 roughly, and one years license plus fuel and servicing would have exceeded that by a substantial amount.

We do hope though that we won't have to move the bus again as it is still a very stressful time. Now we just have to spend the rest of the week cleaning up and sorting everything out.



On the road again (sort of)

**October 11<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

The unpacking continues and we are fairly well sorted out now. The annexe is up (the first time in almost 6 months) and the boat is off the car. We even found time for a walk through the farm just before lunch.



Our new home in the bush

**October 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

A quick trip into Pingelly to join the local library and to have a look at the old settlement of Mourambine. Mourambine was the original settlement in this area and Pingelly only developed after the railway came through 10 kilometres south west. Sadly there wasn't much left of the old settlement besides the church. A number of the graves in the church yard attest to the harshness of life in the early days. Quite a few graves were of children and even the adult graves showed death occurring much earlier than the average today.

I always tend to look around in places like this and wonder just what it would have been like back in the 1800s and what these people would have seen as they looked at the surrounding land from this little church up on the hill.



**October 21<sup>st</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

Took a trip down through Narrogin to Wagin today to check on rest areas and caravan parks, plus do a bit of shopping. Wagin is smaller than Narrogin but bigger than Pingelly but as it is around 100Km from us it isn't an option for regular shopping anyway.

A few nice historic buildings in the centre of town and a good cheap shire run caravan park. We weren't able to find all that much around Wagin in the way of tourist attractions but the town itself qualifies due to the heritage buildings that still exist there.

As we got back to Narrogin the rain, which had been threatening all day, finally came down. The weather was gradually heating up but today we are back down around 21C. We are expecting our new home to be a bit on the warm side, but if it gets too bad we can always pack the caravan and head for the south coast for a while.



Piesseville near Wagin.

#### **November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

The last few weeks have flown by as there has been so much to get done, but finally things are starting to settle down a bit and life is drifting back into a daily routine. There is the possibility of doing some house sitting in the next couple of weeks (back in Rockingham) and then we will have to start thinking about what to do for Christmas. I would like to head off somewhere for a few days but am not sure where yet.

The weather is strangely cool for this time of the year but that is something we won't be complaining about. The heat will arrive soon enough. The wildflowers around this area are amazing. I don't think I have ever seen such a variety in one place.

We know we are living in the bush now and that means keeping an eye open for snakes. There was one hanging around in the roof of our toilet the other day but it was only a small one and seems to have moved on now. It was a bit of a shock looking up while taking a shower and seeing this tail slowly sliding over one of the water pipes.

We have explored most areas close to us now and will have to start going further out to see anything new. There are a large number of nature reserves fairly close by and we are finally walking almost every day.

There are a few things I would like to get done (if I had the money) so maybe it is time for the latest wish list to get put down.

1. 20 amp solar regulator (done)
2. 2 new deep cycle batteries (done)
3. Install water pump in the caravan (done)
4. Get bearings checked and re-packed on the caravan (Checked and seem ok)
5. Find a bigger caravan & sell the one we have (maybe) (done)
6. 700-800w sine wave inverter (done)
7. Put 12v power socket in caravan (done)

#### **November 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

Sadly the wildflower season is coming to an end and our walks through the bush are soon going to be a bit less interesting. The wildflowers we have in this state must be one of the world's greatest natural wonders. It is all very well to trot out statistics about how many varieties we have but it isn't until you walk through the bush at the peak of the season that the astounding variety and the sheer number of flowers really hits you. There are plenty of big showy blooms like the bottle brush and Banksia families but some of the smallest and most delicate flowers are the most fascinating. I am especially interested in finding the various orchids that hide in the dappled shade under the trees. We have at least five different types within a short walk of our bus.

Another month and Christmas will be almost on us again – what a bore! We are thinking about going camping with the 4x4, trailer and tent. I may even take the boat in case we find somewhere to go fishing. We want to look for a secluded spot away from the madding crowd so I have been studying my maps rather carefully.

We will have to make a trip into Mandurah in the next 3-4 weeks to prepare for Christmas but otherwise we are just tootling about the immediate area and exploring.

#### **November 21<sup>st</sup> 2005 (Monday)**

We have packed up the caravan and come back down to Rockingham for a few days to do some Xmas shopping. We need to go to Fremantle, Rockingham and Mandurah so we picked the Lakeside 'Caravan Park' on Old Mandurah Road. It isn't really a tourist park as there are only 2-3 sites for tourists and the rest are all permanent residents. It is a much cheaper alternative than the parks on Dixon Road and at Palm Beach at \$90 a week.

**November 24<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Thursday)**

This trip has been both very tiring and very worrying.

To start off with it was a woman's dream come true and a man's nightmare. We have been to the following shops (in no particular order), Coles, Kmart, Big W, Woolworths, Red Dot, Farmer Jacks, Dewsons, Liquor Land, Woolworths Liquor, Ranger Camping, Bunnings, Barbeques Galore, Repco, Retra Vision, Spud Shed, Golden Ponds, Spotlight, WA Salvage, Baldivis Bottle Shop, Barry Edwards Solar Systems, Canning Vale Markets, Bottle Mart, Dick Smiths, Action and King Kongs. Several of these were visited more than once. Localities varied from Mandurah, to Rockingham and on to Beaconsfield and Canning Vale.

Lastly we went to three mechanics and that is where the worrying bit came in.

As we were going from one place to another yesterday there was a nasty knocking noise in the engine that got worse as the day went on. We dropped in to Drive Safe (who we used all the time when we were down here) and Spence had a quick look at the engine but couldn't identify exactly where the noise was coming from. We went round the corner to a diesel mechanic who had a listen and then told us that the fuel pump was about to give up. Anyone who has had a fuel pump go in a diesel will know why we were very unhappy about this bit of news. We were due to go home today and now we were faced with being stuck in Rockingham for God knows how long, and having to spend God knows how much on the repairs.

We got the number of an injector and fuel pump specialist (Precision Diesel in O'Connor) and we shot up there this morning after they asked us to come up so they could confirm the earlier diagnosis. Much to our delight the horrible noise turned out to be caused by the fan which had two missing bolts and two that had come loose. So much for the work done by Mundijong Mechanical that cost us an arm and TWO legs!

Left unfixed the fan could have come loose and gone through the radiator. In the end it cost us a night of real worry and \$60 and that at least we can live with. Hopefully we and the very weighed down cruiser will be home by this time tomorrow.

**November 25<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Friday)**

Thankfully we are finally home after 4 days of madness in the 'big smoke'. If I don't see that many shops again until next Christmas it will still be too soon.



It looks less than it really was!

**November 29<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

I finally got around to installing a water pump in the caravan today. Half a morning's work resulted in a small switch appearing on the outside of a kitchen cupboard. Although it doesn't look much it will make life in the caravan that much easier.

We have also been busy clearing a bit of a fire break around the bus. It is probably a waste of time if a big fire ever comes through here but it may be of some assistance in gaining a bit of time to get things out. I hope we never see a fire through this property as there is so much potential fuel on the ground it will be a real mess.

One of the changes in moving on to a farm is having the room to plant a few veggies for ourselves. We now have 3 different types of tomatoes, some potatoes, oregano, coriander, parsley, mint, basil, lemon thyme, capsicums and garlic chives all planted. We have never been great gardeners but hopefully we will get something useful out of that lot. Next year we will take it a bit more seriously and when we get back from up north we plan to put in a much bigger veggie plot and do the whole thing properly. Anything we can do to cut the cost of fresh food will help. We want to put in some citrus trees, a lime, lemon and navel orange would be a good start. The owners of the property are quite happy for us to do all this and even supplied us with an old cut up water tank which will become our compost bin.



Weather note: The temperatures so far have been quite good. Only 2-3 days above 30 so far this year and we are still getting nice cool mornings when we can get things done. Even a few drops of rain over the past two days.



The vegie garden in the early stages

The wish list I wrote earlier this month is almost completed already! Just the inverter left to get now.

After installing the new solar power system in the caravan (which consists of 3 x 80w panels, PL20 regulator and 2 x 130ah Trojan deep cycle batteries) I took a few readings on various items and got the following results:

1. 12v incandescent lights use 1.7 amps each.
2. The single 12v fluoro light uses 0.4 amp (I will have to get some more of these!)
3. The Engel fridge uses between 2.7 and 3.7 amps (why there is a difference I don't know) on a maximum setting. The Vitrifrigo with the Danfoss 35 compressor uses around 3.2 amps on the maximum setting.
4. The analogue volt meter I have been depending on up until now shows a higher reading than the real voltage.
5. The same is true of the analogue Amp meter I have been using to gauge amp hours coming in from solar.
6. The PL20 seems to restrict amperage input despite having a load. I tested each panel separately and found the average input was 4.3amps. This should have resulted (when they were all connected) in a total input of over 12 amps but the reading was between 8-10amps.
7. The caravan is parked under what can only be described as light cover with a few straggly trees around. I would expect a daily input of something around 76 amp hours in the open and I have been getting 67-69 amp hours with a bit of shade over the panels during the day so it is reasonable to expect more when the van gets parked in the open.
8. One interesting thing, which is logical if I really think about it, is that input drops when there is no load. Today the Engel was on 240v so the amp hours in was only about 17. The surprising thing was that input was less then it could be when there WAS a load.

I don't know if this is 'normal' but the way the regulator works looks like it puts in extra amps when under load but not all the extra amps that are available. The problem I can see with that is that the sun only gives about 6 hours of good light for solar panels and the regulator doesn't give all the power that is available. That means that 2 batteries, even if they are 130ah just won't be enough. The following table shows what I mean:

Item	Watts	Hours use	WH	WH	Power IN	
					Inv Ohd	WH
					76.8	921.6
Fluro 240v	14	3.50	49	4.9	4.083333	49
Incandescent 12 v	1.7	0.00	0		0	0
Fluro 12v	0.4	1.50	0.6		0.05	0.6
TV 34cm	36	3.50	126	12.6	10.5	126
Pump	48	0.10	4.8		0.4	4.8
Engel 60+40	44.4	11.00	488.4		40.7	488.4
Engel upright 80ltr	48	12.00				
Vitri 40ltr Fridge	54	0.00	0		0	0
Fan 240v	50	2.00	100	10	8.333333	100
VCR/DVD	19	3.50	66.5	6.65	5.541667	66.5
CD player	30	0.00	0		0	0
Grinder	75	0.00	0		0	0

Laptop Computer	48	1.00	48	4.8	4	48
Food Proc	550	0.00	0		0	0
Printer	70	0.00	0		0	0
Juicer	350	0.00	0		0	0
Microwave	2000	0.00	0		0	0
Sew Mach	75	0.00	0		0	0
Stereo	60	0.00	0		0	0
Washing Machine	260	0.00	0		0	0
Bat Charger Bug zap	0.55	0.00	0		0	0
Bat Charger						
Phone	0.55	0.00	0		0	0
Bat charger Torch	0.55	0.00	0		0	0
Bat charger Hot						
Wt	0.55	0.00	0		0	0
Bat Charger GPS	6	0.00	0		0	0
Satellite Decoder	30	3.50	105	10.5	8.75	105
Inverter use	6	5.00	30		2.5	30
<b>Sub total</b>			1018.3		84.85833	1018.3
<b>Plus 10% inverter overhead</b>			49.45		4.120833	49.45
<b>Daily total required</b>			1067.75		88.97917	1067.75
<b>Result</b>					-12.20	-146.5

Even being very careful we would still need another 12 ah on the very best days. So after spending lots of money we STILL need the generator every day. With luck we can halve our current use

As I have only just started getting figures from the PL20 there should be some more meaningful figures being generated as time goes on.

#### December 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)

We went back to the Dryandra Woodland today to have a better look around. We are a bit late for the wildflowers and I must go back next Spring to see them at their best. We still managed to photograph a few more as the gum trees are starting to flower now and there are still a few other types in bloom.

Dryandra Woodland covers a wide range of diverse habitats and there are plenty of walk trails and drive trails through the bushland. If you tune your car radio to 100 FM you can listen to short commentaries about areas that are marked on the drive trails. A couple of these areas must have had transmitter problems as we heard nothing and a couple of intersections were unmarked which led to us taking a wrong turn at the end of the drive.

Even so, considering that this is a CALM administered site, and it is FREE (for once!) it is hard to find anything to complain about. The most interesting spot on the drive was at Congelin Dam but one or two of the other stops weren't all that interesting and could have done with better places to pull off the road.

The highlight of the day was spotting an echidna crossing the road. It was a bit shy about having its photo taken and adopted a typical head down attitude next to a tree. This a typical defensive posture but if you look closely at the photo you can just make out the head and snout. The only other echidna I have seen was in South Australia and I am happy that this time I DID have my camera handy.

After doing the drive trail we crossed the Narrogin – Wandering road going from west to east on Kawana Road. There is a picnic area along this road at Lol Grey Soak. An old well and a fire lookout tree are two of the more interesting items at this site. The road looks like it continues from here and the map show it heading back to the bitumen but both tracks heading south and west were blocked. One by a fallen tree and one by CALM. Why we don't know but there is nothing warning you that it is a no through road until you get there.

The picnic area could make a good overnight stop for small motorhomes but if you don't like the look of the first part of the track then don't go on. The road does get wider and better but the first bit is quite narrow.



Q. How do Echidnas mate? A. Very carefully....

**December 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

Another week or so and Christmas will be on us again. We have decided to stay put until the holiday season is over and once everything starts to settle down again we will think about taking the tent & trailer down south somewhere.

The weather is remaining cool, very cool for this time of year. I remember this time last year we were in the middle of a typical December heat wave. Yesterday we had the heater on?!?!?

We bought a lemon tree, mandarin tree, orange tree and a lime tree the other day and have planted them near the bus. As it takes a few years for them to start fruiting, let's hope we manage to stay here long enough to enjoy the benefits. The rest of the garden we have planted is coming along. With free horse, cook and sheep poo on the farm we aren't short of fertilizer.

The next two big purchases will be a new 12v fridge for the caravan as the old gas fridge is just taking up space. Then I will look for an 800w sine wave inverter and that will be the end of spending for a while (I hope!).

We are still keeping our eyes open for a cheap block of land somewhere within a reasonable distance of the coast but that is an ongoing project that could take ages to be fulfilled.

**December 18<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Sunday)**

As we now have an area we can grow fruit and vegetables in I decided to keep track of when things get planted and how well they do. (Also how much it costs to keep a vegie patch.)

Type	Date Planted	Cost	First Harvest	Comments
Tomato Roma	Dec-05	\$1.95	Jan 06	Poor flavour and texture. Don't get these again.
Tomato Cherry	Dec-05	\$1.95	Jan 06	Best of all the tomatoes we grew. Lots of fruit and best flavour.
Tomato Ox Heart	Dec-05	\$1.95	Jan 06	Plenty of fruit but disappointing flavour.
Tomato other	Dec-05		Jan 06	Planted from seed. So far not bearing as much fruit as bought seedlings. Less fruit than the commercial plants but still not too bad.
Potato	Nov-05			Pulled up as taking too much room but got a few spuds. Need more area if planting this.
Onions	Dec-05			Died. Wrong time of year
Garlic	Dec-05			Died. Wrong time of year
Capsicum	Dec-05	\$2.00		Still waiting March 2006. Poor results. Only about half a dozen fruit in the end.
Mung beans	Dec-05			Doing poorly Jan 06. Eventually failed
Zucchini	Dec-05			Still waiting March 2006. Took too long. Went away before any developed.
Butternut pumpkin	Dec-05			Planted as seed. Seedlings were eaten and had to be protected. Doing well as of 28-Jan-06 but no pumpkins yet. Still waiting March 2006. Eventually died.
Mint	Nov-05			Using right away but limited need for it. Growing like a weed as of March 2006. Died back in winter but full on again in spring.
Chives	Dec-05	\$1.00		Didn't do well but still growing when we left May 06.

Oregano	Dec-05	\$1.95	Using as of Jan 06. Growing well March 2006. Died back in winter.
Basil	Dec-05	\$1.95	Using this almost right away. Growing like weeds March 2006. Died off over winter.
Lemon Grass	Dec-05	\$2.00	Using this from Jan 06. Growing well March 2006. Still going well October 2006
Parsley	Dec-05		Using this from Jan 06. Growing well March 2006. Still going well October 2006
Coriander	Dec-05	\$1.95	Went to seed very quickly but saving seed for next year.
Passionfruit	Dec-05	\$4.00	Slow getting going, only doubled in size as of March 2006. Still growing slowly October 2006.
Lemon	Dec-05	\$28.95	New growth as of Jan 06
Mandarin	Dec-05	\$28.95	New growth as of Jan 06
Lime	Dec-05	\$28.95	New growth as of Jan 06 but not as much as the other trees.
Orange Navel	Dec-05	\$28.95	New growth as of Jan 06
			All citrus survived winter and are in flower October 2006.
Amount spent on plants		\$136.50	
Amount spent on soil, fertiliser etc.		\$31.91	Haven't kept track of this section but must be well into the 150+ limit by October 2006.
Amount spent on sundries like hoses, sprinklers, stakes etc.		\$146.74	
<b>TOTAL SPENT</b>		<b>\$315.15</b>	

A week to Christmas and the weather has now decided to start heating up.

**December 21<sup>st</sup> 2005 (Wednesday)**

Went to the dentist last Friday, my teeth turned out to be fine but I have now picked up the flu for my trouble. The longer I can stay away from dentists, doctors and hospitals the healthier I seem to be. Every time I go in to one of those places I seem to pick up some bug or other.

**December 24<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Saturday)**

Christmas again! The owners of the property are going away tomorrow so we will be here on our own and looking after two kittens so Belle is thrilled. More so about looking after the kittens than Christmas. The beer I brewed has turned out nicely so I won't be short of a celebratory drink but I would have preferred being away exploring. I am almost over the flu so at least I can enjoy (and taste) the Christmas fare.



Tinky Wink and Alice, our guests for Christmas 2005. Very sadly Alice died in early 2006 as the result of a house fire.

**December 27<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

After being at home over Christmas we blew the cobwebs away today by taking a drive north to the lovely little town of York. It is around 100 kilometres from us and we pass through Pingelly, Brookton and Beverley to get there. I have always been fond of York and every time I go there I find another reason to like it a little bit more.

York is to W.A. what Hahndorf is to S.A. It is probably our most historically complete town with most buildings being well preserved and most attractive. Sadly it is a touristy place so prices are higher and that is why we live further south. It would cost us at least \$40 a week more in rent to live in the York area.

The good thing is that it is only an hours drive from us so we can visit the town any time the mood takes us.

**January 11<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Another silly season gone and although we were stuck at home we managed to enjoy ourselves. As Belle's vegie garden is starting to take off we are tied down a bit and not touring much. I will have to solve that by putting in a reticulation system.

The next big project is to get a new 12v compressor fridge and get rid of the useless gas fridge in the caravan. That will mean another trip into Perth in the near future. We have a price from Barry Edwards (who we now deal with for much of our 12v gear) of under \$1100 for an 80 litre Engel. That seems pretty good so that is probably what we will go with.



Belle's Vegie garden

**January 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

We ordered a couple of 12 volt fans for the caravan last week and they arrived today so I spent an hour or so installing them. They aren't cheap at \$94.50 each but they are quiet and only use 0.2-0.3 amps each so we can run them all night if it is hot and not chew up the batteries. As an added sound dampener I inserted a rubber pad under each stand so that any vibrations won't be transferred to the caravan cupboards.

We are planning a trip to Mandurah early next month as we want to pick up the Engel 12v fridge we have ordered (\$1075) I then need to get more wire, some low voltage plugs, an amp meter, another 2 x 12 volt fluro lights, a digital volt meter for the car and some drinking water hose for the bus. That will just about clear out any spare money we have managed to build up but then we can start thinking about a trip down south before we start getting ready for our journey to Broome for the winter.

**31<sup>st</sup> January 2006 (Tuesday)**

The last three days have almost had a touch of winter about them. Here we are in the middle of summer with temperatures at night of around 7-9C. It was so cold that we actually had the heater on one night. What a nice change it is from the blazing hot summers we have been getting over the past few years.

We should be off to Mandurah next Monday to do some crabbing and a quick trip to Rockingham while we are there to do some shopping.

**2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006 (Thursday)**

I keep trying to come up with the 'ultimate packing list' but things change so much that no list remains current for very long. This is the latest effort:

**PACKING LIST**

**BOAT**

Hull

Engine key

Rowlocks



Toilet paper		Toothbrush		Shampoo	
Towels		Thongs		Shoes & socks	
Hats		Sunscreen		Insect repellent	
Fly spray		Matches		Mosquito coils	
Aftershave		Hair brush		Surface spray	
Laundry powder		Reading material			
<b>KITCHEN</b>					
Sandwich toaster		Bread toaster		Rubbish bags	
Cutting board		Corkscrew		Alfoil	
Paper towels		Glad wrap		Dish cloths	
Sponge / scourer		Chux wipe		Bleach	
Dishwashing liquid		Disinfectant		Saucepans	
Frypan		Knife sharpener		Kettle	
Mixing bowls		Tongs		Egg slice	
Cutlery		Plates		Cups	
Glasses		Vegie peeler		Grater	
Baking paper		Biscuit tray		Cake tray	
Roasting pan		Sifter		Colander	
Measuring cups		Measuring spoons		Funnels	
<b>FIRST AID</b>					
Elastoplasts		Bandages		Cotton wool	
Dettol		Savlon		Codral	
Panadol		Gosok		Mylanta	
Oroxin		Lipitor		Calcium	
Fish oil		Antihistamine		Predisolone	
Diprosone		Scissors		Naprosyn	
Sudafed		Magnesium sulphate		Bandage spray	
Calodryl		Nulax		Lip balm	
Tweezers		Forceps		Alcohol swabs	
Saline solution		Slings			

I leave the food to Belle so I don't even attempt to list that side of things. Most food items can be bought during a trip anyway so my job is to try and remember everything else. Something always seems to get left behind though.

