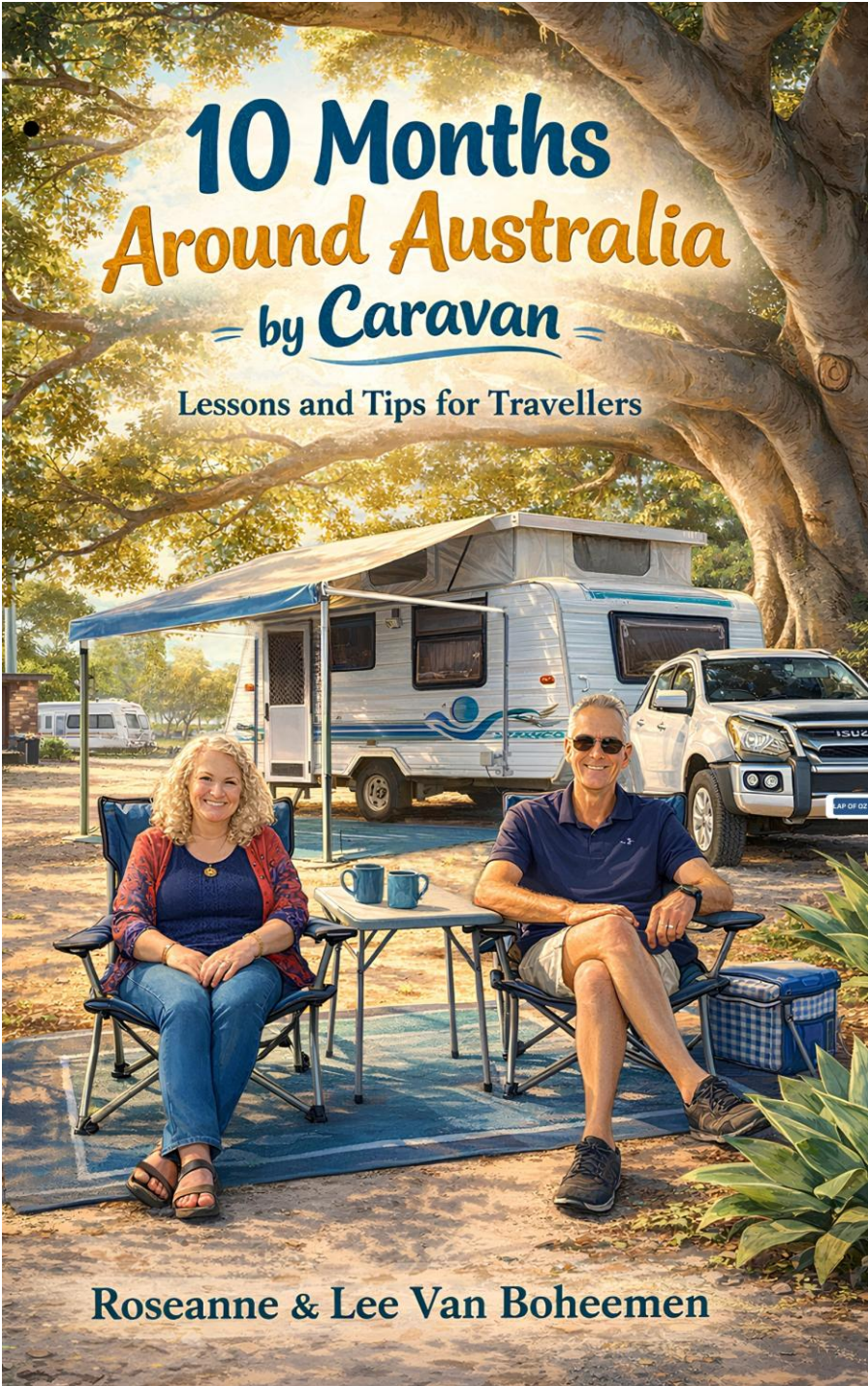


A man and a woman are sitting in folding chairs under a large, leafy tree. The woman is on the left, wearing a blue top and jeans, and the man is on the right, wearing a blue polo shirt and shorts. They are both smiling. In front of them is a small table with two blue mugs. Behind them is a white caravan with a blue awning and a silver pickup truck. The scene is set in a sunny, outdoor environment with other caravans visible in the background.

10 Months Around Australia = by Caravan =

Lessons and Tips for Travellers

Roseanne & Lee Van Boheemen

10 Months Around Australia by Caravan

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A NOTE ON PHOTOGRAPHS — The interior of this book is printed in black and white to keep it affordable for readers. Many key photographs from our ten-month journey can be viewed in full colour, free of charge

[**HERE**](#)

We hope you enjoy them as much as we enjoyed taking them.



Roseanne and Lee Van Boheemen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book, it turns out, takes a village, and we have been blessed with a wonderful one.

To our dear friends John and Pat, seasoned travellers and even better friends. They have explored Australia extensively, and their willingness to give our Jayco Freedom a thorough once-over before we departed gave us enormous confidence. Their practical tips made life on the road simpler and more enjoyable than we could have imagined, from the blocks of wood and drain hose extension, to the fridge level indicator and the genius of using a jack to level the van quickly. But John's steel rod fitted to our drill chuck, making light work of the stabilisers every single day, was nothing short of genius. Thank you both from the bottom of our hearts.

To Jo, editor extraordinaire — thank you for your patience, your professionalism, and your extraordinary eye for detail. I was quietly confident in my English until I saw the corrections you so gently highlighted throughout the manuscript! I have no doubt that you gave this book far more of your time and talent than you charged me for, and it is a much better book for it. You were an absolute joy to work with, and I cannot recommend you highly enough.

To our daughter, Onnika, thank you for organising a wonderful two-week family holiday to Exmouth that became one of the highlights of our journey and the reason we embarked on our Lap of Oz. Your thoughtfulness made it all the more special.

And to our three children and their partners — we appreciate your support more than you know. We do, however, suspect that when you all enthusiastically agreed that driving around Australia for ten months would be a marvellous experience for us, the words 'ten months without a babysitter' had not quite registered. The reception we received on our return confirmed as much. Thank you for coping magnificently, for loving us anyway, and for the hugs that greeted us at home. We missed you all terribly... but wouldn't change a thing.

DEDICATION

For every Grey Nomad (or anyone else) who has looked at a map of Australia and felt the pull of the open road.

You don't need a brand-new van, a perfect plan, or all the answers before you leave. You need determination, flexibility, and the courage to go.

At the end of life, people rarely wish they had worked harder or never travelled. They wish they had grabbed every opportunity and done more with the time they had.

For anyone who has ever thought, “one day.”

This book is for you. One day is now.

We feel incredibly fortunate that we made the decision to do

THE LAP OF OZ.

‘To travel is to live.’ — Hans Christian Andersen

INTRODUCTION

If you have picked up this book, chances are you are either planning a lap of Australia or seriously thinking about it. Perhaps you know someone who is. Either way, welcome — you are in the right place.

This book began as a travel diary, written night by night at campgrounds across the country. It became something more than that. It became the guide we wished someone had handed us before we left Perth in our 2000 Jayco Freedom caravan and set off on what would become ten of the most unforgettable months of our lives.

We are not professional travellers or influencers. We are a couple from Perth who enjoyed camping with our family, had a well-loved caravan, and finally made the decision to discover Australia ourselves.

Inside these pages, you will find the practical, the personal, the planning advice we wish we had received, the packing list refined by hard experience, and the caravan tips that made daily life on the road smoother, especially for those of us travelling in older vans who sometimes wondered how we measured up against the gleaming rigs parked beside us. (As it turns out, you measure up just fine.)

You will also find the day-by-day diary of our travels through Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, coastal New South Wales, coastal Victoria, Tasmania, central Victoria and central New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria again, and then through South Australia before returning home to Western Australia.

Australia is bigger than you think and more beautiful than you imagine. Travel changes you in ways that can feel difficult to put into words, but we have done our best to put them into words anyway.

We hope they inspire you to go.

Roseanne and Lee, Perth, Western Australia

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THE IMPORTANT STUFF

A practical preamble for anyone dreaming of life on the road.

Before the sweeping landscapes, wildlife encounters, breathtaking coastlines, and unforgettable moments with strangers who became friends, comes the unglamorous but essential reality of preparation.

Long-term caravan travel is not about packing everything; it's about packing wisely. Each item we took earned its place through use, not theory. Many of these things sat quietly in cupboards for weeks, until the day they suddenly mattered a great deal.

Preparedness doesn't eliminate challenges. It transforms them into manageable inconveniences instead of trip-defining crises.

Preparation is what smooths the bumps along the way, so that when challenges arise, you're ready, equipped, and confident. We hope our suggestions will help ensure you have not only what you need, but also what you didn't yet know you might need.

And that, more than anything, is what makes long journeys sustainable and joyful.

Our experiences are shared in the hope that they make your journey smoother, safer, and more enjoyable, and that they give you many unforgettable memories.

Some of what follows is logistical. Some is financial. Some is deeply personal. All of it was learned the hard way, and all of it shaped the unforgettable ten-month journey that unfolds in the pages ahead.

Starting odometer reading: 91,837km

Final odometer reading: 128,315km

Total distance travelled: 36,478km

PART 1 – BEFORE YOU GO

The Decision to Go

Our children were planning a camping trip to Exmouth beginning on 4 July 2024. After a week of sightseeing and exploring the surrounds, they intended to meander back to Perth, stopping at various highlights along the way. They invited us to join them.

The answer, unsurprisingly, was an immediate and enthusiastic yes! We never miss an opportunity to spend time with family. However, if we're being completely honest, the idea of driving all the way from Perth to Exmouth and back, with long distances between places of interest, did not exactly fill us with excitement.

That hesitation became the spark.

For years, we had travelled extensively overseas yet had seen remarkably little of our own vast country. It suddenly felt wrong that we had seen so little of Australia. It was time to see more of it!

Somewhere between that invitation and that realisation, the idea of a short family trip transformed into something much bigger.

This wasn't just going to be Exmouth. This was going to be Australia!

Planning the Trip

Our Caravan

We found that our caravan was more than sufficient for our adventure, though it lacks many of the bells and whistles found on newer caravans. The tips and experiences we share throughout this book are helpful for many caravanners but apply particularly to those travelling with an older van.

Our caravan is a 2000 Jayco Freedom Pop-Top, in excellent condition,

with no bathroom. We modified the seating area to better suit our needs by installing a longer bench seat and table, which also allowed the end of the bed to double as an extra seat at the table, giving the interior a more open feel. We have a microwave, a four-burner gas cooktop with griller, a three-way fridge, and a 120-litre freezer.

We investigated installing solar panels and taking a generator, but this setup would have been insufficient to run the freezer efficiently. We decided that the freezer was an important luxury we wanted to keep. This meant we would have to stay in powered caravan parks because we needed reliable 240-volt power. We also enjoyed the safety and convenience of staying in caravan parks with access to amenities, with hot showers and laundry facilities. This made a significant difference to our comfort and well-being throughout this trip, especially during longer stays.

That freezer allowed us to batch-cook meals, freeze milk, and keep a large bag of ice permanently topped up for daily water bottles. We froze two ice cube trays each day and emptied them into the ice bag, a small ritual that paid off daily. And yes, there was room for a large tub of ice cream, which was always a reliable morale booster.

There were only two occasions in ten months when distances forced us into unpowered stops. On those nights, we went to bed early and avoided opening the freezer, a small compromise that worked well, though on one occasion we did lose some of our food to spoilage – a small but frustrating lesson in energy dependence.

Another pre-trip decision we celebrated every single day was installing drawers into our cupboards. We dislike bending down, and too many caravans require constant crouching and rummaging. Drawers made everything visible, more easily accessible and vastly more comfortable. It was certainly one of the best modifications we made.

As we appreciate our creature comforts, we took our toaster, kettle, coffee machine, air fryer and SodaStream. The toaster, kettle and coffee machine travelled in a cupboard, while the air fryer and

SodaStream rode securely on the floor beside the bed to prevent tipping. It was easy to relocate them to our generous benchtop space at each stop.

We carried a portable toilet, but did not need it. What proved indispensable were two portable travel urination bottles — one a She Wee with a cup attachment. They required no chemicals, could be emptied into standard toilets, washed out easily, and were invaluable overnight and in emergencies. Honestly — essential kit.

We considered installing air conditioning before leaving home, but, being a pop-top, a rooftop air conditioner was not recommended, as it would add at least 32 kg to the weight when lifting the roof.

We checked average temperatures along our planned route and discovered we would have passed through northern WA, NT, and Queensland before temperatures there soared. This turned out to be more good luck than good planning, given that the timing of our family holiday created the perfect weather window for the rest of our trip.

We installed two Sirocco multi-directional ceiling fans and took an additional portable fan. This proved to be an excellent decision and would have been a perfect solution except that we struck car problems in Queensland and had to spend 16 days waiting for repairs.

We later decided to install an under-bed air conditioner before travelling to Lightning Ridge, as we were expecting temperatures in the high 30s. Unfortunately, the installer located the outlet vents too low, so the cooling effect was far less effective than it should have been.

We had our caravan fully serviced before leaving home and completed both the RAC WA Tow Safe (two-hour) and Tow Safe Advanced (four-hour) courses. These sessions were invaluable. The courses are designed to enhance your knowledge and explore topics that help keep you and other road users safe. Facilitated by caravan experts at Driver Risk Management, the workshop comprises 1.5 hours of theory and 2.5 hours of practical training using your own caravan.

If you learn only one technical thing before towing, let it be weights.

Tow vehicle manufacturers specify:

- Towing capacity
- Kerb weight (KW)
- Tare weight
- Tow ball mass (TBM)
- Gross vehicle mass (GVM)
- Gross combination mass (GCM)

From these, you calculate payload and legal towing limits. Overloading doesn't just risk fines; it compromises braking, stability, steering, and emergency response. At some point, you will need to brake hard or swerve suddenly. Incorrect loading in those moments can turn a scare into a disaster.

Most vehicles have a compliance stamp inside a door frame with tow ratings, and full details appear in the owner's manual. When researching online, always include the exact make, model, and variant; specifications vary more than most people realise.

We had limited space to park our caravan at home when not in use, so we installed a Purpleline motorised caravan mover with remote control to overcome the challenge of manoeuvring it into a tight space. The mover proved invaluable on the road as well when setting up in confined sites. It sat quite low behind the caravan's wheels, making it unwise to travel over rough terrain. This suited us perfectly, as our plan was to stick to main roads as much as possible.

Our Car

A reliable tow vehicle can make or break any trip.

Ours was a 2018 Isuzu MU-X with under 100,000 kilometres on the clock, always serviced and meticulously maintained. Yet in the month before our departure, it went into limp mode twice. Suddenly, the

vehicle felt as though the brakes were slowing the car, limiting speed to no more than 80 km/h. RAC inspections found nothing.

Two days into the trip, it happened again and required towing, caravan and all, into Exmouth. Still, no fault was found.

This happened six times before Isuzu diagnostics in Cairns finally identified a failing turbocharger. By then, the psychological toll had already been paid. Every remote stretch came with a quiet question: *'Will it happen again?'* This was stress we could have done without. However, until the fault became clear enough for diagnosis, nothing could be fixed.

The lesson? Even well-maintained vehicles can fail unexpectedly. Build contingency time into your plans, not just kilometres.

Dash Cam

Having a dash cam fitted to our car gave us peace of mind. Luckily, we never needed it for any tragic event, although we had a couple of close shaves.

Fuel Consumption

Because we travelled mostly on main roads, we were always able to fill with diesel before each leg and never ran low. Fuel anxiety is avoidable through simple discipline.

Food shopping along the way

Shopping for food is straightforward in most parts of Australia, so it makes sense to pack only a limited amount of essentials before leaving, as you can replenish supplies as and when needed. There is no need to carry excessive quantities of food unless you are travelling into genuinely remote areas.

How long should we go for?

This was a big question. Initially, we thought six months, but when we

started researching all the places that interested us and planning our stops (including five weeks in Tasmania) we realised it wouldn't be long enough to see the rest of this very big country. Nine months felt about right for us.

We excluded the following locations from this trip, but would highly recommend they be included in any Lap of Oz, if you haven't already been there:

1. The south-west of Western Australia, because we already knew it well, from Esperance to Augusta and up to Kalbarri, plus many inland towns towards Albany. There are many remarkable sights to be seen here, including the beautiful WA wildflowers. These parts of WA should definitely not be skipped from your own trip.
2. We lived in Brisbane for a couple of years and previously explored between the Gold Coast and the Whitsundays. This is another magical part of Queensland and is well worth a visit.
3. We have visited Sydney several times over the years, including a trip to the Blue Mountains. This is a spectacular part of Australia, and we highly recommend including it in your Lap of Oz.

What should we do with our home while we're away?

When we suggested renting our home for 9 months, our property manager advised that tenants generally prefer 12-month leases. After much discussion, we decided to rent it out for a full year. That gave us both income security and time flexibility, should we want to linger somewhere longer than planned.

What we did not anticipate were some of the financial implications for pensioners.

We knew that rental income (after expenses) is assessed as income by Centrelink. If your home is rented for more than 12 months, its value is

also counted as an asset, a double impact on pension entitlements. Furthermore, because we weren't living in our home on 1 July (we returned mid-July), we lost our pensioner concessions for land and water rates for a full financial year and had to pay land tax.

None of this is to say, '*don't do it*', but rather, understand it first. Rules vary by state, but these are exactly the kinds of hidden costs that can quietly reshape a travel budget.

We arrived home two months prior to the expiration of the lease on our home, so we joined two different house-sitting sites where people advertised for someone to look after their house and pets while they were on holidays. It was a system that worked very well for us for those two months as we had free accommodation in return for caring for their homes and animals while they were away.

Budgeting on the Road

We created a rough budget before departure and were pleasantly surprised by its accuracy. Unexpected costs that did arise, most notably vehicle repairs and air conditioning, were manageable as we had been generous with other estimations. In hindsight, allowing for a buffer was one of the most important financial decisions we made.

We allowed approximately \$65,000 for the journey, which included our living expenses, many of which we would have incurred even if we had stayed in Perth. Many meals were eaten out; many were cooked in the caravan. Fuel was a significant variable expense, fluctuating significantly depending on location and distance between towns. Caravan Park fees also varied widely, from modest country parks to premium coastal locations. Laundry, attractions and unplanned excursions added to the tally, but because we had built flexibility into all estimates, surprise expenses were manageable.

Overall, we found that long-term caravan travel was far more affordable than we had anticipated. More importantly, it allowed us to live comfortably while experiencing parts of Australia we might otherwise never have seen.

Our budget looked something like this:

Depart Perth	4/07/2024
Return to Perth	24/04/2025
Days away	294
Weeks away	42
Overall kilometres	37,000
Kilometres/litre	8
Average price of diesel/ litre	\$2.00
Total cost of diesel	\$9,250.00
Car repairs and servicing	\$4,000.00
Caravan repairs and servicing	\$1,000.00
Camping/night	\$55.00
Accommodation cost	\$16,170.00
Food @ \$60/day (\$420/week)	\$17,640.00
Entertainment/excursions	\$10,000.00
Prepaid excursions	\$4,000.00
Miscellaneous	\$3,000.00
Total cost of trip	\$65,060.00

What can't you plan for?

A couple of months prior to our departure date, I contracted COVID, then a couple of weeks later, I woke one morning with a case of shingles. I had just had my second shingles vaccination the week prior – talk about bad timing! Annoyingly, these illnesses slowed me down while preparing for our holiday. My shingles rash was relatively mild, but I was still suffering from intense nerve pain on the day of our departure. No amount of planning could have foreseen my illnesses prior to leaving, but we agreed that there was no way we were going to miss our family holiday, or our extended adventure around Australia. We had been planning it for too long.... so off we went on 4 July 2024.

Other things no amount of planning could have prevented included car trouble, road closures, weather events, unexpected delays and health issues for Lee. Yet even those felt minor compared with what unfolded for our dear friends in Cobram during the Victorian bushfires of January 2026.

They had five minutes to evacuate their home, grabbing photos and important documents as they jumped into two separate vehicles to escape the fire. Direct water bombing of their home, combined with firefighters' efforts and a bulldozer, saved the house. Their large shed survived, but their garden, trees, garage, two other cars, office building, and rotunda were all destroyed. Somehow, although damaged, the pool itself remained intact enough for firefighters to use to cool down once the house was safe! On its way to the property, the fire truck was surrounded by flames and was saved only by aerial intervention. Without it, the firefighters themselves would not be here today. Their bravery and the service they provide cannot be overstated.

Losing your home to a fire is devastating, and when it happens to someone you love, the impact deepens immeasurably.

It also reinforced something essential: flexibility is not optional when travelling long-term; it is a must.

One major frustration was Google Maps. For the most part, the App worked fine; however, there were times when we were taken on incorrect routes, or 'shortcuts', that proved to be corrugated dirt roads that violently shook us, the car, and the caravan. Sometimes the road began smoothly enough, but then, many kilometres into the drive, it deteriorated to the point that a three-and-a-half-hour trip turned into six hours because we had to proceed so slowly. Sometimes it took us on a completely random route, around in circles, or onto a track that was impassable. Keeping an old-fashioned, up-to-date road map in the car (rather than the caravan) would have provided a more reliable solution, especially when there was no internet connection.

PART 2 – LIFE ON THE ROAD

The Reality of Day-to-Day Caravan Life

Long-term travel is a balance of wonder and weariness.

Australia astonished us again and again. Gorges carved into ancient rock. Waterfalls tumbling into hidden basins; beaches stretching endlessly, soft sand underfoot; rugged coastlines that stole our breath away; forests, deserts, wetlands, and plains, sometimes within the same week. The scale and diversity of this country are nothing short of extraordinary.

The most challenging aspect for us was the red dust. We know that some people love it, but we did not.

We had booked our Spirit of Tasmania ferry crossing for 14 November 2024, so our plans up to that date needed to accommodate arriving in Geelong on time. However, spending sixteen unexpected days in Queensland waiting for our car to be repaired forced us to adjust our travel plans between there and Geelong so that we could meet that deadline.

Once in Tasmania, we followed a tight schedule to see and do everything we had planned and still return to Devonport by 22 December. Keeping to such a hectic timetable proved exhausting, and by the time we reached Cobram in Victoria, we were in desperate need of downtime.

We relished the opportunity to spend almost six weeks resting and recovering there. Long journeys are not just about covering kilometres; you also need to consider your energy levels. And sometimes the most important destination is stillness.

Travel can also have a significant impact on health. For anyone planning their own Lap of Oz, it's essential to consider your existing health conditions in your travel plans, as well as any new ones that

may arise. We are incredibly fortunate to live in a country with excellent medical facilities nationwide — something that enabled us to fulfil our dream of exploring Australia for almost 10 months, despite needing medical attention along the way.

Long periods of sitting (whether driving or as a passenger) aggravated Lee's already compromised back. He visited the emergency departments of three different hospitals on this trip, and while nothing structural was found (good news), no immediate solution was available for the pain he was experiencing.

Prolonged sitting also carries other risks. Lee developed venous ulcers after six months on the road, a reminder that long-distance travel tests more than just vehicles.

We have included these experiences to show that, with a little extra care, thoughtful attention to health, and a willingness to slow down when needed, ill health does not have to prevent you from undertaking your own journey. Seeking medical advice and allowing extra recovery time proved to be a practical, highly manageable strategy for us – particularly for Lee.

His message to others who can relate to his experience is simple: be aware of your health and have a plan to deal with your own issues while travelling, but don't let it become an excuse that stops you from enjoying the trip of a lifetime. Go prepared.

Medication on the road required careful planning. We arranged a six-month supply of prescriptions before departure. When refills were needed, our GP kindly offered phone consultations and sent electronic scripts to our phones, allowing us to fill them at pharmacies wherever we happened to be. Without this system, things would have quickly become complicated.

We have been married for over 50 years and have spent extended periods together, travelling for months at a stretch, working side by side for 19 years, and living closely – so, being in each other's company around the clock wasn't entirely new. Still, caravan life magnifies

everything. Being together 24/7 in a caravan leaves very little room to escape one another! Disagreements are inevitable. The key, we found, was creating small personal spaces: AirPods, separate entertainment choices, quiet corners, moments alone. We travelled with a TV and a Netflix subscription, invaluable during rest days and rainy afternoons.

Modern connectivity made this journey far easier than past long trips we have taken. FaceTime with children and grandchildren softened the distances immeasurably.

Caravan Parks and Free Camps

As mentioned previously, we required 240-volt power for our stopovers, so we stayed almost exclusively in caravan parks. Some were exceptional, some adequate, and some truly awful. Fellow travellers who were self-sufficient frequently chose free camps.

Comfort, independence, and power availability are a three-way negotiation. Knowing which you prioritise will shape your entire trip.

PART 3 – LESSONS FROM THE ROAD

Mistakes We Made

We initially loaded up with too much food, which was entirely unnecessary as there are shops all around Australia.

Another lesson learned the hard way was that although our caravan tyres had plenty of tread and looked and felt fine, they were not. It was not obvious that the spare had already perished, and the two already on the caravan were of a similar age. All caravan tyres should have been replaced before leaving Perth. That oversight nearly resulted in disaster when we later experienced a blowout on a dangerous bend, a chilling reminder that visual checks alone are not enough. Replace aged tyres before you leave, even when they look fine.

What We'd Do Differently

After long reflection, we came to the conclusion that there is nothing we regret doing, and there's nothing we would do differently, except perhaps change the tyres on the caravan before leaving and pack less food... but we wouldn't change a moment of the trip!

Is This Trip Worth It?

Absolutely. There are so many remarkable places to see. Many will take your breath away and leave you in awe. There are also wonderful people to meet along the way.

Australian Silo Art Trail

We stumbled upon some of the magnificent artwork dotted around the countryside, but if you want to make sure you don't miss any of them on your own trip, you can get hold of the free Silo Art Australia app and find them all [HERE](#):

PART 4 – TIPS FOR FUTURE TRAVELLERS

What You Need to Consider Taking

(The things you don't realise you'll need, until you really, really do)

Long-term caravan travel isn't difficult, but it is different. The learning curve is steep at the start, and then, almost imperceptibly, it becomes second nature. What follows is not a glossy checklist copied from a brochure. This is the collection of items and lessons that proved themselves repeatedly over our 10 months on the road, often in moments when comfort, safety, or sanity depended on having the right thing within arm's reach.

Some of these items were lifesavers. Others were simply quiet, daily conveniences that made life smoother and far more enjoyable. All of them earned their place.

Battery charger

We carried a battery charger so we could keep our caravan's 12V system topped up whenever we had access to 240V power. This ensured we never lost lighting, fridge operation, or the remote-control system for the caravan mover. This was particularly valuable on the two occasions we had to free camp unexpectedly.

It's one of those things you hope you'll never need, until the day you absolutely do.

Blocks of Wood (Levelling and Emergencies)

We carried:

- One large block (approx. 280 x 260 x 190 mm) made by Lee
- Two smaller blocks (approx. 220 x 120 x 100 mm), and
- Two timber lengths (approx. 900mm x 100 x 30 mm).

These proved indispensable. Whether levelling on uneven ground, placing under the jack on soft soil, or compensating for a sloping site, the variety gave us flexibility and control.

The blocks also saved us when our jockey wheel failed, and there was no caravan repairer nearby. Those humble blocks supported our drawbar throughout our stay, a perfect example of why it was so important to have them on the road.

Caravan Water Filter

We drink a lot of water, and Australia's water quality varies widely by region. A caravan water filter ensured safe, clean-tasting drinking water everywhere we went, from coastal caravan parks to inland outposts. Once you've used one, you won't travel without it.

Drain Hose Extension

Our standard drain hose was 10 metres long, and yet it was not always long enough. Some sites position taps and drains on opposite sides, or behind hedges and barriers. We carried an additional 3-metre drain hose extension that slid neatly inside the original. This saved frustration and awkward site rearrangements more times than we could count.

Drill and Bits

We carried a battery-operated drill, multiple bits, a charger and two spare batteries. It was used for far more than just screws, including our portable blower, which used the same battery system.

Between stabilisers, awnings, pegs, minor repairs, and emergency improvisations, the drill became one of our most-used tools.

First Aid Kit

An up-to-date, well-stocked first aid kit is non-negotiable. Ours lived in the car, not the caravan, so it was always accessible. Thankfully, we never needed snake-bite kits or burn treatments, but insect repellent

and sunburn cream were daily essentials. Australia doesn't forgive complacency in the outdoors.