**February 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

Well the packing list must be getting pretty close as I don't think there was anything we needed on the last trip. (As it was only 4 nights away I can't claim complete success yet though.)

Monday was a very long hot stressful day. We took the van down to Heron Point and dropped it and the boat off before heading to Rockingham to do all our shopping. We didn't get everything we wanted but managed to do about 90% of what we had planned. The big item was the Engel upright fridge at \$1059! Then wire, plugs, lights, drinking water hose, switch and the boring stuff like food and drink – well maybe the drink wasn't all boring.....

On Tuesday we put the boat into the water and the wind immediately picked up so it spent the day bobbing about trying hard to drag the anchor or undo the knots holding the anchor on.

On Wednesday morning we finally got out and did some crabbing and were quite happy after 4 runs with 18 size crabs. The forecast for Thursday was for strong winds all day so we were up early and out before it got going. After just two runs and 8 size crabs the wind arrived with a vengeance so we came back in and put the boat up on the car ready for departure on Friday. As soon as we had packed everything up the wind stopped and stayed down FOR THE REST OF THE DAY! B#%!!&R!!

Never mind we did get 26 crabs which for us is plenty. In all the times we have gone crabbing we have never taken the limit of 40 (for a boat) and I don't think we ever will.

Friday rolled around and we reluctantly had to finish packing and head back out to the bush picking up some fruit near Dwellingup on the way.



**February 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

What started out as a quick drive today ended up going to Wickopin, Dundinin, Harrismith, Tincurrin and back via Narrogin. It was interesting to see the effect of all the rain recently on paddocks east of here. At this time of year they should all be brown, crispy and bone dry but there were pools of water, the dams were full and the fields were green. What a nice change.

We spotted an interesting caravan for sale yesterday and went round to see what it was like. It only had 12 v lights (no 240v) and all the existing lights needed replacing. There was no water tank and signs of some water leakage in the ceiling but that had been fixed. Otherwise it was very interesting. It was a 20' Millard mid 80s model and looked to be in pretty good shape. It lacked a shower but that isn't high on my list of 'must have' items. The asking price was \$8900 and after working out what we would have to spend we offered \$8000. That wasn't quite enough so we haven't bought it but you never know, if it fails to sell the owner may change his mind and bring the price down. (Later: turns out he did drop the price later on but by that time we had rebuilt the engine in the Cruiser and didn't have enough money to justify getting the van. In hindsight this was a huge mistake.)

Having just finished all the modifications to our existing van I wouldn't be at all surprised to find we end up buying another one sometime soon.

It looks like we will be off to the south coast sometime in the next week or so, so thoughts of another van are a long way from my mind at the moment.

**February 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

The first hot day of the Summer for this season, 39C today.

**March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

We are off towards the south coast at last. The temperatures have dropped so we are taking advantage of it and going off exploring before it starts to warm up again. We went south through Wagin then Katanning, Broomehill, Gnowangerup and then stopped for the night at a nice rest area north of Borden.

Tomorrow we expect to get to Cape Riche where we intend to spend a few days.





**March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

We did get to Cape Riche but it was after 18 kilometres of dirt road. The first section (up to where the farm properties ended) was fine but the last 8 kilometres was as **rough as guts** and looked like it hadn't been graded for the last six months. When we got to the end it was packed out and it was about then that we realised that it was a long weekend. There was water coming from under the van so I just turned round and went back out again. By the time we got back to Wellstead to have a look at what had gone wrong the inside of the van looked like a tornado had been through it.

The worst problem was the fridge door which thanks to stupid short bolts holding it on, had fallen completely off and the entire contents were strewn across the caravan floor. We sorted that out and found a shelf in one of the cupboards had also come adrift. The waste pipe underneath had let go, as had the outlet pipe from our water tank. These two were easily solved but some shielding had come adrift as well and that will have to wait until I can get the caravan home to sort out.

We enquired at the local Telecentre about staying at the sports ground and we were able to pull in there for the night in order to straighten everything out. Since we also have a problem with the flange gasket in the cruiser we are currently camped out near the local motor mechanic's shed so we can get that sorted out next week.

**March 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Finally made it to Albany today after a minor repair on the car yesterday done by the mechanic at Wellstead. (flange gasket replaced). Anyone with mechanical problems in this area should ask at Wellstead as the mechanic there has a good workshop and doesn't overcharge. You can even camp outside the workshop while waiting for work to be done. (Very handy.)

We dropped the van off at Cheynes Beach caravan park (\$22 a night on power) and shot off into Albany to do some shopping. We met up with Gerry & Ingrid ([www.australianoutdoors.com](http://www.australianoutdoors.com)) who we met last time we were down this way and were pleased to see that Gerry is getting much better after a health scare a little while ago. Gerry is going to take over the sales of Camping Australia again so we can concentrate on updating the guide.

We had planned to do some shopping at Kmart but as their computers were down we went elsewhere (and probably got a better deal too). Lunch was a pie, and this pie deserves special mention. It came from a shop near Kmart called **Jesters**. The pie cost \$3.90 and was supposed to be chunky meat. Well there was meat in it, two smaller than fingernail sized pieces surrounded by what tasted like Gravox gravy mix. **What a rip off!**

After completing all the shopping and blowing around \$400 we went out to Norman's Beach (Et. Al.) to see how busy they were. Sadly we found the roads were in poor shape and I have doubts about taking the caravan out there after the fiasco of trying to get to Cape Riche. We have booked in for two nights at Cheynes Beach so will make our minds up what to do tomorrow.

**March 9<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

We took a drive out to Waychinicup National Park (only about 10 kilometres from Cheynes Beach down a reasonable unsealed road). There are tent camping sites at the National Park but campervans could also get in to some of the parking bays.

The inlet is one of the most spectacular areas on the whole south coast and anyone in this area should really make the effort to get there and have a look.

As we didn't quite get all our shopping done yesterday we have decided to go into Albany for a night or so and did a quick phone around to see what the caravan park charges were. We found a \$9 per night difference between the cheapest and the most expensive. The results were as follows:

King River Palms \$19, Kalgan River \$20, Panorama \$20, Cheynes Beach \$22, Albany Tourist \$23, Happy Days \$24, Oyster Harbour \$24, Mt. Melville \$24, Emu Beach \$25, Middleton Beach \$28.

\$19-\$22 is our budget so we will be going to King River Palms tomorrow. (This park turned out to be a reasonable choice but the ablution block is in desperate need of refurbishment and there is some noise from the tavern and nearby function centre on the weekends. The park owners are very friendly and helpful but my big gripe about the park is all the silly posts around the roadways. They are really are horrible and make getting a caravan in and out quite difficult.)



Waychinicup National Park – this is a magic place!

**March 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

At some stage during moving out of Cheynes Beach a branch must have snagged the solar panel wire on top of the caravan and as a result we lost the entire wire. I don't know yet what the damage is but we will have to get someone out to look at it next week.

**March 11<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

As we hadn't been out to the West side of Two Peoples Bay before we took a trip out there today to have a look round and found a very nice area with boat launching from the beach, a nice shaded picnic area with electric BBQs and an interesting visitor's centre. Not far away was Little Bay which is just one of the many scenic attractions on the coast near Albany.



Little Bay

**March 12<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

I checked the solar panel again today and found that the damage wasn't as bad as I first thought. Hopefully a bit of wire and plastic moulding will fix it.

Apart from that we went exploring north west of Albany to Frankland, Mt. Barker and Kendenup. Along the way we found two good campsites at Kendenup, Lake Nunjup and Lake Poorrarecup. The one at Kendenup is at the local recreation ground and for just \$5 a night you get power, flushing toilets, water and showers. For a more natural setting the two lakes are great but Nunjup is easier to get to (sealed road all the way) and has better sites for big rigs. Lake Poorrarecup was my favourite even though the area for camping was smaller and not very level, there are some nice areas along the lake shore and a very nice shelter. The easier way to get to this site is from the north as it is only about 9 kilometres of unsealed road this way.

**March 13<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

Good news bad news time again. Good news is that the solar panel damage is now fixed, also some damage done to the water drainage pipes on the caravan. Bad news is the Cruiser needs more engine work and it looks like it is going to be pistons and rings at a cost of around \$2000. We are taking it in to get a compression test done tomorrow but it is likely that the rings need doing so we will just have to fork out the money again. We knew this was coming so it isn't unexpected, just unpleasant.

**March 15<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Took the Cruiser in to Campbell Automotive today then got a hire car through the RAC Plus scheme. The hire car is a Mazda 2 and it feels like driving a toy after being in the Cruiser for so long. Campbell Automotive was recommended to us by Gerry ([www.australianoutdoors.com](http://www.australianoutdoors.com)) and we are impressed with the help we have been given so far by them.

With time to kill we went along the coast to Denmark for the day but when we got back to the caravan we had bad news about the Cruiser. It looks like the engine is basically worn out and instead of just (did I say just?) \$2500 to fix

the pistons and rings we are now looking at getting a replacement engine and God alone knows how much that is going to cost.

I wonder why our car troubles are always the most expensive ones?



Denmark River

**March 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Well if we thought \$2500 was going to hurt, \$4000 is going to hurt a lot more. Some days I really hate cars. The rings have scored up the bore in the engine and so another \$1500 has been added to the price. Thankfully the RAC will cover us with a hire car until the repairs are done which we expect to be next Tuesday. We will have to save money somehow as we are still intending to go north for the winter, although it is likely to be Karratha again as that is the cheaper option.

**March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

We are finally back home after a longer than planned trip but despite the expense of re-building the car engine, the trip went quite well. We did get a bit bored in Albany after the first 10 days but I managed to do a lot of photography and see some new places.

In the end the bill for the car was just over \$4000 and that was basically for an engine re-build and new injectors. The AWN warranty we have on the car is actually going to pay \$800 of the bill which is a great help. This is the second time they have paid up so we are very happy with the warranty. We had no problems with the car on the way home and will cross our fingers that things will stay that way for some time to come. If anyone has car problems when they are near Albany contact Jordan at Campbell Automotive, we found him very good to deal with. The charges seemed reasonable and it looks like he does good work. He took time out to explain everything to us and we appreciate that as we are not exactly mechanically minded.

We bought another Trojan 130 amp hour deep cycle battery that will replace the second battery in the car. That was from Marshall Batteries (Chester Pass Rd. Albany) and was the same price as Perth at \$205. (12 Volt World up the road wanted \$245 and wouldn't budge – crooks!) We also got a motorcycle battery (\$47) also from Marshall. They were very good and got the Trojan on a truck from Perth overnight. We can highly recommend Marshall Batteries in Albany if you need that sort of gear. See Peter if you need help.

We did buy some other gear from 12 Volt World, and although they are very useful, I would avoid shopping there again as the woman behind the counter was very unfriendly and snooty.

As I said before, an expensive 3 weeks away, but thanks to the AWN warranty and RAC Plus we saved \$1171. We did end up spending most of our time in caravan parks instead of free camping but what the hell, we got around to almost every site we wanted to see and managed to catch up with Gerry and Ingrid again.

Now it is unpack, clean up and then get ready for another trip north for the winter and only 6-7 weeks before we go.

**March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Fitting the new Trojan battery to the Cruiser was a bit of a challenge. It was fine width and length wise but after everything was attached and it came time to close the bonnet, it wouldn't close! B#!&!&! I had to detach everything and pull the battery out before removing the plate it sits on and doing to quick panel work with a BIG hammer. It still isn't perfect but at least the bonnet closes now.

I finally got round to installing an amp meter on the inverter and discovered that the Engel upright fridge actually uses about 1 amp when the silly thing is turned OFF. We are less than impressed with this shoddy fridge. First the door falls off, then it rattles and hums like nothing we have ever heard before and now we find that it uses power when it is turned off. Engel have come up with the biggest pile of junk we have ever seen in 12 volt fridges.

We are more or less unpacked now and can finally sit down and have a break. The weather has gone all wintery with rain last night and very cool temperature today. Odd that just 3 days ago Perth had a temperature of 37C and Albany had 34C.

We need to get a garden shed organised as we have managed to accumulate too much junk and now we need somewhere to put it all when we go away.

**April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

A rainy day as we get the after effects of Cyclone Glenda. Thankfully it only side swiped Karratha so we should still be on track for heading up there in about 6 weeks time.

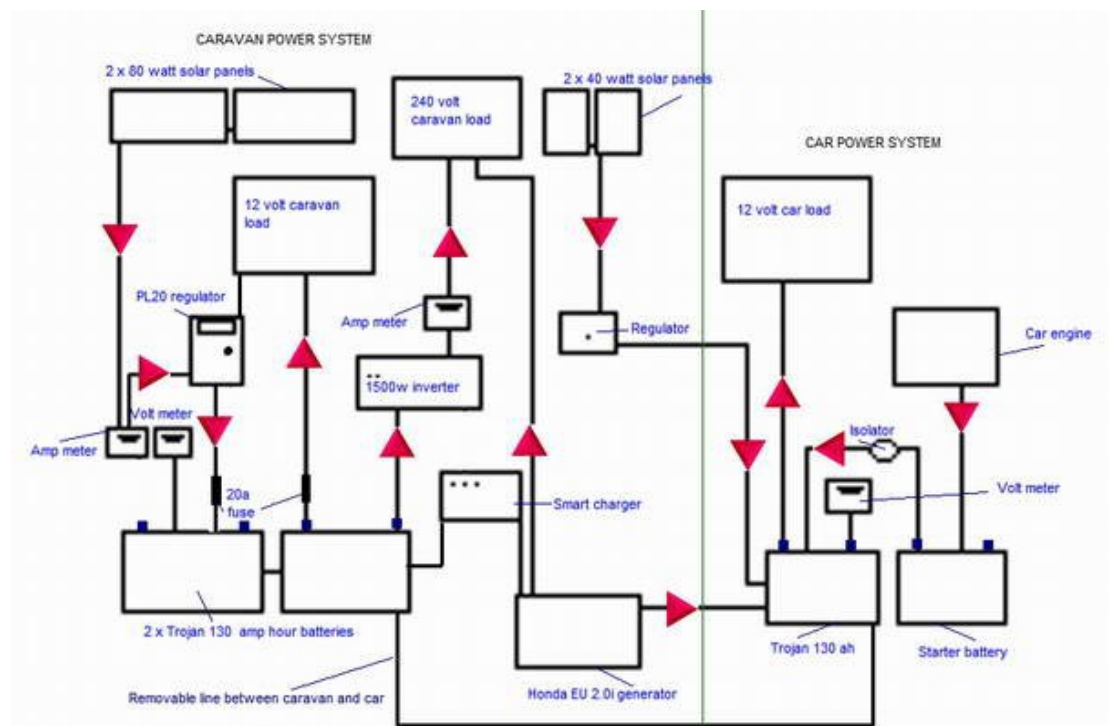
**April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

We took the Engel in to the local repairer (RetraVision Narrogin) to get it check over and hopefully sorted out but I doubt if the rattles in the cabinet will ever be solved properly.

Our quest to get a shed has come to nothing because of the cost of putting down a concrete pad. The shed would have been around \$450 but concreting would cost another \$350 so we have given up on the idea for now. \$800 for a garden shed is crazy!

We have found an alternative folding trailer made by Flat Out Boats in Bibra Lakes. We need to get down there sometime this week to have a look at it and see if it is possible to replace the Little Bulldog. The new trailer is supposed to weigh about 20 kilograms as opposed to 70 or so that the Bulldog weighs.

I have finally got around to drawing up a basic schematic for our battery systems in the caravan and car. The following diagram shows what we have ended up with. I still think we need another 80w panel and another 130ah battery but we just don't have the room for them.



**April 5<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Yesterday we did a quick trip into Perth to have a look at a new folding boat trailer (by [Mangrove Jack Marine, 8 / 15 Port Kembla Drive, Bibra Lake, W.A. \(08\) 9494 2500 www.flatoutboats.com.au](http://www.flatoutboats.com.au)) It looks like it will suit our needs better than the Little Bulldog that we have been using for the past three years. We ended up getting the trailer (\$536 with all the optional extras – see the review in the 'interesting stuff' boating page – which include a stainless steel axle, wide wheels, hitch lock and extension bar. We will hang on to the Little Bulldog trailer until we are completely satisfied that the new acquisition will do everything we need it to.

On the way in to Perth we managed to get a flat tyre which caused a problem when I found the bottle jack I carry won't go in the right position once a tyre goes flat. We were rescued by a couple with a scissor jack that managed to get the wheel up enough to get it changed. B#%!!&r me! if on the way home we didn't get another flat tyre but thankfully we got the original flat repaired in Perth before coming back. While we were in Perth we also picked up an electric winch from Super Cheap (groan, how long will it last before it gives up?) and we will be using that to get the boat on to the new trailer as it doesn't have a winch of its own.

Today we did some testing and found that the winch will do a good job of loading the boat on to the trailer but not on to the roof rack.

**April 7<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

A group of caravaners have come to the park for the weekend so we spent some time swapping travel stories before retiring for the evening.

**April 13<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Just 4 weeks to go before we head off and time has (predictably) slowed to a crawl as I run out of jobs to do. With Easter right on top of us now there is no point in trying to go anywhere but once it is over I might start thinking about making an early start but not going too far too fast.

#### **April 15<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Boredom got the better of us and instead of just sitting still and saving money, we took off on a short exploration trip today. We went through Narrogin and on to Wagin to have a look at Norring Lake. This is a great spot about 10 kilometres south west of the town and although it is reached by unsealed roads they were in good shape at the end of a long dry spell.

From here we went west to Arthur River and found another spot just north called Carberdine Pool. It can be reached from Albany Highway, Noble Road and Carberdine Road but overhanging trees could be a problem for tall caravans and motorhomes. It looks like a nice quiet spot by the river but it obviously has a few yobs going there from time to time judging by the broken beer bottles lying around.

On the way home we passed a ruined farm house not far from Williams on the Narrogin Road. I just had to stop and turn around to take a picture. Ruined houses have always fascinated me and we have so few of them in W.A.

As I look at these places I can't help but wonder about the people who lived there, what their lives were like and what happened to them? There are so many stories lost in time and the ruins show all too clearly the impermanence and uncertainty of life. I look through the windows to a place where a family once lived and feel a sense of melancholy. What happened to make them abandon their home? What stories could the walls tell if it could only talk? I can imagine them sitting on the front porch in the evenings looking out on to a very different world to the one we live in today. Echoes of lives still linger in these places even though the people have long gone. Ruined buildings always seem to leave me with a sense of loss, strange, perhaps this is my way of having a mid-life crisis??? Whatever the reason, I am always drawn to photograph buildings that (like me) are falling apart.

I will never forget the first time I visited Wittenoom (1995) and the huge impression the abandoned buildings left on me. I was so disappointed when we went back 9 years later to find that the Government had come in and managed to almost wipe the place off the face of the Earth. What a crime that was! Thankfully I did take some footage of the buildings when we went there and important buildings like the hotel, fire station and the hospital were recorded. Very sadly I did not take any still photos at that time and so have nothing to put up on the web site.



#### **April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

We are checking caravan park rates in case we decide to stay somewhere along the route to Karratha but with the prices we are being quoted the caravan parks can all get stuffed! We will stick to free camping instead of paying the ridiculous rates some of these crooks are charging. Our results to date (for powered sites) are as follows:

##### **Kalbarri:**

Anchorage \$22 p.n.  
Murchison \$22 p.n. (price rise in July)  
Red Bluff \$22.50 p.n. \$141.75 p.w.  
Tudor \$24 p.n. \$142 p.w.

##### **Carnarvon:**

Marloo \$22 + power p.n. \$110 p.w.  
Norwesta \$20 p.n. (\$18 for CMCA members) \$120 (\$108) p.w.  
Plantation \$21.50 p.n. \$117 p.w.  
Tourist \$21.50 p.n. \$23.50 p.w.  
Wintersun \$23.50 p.n.

Norwesta is the only one we consider to be reasonable and that is only because we are CMCA members and get the \$2 discount. Our base line for commercial parks is \$18 p.n. or \$108 p.w. We believe that is reasonable and anything

over that amount is just greedy. When you consider that we have found shire parks that charge from \$6.30 to \$12 a night for powered sites, some of these commercial parks are really ripping people off.

Tomorrow we will try some shire parks to see if we can find anything cheaper.

Goomalling \$12.50 p.n. \$75 p.w.  
Ballidu \$10 p.n. \$60 p.w.  
Mingenew \$16 p.n. \$105 p.w.  
Wongan Hills \$20 p.n. \$140 p.w.  
Mullewa \$16 p.n. \$80 p.w.  
Horrocks Beach \$19 p.n. \$114 p.w.  
Hutt River \$10 p.n. \$70 p.w.  
Port Gregory \$22 p.n.

#### Geraldton

Batavia \$19 p.n. \$114 p.w.  
Belair \$20 p.n. \$120 p.w.  
Drummond \$23 p.n. \$153 p.w.  
Greenough \$22 p.n. \$143 p.w.  
Sunset Beach \$19.80 p.n. 118.80 p.w.  
Tarcoola \$20 p.n. \$105 p.w.  
S Bend \$18 p.n. \$108 p.w.