Fire

Every caravan should carry:

- Smoke or heat alarm
- Fire blanket, and
- Fire extinguisher (minimum: dry chemical powder ABE) mounted securely in your caravan.

An ABE extinguisher covers:

A — ordinary combustibles (wood, paper, fabrics, and many plastics)

B — flammable liquids (fuel, oils, paints)

E — electrical fires (home appliances, computers).

Fire emergencies are rare, but when they occur, seconds matter. This is safety equipment you hope never to use, but that you absolutely must have.

Fridge Level Indicator

Caravan fridges work best when level, but prolonged off-level operation can reduce their reliability over time.

We placed a small circular spirit level on top of the freezer door so that each time we set up, we could instantly check and adjust using levelling ramps or the jack. A tiny item with a significant long-term impact.

Fridge – Portable

Our EvaKool portable fridge/freezer lived in the car and stored drinks, fruit, vegetables, and overflow food. It also allowed us to carry chilled items on long travel days without repeatedly opening the caravan fridge, helping preserve temperature stability.

Fuses

Carry spare fuses for both your car and caravan – check for the exact types used in your systems. Electrical faults are often simple, and a fuse might just prevent a major inconvenience.

Hard Ground Drill-in Peg Set

Some campsites feel like concrete. Without drill-in pegs and a drill to install them, securing your awning or annexe could become an impossibly difficult task. This kit allowed us to set up confidently, regardless of terrain, especially in arid, rocky regions.

Head Fly Nets

We found these useful on many bushwalks and invaluable along the Great Australian Bight. Without exaggeration, they made the difference between enjoyment and misery. They can usually be purchased locally when needed, but having them already packed saved both money and discomfort.

Head Torches

A hands-free head torch is essential when setting up in fading light, checking under the van, managing power leads, or navigating unfamiliar campground amenities. Once you use one, you'll never want to go back to handheld torches.

Jack

Our jack had a three-piece handle, but we only used the end that goes into the jack and attached our drill to the other end, making it much easier to raise and lower the jack quickly. Sometimes, when the jack was too short, we placed it on top of the wooden blocks to raise it.

Not all jacks are created equal; ease of use matters when you're tired, on uneven ground, or working alone.

Levellers for Caravan

We used our plastic caravan levellers a few times, but generally found the jack easier and quicker to use.

Levelling the Caravan

Our friends John and Pat, who have travelled extensively around Australia, shared a simple and effective method for quickly levelling the caravan freezer, which we first tested in our driveway. We attached a small circular level to the top of the freezer door permanently and left it in place. If we thought another location offered a more convenient view while levelling up on a site, we could have moved it there.

For sites that were very unlevel, we used the jack under the frame on the low side of the caravan. To prevent the jack from sinking into the ground, we first placed a plywood plank measuring approximately 600 x 300 x 20 mm on the ground under the jack. If the jack was too short, we added a block of wood between the plywood plank and the jack.

Before leaving home, Lee built a sturdy portable box that he could easily carry and manoeuvre into place. This box was one of the most useful tools on our trip; it was used often and provided sturdy support for our jack when levelling our caravan. From a piece of treated pine timber 1.8 m long x 190mm wide x 35mm thick, Lee made a four-sided box measuring approximately 280 x 250 x 190mm, and cut another piece of timber to fit inside as a centre support. He then cut two more pieces of timber for the top of the two open ends to create a completely enclosed box. Using 50-60mm galvanised screws, he secured the centre support, the top, and the bottom into place, creating what appeared to be a very solid block of wood. A photo of the finished box is included with the many photos of our trip.

Important note: Once the caravan is jacked up and the bubble is in the middle of the circle level, you can then lower the caravan stabilisers to stop any movement. However, when leaving the site, the stabilisers must be fully retracted before lowering the jack, as failure to do so risks damaging the stabilisers.

Occy Straps

Very versatile, elastic bungee cord with hooks on each end, and very convenient for so many different situations when something needs to be secured.

Portable Battery Air Compressor

We carried a battery-powered compressor that clamped directly to the car battery and checked tyre pressures weekly for both car and caravan. Correct tyre pressure significantly improves tyre life, fuel efficiency and safety. It also gives you peace of mind when travelling long distances between service stations.

Power Cord, 15 amp

Our power lead was 10.5 metres, and occasionally too short. One time, we needed a longer one, but all that was available was a 20-metre option. Ideally, 15 metres would have been perfect. If in doubt, longer is better. Excess cord can be looped, but a shortage cannot be fixed.

Recovery Tracks

We took these with us, but did not need them because we chose to stay on main roads as much as possible. If you intend to venture off-road, these bog mats could be a lifeline.

Ropes – extra

These are lightweight, compact, endlessly useful and came into play more often than expected when things needed to be secured.

Satellite/internet connection

We considered Starlink Roam, a portable satellite internet service designed for travellers and campers who visit remote places, but the high monthly cost at the time (and even higher now), was difficult to justify. You can check it out **HERE** to see if this option suits your

needs. Instead: Lee used Telstra, and I used Optus.

Telstra generally offers broader coverage, but both networks have large gaps, even in places where people live and work. The further off the main highways you travel, the more likely you are to lose signal. This was another reason we mostly stayed on sealed roads and in serviced caravan parks.

To explore their coverage maps, click the links for: [Telstra](#) and [Optus](#) and [Vodafone](#)

Sewing Kit

Ours included:

- Multiple coloured cottons
- Needles (various sizes)
- Threader
- Pins
- Small sharp scissors
- Buttons
- Measuring tape
- Seam ripper
- Thimble
- Safety pins (various sizes).

All of it fitted into a small plastic container and proved invaluable when I needed to make repairs, removing the need to find someone to do it for me.

Shovel (collapsible)

We took one of these with us, but never experienced an emergency that required its use because we stayed on main roads and serviced areas. Still, in remote or off-grid travel, a shovel could be essential for recovery, drainage or even emergency sanitation.

Stabilisers (and Drill Adapter)

Our stabilisers are designed to support our caravan, not to level it, so we often used our jack to level it.

Before leaving Perth, our friend John welded a socket (that fitted onto the nut of the caravan stabilisers) onto one end of a 900 mm steel rod. The other end of the rod fitted into the drill chuck and tightened, making raising and lowering the stabilisers fast, easy, and far kinder on the body than winding them by hand.

Tap Connectors

Always carry spares. We accidentally left several of our connectors attached to taps during the trip, and replacements are not always available in small towns.

Tarpaulin (Emergency Use)

We carried an extra tarp for wind or rain emergencies, but thankfully never needed it. Still, it provided peace of mind as it would have been useful for ground cover, leaks, or unexpected storms.

Tool Kit

Lee's tool kit saw regular use and comprised:

- Adjustable clamps (x 3)
- Adjustable multigrips
- Adjustable spanners (small and large)
- Allen keys set
- Box of different-sized screws, nuts and bolts
- Caulking gun and tubes (mastic and silicone)
- Electronic lighter
- Gaffer tape
- Hacksaw
- Hammer
- Leather gloves or similar – two sets

- Long-nose pliers
- Lubricant spray
- Metal files
- Oil container – small, 3-in-1 (from Bunnings)
- Pliers
- Pop rivet gun and assorted rivets
- Power Tech jump starter and power bank
- Rubber mallet
- Safety glasses
- Scissors
- Screwdrivers – a set of Phillips-head and a set of flat-heads
- Selleys Ezy Glide
- Side wire cutters
- Socket set – large
- Stanley knife
- Steel rod about 900 mm long (specially made), with a socket welded to one end that fits onto the nut connected to the caravan stabilisers.
- Thread tape
- Triton stubby socket set
- Wire brush.

This toolkit allowed us to solve countless minor issues ourselves, from rattles and leaks to loose fittings and roadside improvisations, avoiding unnecessary delays and costly repairs.

Two-Way Radio

We didn't carry one, but many fellow travellers did and found them useful for chatting with other caravanners and communicating with truck drivers about overtaking conditions.

If you travel in convoys or remote areas, this becomes far more valuable.

Tyre Repair Kit

One of the cheapest and best forms of insurance you can buy.

We didn't have one and discovered the hard way how useful this kit is. Our punctured tyre was plugged in Cooma on 27 February by a good Samaritan we called Saint Tony, and more than a year later, it's still holding perfectly. That tiny kit prevented a major delay and potentially unsafe roadside situation.

Water Supply Hose and Hose Connectors

Water taps are sometimes not as close as you expect. Our hose was eight metres long, extended to 10 metres including the water filter, but still occasionally fell short. We recommend carrying at least an additional three metres of spare hose, plus extra hose connectors.

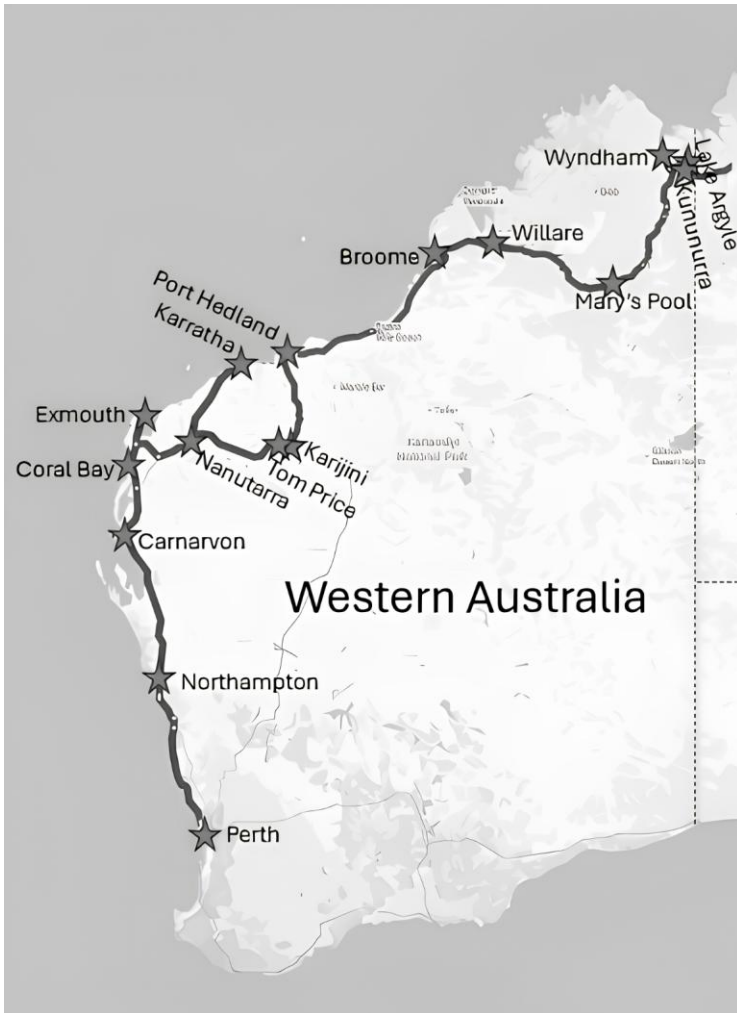
Wheel Chocks

Used in front and behind the caravan wheels whenever stationary, they are essential for safety during unhitching and stabilising, and for general peace of mind.

To view photos of our round leveller used on top of the freezer, the jack, the rod used to raise and lower the stabilisers, and the block of wood, click [HERE](#) and select **"Tools"**.

PART 5 – TRAVEL HIGHLIGHTS – STATE BY STATE

From PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA – heading north



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

4 July 2024 – Perth to Northampton, WA: 19°C

Our journey finally began on 4 July 2024, much later in the day than planned, and with a slight sense of frenzy as there never seemed to be enough time to do everything before leaving.

Planning, packing, checking everything, and making sure the house was clean and ready for our tenants was truly exhausting. By the time we reached Northbrook Farmstead just past Northampton, darkness had settled in. The long day ended on a joyful note as our son-in-law Shaun and grandchildren Joshua and Elise jumped for joy when we finally arrived, and our daughter Onnika captured that moment during a magnificent sunset. It was a beautiful way to capture our first night on the road.

5 July 2024 – Northampton to Carnarvon, WA: 22°C

The following day, we all headed further north to Carnarvon, where a forgotten confirmation of our booking turned into unexpected good fortune. We landed the best site in the Summerstar Caravan Park, right beside the amenities block, effectively giving us an ensuite at our caravan door. Despite the foot traffic, earplugs worked wonders. Shaun, efficient as ever, had confirmed their booking and were parked a short distance away from us.

6 July 2024 – Carnarvon to Coral Bay to Exmouth, WA: 22°C

We called into Coral Bay but were quickly overwhelmed by the crowds and congestion. We drove past the busy caravan park and into a tight dead-end near the beach, which tested our reversing skills, but we eventually escaped unscathed and headed towards Exmouth.

About 80 km short of town, disaster struck when the car suddenly lost power and refused to accelerate beyond 80 km/h. This had happened twice in Perth before we left on the trip, but when tested, the RAC were unable to find the fault. We later learned this is called limp mode. We

pulled over and waited more than two hours for the RAC. Our car was loaded onto a truck with the caravan towed behind, and we joined our family in Exmouth late on a Friday night, with no vehicle for the weekend.

7–12 July 2024 – Exmouth, WA: 21°C

On Monday, after a full diagnostic, we were once again told there was nothing wrong with the car. *‘Just drive it’*, they said. *‘We can tow you again’*, they said. Honestly, if it happened in the middle of nowhere, that was not a very comforting thought.

Despite the slow start to our holiday, the time in Exmouth with our family was very special. We explored canyons, watched sunrises and a sunset from the lighthouse, visited Pebble Beach and snorkelled at Turquoise Bay. While all that was lovely, Lakeside stole the show, where stingrays and turtles glided astonishingly close to us in the water. Termite mounds lined the roads everywhere we went, silent monuments to the outback.

Although my shingles rash had disappeared, the severe nerve pain lingered, sometimes disrupting my ability to participate in activities. One morning, while everyone headed to the beach, I lay in tears on the bed until our daughter, Onnika, suggested I wear my compression garment under my bathers. This made a significant difference, and thanks to her insight, I was able to join the family on the beach.

13 July 2024 – Exmouth to Nanutarra, WA: 28°C

We left the family in Exmouth and headed inland, stopping at Nanutarra Roadhouse, an oasis in the middle of nowhere, on our way to Tom Price.

14 July 2024 – Nanutarra to Karratha and back: 28°C

Engrossed in chatting, we missed the turn-off to Tom Price. After driving for some time, we realised our mistake.

Google Maps showed that it was the same distance to continue to Karratha and then travel through Millstream-Chichester National Park to Tom Price, so we decided to keep going. We were pleased to fill up with cheaper fuel in Karratha, but a local warned us that the road through the national park was badly corrugated and unsuitable for towing a caravan.

Devastating news. It meant turning around and returning to Nanutarra for the night. After eight hours of driving, that night delivered another challenge. The only campsite left in Nanutarra was very small, with a large tree on the edge and a low branch overhanging the site. This combination, together with fading light, resulted in damage to the caravan roof clip and a van wedged between posts and the offending tree. Enter the good Samaritans. With calm problem-solving and teamwork, they helped us manoeuvre out safely. The roadhouse refunded our site fee, and we spent the night behind the facilities in an improvised 'free camp', where Lee repaired the damage using his newly acquired panel-beating skills.

15 July 2024 – Nanutarra to Tom Price, WA: 26°C

We left early the next morning, this time making absolutely certain we did not miss the turn off to Tom Price. This was our base for exploring Karijini National Park for the next couple of days.

16 July 2024 – Tom Price: Hamersley and Weano Gorges, WA: 26°C

The drive to Hamersley Gorge introduced us to bone-rattling red dirt roads, but the gorge itself was breathtaking and well worth the effort. Weano Gorge offered beauty at the start, though the long walk out was less inspiring.

17 July 2024 – Tom Price: Joffre, Kalamina and Dales Gorges, WA: 25°C

We set off early and found the entrance to Joffre Gorge was through the Eco Retreat, followed by a walk along a dirt track. Descending the

steep Class 4 metal steps into the gorge was easily managed thanks to the handrails. Backwards worked best for us! We were completely alone at first, which was a serene experience. Lee tackled the Class 5 rock climb to reach the far end, while I marvelled at the sheer scale and silence of this extraordinary place from the safety of the Class 4 track.

Next, we headed towards Dales Gorge, but the road was closed, so we went to Kalamina Gorge, which turned out to be a wonderful surprise. Although far more challenging than we had expected, the one-hour-twenty-minute trek to the end was consistently stunning. We made the journey back and ended up at a small waterfall. After such a long day, the shower that night felt especially well-earned.

18-21 July 2024 – Tom Price to Port Hedland, WA: 26°C

From Tom Price, we travelled to Discovery Caravan Park in Port Hedland, where our son Blair greeted us with great enthusiasm. He and his co-workers live there in chalets right next to the beach, a beautiful location for them all when they are away from home and family. That night, the three of us went to Rays restaurant in Port Hedland, where we enjoyed an exceptional meal on a lovely, warm night.

The next day, Blair took us sightseeing around town, including the port, the salt fields and the rugged coastline. When the tide was out, it was interesting to see the vast expanse of exposed sand, dotted with puddles.

The following morning, Blair had arranged for us to spend the day with him aboard the tugboat he worked on. After putting on the required safety gear, we boarded a small transfer boat that took us out to the tug. Blair gave us a full tour, and it quickly became apparent that our sea legs were almost non-existent. We always kept one hand on a rail or wall while the crew moved around with the easy confidence of people who had never considered the possibility of falling. We were invited onto the bridge with the skipper while they assisted a large ship

into port. It was fascinating to see the precision and teamwork involved, and it gave us a whole new appreciation for the team's work and the skill required to safely manoeuvre vessels of enormous size. Seeing our son in his work environment was very rewarding for us, and a privilege to spend that time with him.

As Blair had no job booked for the next day, we extended our stay in Port Hedland and went to the Dome for breakfast. From there, we were fortunate to witness some tugs bringing in a large ship right opposite. It was a front-row seat to watch them in full operation, reinforcing how integral tug crews are to port life. For those who don't have a son who can take them on a personal tour on a working tug, this is a pretty good second best.

Before we left home, our family had gifted us a chocolate map of Australia so we could eat our way around the country! It felt entirely fitting to share our first chunk of chocolate with Blair in Port Hedland, so the section from Perth to Port Hedland was demolished and shared between the three of us.

22-25 July 2024 – Port Hedland to Broome, WA: 31°C

We continued north but had to skip Eighty Mile Beach due to the sandy access track. Because the motorised mover sits low behind the caravan wheels, it could have been damaged by the sand. It was a timely reminder that not every iconic destination is suitable for all rigs. We overnighted instead at Stanley Rest Area, where there were toilets but no power. This meant we had to carefully ration our power, opening the fridge only when necessary and not using the freezer at all.

Arriving in Broome during the Staircase to the Moon was pure luck, as this only happens two to three days a month from March to October. As the full moon rose above the horizon, its glowing reflection formed beautiful shimmering steps across the water. Market stalls buzzed along the foreshore, creating a joyful atmosphere. For dinner, we enjoyed pizza perched on a rock in the middle of all the activity.

The pool at the Vacation Village Caravan Park looked inviting but was

surprisingly cold. We walked along the Town Jetty and later visited Cable Beach at sunset, although we didn't see any camels being led along the sand while we were there.

From Broome, we took a scenic flight over the Horizontal Falls and the Dampier Peninsula, including Cygnet Bay, Cape Leveque, and James Price Point. Although we would have loved to see things up close, our pilot, Tom, was extraordinarily knowledgeable and provided excellent commentary. The spectacular scenery really was an unforgettable experience.

26 July 2024 – Broome to Willare, WA: 30°C

What was intended as a simple overnight stop turned out to be a very pleasant surprise. We arrived early to secure a spot, as caravans were packed tightly around a large, central, grassed area. A sprinkler sat in the middle of the lawn and caught us by surprise more than once!

The pool water was cold, but I enjoyed a quick swim before dinner. We were lucky to arrive on barbeque night in the outdoor dining area, and the food was exceptional. Willare is a working cattle station, and there was no shortage of meat to choose from, accompanied by generous salads. It was hearty, delicious food and a welcome break from cooking.

27-29 July 2024 – Willare to Kununurra, WA: 29°C

The long drive to Kununurra took us through Fitzroy Crossing, where we stopped for fuel and found metal bars protecting the pumps and the entry to the graffiti-covered Coles Express building. It was confronting.

We stopped overnight at Mary's Pool Rest area, a free camp shared with roaming cattle. It's a lovely spot, but there is no power. When we reached Kununurra the next day, we discovered some of our frozen food had started defrosting and had to be thrown out. These are the realities of long-distance remote travel when you need power and can't check into a serviced caravan park.

The changing landscapes were extraordinary, including a burn-off that reached right up to the roadside. As we approached Kununurra, the scenery was spectacular. Hidden Valley Caravan Park was dated and clearly in need of maintenance, but it had green grass sites, which we appreciated. It sits next to Kelly's Knob Lookout, which we explored via a rock-strewn track reminiscent of Karijini.

A visit to the Stonecraft Gallery is a must, surrounded by mango trees laden with fruit. Unfortunately, it is no longer financially viable to harvest the fruit, so it is left to rot. Inside, we saw amazing carvings made from the four local stone types unique to Kununurra, formed over billions of years: Zebra Stone, Okapi Stone, Ranford Ribbon Stone, and Astronomite. Some of the carvings were extraordinary, including crocodiles, eagles, and fine jewellery. There were large, magnificent carvings of a crocodile and eagle priced at \$12,000 each.

30 July 2024 – Day Trip from Kununurra to Wyndham, WA: 32°C

On the way to Wyndham, we stopped at The Grotto. Lee felt compelled to climb down to the bottom and back up again. We were amazed to see trees, including boabs, that grew improbably from the rocks.

Wyndham features a 'Big Croc' sculpture and the largest boab not in the wild, which truly is a monster. The view from the Five Rivers Lookout was spectacular, and we were thrilled to spot a Little Rock Wallaby near the car park.

Later, back in Kununurra, we visited Celebrity Tree Park with its manicured lawns and trees planted by notable Australians. We ended the day with a walk through the very impressive Mini Bungle Bungles in Mirima National Park near our caravan park — well worth the visit.

31 July 2024 – Day Trip from Kununurra to Lake Argyle, WA: 31°C

We booked a 10.00 am cruise on Lake Argyle, and the drive there took us through rugged, stunning red rocky hills, making it hard for Lee to

keep his eyes on the road. The lake is one of the world's largest man-made bodies of water, with a dam wall that is a great engineering feat: almost 100 m high, and built from earth, then covered with rocks, making it somewhat flexible as it is built on a fault line.

We saw many freshwater crocodiles close to the shore. Compared with their big saltwater cousins, they are quite small, so they would probably snap their jaws if they took a bite of someone and tried to do a death roll. We were reassured that freshwater crocodiles are not interested in eating people as they prefer fish. Knowing there were crocodiles in the water, getting off the boat for a swim in Lake Argyle felt both brave and surreal. It was an exhilarating experience as the crew tossed cans of beer into the water beside swimmers, which popped to the surface. Keeping the water out of the can while swimming was a bit of a challenge, even with a pool noodle. The lake was 24.5°C, cold by my standards, but it was still awesome in the water. This was now my third cold swim on this trip, and I was being conditioned to enjoy it. A Black-necked Stork (known as a Jabiru) sitting on its nest on top of a rock in the middle of the water was quite safe from predators. On the way back, we stopped at the bridge to watch the water being released from the dam.

1–2 August 2024 – Kununurra to Lake Argyle, WA, and Rest Day: 33°C

We returned to Lake Argyle to visit Durack Homestead, again passing through magnificent scenery, including one striking hill that Lee christened Bum Rock, for obvious reasons.

Originally, the home was built in 1894 using quartzite blocks and crushed termite mounds as mortar. Durack Homestead now serves as a museum documenting the pioneer history of the northwest. Reading about their early life on the land and the years-long cattle-droving journeys was awe-inspiring.

When the lake was built in 1970, it filled with water much faster than expected, threatening to submerge the homestead. A decision was

made to relocate it to its current location. Each stone block was individually numbered so the building could be dismantled and rebuilt on higher ground exactly as it had stood. What a job that would have been, and a testament to the determination of those who valued its history.

Despite enjoying our explorations, we needed a day to catch up on washing and shopping, and to get a bit of a rest.

3-4 August 2024 – Kununurra to Bungle Bungles, WA: 33°C

We had an exciting day planned and were looking forward to our flight to the Bungle Bungles. A small bus collected us from the caravan park and drove us to the airport. Flying over the striped beehive formations was awe-inspiring, but walking amongst them was even more impressive. The sheer scale of Cathedral Gorge defies description, and its grandeur must be experienced to be understood. The dark bands on the formations of the Bungle Bungles are algae, while the orange bands are iron oxide. Termite mounds are everywhere, even on top of the formations.

We paused for an unexpectedly refined lunch at midday, with metal cutlery and cloth napkins for the salad, quiche, assorted nuts and seeds, a cake and fruit juice. Our exploration of the Bungle Bungles was certainly one of the highlights of our trip.

That night, Lee suffered a severe back spasm that had been building for weeks. The pain was intense and frightening. The following morning, we visited the Kununurra Emergency Department and were impressed by the quality of care. The doctor recommended further imaging, but, being a Sunday, that was not possible in Kununurra, so Lee agreed to have it done when we reached Darwin. The rest of the day was spent taking things quietly.

NORTHERN TERRITORY



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

5–6 August 2024 – Kununurra, WA to Katherine, NT: 31°C

It was a long day of driving and took us almost six hours to reach Katherine.

The next morning, we attended the Katherine Outback Adventure Show. Tom Curtain and his team delivered a remarkable performance, demonstrating how they work with horses by understanding their psychology rather than overpowering them. The trust between horse and handler was genuinely moving.

Growing up on a farm, I loved watching our kelpie dogs work for my father, rounding up sheep, so it was a real treat for me when Tom Curtain's Border Collies rounded up cattle with such precision and control. The dogs are even used to train horses to accept loads on their backs, starting with dogs, then progressing to goats, and finally calves that cannot keep up during droving. The coordination and patience required for this work were most impressive.

Later, we visited Edith Falls in Nitmiluk National Park and tackled the Class 4 Leliyn track to a freshwater swimming pool. The climb was demanding in the heat, but the reward was worth every step. Swimming in the cool water was invigorating, and pool noodles proved invaluable for floating and enjoying the tranquillity.

The walk back to the car park felt never-ending. Exhaustion became our enemy, reinforcing the importance of pacing yourself on hot days, even for walks that seem manageable on paper.

Back in Katherine, we finished the day with a soak at the Katherine Hot Springs. Floating along with the gentle current in warm water was deeply relaxing. Unfortunately, Lee had a few warning twinges in his back while swimming there and wisely chose to get out early. Pushing through pain is something he has done often during his life, but he has now come to realise that listening to his body has become increasingly essential. The next day was a rest day for Lee.

7–9 August 2024 – Katherine to Darwin, NT: 31°C

On arriving in Darwin at the Oasis Tourist Park, we ceremoniously broke off another piece of chocolate from our map of Australia. Although it was smaller than expected, it was still satisfying to mark our progress.

Our first priority the next morning was medical. Lee visited a doctor, followed by an MRI on his knee and an X-ray on his back. Thankfully, accessing diagnostic services in Darwin was relatively straightforward, and phone consultations allowed us to continue travelling while awaiting results.

We purchased a Hop-on Hop-off bus ticket, which proved an excellent way to explore the city without worrying about parking. The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory were fascinating and worth the visit, particularly for its Cyclone Tracy exhibition. It clearly showed the terror and destruction the people of Darwin would have endured during that devastating weather disaster.

We also visited Crocosaurus Cove, where the size of some of the saltwater crocodiles was very confronting. Watching people lowered into the water in a Perspex cage, for an up close and personal experience with ‘Willy’ the croc, at a cost of \$195, was entertaining enough for us from the safety of dry land. Sometimes watching is the smarter option.

That evening, we met our friend Darren McCallum at the Darwin Sailing Club in Fannie Bay for a drink and watched the famous sunset. As we chatted, we mentioned plans to visit Litchfield National Park and skip Kakadu, based on advice we had heard. Darren, having recently participated in a Northern Territory Government photo shoot in Kakadu, saw some amazing sights and strongly encouraged us to reconsider. We decided to investigate further while in Litchfield. He also recommended that we hop on the Adelaide River Croc Jumping Tour, about 45 minutes from our caravan park.