After researching prices for caravan parks in a number of places along the coast we have come across some REAL RIP OFF MERCHANTS.

Our awards for the 9 biggest thieving parks we have found on the north west coast so far, go to:

Dongara Denison Beach \$35 p.n.  
Peoples Park Coral Bay \$32 p.n. \$208 p.w.  
Cooke Point Port Hedland \$32 p.n.  
Pilbara Holiday Park Karratha \$30 p.n.  
Balmoral Holiday Park Karratha \$28 p.n.  
Bayview Coral Bay \$27 p.n.  
Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort \$27 p.n.  
Roebuck Bay Broome \$27 p.n.  
Exmouth Cape Holiday Park \$26 p.n.

How the hell do caravan park owners expect people on a budget to pay the crazy fuel prices we are forced to pay and then cough up these obscene site fees? These fools are pricing stays in caravan parks out of reach of the majority of travellers. All for a patch of dirt, a toilet, shower and less than \$5 worth of power. WHAT A DISGRACE! No wonder so many people are building self contained rigs and free camping.

#### April 28<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)

Most things are packed up now, the boat is on the car, the suspension is sagging and we are very close to heading off. Night time temperatures in Karratha have come down from the mid-twenties to the high teens so we may be away as early as Sunday.

#### April 30<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)

Even though it is a bit early we are starting the long drive north and hoping that the temperature up there isn't going to be too bad. We went north through York, Northam, Wubin and then off the main highway to a campsite called Buntine Rocks. A nice quiet night but quite chilly. **Note:** The road north of Wongan Hills to the Great Northern Highway is one lane bitumen most of the way.

#### May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Monday)

We explored a bit of new ground today going to Morawa, Perenjori and Mingeneu before filling the fuel tank at Geraldton and pushing on to the rest area at Nerren Nerren.

#### May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)

From Nerren Nerren we continued on to Carnarvon for another fuel stop and thought about stopping the night at a caravan park but then decided not to give our money to the greedy b#!%!!&rs and went on to Barradale instead. When we got there and opened the caravan door we found that the fridge door on the upright Engel had fallen off AGAIN. We have been over nothing more rough than a few cattle grids on the sealed highway today so to say we are disgusted with this fridge is the understatement of the year.

#### May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)

Finally arrived at Cleaverville but not without our usual hassles on the road. When we stopped to put a drop of fuel in at the HORRIBLY EXPENSIVE Fortescue roadhouse \$1.80 a litre!!!! (Word is that Nanutarra was \$1.88) the Cruiser gave an ominous clicking sound (starter motor) when we tried to re-start. We did manage to get a tow start from another helpful traveller and made it to Karratha where we filled up at the truck stop (without turning the engine off) and then picked up water before making our way to Cleaverville. (Now you have to go 6km in to the tourist office in Karratha to get water as the tap at the info stop on the highway has been removed.) To our great delight the track to the campsite had just been graded and we got the caravan to the campsite in record time.

The bad news is that there are no longer rubbish bins at the campsite (I wonder why the camping fees are still the same) and campers have to take their trash to a big bin near the highway.

Kilometres travelled this trip: 1777. The cruiser averaged 6.08 kilometres to the litre. Not bad considering we had two days of very strong headwinds from Carnarvon to Karratha.



A nice new sandy beach thanks to the recent cyclone.

#### **May 6<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

We are patiently waiting for the wind to drop enough to go out in the boat but experience has shown that it may be some days yet before we finally get to go fishing. The temperatures here are still a little high to be comfortable with nights varying from 17C to 20C and days hovering around 30C. There is some high cloud around making it humid and stopping us from getting all the solar energy we need.

The car's starter motor has been co-operating over the past couple of days and hasn't played up again but it is only a matter of time before it stuffs up again.

There is some soft sand piled up near the boat launching area – courtesy of the cyclone that came through here a few weeks ago. Low pressure tyres and low range 4wd will be needed to get the boat into the water until the sand gets flattened out by the passing of many 4x4s.

#### **May 7<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

We had hoped not to spend too much money this year but we have found that we will need a good battery charger to keep the batteries going. The past few days have been nothing but cloud and the batteries have gone from a high of 88% right down to 43% and the regulator switched off all 12v power.

On top of that we have decided to get a marine radio for the boat so we can legally get out further and catch bigger fish.

Then of course we have to get the starter motor in the car done so by the time all that is paid for we probably won't have much change out of \$2000. <sigh>

#### **May 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

We found a battery charger at Repco but it is only 12amp (20amp RMS) but as it was only \$279 we have decided to try that instead of spending around \$1000 on a 50amp charger.

We also bought a 'Flo-n-go' fuel dispenser as they have now dropped from around \$40 to around \$20. Although we use a boat fuel pump for moving fuel at the moment, we may need to move water if our water pump ever plays up so this was a good chance to have something as a spare.

We decided to try and be as legal as possible when going offshore fishing so we finally bought a marine radio (\$169) and aerial (\$70) and two parachute flares (\$42 each). I do, however, refuse point blank, to be blackmailed into spending over \$500 on a new EPIRB.

We replaced a malfunctioning rod and reel at Kmart (one reason we buy so much gear there is their excellent product replacement policy) and then picked up food and drink supplies so we hope to stay away from town until late next week.

Meanwhile we wait (impatiently) for the wind to go away.

#### **May 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**



Finally the wind was down this morning so we hitched up the boat and headed off to the boat ramp about a kilometre away. As the new boat trailer was still very much 'on test' we drove at walking pace and were very surprised to find that before we had even got to the boat ramp one of the trailer wheels fell off.

This in turn caused the axle to bend and we were left in a position where we had to empty the boat, pack everything into the car, put the boat back up on the roof rack and head back to the campsite. Obviously we are less than impressed with the new trailer and will have no choice but to ask for our money back. The trailer would be fine to move short distances by hand but it is totally unsuited to towing behind a vehicle for any distance at all as the plastic bushes on the wheels just melt and disintegrate.

Despite the problems we have with weight and storage for the bulldog trailer we have decided to purchase a new one and sell out old one when we get home. It is an expensive option at \$1993.00 but if I drove home to pick up the old trailer that would cost at least \$950 in fuel and more in wear and tear on the cruiser so buying a new trailer is the easiest option we have.

#### May 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)

While we wait for the boat trailer to arrive (we found out later that it was already here) and for the wind to drop I have had time to start looking at the figures coming from the PL20 solar regulator and I have to admit that I am still mystified about how these silly things work.

In the past 7 days we have had clear sunny weather with temperatures around 30C every day. You would imagine that this would mean that each days solar input would be more or less the same; not so.

The average input for the past week has been 69 amp hours a day, This means 23 amp hours per day from each of the 3 solar panels. That is a lot less than I would expect but the solar panels are working properly and each putting out close to 5 amps each. What is happening, and I have seen this by checking the input with an analogue meter, is that the regulator isn't allowing the full input from the panels in to the batteries. So while we have a theoretical daily input of 35 amp hours per panel in clear weather, we are getting only around 23????

I have to assume from the behaviour of the regulator that adding another panel won't help as it still won't let in all the power available. This is something I just can't comprehend.

Having said that we have had an average of 69 amp hours a day over the last week, that needs to be qualified by adding that we have had a high maximum of 90 amp hours in one day and a low maximum of 43. Why the huge difference I don't know as the daily temperatures are similar and the sunlight hours are the same as there have been no clouds.

We have found that to keep ahead we need to charge the batteries each night using the generator and 2 battery chargers. In theory this keeps us ahead as that system can deliver around 59 amp hours a day. Even so the low voltage reading each morning of about 11.2 volts makes me think that the batteries are getting too low overnight.

Following is a table showing the results of the last week. The SOC or state of charge is meaningless as it fails to show generator input to the batteries.

Solar	Generator	IN	OUT	RESULT	MAX V	MIN V	SOC %	Date	Condit
43	17.5	60.5	42	18.5	15	11.2	95	8-May	Sunny
77	17.5	94.5	80	14.5	14.6	10.9	94	9-May	Sunny
76	59	135	74	61	14.9	11.1	94	10-May	Sunny
71	59	130	77	53	14.9	11.2	93	11-May	Sunny
63	59	122	74	48	15.6	11.1	90	12-May	Sunny
90	59	149	81	68	15.9	11.2	92	13-May	Sunny
69	59	128	85	43	14.7	11.2	88	14-May	Sunny

#### May 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)

We went to Wickham today, mostly because we were getting bored and while we were there we phoned the freight company in Karratha to see what time the boat trailer was due to arrive tomorrow. Turns out it arrived Saturday night but no one bothered to let us know so we went from Wickham to Karratha to pick it up.

The new design for the Little Bulldog has several improvements over the old one but it is still very heavy and cumbersome to pack in the back of the Cruiser. We have purchased a caravan rack for the trailer which will help once we get a bigger caravan but for now we are stuck packing it in the car.

#### May 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)

After just over 2 weeks we finally got out behind Dixon Island and did some serious fishing. [Yesterday we took the boat down to the creek](#) and unexpectedly caught some blue swimmer crabs on fishing lines. In the end we lost about 4 but got 6 in to the boat. Belle caught a reasonable sized cod but we let that go.

Today the wind stayed down and we got out to a reef and brought back 3 snapper and 2 flag plus Belle's trophy golden trevally. She brought it in all by herself with no help from me and it was a real fight. The rod almost bent double as the fish went under the boat but Belle held on and this is now the biggest fish she has ever caught. I have only caught two that would have been bigger so it was a real achievement for her.

The tally to date excluding what I have just mentioned is about 26 garfish and 6 whiting that Belle caught off the beach, plus several snapper and flag that we let go today.

The boat launching area is proving to be difficult due to all the loose sand and shale and even though we didn't have a problem today a Little Bulldog trailer was just about written off when one of the regulars got bogged. We are going to have to be very careful there until it starts to flatten out.

LT: 7:28am 1.93m HT: 1:25pm 5.20m FM+5



Belle's biggest catch to date

#### **May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

The weather forecast is for rain on Wednesday so we took the opportunity of heading in to town today and get the shopping done. The wind and tides are against fishing at the moment so we just do the chores, read books and watch DVDs and chat with the other campers at morning tea time and happy hour.

#### **May 24<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

We couldn't make up our minds whether to go fishing this morning and as a result missed out on what turned out to be a good calm morning. Everyone is still worried about the amount of loose sand on the launching area and everyone seems to be waiting for someone else to go out first.

#### **May 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Fishing today was a little less successful if you count the number of fish we brought in but it was still fun as we did catch and release a number of fish including a couple of whiskery sharks, several cod, small snapper and two golden trevally. The first trevally was the biggest I have ever brought to the boat and if laid on the seat would have overlapped both sides of the dinghy. It fought a good fight and I was quite happy to let it go once I brought it up. I always seem to feel much better about letting big fish go rather than killing them.

Temperatures have gone up at night and cloud cover makes it very humid so we are very happy with the Caframo fans we installed earlier this year. The forecast is for rain over the next few days and it looks like the wind is coming up again tomorrow so no fishing for a while at least.

Collie had -3C last night and we had 22C, what a difference!

[Fishing Info: Dark moon -2, LT:3.08am 1.99 HT:9.05am 5.13](#)

#### **May 26<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

Bought a Kross DVD recorder from Woolworths today. I have been wanting one of these for ages and now the 80gb model is down to \$299 it seemed like a good time to finally go ahead as I have dozens of video tapes at home I want to transfer to digital format as well as all the original footage I have taken over the years. (This DVD recorder lasted all of 3 months before we had to return it and get our money back.)

Weather wise, the clouds came over and it was hot and steamy. Lots of sand flies and midges about today making everyone's life hell.

**May 27<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

The wind returned today with a vengeance. The cloud cover means using the generator most of the day so testing the new toy and copying DVDs took up most of the time.

It feels like a long time between fishing trips, but looking back at this time last year we had only been out 4 times as compared with 4 times this year so it hasn't been as bad as it feels.

**May 30<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

Went fishing out on the reefs again but the fish didn't seem to be that hungry. We only caught a couple of small snapper, a cod and a blue nose plus one very hungry crab on a fishing line. Everything went back.

The cruiser is struggling to get through the deep sand at the boat launching area and other cars are constantly getting bogged so we are going to give up on getting out that way. It means a long trip round to the creek to launch but as the Cruiser seems to be slipping out of 4wd when it gets into the sand it probably makes sense not to push things until something breaks.

Weather wise it is STILL cloudy and everyone is now using generators to get by until the sun puts in an appearance again. Thanks to the new charger we are at least managing to keep the batteries full.

[Fishing Info: Dark moon +3, LT:6.28am 1.64 HT:12.16pm 5.41](#)

**June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

The cloud broke up a bit during the day but returned in the evening so we are now in the longest period of cloudy weather that anyone can remember up here at this time of the year.

As the wind is still blowing we [went down to the creek](#) to catch some fish to use as bait for crabbing. We went down with the intention of catching catfish but as it turned out caught cod, bream, blue swimmer crabs and even a mud crab so the day turned out to be pretty good. We let the cod go even though a couple were quite large enough to take and ended up taking two bream back to eat and one blue nosed salmon for crab bait. (plus the crabs of course.)

The mud crab we caught (185mm across) was on a fishing line not in a net and as it didn't even have claws it was quite remarkable that it came up at all.

**June 4<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

[Back down to the creek](#) and this time we got some catfish for crab bait. We also caught 4 more blue swimmers (3 on fishing lines and only 1 in a net.)

Cloud continues to cause problems with the solar system but sunny patches allowed us to use the generator less today.

**June 9<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

The wind is still blowing so the only fishing has been at the creek and so there isn't much to write about.

**June 13<sup>h</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

Despite the wind's continued presence we managed to have a good day today. We decided to take all the crab nets [down to the creek](#) and hoped to catch a few blue swimmers. When the first net came up with one blue swimmer in we were quite pleased, the next net came up with another one and the third net came up with a mud crab so we were steadily getting more and more pleased with each net. The next net produced 2 more blue swimmers and the next produced 2 mud crabs. By the end of the first run we had 4 blue swimmers and 6 mud crabs. On the second run we only got one more muddy before deciding to call it a day but by that time we were having trouble keeping the muddies in the container we usually use for the blue swimmers.

Days like this make putting up with the awful wind worth while. Even though we got more muddies than swimmers we still think blue swimmers are much better eating than mud crabs. Mud crabs seem to be more highly prized because they look bigger but blue swimmers (especially up here) have a superior flavour and are usually much easier to catch.



Our best day ever for mud crabs.

**June 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

Everyone is patiently watching the weather as the charts are showing the possibility of some good fishing weather over the coming weekend. It has been so long since we managed to get out and fish the reefs we are really hoping that this will be the start of a few days of fair winds.

**June 17<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

We did manage to get out fishing today and caught 3 snapper, 1 mackerel, 1 shark and a stripey. Not a huge amount but enough for a few meals. One of the more interesting aspects of the day was a group of about 5 small birds that spent their time dipping their feet into the water to get at small bits of berley floating away from the berley bucket. They didn't seem concerned about us at all and came up right next to the boat. The fact that we were several kilometres out to sea didn't worry them either and they just kept flitting around us for hours.

[Fishing Info: Half moon -1, LT:8.24am 1.89 HT:2.20pm 4.97](#)



**June 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

Today we didn't go as far out to catch fish and we did much better than yesterday (when we went about 6km out). The catch today was 1 snapper, 1 trevally, 3 stripey, 1 cod and 8 bream. Although this is more than we usually catch, the weather has been so bad this year that we need to put a few meals in the freezer in case we can't go fishing again for a couple of weeks. (Prophetic words as it turned out as we didn't get any more fish until July 9<sup>th</sup>.) The thing that spoiled a good day out was the new Navman echo sounder playing up.

[Fishing Info: Half moon, LT:9.18am 2.03 HT:3.13pm 4.69](#)



**June 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Our old Navman echo sounder gave up the ghost a couple of weeks ago so we bought a new one (\$239) and on Sunday it stopped working so yesterday we took the transducer in to town and sent it off to Navman in N.S.W. We hope we will get a replacement soon but I can't see it arriving until next week some time.

**June 24<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

We managed to get out early before the wind came up and do some [crabbing](#). The tally for today was 20 blue swimmers and 1 muddy.

**July 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

The dismal year (fishing wise) continues unabated. [We did get out one more time during the last week](#) but without the sounder (still waiting for Navman to pull their collective finger out!) we didn't get on to any size fish. That makes just 6 days fishing out on the reefs in the last 8.5 weeks.

We are now more determined than ever to get a bigger caravan and head east as soon as we can. While we patiently wait in Karratha for the southern winter to end we hope to get a few more days good fishing but the way this year is going we aren't going to do anywhere near as well as last year.

We certainly aren't in any danger of depleting fish or crab stocks – unlike one other camper up here who has pulled 51 mud crabs from the creek in the past couple of weeks. I'm not sure if greedy or stupid would be the best word to describe this sort of thing? Maybe BOTH!

**July 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Desperation took over this morning and we tried to get [out fishing on the reefs](#) only to be blown back in within an hour. We didn't catch any fish worth keeping but were treated to the sight of a sea eagle diving on, and catching, a big blue tusk fish that we had thrown back. The eagle was the only one with a fish brekky today.

**July 9<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

A nice windless day today and we finally managed to get out and fish on the front reefs. Plenty of fish around but not a lot of hook-ups. We managed to come in with 3 snapper, 2 flag and 1 cod. Better than nothing but not great for up here.

[Fishing Info: Full moon -2, LT:3.11am 2.53 HT:9.03am 4.50](#)

**July 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

Two good fishing days in a row! That is a record for this season. Even though tomorrow is a full moon and we went out not expecting much, we were quite happy at the end of the day with 6 snapper and 1 shark. Belle did very well today catching 4 of the biggest snapper. Sadly it looks like the wind will be back tomorrow.

[Fishing Info: Full moon -1, LT:4.03am 2.26 HT:9.54am 4.77](#)



**July 13<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

A few days ago we caught up with Gavin and Tracy who are travelling round in their bus 'Hobohome On Tour'. We had contacted them via the net in the past and it was nice to finally catch up in person. If you spot Hobohome on the road somewhere and need any help (at a very reasonable price) with satellite, solar or electrical problems then see Gavin who is a licensed electrician. They also happen to be really nice people just to sit and have a chat with.



Belle, Tracy and Gavin outside Hobohome On Tour.

**July 17<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

The wind is awful at the moment. It has been so bad that I even took to sleeping in the back of the car last night to get away from the flapping annexe.

We decided to have a go at crabbing in the creek this afternoon but didn't expect much as it has been hammered by everyone in the past few weeks. We ended up getting 4 mud crabs and 3 blue swimmers so it was much better than anticipated.

We are expecting the immanent arrival of an 80w solar panel to replace the one on top of the caravan that got damaged in March and that I wasn't able to repair. I had hoped the re-wiring I did would have worked but no such luck. We are hoping that our caravan insurance will cover the cost but we have to have at least 3 panels so had to order it regardless.

Looking back over the number of good fishing days (weather wise) makes for very dismal reading this year. We have had only 7 days where we managed to get out over the reefs and chase the fish we really want (snapper). That is in a total of nearly 11 weeks. That compares to 20 days in the same period last year.

To be honest, if it wasn't for the cold weather down south we would probably already have been on our way home.

**July 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

Went out fishing at the creek yesterday but only caught 1 cod, 1 bream and 1 tusk fish all of which we let go.

Today we took a trip out to Harding Dam to see if it has changed much since we were there in 1998 – it hasn't but it is still a lovely spot at the end on 27 kilometres of corrugations.



**July 25<sup>th</sup> 2005 (Tuesday)**

The wind managed to drop enough for us to go out fishing again today but the fish weren't co-operating all that well. We managed to get 1 snapper, 1 fathead, 1 mangrove jack and 4 flag but that was it for 5 hours worth of effort. Tomorrow looks like being another good day weather wise but we will have to wait and see if the fish are hungry or not.

**Fishing Info:** Dark moon, LT:5.13am 1.9 HT:11.00am 4.91



**July 26<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Out fishing again today and the tally was 3 flag and 4 snapper. Not great but not terrible. We think we may only be here another 3 weeks before it is time to pack up and head home.

**Fishing Info:** Dark moon +1, LT:5.50am 1.65 HT:11.36pm 5.08

**July 27<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Looks like today was the last day of fishing weather for a while and the fish are still a bit reluctant to commit suicide by grabbing a baited hook. The catch today was 2 snapper, 1 flag and 1 mackerel. If we took the last 3 days into consideration we have caught enough fish to make one good day.

**Fishing Info:** Dark moon +2, LT:6.23am 1.48 HT:12.08pm 5.16

**July 29<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Went [crabbing at the creek again](#) and got 3 muddies and 8 sand crabs.

**30<sup>th</sup> July 2006 (Sunday)**

Although the forecast was for 13-18 knots today and the wind was up early, we still went out to the front reefs but this time we stayed in shallow water only 0.5-1km off shore instead of heading out 3-4 km like we normally do. This turned out to be a good choice as we caught two big snapper (the larger one was 48cm), 7 flag (one measuring 37cm), five Queensland school mackerel and three wolf herring (that are good for bait). All in all a very pleasing days fishing.