10 August 2024 – Darwin, NT: 32°C

In the wilderness at the Adelaide River Croc Jumping Tour, around 50 to 60 of us boarded two small boats and were given very clear instructions: do not touch the rails, not even with a finger. The crocs interpret dangling body parts as an invitation.

The tour was delivered in spectacular fashion. Crocodiles of all sizes leapt from the water for chicken carcasses, the smaller ones quickly retreating when the dominant males arrived. Their raw power and speed were astonishing.

We met Dominator, the five-metre crocodile who rules that stretch of river. Brutus, his predecessor, now lives further upstream in retirement. Estimated at around six metres and possibly over 100 years old, Brutus lost a leg to a bull shark and many teeth to old age. It was a stark reminder that survival in the wild comes at a cost.

The river is also home to hundreds of bull sharks, another fact that quietly reinforces why swimming in Northern Territory rivers is never a good idea.

11 August 2024 – Darwin to Batchelor, NT: 33°C

This was our shortest relocation day yet. On arrival in Batchelor, the campground owner welcomed us warmly and, since we had booked three nights, promised to make us dumplings that evening. What a lovely gesture, and one that made us feel genuinely looked after.

We needed a quiet rest day, so we headed to the local shop for essentials. Supplies were limited; only stale white bread was available, as deliveries arrived once a week. We bought a loaf for toast, and together with a small tub of vanilla ice cream, the total was \$18. Remote travel quickly teaches you to rely on your pantry and to adjust your expectations around food availability and its cost.

12 August 2024 – Day Trip from Batchelor to Litchfield National Park, NT: 33°C

We spent the day exploring Litchfield National Park, starting with Wangi Falls. The setting was so picturesque, and swimming beneath the waterfall felt exhilarating. Standing under the pounding water was an unforgettable sensation.

Tolmer Falls was next. Swimming is not permitted, and while the falls themselves were not particularly impressive from the viewing platform, capturing a photo of a dragonfly hovering in front of the cascade made the stop worthwhile.

Florence Falls was a standout. We walked along a scenic track through lush greenery to reach the waterhole. Two waterfalls feed the pool, and I swam under both several times. This was one of those unforgettable moments.

Bluey Rockholes was last. It is a fast-flowing stream with multiple pools linked by slippery rocks. Lee got farther upstream than I could. We had left our pool noodles behind, and I quickly realised my legs, and perhaps my confidence, were not quite up to it. The current was strong, and a pool noodle would have been extremely helpful and so much more relaxing.

On the way back to Batchelor, we stopped at the Magnetic Termite Mounds. They are carefully oriented north–south to minimise sun exposure and are lined up, looking very much like gravestones. It was very interesting to see how termite mound shapes vary across regions.

13–14 August 2024 – Batchelor NT: 34°C

We spoke with several travellers who had just returned from Kakadu. They reported very dry conditions and said that had they known beforehand, they likely would not have gone. While Kakadu offers spectacular seasonal events, such as crocodiles waiting for fish during tidal changes at Cahills Crossing, the distance would have meant a 600 km round trip and an overnight stay.

We decided against it. Remote travel constantly involves weighing effort against reward, and sometimes the best decision is knowing when not to go. This felt like one of those times.

Travelling through the Northern Territory continued to highlight just how spoiled we are with Western Australia's road quality. The narrow NT roads are noticeably rougher, with endless patched areas, potholes, and uneven surfaces.

What surprised us most was the 130 km/h speed limit in the NT. Given the state of the roads and the presence of unrestrained livestock, it seemed completely reckless to allow such a high speed limit. This belief was reinforced by the sight of numerous smashed cars and bent or broken guideposts along the roadsides. They were silent reminders that road conditions in the NT demand drivers' constant attention.

We returned to Katherine to restock supplies and were delighted to find a pre-cooked roast pork with crackling at the local Woolworths. Dinner was roast pork, air-fried vegetables, gravy, and apple sauce – simple, comforting, and delicious. Our caravan felt better than a Michelin-star restaurant that night.

15–17 August 2024 – Katherine to Mataranka, Elsey National Park, NT: 30°C

We headed to Mataranka and Bitter Springs, full of anticipation as we had heard so much about these swimming places. On check-in at Territory Manor Campground, we were handed a roll of toilet paper. Apparently, locals regularly steal it from the amenities! This small inconvenience became surprisingly disruptive, as we repeatedly forgot to take the roll with us and had to turn back mid-walk.

The campground was home to peahens and a peacock, all wandering freely. Lee was far less impressed when one left an unwelcome deposit on our groundsheet near his chair. His gag reflex went into overdrive and nearly took over completely.

Before checking in, we had thought this was the campground adjacent to the hot springs, but it turned out to be the wrong one. I am not sure why, but this was the only campground I found at Mataranka when checking on WikiCamps. Fortunately, it was only a short drive to Bitter Springs and Mataranka Hot Springs.

At Mataranka Hot Springs, we were met by a peacock who, unfortunately, was more interested in looking for food than showing off his tail feathers. We walked from the car park, past the Mataranka Homestead and along the path through the trees, to the swimming hole where the water temperature was around 34°C. We simply floated on our pool noodles and let the gentle current carry us along, which was pure bliss.

Bitter Springs is much more rustic, and on the first run, we collected a few minor bumps from rocks and branches while learning how to navigate the flow.

The experience quickly became addictive: float down, walk back, repeat. Bitter Springs is natural and shaded, while Mataranka Springs, developed during World War II, is set among beautiful trees and has been immaculately maintained. Both are exceptional, and together they make this area a must-stop for travellers.

There are many very tall, towering and fluted shapes of Cathedral Termite Mounds scattered around, constructed from a blend of soil, plant material, and termite saliva/feces. They are impressive structures that can stand for over 50 years. We stopped by the Giant Termite Mound in the centre of town without realising that it was man-made as it looked so real.

That evening, we watched Nathan 'Mr Whippy' Griggs perform his whip-cracking show. He is a five-time Guinness World Record holder for whip-cracking, and his skills were impressive, but what stood out most was how effortlessly he engaged the children, cracking whips in time to songs they chose. Their delight was infectious, and the show was simply wonderful.

18 August 2024 – Mataranka to Daly Waters NT: 34°C

We passed through Larrimah without stopping and barely caught sight of the historic hotel. Our destination was Daly Waters Inn — chosen largely for its grassed sites, a luxury in the NT where red dust was ever-present.

We visited the Daly Waters Pub, famous for its eclectic memorabilia, including bras hanging from the ceiling above the bar. It is unapologetically ‘ocker’ and proud of it. Dinner in the beer garden was enjoyable, and the atmosphere made it clear why this place is such a well-known stop. A nearby sign summed it up perfectly:

‘Angle Parking – Any Angle Mate!’

19 August 2024 – Daly Waters to Threeways Roadhouse NT: 34°C

This was a short travel day, but the overnight stop left much to be desired. The ground was a mix of patchy grass and red dirt. The amenities block was in extremely poor condition: a strong smell of urine, slow drains, leaking taps, and minimal water flow.

Not all stops are equal, and sometimes you stay simply because it is there, not because it is pleasant. We were more than ready to leave in the morning.

20 August 2024 – Threeways Roadhouse to Barkly Homestead NT: 33°C

We had been warned about the condition of the road between Threeways and Barkly Homestead, and the warnings were accurate. The road alternated between deeply undulating and pothole-ridden stretches, interspersed with frequent roadworks.

The traffic light systems at the roadworks were particularly frustrating. Even when we could see that no vehicles were coming from the opposite direction, we were forced to wait through painfully slow

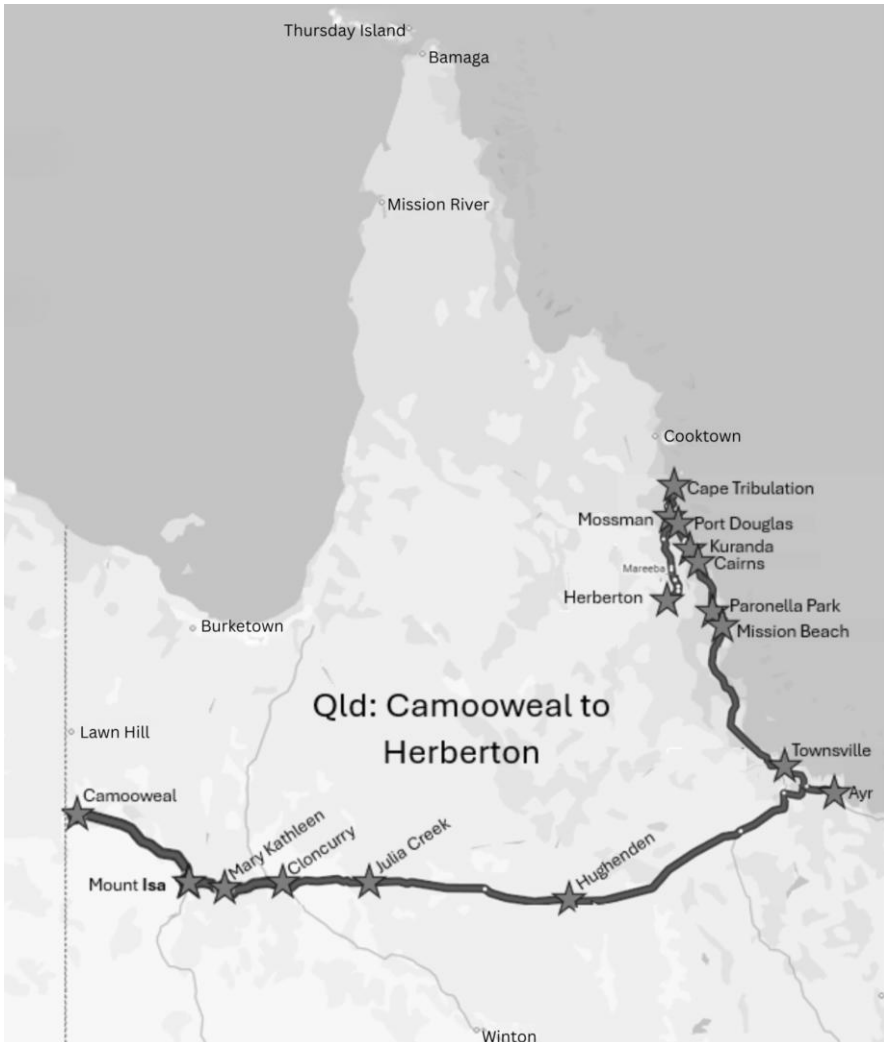
countdowns. It was mentally exhausting and reinforced the need for patience when travelling in this part of the country.

Barkly Homestead was a highlight for us. The facilities were excellent, with drive-through powered sites, a superb restaurant, and impressive range of souvenirs. We learned the homestead had burned down in November 2022 due to an electrical fault and reopened in May 2023. The rebuild was outstanding, with beautifully maintained grounds.

Impressive, large sculptures of goannas stand near the highway, and wire emus mark the caravan park entrance. These were the only emus we had seen to date during this trip.

Sadly, this drive also included some grave sights: dead kangaroos, wallabies, a dingo, a snake, cows, and, most heartbreakingly, a dead horse by the roadside with three other horses standing quietly nearby, heads lowered. It was an emotional moment that reminded us of the realities of life and death in this vast, unfenced country.

QUEENSLAND – heading east from NT, then north



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

21 August 2024 – Barkly Roadhouse NT to Camooweal QLD: 33°C

Crossing the border into Queensland felt momentous. At the border sign, we met another couple taking photos and struck up a brief

conversation. The husband enthusiastically told us about the caves at Camooweal and urged us not to miss them. We noted the recommendation as it was our next stop.

After arriving in Camooweal, we visited the local ‘supermarket’. The quotation marks are intentional. The shopkeeper was unhelpful, the shelves were sparsely stocked, much of the food was close to its use-by date, and the carrots were floppy enough to bend under their own weight. We quickly lost interest and bought only the bare minimum.

Once camp was set up, we followed Google Maps down a dirt track in search of the caves. When the navigation cheerfully announced, ‘*You have arrived*’, all we could see was a rough, narrow track veering off to the left. While the car is technically 4WD capable, we are not particularly adventurous 4WD people. Still, curiosity got the better of us, and we cautiously drove a couple of kilometres along the track before deciding this was beyond our comfort zone.

On the way back, we had to stop and wait while a small group of horses crossed the track in single file, entirely uninterested in us or our timetable. They wandered along and took their time, reinforcing who truly has the right of way out there.

22-23 August 2024 – Mt Isa, QLD: 32°C

Shortly after arriving in Mt Isa, I came down with a dreadful vomiting bug. I was nauseous, weak, and exhausted for days, which put sightseeing firmly on the slow burner.

Despite that, we did manage to visit the peaceful and expansive Lake Moondarra at sunset, and the following day we toured the underground hospital built during World War II, when Japanese bombing of northern Australia was a real threat.

The hospital was dug into shale in the shape of an ‘E’: one wing for men, one for women, and one for a maternity ward. Miners excavated it in just two weeks in their spare time, though it took a further three months to fit out. Thankfully, it was only ever used for emergency drills.

After the war, much of the equipment was left behind in the hospital. The entrances were filled in and the site faded from memory. Some local boys discovered the air shaft, quietly turned it into a cubby house, and used it for years. It was eventually rediscovered when a resident noticed smoke seeping from the ground over several days. A fire had been accidentally lit inside, and, thanks to the termite-proof hardwood supports, it smouldered very slowly. The structure was saved, reinforced, and is now preserved as a museum. It was a very interesting tour that we thoroughly enjoyed.

24 August 2024 – Mary Kathleen, QLD: 33°C

We called into the abandoned uranium mine, Mary Kathleen. The caravan could only be taken partway along the rough track, so we parked it and drove a further seven kilometres along an old bitumen road riddled with potholes.

That eventually became a 4WD-only track, and we had to cross a deep, very rocky, and not particularly confidence-inspiring dry creek bed.

We made it to the car park and assumed we had found the walking track to the mine site. It was rough, grassy, and far from the 'easy 100m path' we had read about. Halfway around, we noticed people strolling comfortably along a beautifully clear path on the opposite side of the site! Oh well, on the bright side, at least we saw the place from every possible angle, though my already nauseous self did not appreciate the extra effort.