Fishing Info: Half moon -3, LT:7.46am 1.37 HT:1.35pm 4.97

**July 31<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

Hmmm.... Silly weather people said today was going to be 10-15 knot winds and it was MUCH higher. I wonder what exactly it is they get paid for because their wind and wave forecasts this year have been way off. Even so we did go out again and were rewarded with just 2 snapper. Both were good size but things were very slow. The wind and tides are due to go right off again by Wednesday so we are hoping for one more day tomorrow even though the forecast was 13-18 knots again. (crosses fingers).

Fishing Info: Half moon -2, LT:8.13am 1.45 HT:2.03pm 4.78

**August 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

We did go out fishing again today but it was a BAD idea as the sea breeze came in before we had even left and in the end we only caught some gardies for bait.

We are watching the temperatures further north with some concern as they are definitely warming up and tonight is the most warm and humid we have had for a couple of months at least. Time up here is rapidly running out as we will be off as soon as night time temperatures come near 20C and the sand flies come back.

The tides and the wind mean no more fishing until next Monday at the earliest and we are booked in to do the Robe Iron tour again and are going out to dinner on Friday. After that it may be just a matter of days before we decide to start packing up. Three months seems to have flown by now but I know it did drag on badly when the easterly wind was howling for days on end.

Fishing Info: Half moon -1, LT:8.41am 1.57 HT:2:32pm 4.54

**August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

As we decided not to go out fishing today the wind did the predictable thing and dropped of all together. Temperatures are definitely on the rise now with last night reaching 18C and 30C today.

**August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

We have started checking out caravan park rates for the route we intend to take home and came up with the following: (based on 2 people on a powered site.)

Mingenew \$16 p.n.  
Three Springs \$15 p.n.  
Carnamah \$20 p.n. (FOR A COUNCIL PARK!!!)  
Coorow \$13 p.n.  
Calingiri \$11 p.n.  
Bolgart \$8.80 p.n. (Bargain of the year!!)

**August 5<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**



Yesterday we did the Robe Iron tour again (we did the first one 8 years ago). The tour guide on this trip was excellent and had a huge wealth of knowledge on local history, flora and fauna. The tour is still FREE and anyone coming up here should book at the Roebourne tourist office and go along as it is the only way to get on site at the Cape Lambert works and get an insight into how the iron ore is shipped overseas. Tours run on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and YOU MUST BOOK as they are usually full.

Last night we went out to dinner at the Bay Village that holds a seafood buffet on Friday nights. It is \$25 a head which might seem a lot until you get inside and see the incredible spread of dishes they provide. There is everything from prawns done in about 4 different ways to fish, scallops, Moreton Bay bugs, calamari, smoked salmon, mussels, tureens, salads and that is just the cold section. Then there are chips, roasted potatoes, rice, a choice of 2-3 vegetable dishes, gnocchi, roast meat, crumbed seafood basket (yummy) and if you still have room there are cakes, fruit tarts, mouse, fresh fruit salad and six different ice creams with toppings to choose from. Even the fruit juice, cordials, apple juice, coffee, tea and Milo is provided for the same price. (Oh and there are also two types of soup and a cheese board I forgot to mention before.)

Needless to say we pigged out and over did it, but then it isn't often we get to eat at a place like this.

As we have now been to 4 different buffets in Karratha this year, now would be a good time to mention the others and comment on what we thought of them.

All the others were lunch time buffets, the first (and our favourite lunch out in Karratha) was at the Jasmine Chinese restaurant. This is a little more expensive than the other two (at \$12.50 a head) but the quality of food was far superior. The atmosphere is very nice with typical Chinese décor and the buffet has a reasonable choice of dishes with sweet and sour pork and garlic fried chicken being the two most popular. Soft drinks here are a bit expensive; \$3.50 a can; but in all other respects we prefer to Jasmine to its two main competitors.

Next was the Red Coy that also has an up-market atmosphere and is \$10 a head. The meat dishes here were a bit skimped on but the food quality was good EXCEPT for the sweet and sour fish. We think the fish used was probably threadfin and it was disgusting. It was so bad that it managed to spoil the whole meal.

Then we tried the Chinese restaurant next to Woolworths in the main shopping centre. This was not a buffet but has lunch specials. We tried beef and black bean and a noodle dish. Both were far too salty. The price and décor are good but over salting the food spoiled the experience for us.

Lastly we tried the Universal (yet another Chinese restaurant) that does a \$10 lunch buffet. This place is very popular with campers at Cleaverville but for the life of us, we could not work out why. The food is, at best, plain and the décor like the food lacks any kind of flair. For the extra \$2.50 a head we much prefer to eat at the Jasmine for lunch.

#### **August 7<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

Up before dawn and out fishing before the sunrise – should have stayed in bed. Everything we caught was undersized and had to go back and it only consisted on 2 flag and 1 snapper in any case.

[Fishing Info: Full moon -2, LT:2.51am 2.79 HT:8:50am 4.17](#)

#### **August 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

Despite the forecast of 13-18 knot winds we did go out again and managed to catch a few fish before the wind finally came in about mid-morning. The fish started to bite after high tide and we caught 4 bream, 1 snapper and 1 flag (all size) but we decided to let them all go again as we already have enough in the freezer to take home and we don't really need anything that we already have, although a nice big coral trout or Spanish mackerel would be most welcome sometime in the next week.

[Fishing Info: Full moon -1, LT:4.00am 2.37 HT:9:53am 4.59](#)

#### **August 12<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Looking at the synoptic charts earlier in the week we thought this would be a good day (finally) to go fishing. Reality BITES! And the wind BLOWS! Bored out of our minds we took the boat down to the creek again and the only thing we got was a big mud crab on Belle's line. At least she was happy with the result.

#### **August 13<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

The early morning forecast was for strong-ish winds (18-23 knots) so we decided to go down to the creek and then go out to the islands if the wind stayed down for a while. As it turned out the wind stayed down all day and we could have been out fishing the reefs instead (thanks again BOM Learmonth for your 'accuracy!' Weather forecasting dart board broken again is it?). We did manage to pick up some more bait in the form of garfish and wolf herring and Belle brought two bream back (I let the one I caught go). The forecast tonight looks promising for tomorrow and since we are rapidly running out of time I really hope the wind stays away for a change.

#### **August 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

The wind forecast was again 13-18 knots but we ignored it and went out anyway. Things looked bleak until the tide turned and in the end we did manage to come back in with [2 mackerel, 2 flag and 4 snapper](#). Tomorrow could be the last fishing day for this year so we are crossing our fingers that the fishing will be good.

#### **August 15<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

We were all set to go out fishing for the last time this year and hopped in the car, turned the key and CLICK, CLICK, CLICK! You B\*%#\$#D! The starter motor chose now to decide to play up again. We collared another camper (Thanks Richard) and asked for a tow start. Thankfully we got the car going and got down to the beach with no further dramas.

We went out to the same spot as yesterday and waited for the fish to come on the bite. We waited and waited and WAITED! But nothing happened apart from catching the odd mackerel or small cod. Finally I did catch a snapper and it looked as though things were about to start happening when the wind came up and the sea went from dead calm to choppy as hell. We had no choice but to pack up and head back in. At least the car decided to start when we got back and we didn't need to ask for a tow start on the beach. Our tally for the day, 1 mackerel that we gave away. The snapper was still alive so I let it go.

The boat is now unloaded and the trailer folded up so that is it for fishing this year. What a shocker it has been. We are questioning whether we will ever bother coming up here again. The lack of fish this year has (we think) been due to the trawlers ploughing up and down near the reefs day and night. Everyone has been catching fewer fish and everyone thinks that the trawlers are to blame.

We will have to get the car looked at now before we go home (Curses! They cheat you like crazy up here.) but we are hoping to be away in the next few days. The BITEYS Are making a come back so now seems like a good time to start the long journey south again anyway.

#### **August 20<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

After a day or so packing up at Cleaverville we spent the next three nights on the road heading home. The car problem looks like it was just a battery and at \$139 that is one of the cheaper automotive problems we have had.

The first two nights on the way back were pretty predictable, Barradale and then Galena, which are our usual overnight stops. From Dongara we took a new route through Mingenew, Three Springs, Carnamah, Coorow, Moora, Calingiri and Bolgart where we spent the night before heading home via Northam. One surprising aspect of the detour along the Midlands Road was the excellent surface of most of the road. It looks as though most of the back roads (especially from the Great Northern Highway turn off to Bolgart) have been recently surfaced and they are in better condition (much better actually) than the main highway. That makes the back roads a good alternative route.

The wildflowers along the route are almost non-existent this year due to the lack of rains. Anyone heading this way in the hopes of our usual breath taking display of flowers is in for a big disappointment this year.

Thankfully the trip home was completely uneventful but I did have to leave two 315 ah 6v batteries I had been given, back at Cleaverville. They would have been ideal for a bigger caravan but easy come, easy go I suppose.

Now we set about getting settled in again and then getting the caravan ready for sale. We were away for 16 weeks this time and the trip overall was a big let down as the wind played havoc with the fishing and even when we did eventually get out the fish were usually very hard to find. We brought home about 15kg of fish fillets which is more than we usually do but then much of it is for people we know to try and we will probably only eat about a third of what we brought back.

#### **August 27<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

We have been home a week and have managed to unload the car, dig up the vegie garden, clear up around the bus and finally order a 3x3 metre garden shed (\$538). We have managed to gather so much junk (indispensable junk) now that we have to get the shed in order to put everything away. The weather has been typical of the season with a bit of rain and plenty of cold nights. The wild flowers here are as scarce as everywhere else so I am contenting myself with finding different types of fungi to photograph at the moment.

#### **September 5<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

We are still patiently (or perhaps impatiently) waiting for the shed to arrive. I think it took less time for a man to fly from the Earth to the Moon than it takes to get a shed from Perth to Narrogin but once you choose to live in the boonies, prompt efficient service is a thing you have to learn to do without.

No sign yet of the wildflowers putting in an appearance.

#### **September 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

The shed finally turned up and we spent the last couple of days putting it together. To start off with it seemed very flimsy but as the pieces were put together it got stronger and more rigid until now it seems very solid indeed. It certainly wasn't an easy task but with a bit of help we finally got there. Now we need to get some shelves and I will be able to sort everything out at last.

The weather has gone all drizzly again so working on anything outside has had to be temporarily abandoned.

#### **September 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Most things are now packed away in the shed and we have the trailer full of camping gear. Weather wise we have had bright sunny days for the last few days and temperatures up around 22-25C.

Not much to write about at the moment so it looks like a good time to write a new 'wish list'.

1. Buy 18' tandem caravan and then sell our old 14' one. (done but it was 20')
2. Sell Bulldog trailer. (done)

3. Sell Honda 2kva and buy a Yamaha 2.5Kva generator (maybe) (got another Honda)
4. Buy a new DV camera before we get back on the road (done)
5. Buy a quick to erect tent for upcoming camping trip in Nov-Dec. (done)
6. Buy a cheap regulator for the car (old one got broken) (done)
7. Get pay TV (Select TV looks good at \$29.95 a month) (done)
8. Get new replacement computer before this horrible Toshiba gives up. (Finally done in Karratha)
9. Get a sine wave inverter to replace the old square wave we have. (Ditto)
10. Work out why the Canon printer won't print using black ink. (Gave up got new printer)
11. Remove 120w solar panel from bus and put it on the new caravan when we get one. (Done)
12. Get a second satellite dish so we don't have to move the one for the bus when we go away. (done)



The Shed

**September 29<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

32C today, that is very hot for this time of year. Lets hope we aren't in for a stinker of a summer.

**October 4<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Wednesday)**

Spending time getting all sorts of odd jobs done and slowly getting the van ready to head down to Perth on Sunday. We have a lot to get done in Perth so will probably be there at least a week. Items to get while in Perth include a flat screen TV for the caravan (as we want to get rid of the old Orion we have been using), a quick to erect tent for travelling the south west later this year, possibly a new stereo to put in the caravan when the one we have there sells with the van and we also need to look at DV camera prices and computer prices as this Toshiba is about on it's last legs.

Also pick up a couple of cheap solar regulators, return the trailer we had problems with in Karratha, return the DVD recorder as it has already broken down only 3-4 months after we got it, fill the gas bottles, return the broken mudguard to Bulldog and do all the odds and ends shopping plus see a doctor, dentist, catch up with friends in Applecross and Rockingham, Mandurah and finally collapse exhausted in a heap.

Oh... and look for another caravan while we are there..... Hmm I think I need to make a list:

Fremantle area:

- Barry Edwards Solar - regulators
- Little Bulldog Trailers – return mudguard
- Mangrove Jack – return trailer

Rockingham:

- ABBA Caravans - look
- Bunnings – glue, sealant, screws, wood, rake.
- WA Salvage - look
- Spotlight - look
- Ranger Camping – tent
- Kmart – General shopping
- Coles – General shopping
- Woolworths – General shopping and return DVD recorder
- Auto One – paint for car
- Repco - look
- BBQs Galore – refill gas bottles
- RetraVision – fan heater, FS TV, stereo, look at DV cameras & computers
- Catch up with Mick & Jean
- Doctor
- Dentist
- Spud Shed
- Chemist

Mandurah:

Big W – General shopping  
Catch up with Dave & Carmel if possible

Applecross

Catch up with Gerry.

Canning Vale & Maddington

Shopping at the markets  
Look in caravan dealers

Perth:

Do some sight seeing and photography if we get the chance.

### **October 6<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Friday)**

We haven't even been to Perth yet but have already started spending money. We saw the shelves that we bought for the shed on special (how typical is that!) for just \$19 when we paid \$32. We still needed a couple more so we bought them and at least managed to save a little bit. We also decided that having a good BBQ for the time we are back at the bus and the summer heat makes it too hot to cook inside would be a good idea so we picked up what looks like quite a good 4 burner with hot plate, grill, lid and cover for just \$149. If it lasts a while it will be good value for money.

Tomorrow we will finish packing up and then head down on Sunday. I think we are in for a busy and expensive week.

### **October 17<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

The trip to Perth was reasonably successful as we got most of the things on our list done. We are having an uphill battle finding another caravan as the spec we are looking for seems to be quite rare. We did find one that was close for \$11,500 but it had no air conditioner and we have decided we really do want one of those. We looked in about 8 different dealers as well as several private sales but nothing doing yet.

We did get an LCD TV and a second satellite dish which I finally got installed along with much swearing. Now we have the free to air channels and SelectTV and all we have to do is swap cards to switch between them.

Mangrove Jack refunded all the money we paid for the light weight boat trailer as they promised to do (it really is nice to find a decent honest person in business these days). They have come up with a much better and stronger design now but it looks like the price won't be much less than a standard Bulldog at around \$1500 retail. That is a bit of a shame but now retailers are involved in selling the product the price is higher than it would otherwise be.

We also managed to find a quick erect tent from Ranger in Rockingham (OzTrail at \$299). It is a reasonable size for overnight stops and is made from canvas so another review will need to be written on the website.

It was a big surprise to find all sorts of changes at Canning Vale markets with all the Asian shops we used to go to moved to new premises. Only one of the original shops has stayed in the complex so Belle managed to get most of what she wanted.

Another surprise was finding WA Salvage closing down but we did make good use of the 30% off prices they had. A real shame they won't be around anymore but I guess Bunnings has out competed them.

The place we stayed while in Perth was great. It is a private property in Oakford and in that location it was central to the places we wanted to get to. It was also nice and quiet so going back to the caravan after a full day fighting the traffic was a big relief.

A trip wouldn't be a trip for us if we didn't have some sort of car trouble. We parked at Spencer Village, did a bit of shopping and hopped back in the car and turned the key.... CLICK, CLICK, CLICK! The old problem was back to haunt us yet again. Ok, so it wasn't the battery, perhaps it was the alternator?? The RAC man turned up after only a short time and started us up easily enough with jumper leads. He then got out a couple of testers and quickly determined that the batteries weren't getting a charge from the engine (I wonder why this wasn't checked by the RAC in Karratha?). Long story short – he found the plug from the alternator was loose and as soon as he pushed it back in the batteries were being charged again. HOORAY! Finally a mechanical problem that didn't cost a brass razoo to fix.

I have often thought that being an RAC roadside assistance mechanic must be a very rewarding job. You spend your time helping people who (I suspect like us) are always extremely grateful for the help. I think if a poll was held on the subject, the RAC mechanics would be one of the most liked and respected of all workers. They have certainly helped us out countless times and we have nothing but good things to say about them.

### **October 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

How the year is flying by. Checking entries for this time last year I note that I was commenting on how good the flowers were and that they were only starting to die off in November. This year has been totally different with the bush looking like it is summer in mid-September. The river has already stopped flowing and the fields are mostly brown. The farmers are going to have a tough cropping season but they are better off here than in many places over east where many didn't even have the chance to put in a crop.

Today was around 32C and it looks like it will be a very long hot summer. We didn't manage to get away over Christmas last year but we are determined to do so this time. We put the new tent up and left it for a few days after wetting it down to break it in. When I went inside to pack it up I felt something move under the floor and being where we are the word 'SNAKE!!!' immediately popped into my head. Being very careful I lifted a corner and had a look underneath but it turned out to be a couple of bob tail skinks and a dark coloured scorpion that had taken up residence. The lizards were gently moved on and the scorpion 'gently' put to sleep with a big rubber mallet.

Up until last night the evenings have been quite chilly but it looks like that has all changed now and the winter quilt can finally be put away until next year.

**October 26<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Speaking of SNAKES, the other day I was looking for a bit of copper pipe and looked on top of the chip heater in the toilet. After picking up a piece of pipe from the top and moving some stray bits of plumbing fittings around I turned away and my brain did a bit of a double take and somersault. That wasn't a bit of hose I had seen just a few inches from my fingers was it!?!?

Looking back on top I saw the unmistakable coils of a snake curled up next to the flue. Thankfully it turned out to be a python, the same one I suspect gave me a bit of a fright in the shower last year. It must have been living around the toilet all the time but this is only the second time I had seen it. I must have disturbed it's slumber because it uncoiled and wound its way up a pipe on to the roof.

It was back again today but found the chip heater getting too hot after I lit the fire so made its getaway again up the pipe, but not before I had managed to take a few photos.



**November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

Checked the Quokka for caravans again today and finally found one that sounded like it was what we were looking for. After phoning and getting more information we shot down to Rockingham to have a look. The upshot of that is that we are almost 10K poorer but 1 caravan richer.

The van is a 1986 20' Evernew with a roll out awning / annexe, new split system reverse cycle air conditioning, 4 burner cook top and grill, new double bed, new upholstery and vinyl floor covering, new tyres and is most of what we wanted in a van. On the down side it has only a 240v fridge that we will have to replace and strangely it has no water tanks. The water tanks will have to wait until we can sort that out but I can get most other bits and pieces sorted out without having to spend too much more money. It is Queensland licensed so we will have to re-register it in W.A. and there are a few odds and sods that need attending to but overall we hope to get a fully functional van by only spending a couple of hundred dollars more on it.

**November 4<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

After two days of fiddling around we have managed to get most things sorted out in the new van and now have to put the old van in a saleable condition. I am finding it harder and harder to get things done as my back tends to play up all the time and I end up having to take big orange 'horse pills' and lying on my back for hours on end waiting for the pain to ease off. Getting old sucks!

There is quite a long list of things to do and (even worse) things to buy.

1. Water tanks and water pump need installing. (This sort of work is now too painful as I can't crawl under things these days so we will need to get someone to take care of this.) (done)
2. Solar panels need mounting on the roof. (Same as above). (done)
3. Finish installing 12v fridge. (Need wood) (Done)
4. Get 2 x 6 outlet power boards. (Done)
5. Get safety switches checked (test switch not operating).
6. Get wiring checked as there are some signs of a short in the past.
7. Get electric brake controller fitted to the car. (done)
8. Get rear bumper on car re-welded or fixed. (done)
9. Get car serviced. (done)
10. Return LCD TV (not working after only 2 days) to RetraVision. (done)
11. Get pole to mount Sat dish on caravan. (Done)
12. Get caravan rear bumper modified to take Little Bulldog trailer mount. (done)
13. Get Generator sorted out (cycles on eco throttle) (done)
14. Get van licensed in W.A. (done)
15. Get curtains made up for bedroom door, main door and front window. (done)
16. Get new dustbin for the van. (done)
17. Heavy duty jockey wheel. (done)
18. Fix front right stabilizer. (done)

- 19. Stove top cover. (done)
- 20. Get matching wood for fill in above the fridge. (done)

I don't even want to think about how much all this is going to cost. If we can sell the old van for a decent price I will be a lot happier. (By the time we had finished – which included two new tyres for the Cruiser and a new set of rear springs, we didn't get much change from 4K.)



**November 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Hopefully by mid-December we will have all the work on the new van finished and we can finally think about going away somewhere. We aren't sure yet if we will go away in the van or stick to the original plan and go away camping in the tent. I have to admit that now we have a bigger van, that option is a little more attractive.

I have been testing the Engel upright fridge to see what it draws in Amps at various settings. I have found that on a setting of 2 it will not freeze anything in the freezer and the cabinet only goes down to between 9-12C. Not at all suitable for perishable foods and meat. The draw at this setting varied between 12 and 24 amp hours per day over a period of about a week. I am not sure why there is such a big variation on the power usage as the fridge has been kept full and the door rarely opened. Next I will test it on 2.5 and then on 3 to see what the differences are. I do know that set to 3 it will freeze meat.