The mine's ridges were filled with vivid aqua-blue water, striking and strangely beautiful. It was a wonderful reminder of how nature reclaims industrial scars.

25 August 2024 – Julia Creek, QLD: 34°C

Not long after leaving Mary Kathleen, the car went into limp mode once again. This really was breaking down in the middle of nowhere, just as we had feared. We decided to slowly push on to Cloncurry and pulled up beside a petrol station —strategic positioning, just in case. Lee

disconnected then reconnected the battery. Luckily, the problem disappeared, and we continued to Julia Creek without further incident.

On arrival there, we hesitated. The caravan park looked barren, hot, dry and not particularly inviting. At 34°C, our enthusiasm was low, despite the lack of alternatives. Glowing reviews gave us hope.

The park was busy, and we were allocated 'level' Site 12. It was one of the most unlevel sites we had ever encountered! Levelling the van in the heat proved challenging. The payoff came later: the new amenities block was the best we had experienced since leaving Perth.

To cool off, we visited the pool across the road, included in the cost of our stay. The water was shockingly cold, but extremely effective as we fully recovered from the heat in moments. The park also offers two bookable bath houses with artesian water, housed in tin sheds facing the sunset. They are open at the front, but strictly no peeping allowed! Sadly, they were fully booked.

26 August 2024 – Hughenden, QLD: 32°C

We headed for Hughenden, stopping at Richmond. Kronosaurus Korner greeted us with the tantalising smell of incredible pies, but the café was closed for a private function, despite signage stating it was open seven days a week. Many other travellers were also turned away.

Kronosaurus Korner is Australia's premier marine fossil museum. It showcases nearly 1,150 unique fossil specimens from Richmond in outback Queensland. At \$35 per senior, we decided to skip the museum for now, as we planned to return later on our inland loop.

The road towards Hughenden was relentlessly bumpy, with roller-coaster undulations and uneven repairs to potholes. Hughenden Caravan Park delivered a rare luxury: a dedicated wash bay for caravans and cars. Our first wash since Perth took nearly two hours of hard yakka but was immensely satisfying, especially removing bird droppings from the caravan roof.

An unsettling story emerged during check-in. A week earlier, a car and caravan had been stolen from Site 69 — the very one we had just been allocated. Thieves broke into the caravan during the day, stole spare car keys, returned at night, and drove off, unaware the van was fully connected to the jockey wheel, stabilisers down, and the annexe out. The van was dragged through the park, and the family fortunately managed to escape as the thieves slowed at the exit. The car was recovered, but the caravan was written off, and the family traumatised.

Later, a neighbour warned us about a rat plague moving through Longreach and Winton. In caravan parks, the rats gnaw through anything left outside, including thongs, chairs, mats, and even car cables. We took the warning on board.

27–28 August 2024 – Ayr, QLD: 28°C

Greenery at last. Trees, ranges and water in rivers. It felt almost surreal after weeks of dust and dry riverbeds. We arrived at Burdekin Cascades Caravan Park and were instantly uplifted by the lush grass, towering palms, large trees, and immaculate amenities. We felt like we were in heaven.

Since leaving Perth, we had not seen a drop of rain.

Having officially reached the east coast, we ceremoniously cut into our chocolate map of Australia. It was also our granddaughter Ayla's fifth birthday, so this felt like the right moment to celebrate from afar.

The following day, we explored the area, starting with Alva Beach at low tide and its many puddles, followed by Plantation Park where ibises hoped for dropped lunch, then on to Mt Inkerman Lookout overlooking endless sugarcane flats, and Charlie's Hill WWII radar station that is sadly marked by graffiti.

29 August – 4 September 2024 – Townsville, QLD: 27°C

We arrived early at Riverside Convention Centre Campground, which backed onto a stunning green park along the Ross River. Yes, that Ross

River, infamous for its mosquitoes! We never left the caravan or car without Aerogard insect repellent.

Our portable fridge failed, and Lee's troubleshooting revealed dust clogging the intake. A good clean fixed that problem, but the fridge still would not work. We found a repairer in Bohle Plains, who was miles away, but he was willing to look at it right away. A new transformer allowed him to adapt the connector to fix the problem, and it was good to go again.

The health issues that Lee and I had left home with, persisted, creating changes and delays to our schedule. I was still suffering from shingles pain, so after a phone consultation with my doctor in Perth, I was prescribed a cream which had to be made up by a compounding pharmacist. We found one on the other side of Townsville, but they did not have all the ingredients in stock, so had to order it in. We were told it could take a week.

Lee received the results of his previous scans and was told that his problems could be muscular and caused by driving. This was not something we wanted to hear when we were on the Lap of Oz and about as far from home as we could get. More scans were recommended, but as usual, the wait was more than a week, so he arranged to have them done in Cairns. He soldiered on.

Townsville itself boasts an abundance of lush parks. We drove along The Strand, a two-and-a-half-kilometre promenade lined with Banyan trees, their spectacular aerial roots creating an impressive sight. A beautiful park runs along the foreshore and includes a swimming pool and kids' water playground. On the other side is an array of eateries and shops.

The views over Townsville from the top of Castle Hill were spectacular. We were amazed to see the number of people walking or running up the 286-metre incline in the middle of a warm day.

Next, we stopped at the Tropical Museum, where we were fascinated by the story and artefacts recovered from HMS Pandora, the ship sent

from England to round up all the mutineers from The Bounty. We also saw a model of the Nautilus creature, the ‘living fossils’ that live in Nautilus Shells. This was particularly interesting to us as we have one of these beautiful shells framed and on display at home.

At Pallarenda Park, the mosquitoes found Lee’s B-negative blood irresistible. My O-positive blood? Apparently boring! As soon as we arrived, the mosquitoes called in reinforcements and swarmed around him. We could not swat them quickly enough, so we had to hightail it out of there before he was eaten alive.

We visited the Palmetum Gardens, which are just across the Ross River from the caravan park where we stayed. What a magical place, filled with palm trees, hanging vines, ferns, grass, and greenery everywhere. We stopped for a coffee at the Long Shot Café, which cost \$18 for a coffee and an iced coffee — a bit pricey, we thought.

The caravan was booked in for a service, including bearing replacement and brake adjustment. As one of the indicators needed repairing, we were glad to get this done so that we were good to go for the next 10,000 kilometres.

We caught the SeaLink ferry to Magnetic Island and joined the Maggie Comprehensive Bus Tour. Our guide, Neil, was outstanding. He was very knowledgeable and entertaining. While the island was pretty, we felt it was somewhat overrated, perhaps due to inflated expectations.

On the walk through the butterfly habitat, we saw one large blue Ulysses butterfly, many other beautiful species, two rock wallabies, one of the 8,000 koalas living on the island, and dramatic rock formations.

5–6 September 2024 – Townsville to Mission Beach, QLD: 23°C

Rain at last, with grey skies. The roads were wet, and there was sugarcane as far as the eye could see. The Tully sugarcane chimney stacks emitted white smoke that contrasted with the grey clouds. We had been advised that mothballs installed in the engine bay would

protect the cables from rats, so when in Townsville, Lee had installed a couple of packets. Now we were getting strong, unbearable wafts of the fumes through the car. Unfortunately, we had to put up with this odour to protect our car's cables from those pesky rats.

The rainforest walks at Lacey Creek and Licuala Day Use Area delivered an amazing reward: two cassowary sightings in one day. It was absolutely unforgettable. They are such magnificent birds. On arriving at the Licuala Day Use Area, we met two wildlife officers watching a Cassowary; they had been told of a 'strike' (where a bird had hit a car). Luckily, there was no evidence of injury to this bird, but we wondered if another one was suffering in the forest somewhere.

We drove back to the caravan via the beach, which looked so much nicer on a sunny day, and were lucky to witness an amphibious vehicle go from the car park directly into the ocean, something we had not seen before.

That night, there was a wedding reception at the Tropical Hibiscus Caravan Park, where we were staying for two nights. We had been told about this at check-in, but had not realised it would be held outdoors, about ten paces from our caravan! Thankfully, it was a pleasant surprise. No rowdiness, and the country-and-western singer was particularly good. They wrapped up around 10.30 pm, which seemed entirely reasonable, and we drifted off to sleep without complaint.

7 September 2024 – Mission Beach to Paronella Park, QLD: 24°C

Clearly, we were finally getting the hang of this caravanning life. We slept in until 7.30 am, had breakfast, packed up, and were on the road by 9.00 am. That efficiency meant we were an hour early for our Paronella Park booking, so we decided to head to the Mamu Tropical Skywalk first. Both experiences are bundled together and include a complimentary night at Mena Creek Caravan Park. Such a brilliant bonus with its excellent amenities.

The Mamu Tropical Skywalk delivered exactly what a tropical rainforest should: rain included. Massive trees with sprawling buttress roots compete fiercely for light, racing skyward in a tangled, vertical world. We were lucky enough to see a Wompoo Fruit Dove up close. We first heard a strange call sounding something like ‘*wollak-a-woo*’ — and were astonished to discover such a sound coming from a bird. The view from the tower was spectacular, though the rain meant our photos did not quite capture the magic.

Paronella Park itself is extraordinary. Built in the 1930s by Jose Paronella, a cane cutter from Spain who gradually built a fortune by buying and selling cane farms. It reflects the vision of a man far ahead of his time. In 1933, he planted Kauri pine trees knowing he would never see them fully grown, deliberately planting them for future generations. His dream was to create a world-class tourist attraction, and he succeeded.

Jose had even harnessed the waterfall to generate hydroelectric power for the property, so that the fountains ran purely on gravity and water pressure. It was an astonishing achievement for the 1930s.

A concrete roller originally used to maintain the tennis courts was on display, a reminder of how meticulously the grounds were kept.

Jose died in his early sixties, and the family struggled to maintain it without his guiding hand. Fires, cyclones, and floods also took their toll, reducing it to a shell of its former glory. Sadly, it stood neglected for a time, but new owners purchased the property in 1993 and have focused on maintaining and preserving rather than rebuilding. The original hydroelectric system has been restored, providing all the park's electricity requirements, and the park is now an impressive, beautiful ruin with the fountains restored to their former glory.

We were given food pellets to feed the turtles and fish in the river, where tiny turtle heads popped up expectantly.

The night tour was beautifully done, with lighting that brought atmosphere and life back into the ruins.

8 September 2024 – Kuranda, QLD: 26°C

Well, this day did not go as planned. We reached Palm Cove only to discover the Captain Cook Highway, the only road to Mossman, was closed for the entire day due to a cycling event. With no alternative, we turned around and headed for Kuranda.

What followed was a genuinely nerve-racking drive. It was twelve kilometres of winding, rain-soaked roads with steep drops and tight corners. I chose the Kuranda Rainforest Accommodation Park specifically for its proximity to the Kuranda Butterfly Sanctuary and Birdworld, places we had enjoyed during our 2018 Cairns cruise stop. The Koala Sanctuary was included in the three-attraction pass, suggesting that a koala encounter might be on the cards.

Lee seriously questioned my judgment once we survived that drive. Parts of the road had collapsed into deep valleys, forcing traffic lights to control single-lane sections. My only defence was ignorance! I truly had not known how challenging the drive would be.

The park itself, tucked deep within the rainforest, was old, but so beautiful. We noticed a walking track and planned to explore it later.

After setting up in the rain and having a late lunch, we decided to postpone attractions until the next day. Instead, we visited Barron Falls. On our previous visit in 2018, the river had been a mere trickle. This time, it was flowing strongly and looked magnificent. Along the way, we passed a couple of brush turkeys and a sculpture of a very large ant perched on the walkway railing, which was rather startling.

9 September 2024 – Kuranda, QLD: 29°C

We arrived at the Butterfly Sanctuary 20 minutes before opening.

It was not breeding season for the iconic blue Ulysses butterflies, but many stunning species were still fluttering about, some even settling on me. Most butterflies live only a few weeks, and very few reach a year, knowledge that adds a sense of sadness to watching them.

Next was Birdworld, where we fed exotic birds and admired their colours. A cassowary paced on the other side of the fence, and interesting water birds were kept in a large enclosure. One large red macaw bit Lee on the finger when he tried to feed it, so no second offerings were made.

The Koala Sanctuary was next, home to koalas, freshwater crocodiles, kangaroos, reptiles, and other native animals. Afterwards, we had lunch in Kuranda Village, which was buzzing with tourists.

Later, we walked through the rainforest behind the caravan park, ending at railway tracks beside the Barron River. Being crocodile country, we did not venture too close to the water. On our return, yet another brush turkey wandered through the park.

10 September 2024 – Kuranda to Mossman, QLD: 29°C

We left Kuranda via Mareeba and headed to Mossman for a day of sightseeing at Mossman Gorge, Port Douglas, and Four Mile Beach.

Flood-damaged roads slowed us repeatedly. Traffic lights controlled single lanes with signs reading, ‘changed road conditions’, but the repairs were clearly ongoing. During the drive, the vegetation had become more open. While stopped at traffic lights for more than 10 minutes on one occasion, the smell of mothballs inside the car became unbearable, so we lowered the windows, only to be greeted by the unmistakable aroma of livestock. Faced with the choice, we chose animal poo.

The winding road into Mossman was nearly as challenging as the one into Kuranda. As we approached the coast, the vegetation shifted back to lush tropical greens.

After setting up camp, we visited Mossman Gorge and noticed a large bird’s nest high in a tree. We were warned that snakes sometimes hide in them, waiting for prey. A timely reminder: do not climb trees or stick your hands into birds’ nests in the tropics.

We skipped the one-hour circuit walk, having completed many rainforest walks recently, and instead drove to Port Douglas. We were keen to see what it was like as this was where Lee would most likely have been posted to when working for the Sheraton Hotel in 1987, before we chose instead to return to Perth.

Driving into Port Douglas, we were impressed with the palm-lined avenues and manicured lawns. It certainly had a holiday atmosphere. The golf course lies just across from the Sheraton. Had we moved there, Lee might have improved his handicap — or so he claimed.

Four Mile Beach looked lovely, but warning signs for stingers (especially box jellyfish) and crocodiles made swimming unappealing. We did spot a man towelling himself off, though whether he had been swimming or just using the showers remains a mystery.