**November 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

After more testing we have found that the Engel will freeze water on a setting of 2.5 but that at this setting the cabinet temperature only drops to 7.4C. Again not low enough to be safe for things like chicken and milk. At that setting it was using between 30 and 47 amp hours a day. This was during weather with temperatures in the mid to high 20s.

Yesterday and today saw some good progress with regard to the new van. We got the electric brake controller fitted yesterday (\$125) and got the van inspected and licensed today (\$56.50 inspection \$216.10 license including the rip off stamp duty.) These charges really start to mount up.

**November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

We have done another quick ring around of caravan parks to see if we can find some more good value ones but we were a bit disappointed with what we found. The results are as follows:

- Broomehill \$25 (what a crazy price for a town with nothing much to offer).
- Peaceful Bay \$20
- Parrys Beach \$7 - \$10
- Windy Harbour \$16 (\$12 concession) No power but generators are Ok.
- Darkan \$14
- Northcliffe no answer
- Wharton no answer.

**November 27<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

With the van finally licensed we have booked it in to have new water tanks fitted next Monday. That means another trip down to Perth and I can't say I'm looking forward to all that traffic again but the work has to be done. We will probably get the solar panels fitted to the roof as well as this will mean I don't have to worry about them being pinched when we are away from the van and need to leave the fridge turned on.

We (and the rest of the wheatbelt) are suffering from a plague of locusts at the moment. That has meant strapping some fly screen mesh on the roof bar to stop the little beasts from clogging up the radiator, but it doesn't stop them splattering all over the rest of the car and sticking in to just about any crevice they can find. Although we thought that they would attack the veggie garden it has remained intact, but what the locusts have left alone the cabbage white caterpillars have found and made a meal of.

I really think growing your own vegetables is a bit of a waste of time. We would have been eating much better if we had put the money into the food budget rather than into fertilizers and insecticides but it keeps Belle amused at least.

Even though we are still a few days away from the official start of Summer, we have found that the temperatures are now regularly in the mid to high thirties. (39.6C the other day). We are now planning a short trip away over Christmas with the caravan – just to see how it goes – and then a camping trip as originally planned to the south coast, where hopefully the temperatures will be a bit more pleasant.

**December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Saturday)**

Very strange weather. It is now officially Summer and as I write this I have got the heater on. The past few days have been wet, windy and quite cold.

We are due to head down to Rockingham tomorrow and on Monday the new water tanks should be going in to the caravan. We haven't had much luck selling the old van yet but being right out here in the boonies, I'm not overly surprised. We will probably have to take it down to ABBA Caravans and put it there on consignment.

**December 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

We are back from Rockingham with the new caravan almost sorted out. After spending \$880 on new springs and shocks for the Cruiser and over 1K on the caravan we are really hoping that the old van sells quickly once we take it down to ABBA Caravans and put it on consignment. New rear tyres for the Cruiser were also needed so we won't see any change from 3K (and not much from 4) from this last trip. We still have to get a rear diff seal done but that shouldn't be too expensive. (Turned out to be \$72). As long as nothing goes wrong for the next 6 months we will be ok – some hope though!

**December 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Thursday)**

The old caravan went down to ABBA Caravans in Rockingham today and as the new one is almost finished, all we have to do is pack up and get ready to head off for Christmas. We have picked a small town about 150Km north of where we are and are expecting Christmas to be very quiet there (just the way we like things to be). We expect to be there anywhere from 2-4 weeks and then head back home to get ready to do a tour of the south west. That is still plan 'A' anyway.

This will be our tenth Christmas since taking off in the bus and every one has been spent in a different place. As long as we can continue to do that, life should continue to be an interesting experience. Some places have been less than attractive but even God forsaken dumps like Halls Creek still left us with some interesting memories and weird experiences.

Looking at where we actually were each Christmas day it turns out that of those ten years we were only actually in the bus on three occasions. Last Christmas probably stands out as one of the most boring to date as we didn't try to go away from our current base.

**December 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Monday)**

We arrived in Goomalling and settled in at the local caravan park. After two very hot days today is overcast, cloudy, humid and still very hot. Thankfully as we are on power we can use the air-conditioner.

The local caravan park is very good for a shire park and as CMCA members we get a very good discount. The local swimming pool is next door and the small commercial area of town is only a short walk away. From here we intend to travel round to the surrounding towns spending some time checking out as much as we can.

Goomalling is a small town but displays a high level of civic pride that seems to be missing in some other small wheat belt towns. People here seem very friendly, more so than where we are based, so it looks like a good base to explore the central wheat belt from.

**December 19<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

As we usually do when we are staying in a new town for a while we joined the local library and I found some more material for the W.A. Guide that will keep me busy until after Christmas.

The weather today had turned drizzly – no surprise after the heat of the weekend – and we have discovered a small leak at the front of the van. Hopefully it will be easy to fix as leaks in caravans can be a real source of hassles.

**December 31<sup>st</sup> 2006 (Sunday)**

A few very hot days later and Christmas is over with only New Year to get out of the way before we start to think about what to do next. The ankle biters don't go back to school until the end of January so we won't want to go near the coast until then.

We have managed to get out to Dowerin, Cadoux and Wongan Hills and still plan to have a look at Wyalkatchem, Cunderdin, Meckering and Toodyay before we leave the area.

**January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

We have been surprised by the difference between the caravan and the bus on really hot days. It turns out that the caravan is far better insulated and (with the help of the air-conditioner) stays much cooler than the bus when the temperatures head up into the high thirties.

**January 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

After a good 24 hours or so of non-stop rain we discovered another three leaks in the caravan roof. None were severe but all were annoying considering we haven't been anywhere since the last rain and the leaks weren't there last time ?? The good news was that the leak I attended to has been stopped but now I have three more to find.

As the rain stopped this morning we took off on a trip around the area to see Meckering, Cunderdin, Tammin and Wyalkatchem. There wasn't much of note at Meckering but Cunderdin was much more inspiring.

For some strange reason the good folks at Cunderdin seem to have decided to take temporary leave of their sanity and have allowed the monstrosity of an 'Ettamogah Pub' to be built in their nice little town. This hideous monstrosity may not be out of place in the cheap and nasty Gold Coast but in a quaint, historic town like Cunderdin it stands out like the proverbial dunny in the desert. We officially hate 'Ettamogah Pubs'. They belong in the pages of a comic book, not on the heritage streets of our towns.

To make up for this awful lapse in judgement, the Cunderdin museum (housed in the old number three pumping station) is one of the best regional museums you will find anywhere. A donation is requested and if you visit you will feel giving a few dollars to help keep this excellent museum operating is well worth while.

East again to Tammin and a small town with an unusual facility called the Hydrology Model. We are still not sure what it is all about but think all the money wasted on it could have been much better spent giving the locals somewhere to swim.

We turned south (briefly) to visit Hunt's Well. Charles Cooke Hunt was very important in opening up a track to the goldfields (before anyone knew there was gold there) and this is one of the many important wells and dams he constructed that were used by others as they opened up the country east of York.

Next was Wyalkatchem, quite a nice little town on the old goldfields route that is bypassed by many in favour of the Great Eastern Highway.

The highlight of the day, without doubt, was the Cunderdin Museum and good stops along the way include Cunderdin Caravan Park, Hunt's Well and Wyalkatchem Caravan Park.



Goldfields pipeline and Great Eastern Highway

**January 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Took a trip to Toodyay to have another look at the town, this time in a bit better detail. After that we went south to Clackline, Bakers Hill, Wundowie, Wooroloo, Chidlow and finally took a look at Noble Falls – which were very dry this time of the year.

The last place I want to see before we go back to the bus is Jennacubbine Tavern but we may still be away for another week or so.

**January 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 (Tuesday)**

Sunday was a very hot day with official temperatures being given as 40C but we put a thermometer outside in the shade and it registered 43.9C. It was enough to defeat the air conditioner which continually turned off the compressor. As we have been told that February gets even hotter round these parts we will be heading off at the end of the week.

As we have contemplated heading south with the caravan instead of the tent we did a ring around of the caravan parks this morning and following are the results:

Park	Daily	Weekly
Bunbury area		
Australind	24	138
Leschenault	17	119



Binningup	20	140
Bremer Bay		
Bremer Bay	22	154
Fishery Beach	25	150
Capel	Closed down	
Denmark		
Denmark	22	154
River Mouth	22	140
Hopetoun	21	126
Kirup	20	90
Margaret River area		
Gracetown	23	138
Canal Rocks	Closed down	
Caves	30	210
Yallingup	50	350
Augusta		
Doonbanks	22	154
Flinders Bay	23	140
Molloy Island	25	175
Westbay	22	130
Turner	24	135

Most of these prices are out of our reach and some are nothing but daylight robbery. I wonder how much longer people will be able to afford to travel?

#### January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)

We are all packed up and ready to head off around the south west with the camping gear. We were trying to work out the last time we went away camping and worked out that it would have been in 2001 and then it was only a few days at Gooralong. (After checking it was actually 2003 at 40 mile when we last put the tent up but then we also had the Coaster as well so that doesn't really count.) This could be quite a big trip as plan 'A' is to head down through Collie, then Donnybrook, Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River, Augusta, Bridgetown, Nannup, Manjimup, Windy Harbour, Walpole, Denmark, Albany then possibly across to Hopetoun and east of Esperance. Whether we get that far will depend on both the weather and how much we enjoy tenting again.

If we do the full trip we expect to be away 3-4 weeks. By that time we are hoping that the caravan will have sold and we can plan a trip east at last. Our last attempt at going away with the Cruiser and trailer ended after just 3 nights but that time we didn't have all the camping gear and (as I remember) it managed to rain quite a lot.



Camping – too much work these days

#### January 24<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)

After a brief stop in Collie to do some last minute shopping we went south to Glen Mervyn Dam. The dam has a boat launching area just south of the turn off to the campsites on the western side so if (like us) you miss the track north of the dam you can turn around at the boat ramp and go back.

There is room for a couple of caravans near the boat ramp but most of the ground is quite uneven. The track north of the dam is corrugated but passable by 2wd and most of the tracks leading south to the waters edge would be suitable for 2wd vehicles.

The dam is used by water skiers etc. so can be quite noisy at weekends – we aren't much looking forward to this long weekend but hope for the best. During weekdays the dam seems mostly quiet and peaceful apart from the odd boat or two that comes down for a couple of hours.

**January 25<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Campers starting to arrive today but apart from the boat noise – that is only to be expected here – it was a reasonably quiet night.

**January 26<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

Very busy on the water with ski boats going round and round all day. Surprisingly little noise after 10pm though.

**January 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Noisy day and night, I will be glad when everyone heads back home tomorrow. The big engines of the boats wear on your nerves after a while.

**January 28<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Finally everyone left and we had the lake to ourselves. What a wonderful spot this is when it is quiet. Swimming in the dam has kept us quite cool as the weather was hot over the weekend. Time to move on tomorrow as the march flies are coming out in force here and we are being constantly bitten.



Glen Mervyn Dam

**January 29<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Rain and thunder overnight but we want to move further south so packed up camp and drove down through Donnybrook (very pretty little town), Capel, Busselton and had a look at the campsites at Conto Road and Boranup Drive before deciding on stopping at Alexandra Bridge.

It was at this point that I decided that camping is just too difficult these days. Packing and unpacking in the same day was a bit too much for me and I think this is as far as we will go on this trip.

Alexandra Bridge is still a terrific campsite but it is very well known now and gets quite crowded. Fees are now \$5 per person per day or \$60 a week. We decided to stay a week and look around the area at other sites without moving camp again.

**January 30<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Went down to see Augusta as we haven't been here in a very long time (probably 12 years or more). Apart from some better shops the town was very much as we remember it, quiet, laid back and tranquil. Thankfully it hasn't been overdeveloped yet and I hope it never will be.

We drove the 40km north to Margaret River to find a totally different atmosphere. This town has been subject to lots of development and has a busy bustling feel to it. The contrast with Augusta is striking and if the two towns keep their separate climates then there will be something for everyone in the area.

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Went to have a look at some other campsites in the area and the first on the list was at Hut Pool. Southern access if from Brockman Highway and the Great North Road – much better named the Old North Goat Track. Very rough in places and would be difficult for 2wd. Hut pool doesn't offer much apart from a toilet and a couple of tent sites. A nice tranquil spot but no good for most travellers.

Next was Sue's Bridge campsite that has been extensively re-developed. You can no longer camp by the river as the campsites have been moved up the hill. Still a very nice place with toilets and a camp kitchen. Bays are a bit small for anything but a small caravan or campervan and it is a CALM site so no dogs are allowed. CALM fees are now \$6.50 per person per night but at least there is now a concession rate of \$4.50 per person per night. We think this is still a bit high but at least it is a little better than it was.

Finally we went out to look at Campbell Pool (where we camped once before in the campervan) and Rosa Pool a bit further north. This is a nice little spot but only suitable for campervans and tents due to the track leading in. It is only a short distance from the road but a 90 degree bend around a fence post would stop most caravans and big rigs from getting in.



Rosa Pool

#### **February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Alexandra Bridge is getting too crowded for our liking so we have decided to head home tomorrow. Today we went and had a look at the coast near Margaret River and found a lot of new development there as well. It won't be long before the place has far too many houses and it will be ruined for ever.

Along the coast to Redgate Beach we found another popular area that is still much as it was many years ago.

Further south at Hamelin Bay we found a much less developed area where the peaceful waters invite swimmers and boaties alike. Hopefully development in this area will be contained around Margaret River and won't be allowed to spread right along the coast.

Another stop off at Augusta to soak in the peaceful estuary and a lunch of crackers, pate and cheese before heading back to Alexandra Bridge to start packing up.

It is little wonder that the area between Busselton and Augusta is so popular. It is one of the most interesting places in the state and certainly one of the most beautiful. There is plenty to do and see and it caters for both the rich and poor (like us) alike. You just have to hope that greed doesn't become king down here and the area is allowed to stay pretty much as it is now.

#### **February 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Packed up and on the road by 8am. Drove up through Nannup, Bridgetown, Boyup Brook, Arthur River and Williams before getting home some 5.5 hours later. The drive from Nannup to Boyup Brook is both picturesque and tiring as the roads are very lumpy and winding as they make their way through the hills.

One thing this trip has taught me is that I won't be trying to go tenting again anytime soon. Age and infirmity are catching up with me in a big way and tenting is now well beyond my capabilities.

Even though we didn't get to see everything we wanted to we did get to a few new places and we actually enjoyed seeing Augusta so much that we are now in the process of packing the caravan to head back down there next week.

#### **February 10<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

After a couple of nights down at Oakford we have moved south to the rest area on Ludlow – Tuart drive just north of Busselton. It is still the pleasant shady site we came to in December 1997. Busselton is managing to remain a reasonable sort of town despite the development that is going on in the area and if the sheer number of caravan parks are anything to go by then it is the most popular tourist destination in the state.

Dunsborough on the other hand has had far too much development and (at least in my opinion) has been ruined.

We expect to move on to Augusta tomorrow and with luck we will be there for a few weeks at least. We have been spending far too much on fuel lately and need to sit still for a while to save some money.

**February 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

We are all set up at Westbay Retreat and have already had the boat out once to 'test the waters'. We didn't catch any fish where we used to go fishing in the Hardy Inlet but we did catch 25 whiting near the mouth of the river (although we only took 4 to eat). Crabs are supposed to be running at the moment so we may give that a go next time.

Westbay Retreat is what all caravan parks should be. There is plenty of room and sites are spread around the place and not all laid out in horrible little rows. There are open sites and shady sites and some excellent tent sites under the trees. The most interesting thing about the park is the very unusual ablution block. It is a semi open style and would be very much at home up I the Kimberleys. How well it works here in the chilly winter I am not sure but it is quite an amazing structure.

At \$130 a week for a powered site the park is at the upper end of our budget but it is nice and quiet (at the moment anyway) and has a great laid back atmosphere. There is even a boat ramp so we don't have to drive anywhere to launch the boat.

Latest wish list:

- 1.New computer (done)
- 2.Video camera (done)
- 3.Sine wave inverter (done)
- 4.New deep cycle for the car
- 5.Sell old caravan (done)
- 6.Service car (done)

A short but very expensive list. I wonder if we will manage to get all of them done? (All done before the end of 2007)



Cape Leeuwin

**February 18<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Took the boat out to see if there are any crabs in the inlet and found that there aren't many. With the number of boats and nets out every day it is a wonder there is a single crab left but at least we did managed to get three legal sized ones so Belle was happy enough.

Here I am very relaxed about fishing, actually I don't care if I catch anything or not, but when we go north I get much more hyped up. I guess it's because down here I don't expect to catch anything worth while anyway so if I don't then it doesn't bother me.

One oddity we did catch was what looked like some sort of bream but it had bright blue spots almost like a spangled emperor from up north. We certainly haven't seen a fish like that before. It wasn't any kind of size so we let it go again anyway.

**February 20<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Took the boat out again and went up the Blackwood River this time. This is a wonderful tranquil river with very little habitation on the banks. The echo sounder showed a number of fish along the banks but most weren't interested in the nice juicy prawns that were on offer. We did finally catch three tarwhine but as they weren't quite size we let them go again. It is a real joy just motoring slowly along the river looking at the thick bushland that lines the banks.

Since we have been here the weather has been pretty typical for this area, a bit of sun, a bit of rain, some cloud, some blue sky, warm and then cool – all in the space of an hour (well maybe that is exaggerating a little.)

**February 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Took the boat out again to try and get a few more crabs and did actually catch 4. One was the biggest blue swimmer we have ever caught. The day was beautiful, clear blue sky and warm. We did catch a few fish as well including small

Australian salmon, King George whiting and what we think may be juvenile snapper (the bream like things with bright blue spots). Nothing was big enough to keep so we put them back again but it was still a lot of fun.



Big blue swimmer crab

**February 28<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

Today was the complete antithesis of yesterday. We had to get up early and have the car at Busselton by 8am so we left in the dark. It was windy and rainy most of the day. The reason for taking the car to Busselton to get it serviced was price. The mechanic down here wanted \$242 for a simple diesel service. It was cheaper (including fuel there and back) to get the work done in Busselton.

On the way back we stopped in at Yallingup and Cowaramup to take a few photos and the sea was pretty angry. No surfers out today.

**March 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Labour Day long weekend has gone (HOORAY!) and with it all the noisy dickheads that pour out of Perth like bull ants charging out of an ant nest. The caravan park is now nicely coated in dog poo because everyone ignores the 'keep the b&\*\*#y dog on a leash' rule and lets the damn things run everywhere. I can understand why most parks now ban dogs – lots of dog owners are irresponsible morons!

The weather has been hot over the past few days – even getting to 35C here yesterday. All the locals were sweating it out as hardly anyone has air conditioning here. Today we took the boat out for the 4<sup>th</sup> time but only caught three crabs. Lucky for Belle 2 were big and worth keeping.

**March 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

Out crabbing again today, again we only caught 3 but they were all big males. To our surprise we also caught 4 'size' King George whiting.

We have already been here 5 weeks and will have to start making plans to move on soon. Easter is coming and we really want to be away from tourist areas before it arrives. At this stage we are thinking that Kendenup might be Ok for a couple of weeks.

**March 21<sup>st</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

Took the boat out to see if we could find a few more whiting – having given up on crabbing as being too much work for too little reward – and went back to the spot we caught them last time. Again to our surprise we caught whiting, this time King George and sand whiting and managed to come home with 9.

**March 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Our time at Augusta is gradually coming to an end as the weather starts to get colder and wetter and my joints start to stiffen up – getting old is such fun!

On Sunday we managed to get out in the boat again and caught a few more whiting plus 3 herring. Although the fishing and crabbing here hasn't been spectacular we have managed to bring home something every time we have been out which is pretty good really. I have been surprised at the size of the whiting with the biggest measuring a pretty reasonable 35cm.

We caught a lot of undersized whiting this time that we had to throw back but we did bring home 5 that were size.

By the time we leave we will have been here 7 weeks. The time has flown which means we have been enjoying ourselves. Our next stop is somewhere between Kendenup and Tambellup for Easter and once all the tourists go home we think we may go down to Albany for a while before working out what the next step will be. There is some

work needed on the car as the front diff seals need attention and the brakes need fixing so we are hoping that Jordan (who re-built the engine) in Albany will be able to do the work for us.

**March 29<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

A nice clear day today so we took the boat out one last time but this time we came home empty handed. We did catch one herring and one whiting but let them go.

The rain is due back by Saturday so we are packing the boat up today and the annexe tomorrow. It has been a very nice 7 weeks here but I have just about run out of research material in the local libraries so it is time to move on somewhere else. Even if the Easter long weekend wasn't looming like a noisy black cloud on our peaceful horizon we would have to be heading away from here soon anyway as we expect the weather to get steadily colder and wetter.

**April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Left Westbay heading for Tambellup and stopped overnight at the observatory by Lake Muir (after brief stops at Pemberton and Manjimup).

The roads up to about half way were reasonable but hills and bends through Pemberton and Manji meant speed was way down and fuel consumption was way up.

Lake Muir is hardly a lake these days. Most of it has evaporated and what water we could see in the far distance may have actually been a mirage. The setup by the lake would be good if there was anything to look at but the THREE MILLION DOLLAR price tag seems to be a huge waste of money when we need more hospitals, schools etc.... I wonder which politician's mate got rich out of that contract. (Turns out it was that little crook Omodei.)

The site is a good spot to overnight as there is a toilet and tank water. There is room for a couple of vans but not a huge amount of space along the turning circle as it has been mostly designed for car parking.



**April 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

Arrived at Tambellup and settled in. The caravan park really isn't much more than a car park with power poles and water taps. Strangely the water taps are clustered in their own area away from the power poles but we have just enough hose to fill the tanks.

Apart from a big dog barking at night (waking us 3-4 times) the area is very quiet and there is no one else in the park so most of the time it is nice and quiet.

**April 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Followed our usual pattern after arriving in a new town and joined the local library, had a look at what shopping there is and got ourselves sorted out.

Once Easter is over we will head back to the bus to pick up a few things then we have to get down to Albany to get the car sorted out. There is the slight possibility of house sitting near Margaret River after that but we won't know more on that until we sort the car out.

**April 10<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

We have been in Tambellup just over a week and we took the opportunity today to take a 180km trip up to the bus and pick up a few bits and pieces we needed. The weather has been dull and drizzly for most of the time since we left Augusta and only started to clear a bit today.

We have the car booked in for some work next Tuesday so we need to be in Albany by then. We will probably head south to Kendenup tomorrow and then go on to Albany in Sunday.

**April 14<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Well the Kendenup plan went out of the window because of the weather forecast (it was wrong anyway) and we went straight down to Albany. We decided to try Kalgan River caravan park and are now regretting that decision based on the noise going on from some sort of function here. At the moment I have a set of headphones on and am listening to music and I can hear the racket going on coming in over the top of that! B&\*\*\*Y RIDICULOUS!!

As soon as the car is sorted out we will be away from here as quick as we can.

**May 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday) (5 fishing days)**

More disasters! The lack of diary entries for the last month is an indication of the first one – the horrible Toshiba laptop died just as I sat down to do a backup and I lost all the work I had done since Albany. Most of it can be re-entered but all the photos we took on the way north have been completely lost.

Secondly I managed to destroy the annexe on the caravan and we are now up at Cleaverville for the next 3 months with no shelter on one side of the caravan. I won't go into details about the accident but needless to say a 2 ton Landcruiser and a canvas and aluminium annexe don't mix well.



The car was sorted out at a cost of around \$1200 <sigh> and we made our way north through wind and rain to Cleaverville once again. We did plan to go to 40 Mile this year but changed our minds at the last moment. We came up the inland road this time and will have to go that way again one day to recover some of the lost photos.

Yesterday we picked up a new computer (just under \$700 which is a good price) from Retra Vision but the annexe repairs will have to wait until we head south again as we have no intention of moving the van until we leave.

Fishing has been pretty good so far. We have been here 2 weeks (last Thursday) and have already been out 5 times. There has been quite a variety to the catches including 3 types of shark, emperor, cod, mackerel (including some Spaniards), flag, tusk fish, queenfish (lost the picture to the big one I caught!) and sundry other types including a huge frog fish with a huge mouth and some fearsome teeth.

The catching of the queenie is another good fishing tale because when we first spotted it I wasn't rigged up for catching that sort of fish. We had been at another reef where my heavy line had been busted off and I hadn't re-rigged. We dropped anchor at a new reef and I hooked a small tusk fish. As I brought it up a huge shape materialised behind it and we quickly recognised it as a large queenfish. To keep the queenie around I left the tusk fish swimming about on the end of the line just under the boat. This kept the queenie entertained while I hurriedly rigged up the heavy line, got a gardie on a gang hook and dropped it in front of the queen fish. After being teased by the tusk fish the queenie took one look at the gardie and lunged at it but in the process managed to get foul hooked in the belly. Anyone who has hooked a big queenie in the mouth will have some idea of their fighting power but hooking one in the belly more than doubles their fighting power. As usual we didn't get the anchor in quick enough and the fish almost got tangled up in the line but some quick work from Belle meant I was able to get the fish away with no complications. Eventually we landed it and it became a very tasty few meals barbequed with lemon pepper.

A lot of people don't think much of queenfish but we like it if it is eaten fresh. The meat is white, firm and not at all strong tasting. If cooked properly it is nice and moist and done with lemon pepper on the BBQ it is brilliant!

Sadly the picture didn't survive the computer crash so I don't have a shot of the biggest queenie I have ever caught to show off (curses!).



Fish caught 5<sup>th</sup> May

Queenie, spotted mack, 38 garfish  
5<sup>th</sup> Full moon +3 6:05 1.5 / 12:00 4.6

4 flag  
6<sup>th</sup> Full moon +4 6:30 1.57 / 12:27 4.53

Spaniard, snapper, 6 garfish  
10<sup>th</sup> Half moon 8:39 2.32 / 15:05 3.72

Snapper, flag, 42 garfish  
14<sup>th</sup> Dark moon -3 2:23 1.91 / 8:30 4.02

2 Snapper, 45cm cod  
15<sup>th</sup> Dark moon -2 3:12 1.7 / 9:12 4.38

The solar system isn't exactly holding its own at the moment and because the weather is still hot we are using the generator to run the air-conditioner most days. This has resulted in a higher than usual fuel bill but having the added comfort is worth it.

#### **20<sup>th</sup> May 2007 (Sunday)**

Dark moon +3 6:30 1.47 / 12:33 4.72

An unexpected fishing day presented itself today and we went out trying to catch enough fish to use the frames for crab bait. In the end we came back with enough for 8 nets so mission was pretty much accomplished.

The best fish of the day was a nice Spaniard which we have just fried up on the BBQ with lemon pepper. Needless to say there are no leftovers.

The computer is more or less back together, all I have to do not is catch up on all the work I lost.....

Weather wise it looks like it is starting to cool down a little, night time temp last night was 17C and the days are cooling down a bit too.

#### **29<sup>th</sup> May 2007 (Tuesday)**

Full moon -3 3:08 2.07 / 9:04 3.93

Gavin and Tracey (travelling in Hobohome) are back at Cleaverville again heading north again on their travels. Gavin helped us out with getting satellite signal and now we have Select TV again after quite a few weeks without it.

Yesterday they went over to the island in their canoes and brought us back a little present (see below) which was very much appreciated. They actually go diving in these waters, a place that I am too chicken to even wade knee deep because of an ongoing terror of sharks. We have seen some big specimens up here and the closest I want to get to the sea is sitting on it in a boat.

We went fishing ourselves but only managed one Spanish mackerel and a couple of flag but still it covered dinner for a couple of days.

So far this year we have caught most of our fish in quite close to shore. The outer reefs just aren't producing anything but undersized tusk fish and undersized snapper. Unfortunately I have been having all sorts of back problems and have had to cut short some fishing trips. Still just being up here away from the cold is great so I can't grumble. A couple of big orange 'horse pills' usually does the trick if the pain gets out of hand.



The weather is slowly (very slowly) cooling off but night time temps are still just under 20C. The easterly winds look like they have set in for the next week so no fishing for a while. We have been out to the reefs 7 times so far and once to the creek so we are pretty happy with the season so far.

I am still trying to get the computer back to full working order and haven't got everything sorted out yet but sooner or later I will get it all working properly. (It actually took until December to get the horrible thing mostly sorted out!)



The present from Gavin and Tracey (very tasty)

**9<sup>th</sup> June 2007 (Saturday)**

Almost 2 weeks now with no fishing as the wind has been back to its usual tricks.

We did make the decision to buy a new generator even though the old one is running well. We hope to sell the old one for about half the price of the new one and that way ensure we have trouble free power for the next few years. Honda currently have a \$200 cash back offer so the new one set us back \$1950. We hope to get around \$900 for the old one.

**14<sup>th</sup> June 2007 (Thursday)**

The bad news that the wind is still blowing has been overshadowed by good news (what a nice change) that the old caravan finally sold HOORAY!!!

Even better the old generator sold for \$900 so after the \$200 cash back from Honda the new one has cost us \$1050. Not bad for a brand new 2kva with a 4 year warranty.

I am finally going to bite the bullet and buy a sine wave inverter so shortly the old MSW inverter will be up for sale as well.

We picked up a new printer / scanner today (HP Deskjet F3xx series) for just \$59 from Woolworths.

**20<sup>th</sup> June 2007 (Wednesday)**

That cursed wind is still blowing and it has been 3 weeks and 3 days since we last managed to get out fishing. That is a record for Cleaverville. The previous bad windy period was a mere 21 days!

We are crossing our fingers that the synoptic charts are correct and we may get a chance to go out on Friday and Saturday. The freezer looks very pathetic at the moment (fish-wise) as we only have 1 meal of snapper left.

On the 'buying things' front we have just ordered a sine wave inverter (at LOOOONG last) which is a 700w model for \$710. Hopefully that will stop me having to start the generator every time I want to run the computer.

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2007 (Monday)**

4 weeks and counting and the wind is still blowing.....

**2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007 (Monday) (Fishing 29<sup>th</sup> April, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1<sup>st</sup> July)**

29<sup>th</sup> Full moon -1 3:52 3.09 / 9:44 3.92

30<sup>th</sup> Full moon 4:31 1.92 / 10:24 4.08

1<sup>st</sup> Full moon +1 5:07 1.77 / 11:02 4.23

2<sup>nd</sup> Full moon +2 5:43 1.64 / 11:40 4.34

Well the last 4 days, if not exactly perfect fishing weather, at least allowed us to get out and catch a few fish. Being right over the period of the full moon the fish weren't too cooperative but we did bring in about 6 good sized snapper, a couple of flag and a 53cm cod. Not great but not too bad.

The only sour note was picking up a very nasty dose of the flu last time we went to town.

Belle had a bad allergic reaction to something (we think it was some blue cheese) and came out in a rash that gradually spread almost all over her body. After about 5 days it went away but we are still not sure what triggered it. (Turns out it was the mould in the cheese – penicillin).

### **3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007 (Tuesday)**

Full moon +3 6:18 1.55 / 12:17 4.4

One last good day for fishing before the winds come back and this one was the best of all 5 days. We seem to have found a spot where there are more large fish than small ones and even though things can go quiet at times, if you do get a bite then it is usually from a fish that is worth catching. This time (for the first time ever) we actually took our limit of 8 snapper. This was mostly because the fishing weather has been so poor this year that we had virtually no fish in the freezer, now we have about 10 meals put away.

One good thing over the last week was the arrival of our new 700w pure sine wave inverter. This is the first diary entry made without having to turn the generator on so in the long run we should save money as we only need to run the generator at night now.



Finally a good day fishing!

### **July 13<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

For some reason this year we have had on going problems with our shower pumps so we finally decided to give up on submersible pumps and get a self priming in-line Shur Flo (\$175). This has been temporarily fixed under the rear of the caravan and means less fiddling around when we want to take a shower.

The weather has turned grey and dull today and the generator will have to be on most of the time to keep the batteries charged.

It has blown for 10 days straight since the last fishing day so life has been rather unexciting.

We are getting very close to fulfilling all my wish lists at the moment with only a wind generator (Rutland 913) and a Digital video camera left to get.

The sine wave inverter has proven to be a real boon, why I waited for so long to get one I don't know. The old inverter hasn't sold yet but I hope it will do so before we head south again.

### **July 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

No surprise but the wind is still 20-30 knots every day but everyone is crossing their fingers that it might start to settle down by Saturday and then if it does we may get 1-2 days fishing before it comes back again.

### **July 21<sup>st</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Half moon -1 8:48 1.5 / 14:41 3.78

We watch the weather each day and carefully study the synoptic charts in the hope of seeing some good fishing weather on the horizon. The trouble is that when we see some likely weather it is usually 5 days away and by the time the five days have gone everything has changed.

Last Tuesday, today (Saturday) was looking like a good day but come this morning the wind began to build. We were so frustrated about the lack of good fishing weather that we decided to go out anyway – that was a mistake – and in the end we only brought two small trevally in which we gave to our neighbours. We aren't holding our breath about tomorrow either but Monday will be the last possible day to fish before the tides go out of whack so we are hoping like crazy that we will get some good weather.

Note: Took the HP printer back to Woolworths on Wednesday and got our money back because it wouldn't work properly with Vista (What will I wonder?) and it couldn't feed pages properly.

#### **July 24<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday) (fishing 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>)**

22<sup>nd</sup> Half moon 9:23 1.65 / 15:15 3.5

23<sup>rd</sup> Half moon +1 10:04 1.82 / 15:55 3.22

We managed to get out fishing again over the past two days. Sunday was rather bumpy again as the wind came in but we did catch a few nice fish. Yesterday the wether was perfect but the fish weren't overly co-operative. We did catch a big gold spotted trevally, a sweetlip and a few flag and snapper but nothing really spectacular.

We went out early yesterday and fished the low tide all the way through and by the time we got back in I was totally knackered. My back won't stand up to that sort of thing any more and I won't be attempting to do it again any time soon.

#### **August 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Time is quickly running out on our time up north and still the winds are doing their best to keep us off the water. We have had a total of 15 days fishing on the reefs this year and two of those were so bad we shouldn't have been out on the water.

There has been a drilling rig near the campground taking core samples. They won't let on what they're looking for but everyone hopes they don't find anything or that will be the end of camping here.

#### **August 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

Ordered wind generator from Outback Marine (circa \$1600).

#### **August 10<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

Dark of moon -3 1:37 2.44 / 8:12 3.46

Managed to go fishing very early this morning and caught 4 snapper, 1 flag and 1 spotted mack. (more properly called Queensland school mackerel.)

#### **August 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Dark of moon -2 3:38 2.15 / 9:33 3.73

Fishing again but although the water was nice and clear the southerly wind was blowing and fishing sucked! The worst day so far this year.

#### **August 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Dark of moon -1 4:29 1.78 / 10:27 4.03

A perfect fishing day weather wise but we went to Walcott Island and although we had hoped to catch bream we came back with garfish – 80 of them – for use as bait. In the end a lovely day on the water and now we have plenty of bait to fish the outer reefs with. Belle caught a coral trout but as it was only 37cm we had to let it go again <urses!>

The weather remains reasonably cool despite the lack of wind but how long it will continue remains to be seen. We are paying rent weekly now so it is only a matter of time before we start packing up. 18 days fishing out on the reefs so far this year but only 15 of them were really good enough weather wise, the other three were so rough we would have been better off not going out.) Today is the first time we have been out on the water with no wind at all until we decided to come back in.

#### **August 13<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Dark of moon 5:08 1.45 / 11:07 4.27

Out fishing again and again the wind stayed down until the afternoon. Fishing wasn't quite so good with only 2 snapper, 1 flag and 1 mackerel caught.

I never thought I'd say this but I am getting tired of catching snapper, a big chinaman or a big coral trout would make a nice change.

#### **August 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

We are still at Cleaverville as the weather is staying quite cool. The wind is up – nothing new there – so we haven't been out fishing again but the dinghy is still on the trailer in the hope that we may get out again before we leave.

A lot of people are packing up and heading south now so the campsite isn't as crowded.

The wind generator has arrived but we haven't been able to set it up because we can't find a suitable mounting pole, it looks as though we will have to order a mounting kit from the original supplier.

I have been trying to work out what conditions are best for fishing but on reviewing the statistics I have kept for the past few years, there seems to be no correlation between tide heights or phases of the moon and good fishing days. The only thing that the best fishing days seem to have in common is that the high tide was in the morning not the afternoon.

Over the three years I have kept reasonably detailed records at Cleaverville we have been camped here for a total of 321 days, of those we have been fishing on the front reefs a total of 50 days. 13 days were good, 20 were average and 17 were poor.

A combination of bad wind and difficult tides have meant 271 days waiting to get out fishing. Just as well the weather is better than Perth up here during the winter!

Items bought up here this year:

Computer \$698, printer \$159, new satellite system \$344, sine wave inverter \$710, wind generator \$1600, Honda 2kva generator \$1050 (after selling old one), new water pump \$175.50, box fan \$32, shower kit \$40, gazebo \$50 – well over 5K! Karratha is always expensive for us when we come up here.

#### **August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

We are all but packed up now and will be heading for Carnarvon in the next few days. The weather has gradually been heating up and although it is still quite pleasant here at the moment we have decided to go before the heat turns up.

Sadly the wind has continued its onslaught and we haven't been out fishing again. We are toying with the idea of buying a set net to do some mullet fishing when we get to Bush Bay but whether we decide to take the boat off remains to be seen.

#### **August 26<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Left Cleaverville just about the right time as the weather seems to be getting quite warm now. Stopped the night at Lyndon River East. The only problem was a slow puncture in the left rear tyre on the car that I had to change.



#### **August 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Arrived at Bush Bay which already has quite a few campers scattered around. The wild flowers are back this year, not as good as they can be but much better than last year so the trip down has been a bit more interesting.

#### **August 28<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Settling in and unpacking today and hopefully we will get into Carnarvon tomorrow as our water is starting to run out. Despite misgivings about getting the boat off here we did take it down and put it on the trailer just in case.

#### **August 30<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

I had forgotten how awful the wind can be at Bush Bay and last night we had a real reminder of how nasty it gets. A storm rolled in around 9pm and we spent a rather uncomfortable and sleepless night as the caravan was buffeted rather violently by the wind.

Yesterday we bought a set net (\$170) for catching mullet and we put it out for the first time this afternoon. The result was one solitary fish but it was a good size so we kept it in case we get another one or two tomorrow to make a meal.

**August 31<sup>st</sup> (2007) Friday**

Put the net out again today and caught 5 big mullet, much better than we expected but it will take a long time before the net pays for itself.



Bush Bay

**September 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

We tried putting the net out at night but it was a waste of time. We only managed to catch one mullet and a whole lot of seaweed.

The wind seems to have dropped off for a while and we managed to get out in the boat today. We didn't catch anything worth keeping but were surprised to find blue lined emperor and blue tusk fish here. Normally we would not expect to catch them this far south.

**September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Out in the boat again and this time we caught a couple of reasonable sized tailor. We don't think much of them ourselves but our neighbours (Don & Wendy) like them so we brought them in so they could have a feed. As they don't have a boat they have only been managing to catch small whiting from the shore.

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Went into town but got back early enough to get the boat on the water again. The wind is gradually making a come back so this might be the last outing for a while. Unfortunately we didn't catch anything worth keeping today but at least we did get out again.

**September 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Went wading in the shallows as the tide went out, looking for crabs and caught 5. One was the largest we have caught to date at 165mm across.

**September 6<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Crabbing again today and caught 5 more (Belle is very happy about this). We beat the old record of 165mm by 1mm today and three of the crabs were over 150mm. We have to walk a very long way to find them and they don't pop out of the sand but at least it is a walk with a purpose.

**September 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Went into town yesterday and picked up a DV camera (at LAST!) and I am now trying to get to grips with how it works. These things have got very complicated since the old analogue video cameras!

Today we got out fishing in the boat again and caught a legal sized blue lined emperor as well as a few snook – what they are like to eat we are soon going to find out as I filleted the lot.

**September 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

Put the net out today and caught 4 mullet.

**September 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Managed to get out in the boat again today and caught 3 tailor which we gave to our neighbours. We did catch a few blue lined emperor as well but all were just undersized – very frustrating. I still haven't managed to get out into deeper water as the wind is not dropping off enough to go out more than a kilometre or two.

The DV camera is proving to be a bit of a let down. First the software doesn't seem happy working with MS Vista (then what does?!) and second the video quality certainly isn't what I expected, in fact it isn't as good as the old analogue cameras.

#### **September 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

Put the net out again and caught 1 mullet and 2 bream.

#### **September 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Went out looking for crabs in the morning and caught 7 big ones. The largest was 172mm a new record for us. The afternoon was still quiet so we took the boat out to the channel and caught 2 tailor and 5 size blue lined emperor. A good day.

#### **September 18<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

Took the boat out to the channel again but this time looking for whiting. This time we weren't so lucky but it was nice just sitting out on the water.

#### **September 21<sup>st</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

We finally got the last bits and pieces for the wind generator stand yesterday and I set to work making the stand this morning. This involved drilling a few holes in the 48mm pipe and fitting 4 eye bolts, plus a hole in the base to let the cable through and two in the top of the pole for the wind gen bolts. Doesn't sound like much work but with a battery powered drill it took ages as it was a case of drill 3 holes and wait while the battery re-charges. (I don't think much of battery powered drills and will get the normal 240v drill when we go back to the bus again.)

Putting the wind gen up was easier than expected and it has been happily powering along in the 'gale force' Bush Bay winds ever since. Last night was the first time ever that we did not use the generator while free camping and the batteries didn't get any lower than 12.2 volts. This morning they were up to 13.7!

The items we needed to get for the wind gen were:

2.7 m Pole and base (section of round pipe welded to a square base) \$80

4 x 4 metre 5mm wire cable \$24.00

16 x 5mm cable clamps \$20.80

8 x 5mm U bolts \$11.60

4 x 8mm cable strainers (turn buckles) \$22.60

4 x star pickets \$14.00

4 x Eye bolts \$4.90

4 x large tent pegs \$7.80

12.5 metres of dual core electrical wire \$45.00

Total of \$240.70 added to the \$1582.50 for the wind gen & regulator makes a total of \$1823.10. For every week we are able to run without using the generator we save \$30 in petrol so it would take just over 60 weeks for this set up to pay for itself – not bad really.

According to the 'blurb', the Rutland 913 can deliver up to 250 watts of power (about the equivalent of 2 x 120 watt solar panels, but the good thing is that it delivers it when the wind blows (which is most of the time on the West Coast) not just for a few hours when the sun shines.

(Note: This turned out to be a practical maximum of 9 amps or 108 watts and an average to date of around 3 amps an hour or 72 amp hours a day.)