11 September 2024 – Day trip Mossman to Cape Tribulation, QLD: 29°C

We drove north to Cape Tribulation, stopping briefly at Daintree Village, which was very quiet, with a few shops and a rather tired caravan park for sale.

The ferry ride across the Daintree River took less than five minutes. Beyond it, flood damage was evident everywhere, with long-term roadworks managing single-lane traffic in many places. We had hoped to stop at Mt Alexandra Lookout, but were waved past, due to ongoing repairs.

Cape Tribulation Beach was beautiful. Tiny crabs dotted the wet sand, their perfectly formed little sand balls decorating the shoreline. We watched one slightly larger crab chase another, briefly locking together before both scuttled off in different directions. Whether it was a fight or a courtship remained unclear.

It felt like such a waste of a stunning beach, as crocodiles made swimming impossible. The water along these northern beaches was unappealing, a murky grey-brown colour, likely from stirred sediment.

12–13 September 2024 – Mossman to Cairns, QLD: 24°C

Lee had another CT scan and MRI in Cairns. His back pain had been causing concerning twinges, different from his usual issues, so further investigation was needed.

The coastal drive was beautiful, with rainforest and ocean side by side, though the sea remained that same murky grey colour.

That night, we stayed at the Tasman Caravan Park, old but immaculately maintained, right by the river. We were told there were no crocodiles in there, and swimming was allowed. We chose not to test that theory.

The next day, we visited Babinda Boulders, where the water flow was disappointingly low. Then we headed to Josephine Falls, which were spectacular. I attempted a swim, but the rocks were dangerously slippery. One grazed shin was enough for me. Lee took one look and declined entirely.

14 September 2024 Fitzroy Island, QLD: 28°C

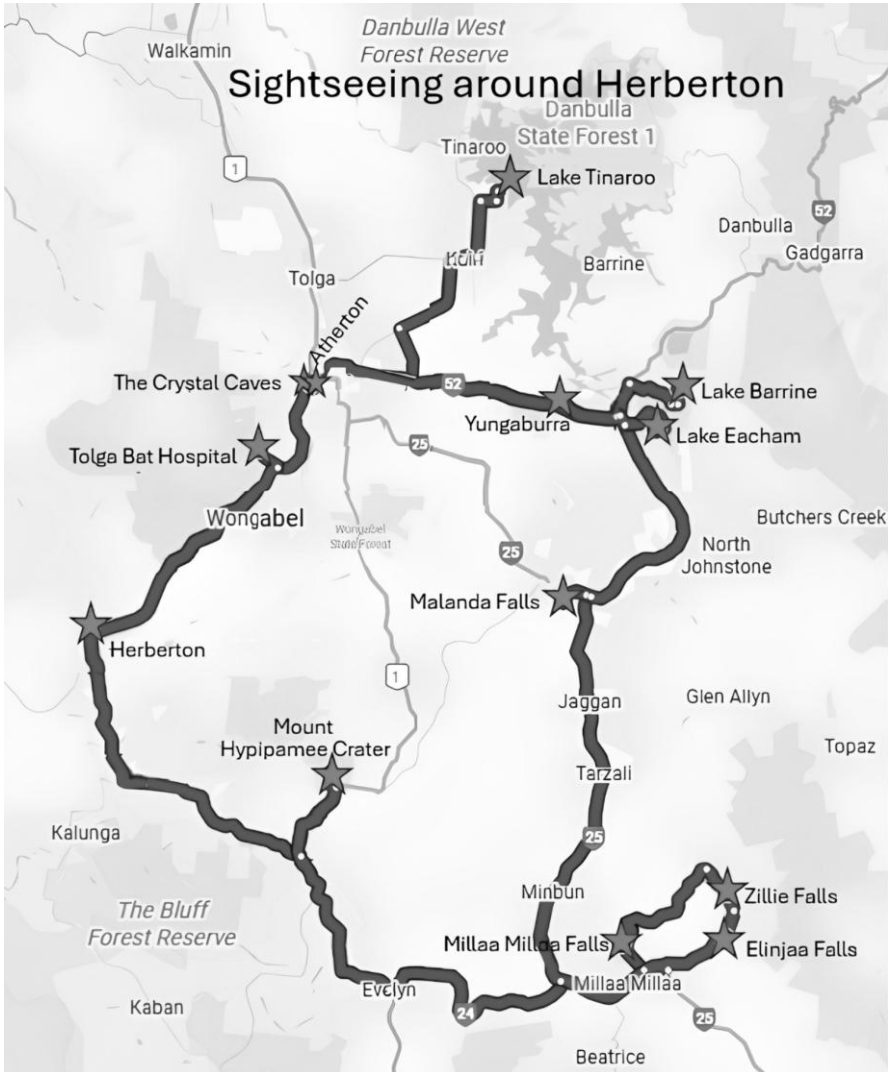
We boarded the Fitzroy Adventure Catamaran under grey skies, but the weather cleared beautifully.

The walk to Nudey Beach — Nudey by name, not nature; clothes remained on — took us far longer than the stated 15 minutes, with rocky steps and an undulating path. The beach itself was covered in sharp coral fragments, and close-to-shore snorkelling was disappointing. Conditions further out were rough, and with Lee's back, we did not want to risk it.

When we walked back to Welcome Bay, where the jetty is, we walked to the other end of the beach, but again, the sharp coral and barnacle-covered rocks were a strong deterrent. I gave up trying to walk over them, but Lee persisted and thought it was worth doing — once! He saw some pretty coral and many fish. We eventually found a better snorkelling spot halfway back towards the moored boats at Welcome

Bay. This time, I made it out into the water and was rewarded with vibrant coral, schools of fish, and a turtle calmly feeding while smaller fish hovered nearby.

QUEENSLAND – sightseeing around Herberton



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

15–30 September 2024 – Herberton, QLD: 28°C

We crossed the Dividing Range via the Gillies Range Road, which included 19 km with an elevation change of 800m and 263 corners. It

was a very long and challenging drive for Lee as he had to focus solely on the road. As the passenger, I was able to admire the stunning landscape with its plentiful ferns and greenery, however peering down the steep drops at the edge of the road was quite confronting from where I was sitting.

Five kilometres from Herberton, the dashboard lit up again and the car dropped into limp mode. With nowhere safe to pull over, we eventually found room across someone's driveway. Disconnecting the battery cleared one warning light, but another light stayed on for a while before disappearing. Luckily, no one needed to use that driveway while we were sorting out our issues.

The camp at Wild River Caravan Park was rustic but clean. We were told that an excellent mechanic operated directly across the road, and people often camped there just to access his services.

Unfortunately, the issue required Isuzu-specific diagnostics. As the fault always cleared temporarily, tests always showed nothing wrong. With the first available appointment in Cairns a week away, it looked as though we were stuck for a while.

Thankfully, if there is a place to be stranded, this was a beautiful one, even though the weather was terrible for sightseeing or getting laundry dry. One fellow traveller who stays there often when visiting his son called it '*mizzle*' — a cross between constant mist and drizzle. He said it is common in June/July, but apparently unusual for this time of year. So, we made the wise decision to stay out of the mizzle by visiting the Crystal Caves in the main street of Atherton.

The caves hold a spectacular collection of Rene Boissevain's 600 crystals and fossils from around the world, including one amethyst crystal weighing 2.5 tonnes, standing 3.27 metres tall, and which cost him US\$120,000 back in 2007. Rose quartz was used to create the brook surrounding its base in the display. The Crystal Caves offer an impressive display, and it was a wonderful way to spend an afternoon.

With the car officially sidelined, we settled into Herberton rather than

fretting about what we could not control. We did, however, purchase an on-board diagnostic tool to record the fault details when it next occurred. Wild River Caravan Park turned out to be a perfect, quiet place to park for a while. It was green and perfectly placed to explore the Tablelands at a slower pace. With hindsight, what first appeared to be a terrible inconvenience became the gift of a slower pace that we really appreciated.

Herberton itself is charming in an unpretentious way. The historic village is well worth a visit, offering a glimpse into early mining life that reminded us just how hard and isolated living there once was. The altitude also brought cooler nights, which made sleeping far more comfortable than the sticky coastal humidity we had grown used to.

We did not want to venture too far from the campground with an unreliable vehicle, but could not stay completely stationary either. We drove 20 minutes to visit the Hypipamee Crater, which involved a short walk on a well-maintained track. Near the start, we came across a couple of young girls, standing still and peering into the bush. We assumed we were in for another cassowary sighting, but no! They were looking for a taipan snake that someone had spotted slithering off the track. One of the girls, wearing sandals and shorts, was understandably terrified of being underdressed to meet a snake! Her friend and we were wearing jeans and sneakers, so we all stomped ahead towards the crater. She followed behind, hoping that our noise and movement would send the snake on its way before she arrived. Hypipamee Crater is an impressive sight: 61 metres wide and 82 metres deep. It is a volcanic pipe with sheer granite walls. The viewing platform sits 58 metres above a lake carpeted in waterweed. It was well worth warding off a snake for.

Google Maps was not in a helpful mood that day and took us around in circles looking for Dinner Falls. We gave up on Dinner Falls and set out to find Millaa Millaa Falls, again following Google Maps. We were directed down another narrow, pothole-filled dirt track that really did not seem like the right way to a popular tourist attraction. Fortunately, we finally arrived, and it was every bit the postcard image, wide and

fast flowing amongst beautiful rainforest. Our next stop was Zillie Falls, which was equally impressive, though walking along the muddy track, littered with rocks and tree roots, was challenging. Proper footwear with good grip was also essential, as the constant drizzle made the tracks slippery and full of puddles to dodge. It reminded us that sometimes, a reasonable level of fitness and agility matters when faced with tracks like this. Fortunately, there were trees close to the edge of the track to hang onto for balance. Ellinjaa Falls was also magnificent, and thankfully, that track was much kinder to our weary legs.

There is something oddly calming about relinquishing a rigid itinerary and allowing circumstances to dictate the pace, and we enjoyed that rhythm.

Finally, the day came to make the almost two-hour return trip to the Isuzu dealership in Cairns for the diagnostic test. We had to be there by 7.30 am for our appointment, so it was a very early start to our day. We had the pleasure of driving the Kuranda Range Road with its twelve kilometres of twists and turns, but it did not seem so hair-raising this time. Perhaps we were getting used to these winding roads!

As luck would have it, seven kilometres from the Isuzu dealership, the car went into limp mode for the sixth time since the problem had begun. We limped there, allowing them to investigate the problem firsthand. A courtesy bus took us into Cairns Central for some retail therapy while we waited for the results. The diagnosis was a faulty turbocharger that caused all our grief. The good news was that it was covered by warranty as it was a known fault. We were stunned to hear the words 'known fault' and struggled to comprehend why it took six breakdowns to determine the problem. The bad news was that the part needed to come from Brisbane, which would take a week.

There was more good news. We were provided with a brand-new Subaru courtesy car while ours was being repaired. The downsides were twofold: if the sales team sold the car before ours was ready, we would have to return it; and the excess was \$5,500 if the car sustained

any damage, whether our fault or not. Ouch! Lee drove very carefully — even more so than usual!

Having really enjoyed the Kuranda village's atmosphere, we stopped there on our way back. We also stopped at the Yungaburra platypus viewing platform in the hope of seeing one, but — no luck. We continued to the amazing Curtain Fig Tree. What an extraordinary sight. The host tree is surrounded by aerial roots, which can be admired from anywhere along the viewing platform.

The next day, we headed off for a 'lakes' day, with the first stop being Malanda Falls. It is very pretty and a great spot for a swim, but it was a little too chilly for us that morning.

A brush turkey came to say hello, and I have since learned this one was a female. The male has a large, bright yellow flap of skin hanging from its neck, while the female has a much more modest yellow ring around her neck.

From there, we headed to Lake Eacham, which is a great spot for families. We completed the three-kilometre circuit around the lake on an even, well-maintained path, and enjoyed the fact that there were no rocks or tree roots to navigate, just the undulations of the track. There were many fascinating plants, trees, vines, roots, and fungi along the way. Though we were quite tired by the end, we found it all very interesting. We spotted some small turtles swimming in the lake. A local watching alongside us mentioned it was a shame that some dill had put a freshwater crocodile in the lake some time ago, and he believed the turtle numbers had declined since then. Apparently, the local council will not remove the crocodile as it poses no threat to humans.

Next, we headed to Lake Barrine, arriving at 2.35 pm, only to find that the tearooms had closed at 2.30 pm. There were still plenty of people inside finishing their meals and drinking coffee, so Lee told the staff that we had come all the way from Perth for their coffee. Unfortunately, his charm failed to impress the young woman who was

already cleaning the coffee machine. Lake Barrine is a stunning place and well worth a visit. They also run boat trips around the lake, which would have been lovely, but we had arrived too late!

Our next stop was Lake Tinaroo Day Use Area, but after all the beautiful sights of Far North Queensland, this one felt underwhelming. The foreshore, however, features some unusually shaped pines.

As we had days to fill in while we waited for our car to be repaired, we decided to make a day trip to Millstream Falls and Innot Hot Springs. The well-maintained path to the lookout over Millstream Falls wound steadily down, down, down. As we descended, we were already thinking of the effort required to get back to the car park. The waterfall was spectacular as it poured over the black rocks, and the walk back up only required a couple of stops to catch our breath and rest our weary legs. It really wasn't as bad as we had feared.

Next stop was Innot Hot Springs. On arrival, we made our way down to the stream near the caravan park and were horrified at the thought of swimming there. It looked green and slimy. We went to the nearby caravan park reception and were relieved to discover that, for \$10 each, they offer six pools fed by hot-spring water. Two are kept at 20-24°C, three are at 32-36°C, and one is hot at around 40°C. We spent a relaxing afternoon rotating between the various temperatures, but avoided the cold ones, which felt closer to 20°C. One of the warm pools was also a spa, which I loved. Lee alternated between the waterfall massage and the one pool with a powerful jet. They both felt wonderful as they pummelled his lower back.

The next day was one to reflect on the universe's lack of cooperation. Lee's driver's licence renewal notice arrived the week before, but every 10 years a new photo is required, and for him, that was 2024. This meant that some very time-consuming form-filling was involved, including the certification of photos and a copy of his current driver's licence and Medicare card. All this then had to be sent via Express Post to Perth.