The Rutland is by far the quietest wind generator we have ever heard so the research done on the internet wasn't wasted. It does mean carrying yet more gear but we want to become completely self-sufficient in power and not use the petrol generator any more than we have to.



New wish list:

1. Get roll out awning replaced (done)
2. Replace cooker with full 4 burner, grill and oven (done)
3. Put a good security door on (done)
4. Sort out water pump system so that water can be pumped from the tank or external source. (done)

**September 25<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)**

A very stormy night was followed by a quiet morning so we decided to take the boat out. We should have known better. As soon as we got out there the wind came up but we persisted and kept fishing right up to high tide. Again we should have known better. The catch for the day was 1 sand bass and we let that go.

**September 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Went out to have a look at Rocky Pool yesterday, the last time we were there was in August 1997 during our first major test trip with the bus. Ten years seem to have just flown by, it's hard to know where the time has gone.

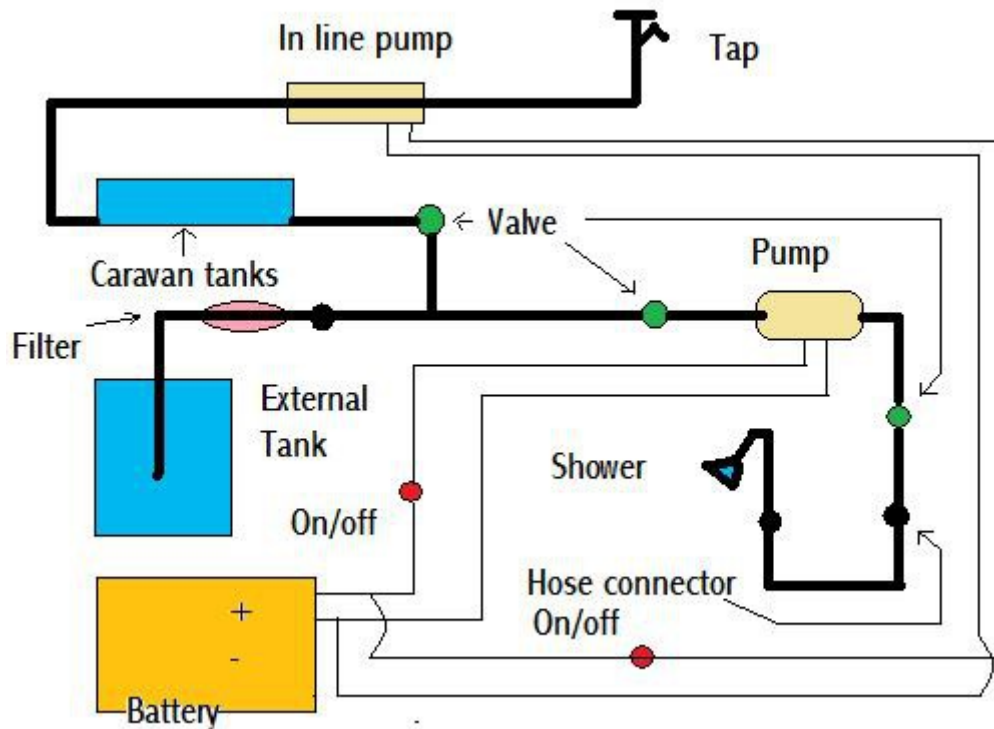


Got all the bits and pieces to complete the water pump system for the caravan yesterday and got the job done today. We can now pump water directly from the internal tanks or from an external source to the shower via the Shurflo pump which has been mounted under the van. A simple on/off switch inside lets us turn the pump off when not needed but it can be left turned on and used in an on-demand way while we are camped.

The wind generator has made a lot of difference to our way of life as we now have 24 hour power and hardly ever use the Honda Generator any more. We still need it to run the microwave but in the past week it has been used for less than 2 hours. This will greatly save on wear and tear as well as maintenance costs for spark plugs and oil.

After keeping an eye on the power coming in from the wind gen it seems as though we get anywhere between 2 and 6 amps most of the time. If it averages out to around 3 amps and hour then that will be an extra 72 amp hours power a day giving a total of between 150-170 amp hours a day. That should be plenty. Because the wind gen works all day as opposed to the 6 hours we get from the solar panels, it doesn't need to put in more than 3 amps in order to be useful. In effect the wind gen is equivalent to 223 watts of solar panels.

We put the net out again today but caught nothing.



Water system schematic diagram

**September 28<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

Left the net out again last night and when I checked before first light we found just 1 bream that was very much alive so we let it go again.

**October 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

We put the net out again over night and this time we caught a variety of fish that included mullet, bream, flathead, mulloway and a shark. After we brought the net in we went looking for crabs and managed to come back with 7. All in all not a bad day.

We expect to only be here for another 10 days or so before heading down to Kalbarri and Geraldton. The weather has started to warm up over the past two days but is still reasonably comfortable. The wind today is almost non-existent but the tides are wrong so we weren't able to get out in the boat.



Species of fish caught at Bush Bay are:

Yellow fin whiting, Tailor, Yellow fin Bream, Blue lined emperor, Butterfish, Western Whiptails (or something very like them), Garfish, Blue tusk fish, Unidentified tusk fish, Sand bass, Trumpeter, Shark, Mulloway, Flathead, Mullet and an eel. (We also caught one squid and saw several others).

By the time we leave we will have been at Bush Bay for about 7 weeks (saving a minimum of \$280 in rent) and will have had the wind gen working for around 3 weeks (saving about \$90 in fuel) an approximate saving of around \$370.

**October 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Sunday)**

The wind dropped to nothing this morning so we took the boat out to do some fishing and after a frustrating morning during which we saw some of the biggest mackerel we have ever seen swimming around the boat (the only one to



take a bait bit my line off even though I was using a wire trace) we only brought in 5 sand bass – 4 of them caught by Belle.

We have never tried sand bass before and have let them go if we caught any but a couple of people told us they were good eating so this time we decided to try them out and found they tasted ok but the flesh was far too soft.

### October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)

We are hoping to take the boat out one last time today and are waiting to see if the wind stays down. It was blowing a gale last night (nothing new for Bush Bay) and we thought we didn't have any chance of getting out but this morning the wind has dropped right down and we are crossing our fingers that it stays that way long enough for us to go fishing. I would really like to find those big mackerel again.

If we don't manage to get out then the packing up will begin.

As it turned out the wind did drop and we got a last day out in the boat but apart from something big grabbing Belle's line and then getting off (after she handed the rod to me) we didn't manage to bring anything back. Belle caught an eel of some sort but we let that go.

We are now getting ready to head further south as the temperature here starts to go up (and the mozzies come out in very large numbers.)

### October 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)

We are almost packed up now and expect to head off tomorrow. The next stop should be Hutt River and then hopefully down to Geraldton to get the caravan annexe sorted out.

Bush Bay has been its usual windy self with about half a dozen less windy days over 7 weeks. On two occasions the wind did actually stop completely but this isn't as good as it sounds as it gives the millions of mosquitoes that live in the area a chance to get out and have a good feed before the wind comes back – and BOY are they HUNGRY.

We have been slightly amused watching the people who come to Bush Bay without knowing what to expect. The wind usually drops a little during the day and the campers with their caper trailers and small single axle caravans arrive, look around and obviously wonder why there are so many lovely beach side sites available.

They set to work putting up their annexes and setting everything out nicely and then the night comes. With darkness comes the wind, howling in from across the bay, buffeting their vans all night and threatening to destroy those carefully placed annexes.

Next morning you can hardly see them leave for the dust flying out from behind their vehicles as they flee with all the speed their vehicles can muster. We have lost count of the number of people we have seen do this in the last 7 weeks and it gets to be a bit of a game to see how long the latest arrivals can survive before tucking their tails between their legs and heading for the highway at top speed – at least until they hit the first of the 10 kilometres of corrugations. Bush Bay can be a cruel campsite for the un-initiated.

Wish list and to do list

1. Slide out shelving for kitchen cupboard. ???
2. New cooker for van (done)
3. Security door for van (done)
4. LCD TV and stand (done)
5. Mount good speakers in cupboards (done)
6. Repair awning and annexe (done)
7. Get shade cloth floor and walls made up (floor done walls still to do)
8. Fix step (done)
9. Fix fishing rod (done)
10. New stereo for bedroom (done)
11. Sort out problems with video files (done)
12. Service car (done)
13. Get new shower tent (done) and build a more permanent one for the side of the van. (give up)
14. Fix wing mirror on car (done)

Wind gen stats for future reference:

Set up this period :	23 days
Ran generator due to lack of wind :	3 days
Total days with wind gen power only:	20 days

Average cost per day to run petrol generator

Fuel	\$4.30
Maintenance	\$0.50
Wear and tear	\$0.34
Daily running costs	<b>\$5.14</b>

20 days at \$5.14 = \$102.80

### October 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Tuesday)

After quite a long (time-wise) tiring drive we arrived at Hutt River Province – none too easy to find due to the lack of signage – and settled in.

The caravan facility is quite basic but it has all the essentials like power (7am-10pm), toilet, shower and washing machine (free). Best of all it is quiet and very cheap (\$10 per night on power).

**October 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Wednesday)**

A mad rush today to get round to see everything I wanted to see north of Hutt River turned out to be a disappointment as it was almost impossible to find the Geraldine mine site and it was impossible to find Lucky Bay which we have now re-named 'Lucky if you can find it Bay'.

We did see part of the sights at Kalbarri National Park but didn't get to Nature's Window and Z Bend and we did have a quick look around Kalbarri town. Sadly it is no longer the quiet little backwater it once was and new housing developments will ruin the area.

**October 18<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Today was much more fruitful as we went to Northampton and then to the old Lynton convict depot and to Port Gregory. A much more interesting day than yesterday and much less stressful as we didn't get lost this time.



The old convict depot at Lynton

**22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007 (Monday)**

Our last day at Hutt River before heading down to Geraldton to get the caravan awning fixed up. There hasn't been much to do since last Thursday and we have been going a bit loopy as a result. It will be good to get everything sorted out and get back to doing what we want to again.

**26<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

IGA phone call.

**29<sup>th</sup> October 2007 (Monday)**

Coming down to Geraldton seems to have been a complete waste of time. The caravan repairers we took the van to last week have not returned any of our phone calls and when we rang the insurance company this morning we find that they haven't even got round to sending in a quote yet.

As a result we are going to go down to Rockingham and get Gary (who worked on the van last time) to do the work instead. We have to make up our minds what to do for the next couple of weeks as we have to waste time until the work can be done.

**30<sup>th</sup> October 2007 (Tuesday)**

We gave up on Geraldton and have gone east to Mullewa for a few days. Unfortunately Mullewa seems to be about the most unfriendly town we have been to in W.A. Maybe everyone in town was just having a bad day today but they mostly seem like a real bunch of grumps. The woman at the Telecentre / Visitor Centre begrudgingly said hello and then proceeded to ignore us completely. Strange how the most unsuitable people end up in some jobs.

The major tourist attraction in town (the Monsignor Hawes designed Catholic church) is only open to visitors between July and mid October and most of the businesses in town seem to have closed down.

We will be here a week, long enough to have a good look around, but I don't think I would ever bother coming back. The caravan park is one of the best things in town, at least the people at the Ampol service station (where you pay the site fees) were friendly.

The park itself is cheap if you stay weekly (\$80) and reasonable if you stay daily (\$16) and the toilets and laundry are some of the best we have seen in any caravan park.



**November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

The last few days have been a bit of a strain and I can't pin the blame on anyone but myself. When I was giving the car an oil change I must have put the oil into the engine too quickly and the funnel I was using was too well sealed in the hole. This led to oil being forced down into the cylinders and when I tried to start the engine it refused to turn over. This meant the car had to be taken down to the local garage to have the glow plugs removed and the oil allowed to squirt out. It only cost \$58 in the end but it was worrying at the time AND I TEND TO BEAT MYSELF UP MENTALLY WHEN I DO SOMETHING STUPID.

Today we went out to have a look at Tenindewa Well (not a bad campsite) and Noondamurra Pool that is pretty but too small to be of much use as a campsite to most people.

It turned out that we must have met a few real grumps when we first got to Mullewa as the rest of the people we have spoken to have been very friendly. Shows you that first impressions can be quite wrong.

**November 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Yesterday we had a look at the De Grey Stock Route picnic area that would make quite a good campsite in the right weather. We then went east to Pindar and had a look at the old hotel.

We have now been to most places we wanted to see around Mullewa (except perhaps Tardun) and will be moving on again. We were planning to go to Moora for a week or so but when we rang and found that a shire park is charging \$21 a night or \$130 a week we changed our minds. Now we have decided to go to Goomalling for a few days and then on to the farm at Popo until we hear that the parts have arrived for the caravan in Rockingham.

**November 9<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Friday)**

Finally after around 7 months we are back at the bus. We will be here until the parts from the caravan arrive and then it is off to Rockingham for a couple of days and then down to Augusta again for the summer.

**November 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

Most things have been sorted out with dropping off and picking up items at home base and now we are just waiting (rather impatiently) for the word to take the caravan down to Rockingham for the repairs. If nothing has happened by the 29<sup>th</sup> we will go part way down and stay at Wandering for a few days just to get a little closer.

We are booked in at Cowaramup from 20<sup>th</sup> of December for a month to do some house sitting, that will make a nice change and after that we will go back to Westbay for a few weeks to stay away from the heat of summer.

**November 26<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Monday)**

We are booked in to get the work done on the caravan next Monday and will be stopping at Wandering for a couple of nights just to get us a bit closer to Rockingham. After that the plan is to go to Heron Point for three nights than on to Leschenault caravan park for two weeks before we house sit in Cowaramup for almost a month. From there we hope to go back to Westbay and sit out the summer in a reasonably cool spot. That is plan 'A' anyway.

**December 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

The new roll out is on and the oven installed in the caravan and we still have the new door to go on and we expect that to get done around Christmas. The Annexe walls are still to be stitched up and we have ordered a 'privacy screen' \$140 and all that will get sorted out at the same time.

We spent 3 nice quiet nights at Heron Point although the weather wasn't that great (coldest minimum temperature ever recorded for December apparently) it was still enjoyable.

We are staying at the Leschenault caravan park in Australind for the next week or two and I will spend some time looking around the Bunbury area. I still don't like Bunbury, it is over populated and ugly. I just can't find anything nice to say about it. The streets are congested with traffic and it is almost impossible to find parking in the middle of town.

**December 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Saturday)**

Managed to do a trip round to Brunswick, Harvey, Yarloop, Myalup and Binnigup today. The highlights of the trip were Stirling's Cottage and the weir at Harvey and the Yarloop Workshop museum. The museum houses the largest collection of working steam engines in the southern hemisphere. Live steam days are held on the second Sunday of each month from March to November.



Yarloop Workshop museum

**December 20<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Christmas (YUK!) is almost on us again, what a bore.... At least by this time next week it will all be over again for another year.

We are upholding our tradition of the last 10 years and staying in a different place from all the previous 9 Christmases. This one will be in Cowaramup and as it is one of the nicest areas in the state we hope it will be one of the most enjoyable of the past 10 years.

Tomorrow we head down to the house we will be looking after and meet the owners.

**January 7<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

We have been hose-sitting for over two weeks now and have about the same still left to do. It has been fun looking after dogs again and I have managed to get a lot of information from the internet for the WA Guide.

Apart from that we have been taking things relatively easy and staying away from tourist spots. With luck most of the 'blow ins' will be heading home by the time we head down to Westbay.

**January 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Thursday)**

Less than a weeks house sitting left to do and then we are off to Augusta for a while. We have had a couple of periods of very hot weather while we have been here. Christmas and Boxing day were both scorchers and the last two days have been equally bad. Much better than being up near Perth though.



**January 26<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

We are now back down at Westbay after a very enjoyable time house sitting. So far it is very restrained here for a long weekend – apart from one peanut in a campervan who had to park next to us and then play his music too loud – what this evening will bring who knows what, but so far it hasn't been too bad compared to the Labor Day long weekend last year.

The bad news is that Easter is early this year (March 23<sup>rd</sup> I think) so we will probably have to ride it out with ear plugs in.

No chance to get out fishing yet but the boat is all ready to go and the rods are rigged up, maybe tomorrow?

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

The wind continues to be a problem here and even the locals – who should be more or less used to it – are complaining. It seems as though W.A. (alias WINDY AUSTRALIA) is getting more and more wind every year – too many politicians perhaps?

**February 7<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

After taking the boat out three times we have caught – NOTHING – at least nothing worth while. We did hook lots of undersized KG whiting that had to be put back but nothing else and no crabs at all. Rather dismal compared to last year.

We are experiencing the first rain – if you could call it that as it is only drizzle at the moment – since we came down to Augusta. Little else to write about at the moment.

**February 8<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

We were only going to Margaret River today to do some shopping but as I couldn't get a connector for the mobile phone anywhere in town we had to go up all the way to Busselton. It turned out to be an enjoyable if somewhat tiring (not to mention expensive) day as Belle did the rounds of the shops.

**February 12<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

Belle's 49<sup>th</sup> today and we took a drive up to Hamelin Bay. When people bring their boats in from fishing in the bay a number of stingrays turn up to get fed. It was very interesting to see how big some of the rays grow. They are so greedy that they almost strand themselves in an effort to get any food on offer.



**February 14<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

The wind has been so bad in Augusta this year that we have decided to give up and go inland at the end of the month. We were expecting a better day today and to start with it was beautiful so we took the boat out. Everything was great until we started back and then we encountered a very strong northerly wind blowing right down the inlet. It was probably about the roughest water we have ever been out in, in the dinghy and this was in a 'protected waterway'.

We have given up any idea of going out again and will pack everything up slowly over the next two weeks. We are thinking about going to Woodanilling and then dropping off at Popo on the way north but we will see how things go.

**February 18<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

Phoning around for caravan park prices today resulted in:

Wagin \$82.50 per week  
Woodanilling \$132 per week ! up from \$80 this time last year WHAT A RIP OFF !!  
Darkan \$50.00 per week concession rate  
Bolgart \$11 night \$55 a week.  
Towerrinning \$90 per week no drinking water available.  
Bindoon. Overnight only by tourist info. Showers & toilets. \$10  
Hamelin Pool \$20 night \$120 week.  
Green Head \$23 night \$138 week  
Leeman \$23 night  
Jurien \$26 night \$163.8 week RIP OFF!  
Cervantes \$27 night RIP OFF!

**February 24<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Sunday)**

Our time at Augusta is coming to an end and we expect to be away this Thursday. The weather, fishing and crabbing have all been awful this year and we probably won't be back again for quite some time.

We now have to bide our time before heading north so the plan is to visit:

Busselton, Darkan, Wagin, back to the bus, Beverley, Bindoon, Bibby Road, Green Head, Cliff Head, Seven Mile, Coronation Beach, Galena Bridge, Hamelin Pool, Gladstone, Bush Bay and Barradale before getting back to Karratha for the winter. How long we stay at each spot depends on how bored we get. We have 9 weeks in all to kill before we want to be up there.

**February 27<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

We had planned to be on our way again tomorrow but a heat wave is due and we have had second thoughts about heading further north. That means we are stuck here over the long weekend and after that we may as well hang around another couple of weeks or so as we wanted to kill a bit of time anyway. The only down side is that just about everything is packed away now but at least that means we can get away quickly when we are finally ready to go.

**March 4<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

The Labour Day long weekend is over and much to our great relief it was nice an quiet despite the fact that quite a few people came into the caravan park. It was a nice change after the horribly noisy Labour Day weekend last year.

We are off to Busselton for a few nights on Thursday. I have been busy checking the caravan bearings and have re-greased a couple that looked like they needed some new grease. Hopefully this preventative maintenance will stave off any problems with the wheels.

While we are in Busselton we want to get a new gas regulator fitted as well as do a bit of other shopping before we head inland away from 'civilisation'.

**9<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Sunday)**

We arrived in Busselton on the 6<sup>th</sup> and have stayed at the Fore Square Church camp (\$18 per night). This was not the best place to stay as there are tennis / basketball courts next to the caravan area and when groups of kids come in the noise is too much for us. We were thinking about staying one more night as the weekend arrivals left this morning but as another group is due in tomorrow night we are heading to Darkan to see what the caravan park there is like.

There are a number of church camps along what is called the 'holy mile' in Busselton that take caravans but they are not allowed to advertise. The Uniting Church looked like a good spot to stop and we will try that if we are down this way again but we hope that it won't be any time soon.

I got the gas regulator done and saved about \$110 in the process but we have managed to spend too much while we have been here so it will be a relief to get away from the temptation to spend money. We were quoted \$150 for the supply and fitting of a regulator and managed to do it ourselves for \$40.

We are basically marking time now until we can head north again.

**10<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Monday)**

We had intended stopping at Darkan but the caravan park was just about full – something we hadn't expected, so we kept on going to Wagin where we have booked in for a week to see how things go. I would like to get out to Dumbleyung while we are here as well.

**11<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Tuesday)**

Took a trip out to Dumbleyung today to have a look at the town and the lake. The lake is currently nothing more than a huge expanse of salt flat. It seems odd to look at it now and think that Donald Campbell broke the water speed record there in 1964. How things change.

Dumbleyung is a very small town which has limited attraction for tourists. Without the lake it has almost nothing to offer.



**17<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Monday)**

Back at the farm now for 2-4 weeks and best of all we are back in the bus for a while. It will be nice not to have to pack the computer up every day and just leave it on the desk.

**29<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Saturday)**

Almost two weeks at the farm now and another week to go before we start heading north. I have fitted a new set of rear lights to the caravan but otherwise apart from tidying things up life has just rolled on without much of interest. The weather is nice, warm days and cool nights but the cold toes in the morning mean it is really time to go where it stays warm all winter.

Caravan park fee check for:

Beverley \$20 pn  
Brookton \$17.50 pn \$100 pw.  
Waddi farm \$20 pn  
Hamelin Pool \$20 pn (7<sup>th</sup> night free)  
Gingin \$23 and \$27

**7<sup>th</sup> April 2008 (Monday)**

On our way north again for the winter. We didn't get far today as we stopped off at Brookton for the night. We wanted to check out Yenyenning Lakes and then go into Beverley to see the Aeronautical Museum and Avondale Discovery Farm. Avondale turned out to be the best place we have been to in a while. It is officially an agricultural research station but the public can visit and entry is free. There is an excellent machinery museum, the old homestead

museum and a number of interesting farming displays to see. There is also a picnic area with seats and BBQs so you can take in lunch and relax for a while.

Yenyenning Lakes would be much better with more water in them but it was still an interesting drive east of Brookton. Much better done in wildflower season I expect.

The Aeronautical Museum at Beverley was interesting but the plane I really wanted to see (Silver Centenary) was no longer there. (It has been restored and is now flying again.)

Fuel prices up north are very frightening at the moment (diesel in Karratha is currently \$1.72 a litre). We have to wonder how much longer we can keep on going up there.



Avondale

#### **April 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

Yesterday we got to Bolgart and stopped overnight. The caravan park there is cheap (\$11 a night or \$55 a week) but the toilets could do with a bit of renovation and some disinfectant.

On the way in to the park we had to cross a bit of a wash away and the back of the van grounded as we crossed it breaking the new feet we only recently put on the wind down legs. Anyone going in to Bolgart caravan park needs to be aware of this problem as you enter.

Today we stopped off at New Norcia to have another look round and to take some updated photos. Then we went on to Moora and did some shopping before reaching the Transit caravan park at Dandaragan where we called a halt for the day.

The transit facility is very good. There is only room for 3-4 vans but the ablution block is new and spotless and the area is well presented. At only \$15 a night (\$65 a week) it is good value for money too.

#### **April 10<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

The weather is a bit on the drizzly side at the moment so we are trying to stay on powered sites with proper facilities until it clears up. We have gone a short distance north to Waddi Farms Resort. The resort is 5 kilometres down an unsealed road (a bit corrugated in places) off Koonah Road which runs east from the Brand Highway.

Waddi Farms was obviously set up with lots of money. The caravan park would not be out of place in a seaside resort (in fact it is better than some we have seen in such places.) It was apparently built in the late 1980s and is getting a little run down and uncared for now but it is quite a long way from anywhere and unless you just want some peace and quiet it is hard to see why anyone would make a special trip out to stay there any length of time.

It is difficult to work out why someone would go to all the effort of building such a facility right out in the middle of nowhere. Perhaps it gets busier during wildflower season.

There is a large well appointed ablution block and even a swimming pool and restaurant.

#### **April 12<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

We arrived at Sandy Cape (just north of Jurien Bay) yesterday and will be here for 3-4 nights. The road in is very corrugated this year and we had to stay in 1<sup>st</sup> gear almost all the way in.

#### **April 17<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

Still at Sandy Cape killing time. The weather turned nasty last night as thunderstorms and rain rolled in. We are hoping it will clear in the next 24 hours as we want to move on.



**April 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

We arrived at Cliff Head North yesterday and will be off again tomorrow. The next stop we expect to be Galena or Nerren Nerren. From there we take a short detour to Hamelin Pool for 1-3 nights and then on to Bush Bay which will be the last major stop before we get back to Cleaverville.

We have been lucky weather wise as the clouds have gone all round us but not over the top so the solar panels have managed to keep working properly and we have only used the generator at night.

**April 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

Arrived at Hamelin Pool today and settled in for 2 nights. The stromatolites are everything we had heard they were – ugly funny shaped little rocks with little visual attraction – but the caravan facility at Hamelin is not too bad. The ablution block is a little 'dated' and fresh water is from a tank rather than on tap but it is a pleasant enough spot. We haven't managed to do any proper shopping for over 2 weeks now and we are starting to run out of all sorts of things so it is going to be a big relief when we finally make it to Karratha.

We expect to be at Bush Bay by Wednesday but that will depend on the weather and as there is a cyclonic low developing out in the ocean near Christmas Island we will be studying the weather reports to see what is likely to happen.

**April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

Arrived at Bush Bay and Belle was straight into the whiting. She has been waiting for this since last year and really enjoys fishing for what I call the 'poor little fishies'.

There are some very high tides at the moment and our usual campsite disappears under water once a day so we are camped on the highest ground we can find.



**April 24<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

We couldn't wait any longer to get some supplies so went into Carnarvon today to stock up on the essentials. Everything else can wait until we get to Karratha.

We caught some whiting, a few to eat and some more to freeze and use as bait when we get to Karratha. There have also been some squid in the shallows but we haven't managed to bag one yet.

**April 25<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

Clouds have covered up the sun so we are having to run the generator to keep the batteries charged.

The whiting all seem to be asleep today but we have managed to get the first mullet in the set net. A fisheries inspector had a good look at the net yesterday but we did everything properly so no problems and no fines.

**April 30<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

We arrived at Cleaverville yesterday after making the 680 kilometre drive from Carnarvon in one go. It was a bit on the tiring side but it was good to finally get where we wanted to be. Now we can more or less relax for the next 3 months.

For half the drive we had overcast rainy conditions which was good for driving but as we passed Barradale the sky started to clear and things warmed up a bit.

It isn't as hot here as we expected but the generator will still get a work out over the next couple of weeks as we enjoy having the air conditioner on.

We had heard that the campsite was over-run with workers but thankfully that turns out to be quite untrue.

By the end of tomorrow we should be more or less set up and ready to go fishing.

**May 5<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

**Sunday Dark moon -1 03:09 1.6 / 09:37 4.4 Light winds clear sky**

**Monday Dark moon 04:15 1.5 / 10:11 4.7 light winds some cloud**

We more or less finished setting up our camp by the end of Thursday and went into town and spent too much money on Friday. (2 new Alvey reels and a 2<sup>nd</sup> LCD TV for the bedroom plus all the usual booze and grocery items ended up costing over \$600!) We weren't quite ready for the perfect fishing day that presented itself on Saturday but by Sunday we were, and the weather was still good so we went out to one of the close reefs that we have labelled 'flag' on the GPS and picked up 2 flag and 2 blue lined emperor. The float line took off with something huge but as I had only rigged with a short wire trace it was bitten off and we had nothing else with us.

Today we were much better prepared and came back with a 1.34 metre Spaniard plus a smaller spotted Mack and a good sized flag. Quite a nice start to the season so far.



**May 6<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

**Dark moon +1 04:51 1.3 / 10:46 5.0 Light wind cloudy**

Went out fishing again today and did a bit of exploring trying to find some new spots. We did find two rather promising places out behind Dixon Island and although we only brought in 1 mackerel, 3 snapper and 2 flag, we caught a lot of other fish that we put back including 2 other macks, 1 huge golden trevally and numerous snapper, flag, cod and tuskfish.

The highlight of the day was a massive stingray coming right up to the back of the boat with its entourage of at least 4 large sucker fish. It would have been a good time to have a camera on board but of course I didn't. We also saw a school of tuna hunting baitfish and leaping out of the water. A very entertaining day.

**May 7<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

We were a bit 'fished out' so despite today being good fishing weather again we opted not to go out.

**May 8<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

**Dark moon +3 06:04 1.3 / 12:03 5.0**

The weather looked ok for fishing this morning so we took the chance and went out again. We should have known better. The wind came up before we got on to our fishing spot and after trying one or two other places we gave up and came back in quite fishless!

**May 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

Shopping day in Karratha.

**May 13<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

**Full moon -2 03:45 1.9 / 09:40 4.2 Calm to start but wind picked up**

Managed to get out crabbing today. For a change the wind allowed us to get 3 runs in before it started to come up and we finished the final run as the wind was picking up. 12 blue swimmers was the total for the day and for us that is quite sufficient.

**May 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

**Full moon -1 04:18 1.8 / 10:12 4.4**

There was no wind this morning and a 10am high tide so we went out in the boat to have a look at Rocky Creek to the east of the campsite. There were too many biteys in the creek so we came out again faster than we went in, but it looks like a good place to explore later on. All we managed to catch were a few garfish to keep in the freezer for bait. We are hoping the next couple of days will be a bit better fishing wise.

**May 20<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

**Full moon 04:49 1.7 / 10:42 4.4**

A good fishing day weather wise looked like being a lousy day fishing wise as when we went out 5km to the reefs behind Dixon Island we didn't catch anything worth while. A few good hooks ups resulted in fish getting off before we even saw what they were so we came back in closer to shore and finally came back in with a 550mm estuary cod and 3 good sized spotted macks which were delicious (as always) smoked.

**May 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

**Full moon +1 05:17 1.7 / 11:12 4.5 calm and cloud**

Today we decided to go crabbing again and the weather was perfect for it. Although we only caught 8 crabs this time in 4 runs we were happy enough with the results as this will keep Belle in crab for the next 2-3 days. We did try a spot of fishing near one of the islands but only caught one 30cm bream that we put back.

**May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

**Full moon +2 05:45 1.7 / 11:41 4.5**

The forecast said 8-13 knots but the wind seemed to be up a bit. We decided to chance it anyway and took the boat out yet again but this time the wind shifted round and came up too much to make fishing pleasant. Belle caught a nice 39cm snapper for dinner but that was the only fish we brought in. The fish were on the bite when we got to the reef but after 20 minutes everything went quiet so an hour before high tide we decided to give up for the day.

**May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

Another expensive trip into town today courtesy of a new camp kitchen from Kmart that cost \$170. The old one is starting to look a bit shabby and even though it would probably last a few more years yet we decided that the new stainless steel model with tap, lamp holder etc. would be nice to have. We will see if we can sell the old one for about \$30 before we head back south, if not we'll probably take it back to the bus.

**May 24<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

**Full moon +4 06:40 1.8 / 12:43 4.3**

The wind was down yet again today (what a nice change!) so we took the boat out to see what we could find. Belle didn't have a very good day and her mood wasn't helped by the fact that I just kept on hauling the big ones in just a couple of feet from where she was sitting.

The bring home catch was 6 snapper (137-144mm) and one large minstrel sweet lip. The catch of the day was a huge estuary cod. Initially I thought I had a snag but then the 'snag' started to swim away. The cod was well over the length of the 900mm fish measuring sticker we have in the boat so as it was very likely over 1 metre long (the maximum size for estuary cod in W.A.) we put it back alive and kicking. I hadn't brought the camera out and was sorry to have no proof of the huge fish and it was only seconds after I had let it go that I realised that we had the mobile phone with us and IT WAS EQUIPPED WITH A CAMERA ! B#%!!&R !!! All those bragging rites gone to waste.

I would estimate the cod's weight at something around 20 kg or maybe more! It was massive, in fact weight wise the biggest fish I have ever boated.

Soon afterward a large spotted mack took the float line but I wasn't able to control it and it got off after wrapping the line around the anchor rope. It didn't matter, I was on cloud nine anyway. Belle, however, was casting rather dark looks at me all day but she got over it when we got home.



#### **June 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 (Sunday)**

A bit of a dry spell fishing wise as the tides and winds have been against us. If we had managed to get up early enough we could have gone this morning but we are crossing our fingers that we can go tomorrow instead.

#### **June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

**Dark moon -2 02:50 1.9 / 08:52 4.5**

Went out this morning but the wind came up almost as soon as we got out – same old story. Went near Dixon Island to fish the drop off but only caught 1 spotted mack that we brought in to smoke and 1 shark which we let go.

#### **June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

**Dark moon -1 03:40 1.8 / 09:38 4.5**

Out again in the boat and this time the wind stayed down. We fished out the back to start with but we were late getting out and the fish weren't biting. We came in to 'buoy' and the macks were nailing the bait fish and we got 1 Spaniard and 2 spotted. Would have got more if two traces hadn't been bitten off.

#### **June 6<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

Into town spending too much money again. Diesel now almost \$1.93 a litre ! Bought 2gb memory for the computer \$99.

#### **June 10<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

Rain last night but it looks like clearing today. The wind is still too high to get out the front so we are taking the boat to the creek as we are a bit bored.

The council had a slasher around the campsite today and yesterday and the rotten thing managed to throw a small stone out in the direction of our car and punched a hole in one of the back windows. Now we have to sort out getting the repairs done. Bit of a pain. Good job the stone didn't hit anyone in the head as it could easily have killed someone. We think it is a rather stupid idea with campers all round the place.

#### **June 12<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

More rain; we are wondering if we will be able to get into town tomorrow but it doesn't matter if we can't get in as we have enough fuel and water to last a while yet.

**June 14<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

The forecast looks good for the next two days and the high tides are early in the morning so we are crossing our fingers that we might get out tomorrow. The rain this last week went on for a while.

We did manage to get into town despite the rain. It looks as though the work the council has done on the road over the past couple of years has paid off. Only one slightly mushy spot but the rest was almost as good as when the track is dry.

11 days since we last went fishing so a couple of days now would be nice.

Jobs done on the caravan this week were: new 12 volt light over the seating area, mount DVD Video player above the fridge (pig of a thing died just a couple of weeks later and I had to take it all out again!) and install a new Caframo 12 volt fan (\$99) over the main seating area.

**June 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Sunday)**

The tide was a bit too early to get out today and the wind looked like it was going to come up so we decided to take the throw net down to the point instead. We should have taken the boat out as it was a perfect flat day in the end.

RATS!

**June 16<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

**Full moon -3 00:06 2.2 / 09:00 3.9**

We did manage to get out today and caught another big Spanish mackerel (1.33 metre) which makes it just a little smaller than the last one. The freezer is now rather full again so we don't mind that the forecast for the next week is for stronger and stronger winds.

We had another look at Rocky Creek and this time the sounder was working properly. The creek was a bit disappointing and it is quite shallow (max amount 6 feet deep). We did catch a threadfin in the creek but nothing else.



**June 17<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

**Full moon -2 00:06 2.2 / 09:00 3.9**

The sea looked too good to miss out on this morning and we weren't the only ones who thought so. We weren't in a hurry to get out as we have enough fish in the freezer and only went out to do some catch and release fishing.

The boat sitting not far from us must have thought we were nuts. They weren't catching anything but we were hauling them in one after another and just tossing them back into the sea again. The wind eventually came up and we went back in fishless but quite happy with the session.

**June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 (Sunday)**

The easterly winds have arrived with a vengeance and have been blowing for 5 days now. Sleeping at night is difficult at best and I have resorted to a sleeping pill on one occasion. Only about 7 weeks left before we start to head south again – how time flies. We are just over the half way point now as we intend leaving by about August 11<sup>th</sup>.

#### **June 27<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

We finally got the back window in the cruiser fixed today and thankfully the company that operated the slasher payed for the work to be done so we didn't lose any of our insurance benefits.

I finally got round to buying a new graphics card and 5 metre cable for the computer (\$160) but otherwise have managed to keep other spending to less than horrific levels.

We are patiently waiting for the LCD TV we sent off for repairs on May 9<sup>th</sup> to come back – we are told it is on its way so hopefully we will see it next week.

The forecast is for light winds tomorrow but again the tides are all wrong so the best we can hope for is to do some crabbing. Based on the wind today I am not going to hold my breath.

#### **June 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

**Dark moon -5 04:39 3.8 / 11:27 1.9**

Although the tides aren't any good for fishing they were ok for crabbing and the wind obliged today so we were able to get out at the creek and do 3 runs. The result was 7 crabs. A feed at least so no complaints.

#### **June 29<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Sunday)**

We decided to try and get out this morning (neap tide) to fish the dropping tide for a couple of hours. We even got as far as taking the boat down to the ramp just on first light but when we got there I chickened out due to the level of the water. I decided to check 3 hours later and we would have been ok (on a low tide of 1.8 metres) the wind stayed down ALL DAY just to taunt me.

#### **June 30<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

As the tides are still out for fishing and the weather forecast shows a possibility of getting out from Wednesday to Friday we have moved shopping day up this week and will go in tomorrow.

#### **July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

**Dark moon 04:18 1.8 / 10:19 4.4**

We finally got out fishing again and the weather was perfect. The fishing wasn't so good and all we brought back was one spotted mackerel.

#### **July 4<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

**Dark moon +1 05:10 1.6 / 11:11 4.6**

Good fishing weather again today, virtually no wind. Caught a lot of fish but in the end only brought back 6 snapper (all 38-43cm). Good day.

The weather has stayed quite hot this year with temperatures of about 28C during the day. This means the sandflies are still hanging around.

Jobs recently completed: Service the car and change the left front wheel which had the old spare tyre on it.

Jobs still to do: Service the generator and put new lugs on the wind gen pole.

#### **July 5<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

**Dark moon +2 05:58 1.4 / 12:00 4.6**

We took the boat out again but the forecast was wrong and the wind came up quite early. We tried out on the north side of Dixon Island but didn't get anything worth while but then we went round to the mangroves on the south side and dropped some berley in the water and soon all sorts of fish started turning up. We caught some yellowfin bream, pikey bream and some garfish. We only brought in 5 yellow fin and some gardies for bait but there were quite a few other rather large fish hanging around in very clear water so we will probably visit that spot again if we get the chance.

#### **July 12<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

The tides were no good for fishing today but the wind dropped and there was just enough water to get out at Cleaverville Creek and do some crabbing. The crabs seem to be moving off again and after 4 runs all we got were 6 but at least it was enough for a feed.

The Little Bulldog trailer mudguards are playing up again. Both are broken so that makes 3 in all that have failed – not very impressed.

I have finally finished making up a wind break for the BBQ so hopefully outdoor cooking will be a bit easier from now on.

The easterly wind is back today but we hope to get at least a few more good fishing days before we leave in early August.

**July 16<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Wednesday)**

**Full moon -2 03:42 2.3 / 09:00 3.7**

Went back to the mangroves again to see if it would be as good as it was last time. We caught a lot of bream (all legal) between 28-34cm but in the end we let them all go. We also let a cod go but the catfish weren't so lucky. A large sea eagle was sitting up on the mangroves so we fed it the catfish we caught.

We did see thousands of mullet swimming past the back of Dixon Island but didn't have a net so just sat watching them swim past us.

**July 17<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

**Full moon -1 04:24 2.0 / 10:15 3.9**

Perfect fishing weather all day today and we got out to the big reef (about 5km out) and caught 4 snapper and 1 shark. We came back in, looking for garfish as we were just about out of bait but didn't find any. I did catch a spotted mackerel on one of the inner reefs but then we went back to the mangroves behind Dixon Island (yet again) and caught 3 reasonable bream. This time we kept them but let several other smaller legal sized ones go.

When we got back in we were totally out of garfish and as we have some new neighbours we asked if they would like some fish for dinner. They said they had caught some and we asked what they were – turns out they caught garfish so we did a swap. We now have some bait ready if the weather is good again tomorrow and they have enough fish for a couple of decent feeds.

**July 18<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Friday)**

**Full moon 04:59 1.8 / 10:52 4.1**

Out fishing again but today was a bit on the frustrating side. Belle did well catching the biggest NW snapper we have ever landed (55cm) and I got one 41cm but there were lots of nibblers around and the only other fish we caught was a mack (Queensland school). I wanted two macks to smoke but despite a number of hook ups the rest all got off. I blame the full moon! Belle did very well to get the big snapper in to the boat as she only had a very small hook on the line.



**July 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

We got caught out with the forecast and could have got out fishing today as the wind was southerly and didn't get too high. Instead we were reduced to standing on the beach catching garfish as we had completely run out of bait.

Thankfully we did well enough and our new neighbours donated their garlies to us as well so we now have 65 garfish in the freezer ready for the next calm day.

**July 26<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Saturday)**

After being frustrated by the wind over the past few days we got fed up and went out fishing today and promptly regretted it. As it has been doing for a while now, the wind stayed down most of the day but as soon as the tide was fishable and we could get the boat out over the reef the wind came up and made conditions unpleasant. We didn't catch anything worth while and all in all it was a waste of time.

**July 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Monday)**

Went into town and spent more money! Belle has had an idea for a book so we have bought her, her own laptop computer (\$649) plus a microphone for conducting interviews (\$49.95) and to cap it off we bought some more external disc storage in the form of a Maxtor One Touch 4 (\$159).

**July 29<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Tuesday)**

Phone call from Belle's sister Blue today and the good news was that we seem to have finally found Belle's identical twin sister. She is almost certainly the Dorothy Loader (now Ong) who posted a message to a Malaysian web site in 2003. Now we will have the interesting task of making the first contact as we are not even sure if her twin knows about Belle. I have to admit that after searching for all this time we are both excited but there is also a bit of trepidation at how things will turn out.

Belle is going to call her family in Singapore on Saturday to get as much detail as she can.

**July 31<sup>st</sup> 2008 (Thursday)**

**Dark moon-1 03:28 2.1 / 09:30 3.9**

Went out fishing based on the weather forecast but the wind came up and although we caught 7 'keepers' including a 37cm and 41cm snapper we were cheesed off and put them all back in.

**(journal continues in Part II)**