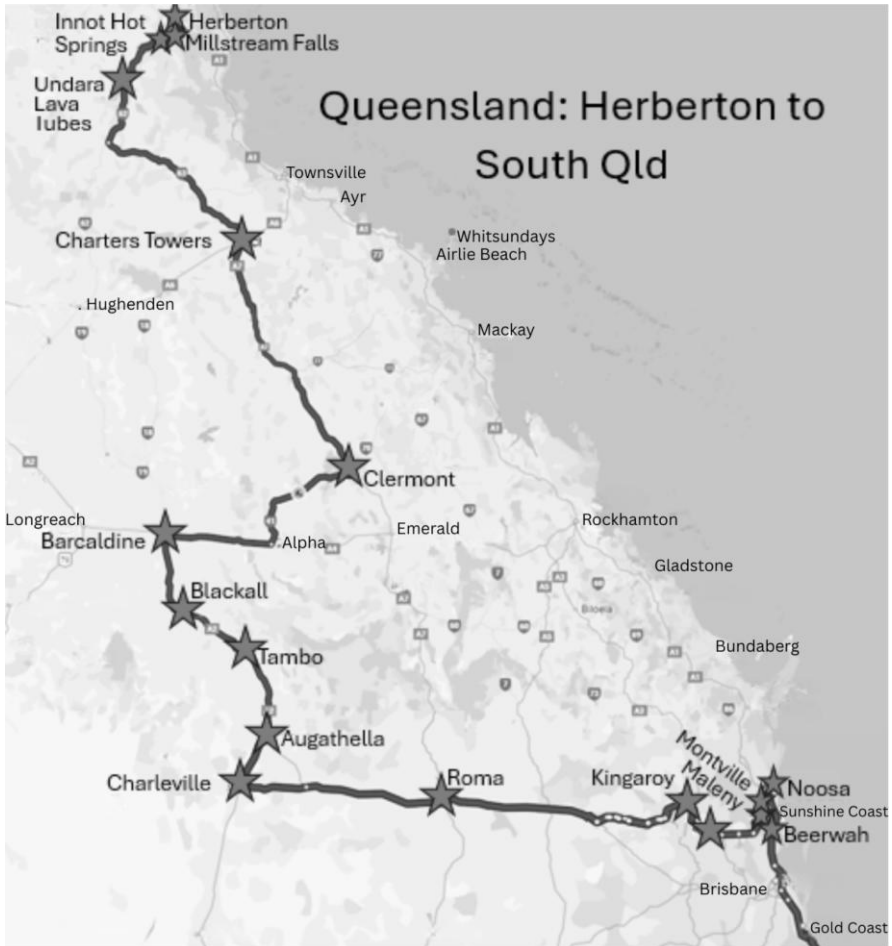
We decided to check out the Bat Hospital near Atherton, the only one of its kind in Australia. Seeing the dedication of volunteers caring for injured flying foxes was both heartwarming and eye-opening. These animals are vital to the ecosystem, yet so often misunderstood. They frequently become tangled in nets or on barbed wire fences, and if their wings get badly damaged, they cannot survive in the wild. Of those brought to the Bat Hospital for treatment, the ones whose wings heal are test-flown, and if they pass, they are released back into the wild. Those whose wings do not heal remain in the hospital. While we were there, three bats that had previously been released returned for a visit and some food. One of them hanging outside the hospital had a baby tucked under her wings. Another bat, also hanging outside, wanted to wee, so it pivoted its head up to do its business, gave a shake, then hung upside down again. We were introduced to a week-old baby, Maree, who was sucking on a dummy and loudly protested when it was removed.

On the last Saturday of the month, Yungaburra, a very quaint little village about 25 minutes from Herberton, holds a market in the centre of town. The markets and their many stalls are well supported by the surrounding community and rank among the best we have ever seen. It was a very pleasant way to spend the morning. We came across a very chirpy lady who confidently told stories about the success of her pain-relief ointment, so we listened. When you are in pain, you are always seeking ways to relieve it, so we purchased some for Lee's back, hoping it would work, but it did not!

We could not resist calling into the Crystal Caves again on our way back to the caravan park, having found the place so fascinating the first time.

Finally, on 30 September, the call we had been waiting for came. The car part had arrived and was ready for collection. When we picked up the car, it felt like being reunited with our old friend before there were warning lights and limp mode events. We really appreciated the smooth, reliable movement again and were keen to restart our journey.

QUEENSLAND – Herberton to South Qld



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

1 October 2024 – Herberton to Undara Volcanic National Park, QLD: 30°C

It felt wonderful to be properly on the move again. The sense of freedom that comes with rolling wheels is hard to overstate.

On the drive to Undara, we encountered yet more roadworks, now a familiar feature of travel in this part of Queensland. For once, we were lucky and caught a green light at the first stop, though our luck did not

hold for the next one.

We passed paddocks dotted with wind turbines and drove alongside an active fire that created dense smoke near the road. It appeared to be a controlled burn, probably part of the Aboriginal mosaic burning practices used in this region, and we were given an escort through. Burning small, strategic patches of grass reduces fuel loads and prevents large-scale bushfires. It is a fascinating and effective land-management technique, and one you see regularly once you know what to look for.

We arrived at Discovery Resort Undara just before the 1.00 pm Archway Tour of the lava tubes was due to start. There was no time for a proper setup, just enough time to plug in power so the fridge and freezer could recover, then a quick dash to join the tour group.

We chose the Archway Tour over the more rugged option because of the easier access, with steps and wooden walkways rather than a scramble over rocks. It was an extraordinary experience. A Bottle Tree stood near the entrance. They are known for their vital water source, traditionally used by Aboriginal people who know how to tap into it. Bottle Trees are native to Australia and are often confused with Boabs, which are native to Africa.

Inside, the lava tubes were immense. The walls and ceilings varied wildly in colour and texture, clearly showing different lava flows that had formed at different times. The scale of it all put the power of nature's engineering on full display.

Wildlife was abundant. At one point, a kangaroo wandered casually through one of the entrances, completely unbothered by our presence. Deep inside the tubes, we saw clusters of microbats clinging to the cave walls. At collapsed entrances, fig trees had taken hold, their roots continuing to grow and spread relentlessly through the lava rock, putting nature's persistence into perspective.

On returning and opening the van, we discovered it was 37°C inside. Opening every window and running the fans helped, but this was the first time on the trip we genuinely felt an air conditioner would have been useful, even if only briefly. We gratefully cooled off in the resort's pool. A trek through the red dirt was required to reach the amenities.

Overnight, however, the temperature dropped enough that we needed a blanket, demonstrating the contrast between day and night temperatures out here.

2 October 2024 – Undara to Charters Towers, QLD: 31°C

We shared the driving as the trip to Charters Towers was a long one, over four and a half hours. Pulling into the BIG4 Caravan Park, we were immediately grateful for a concrete slab rather than red dust and for the good amenities.

Charters Towers is rich in history, with many beautifully preserved old buildings. We briefly considered gold fossicking, but the staff at the Information Centre advised that the area had been thoroughly worked over by tourists, so we took the hint and moved on.

Google Maps then provided what can only be described as a spectacularly bad recommendation. When we searched for 'Charters Towers Lookout', it sent directions to a steep, rough, four-wheel-drive track that frustratingly ended up on a sealed road less than 100 metres from the lookout. Thankfully, our vehicle is four-wheel drive.

Another frustration was that the Information Centre had only warned us not to take a caravan up there. No kidding! On that track, the caravan would have got stuck, had it not already shaken itself apart before then. They also said we would not be able to turn a caravan around at the lookout, despite there being perfectly adequate room in the car park at the end of the sealed road.

We visited the enormous history mural near the shopping centre: 60 metres long, seven metres high, and made up of five million tiles. Nearby stood a mirrored globe of the world and several informative

displays about the town's past. Close by was an old, preserved gold mine site, complete with authentically styled outdoor dunnies — toilets to the uninitiated. We assume/hope they are modern inside.

3 October 2024 – Charters Towers to Clermont, QLD: 31°C

The Gregory Developmental Road was rough, bumpy, and very narrow in places. Roadworks were constant, with long waits at red lights while one side of the road was being repaired. What should have been a four-hour drive stretched out to more than five and a half hours.

Along the roadside, we noticed fluffy wisps of cotton scattered everywhere. Cotton bales are transported wrapped in yellow plastic, but the ends are not sealed, allowing the wind to strip fibres off as trucks barrel along. It is surprisingly widespread.

After a late lunch, we set out to explore Clermont. We were now extremely efficient at setting up camp. Practice really does make a difference on a long trip.

Near Hood's Lagoon, we discovered hundreds of flying foxes roosting in the trees. The noise was overwhelming. We assumed that babies were calling for their mothers, while others were clearly disputing preferred roosting spots. It was chaotic and loud, but an oddly fascinating sight.

We visited the memorial marking the devastating flood of 29 December 1916. The white line on a tree stump at more than twice Lee's height of six foot three, indicated the height the water reached, making the scale of the disaster almost impossible to comprehend. Around 60 to 70 people lost their lives. Aboriginal people had warned settlers not to build the town so low down, but those warnings were ignored, with tragic results.

A visually powerful tribute was that of a replica piano lodged in a tree to commemorate a real piano carried there by the floodwaters.

In town, an interesting train mural depicts the industries of the area.

4 October 2024 – Clermont to Barcaldine, QLD: 31°C

Google Maps truly tested our patience that day. We wanted to travel from Clermont to Barcaldine via Emerald, staying on bitumen roads. It was a four-hour, 31-minute trip according to Google Maps. Instead, it decided a 'shortcut' to Alpha would save us an hour. There was no shortcut! Instead of a three-and-a-half-hour drive via Alpha, we endured six hours, much of it on heavily corrugated, bone-rattling dirt roads with short stretches of narrow sealed surface. Every time we saw bitumen, we celebrated, only to be disappointed moments later.

With no fences, cattle wandered freely across the road, forcing frequent stops. The constant shaking rattled both nerves and the vehicle. We were tense, frustrated, and very relieved when we found a small roadside stop where we made a cup of tea to calm down.

Eventually, we arrived in Barcaldine and passed the iconic Tree of Knowledge, the birthplace of the Australian Labor Party, which was symbolically created beside the railway station.

We checked into Roses 'n Things Caravan Park, a genuine oasis. Lisa greeted us warmly and led us to the only shaded, peaceful drive-through site. The Tea Garden is delightful, complete with a tiny pixie treehouse carved into a trunk. Five-star reviews are rare, but this park deserved every one. We decided to stay and enjoy breakfast in the garden the next morning before heading to Tambo.

5 October 2024 – Barcaldine to Tambo, QLD: 33°C

Unfortunately, breakfast was underwhelming. Bacon and poached eggs arrived in a paper-lined cardboard box, with white toast drenched in butter. Lee deserves credit: he cannot stand butter but managed to eat one slice. Our request for tomato was somehow translated into tomato sauce. The coffee and orange juice, however, were excellent, and scented roses almost made up for the culinary disappointment.

The drive to Tambo was on bitumen, which we were grateful for, but Queensland roads are notoriously undulating, even sealed ones, due

to frequent flooding. We stopped at Big Ram Park in Blackall. The ram sculpture has clearly seen better days, with a horn patched using sticks and grey tape. The machinery on display reflects a bygone era.

We stayed at Tambo Caravan Park, right on the highway. Road trains thundered past, so earplugs were essential. The park itself was lovely, converted over three and a half years from a gravel pit into green, well-kept sites with excellent amenities.

That evening, we caught the courtesy bus to the Royal Carrangarra Hotel for the famous Tambo chicken races that take place seven days a week from April until the end of October at 5.00 pm. Each of the ladies (chickens) is dyed a different colour and auctioned off, with proceeds split between Little Windmills Charity, which helps sick country children, and the winning bidder. A remote-control car loaded with food completes five laps, with the chickens in pursuit. It does not matter whether they follow the car all the way around five times (none do), run partway, or head off in the wrong direction. All that matters is who crosses the finish line first, immediately after the car. We bought Pink Bits for \$40, and she came a close second. Hulk, bought for \$160, won again. The prize was \$227. No prize for second, but the laughter alone was worth it.

6 October 2024 – Tambo to Charleville, QLD: 33°C

We said goodbye to Tambo's green sites and headed west. Passing through Augathella, we admired the colourful silo art and a horse sculpture in the middle of the main street. We also drove past the wall promoting the 1960s film 'Smiley', which was filmed there.

Arriving in Charleville on a Sunday proved unfortunate. We found that travelling sometimes made us lose track of which day it was. Perhaps we needed mats with a weekday marked on them, to be changed daily as they do in elevators on cruises. Most attractions were closed, and we discovered the next day was also a public holiday. That meant no Date Farm, no World War II tour, and no Bilby experience. Even the museum closed ten minutes after we arrived. Not our day!

Rather than wait until Tuesday, we decided to move on towards Roma, keen to get back on schedule after delays caused by the turbo troubles.

7 October 2024 – Charleville to Roma, QLD: 35°C

Back on the bitumen rollercoaster, one caravan flew past us doing well above the 100 km/h we were doing and disappeared into the distance. Later, we hit a particularly severe dip that nearly launched us airborne. Not long after, we saw that same caravan pulled over, liquid pouring from beneath it. A significant reminder for them that speed and rough roads are a dangerous combination.

We braved the heat in Roma and visited the largest Bottle Tree, which was transplanted there in 1927. It was simply majestic, with a girth of 9.62 metres and a height of 15 metres. These trees can live for over 200 years in the wild.

The drive along the Avenue of Heroes was impressive, with 140 Bottle Trees that lined both sides of the street to honour locals who never returned from WWI, each tree bearing its own plaque. We also visited the war memorial and briefly explored the Roma Bush Gardens.

Our campsite at the Roma Gun Club was excellent value at \$25 per night, with good facilities, and its own little Bottle Tree.

8 October 2024 – Roma to Kingaroy, QLD: 32°C

We headed for Kingaroy, the home of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the Queensland Premier who held office from 1968 to 1987. We stopped in Miles for coffee and cake at Creek Café. It was pleasant, but not as fresh as we had hoped. The war memorial was beautifully maintained.

Lunch was in Chinchilla, a vibrant country town famously known as Australia's 'Melon Capital'. It produces roughly a quarter of the nation's watermelons and is home to the Big Watermelon Slice that stands three-metres high and nine-metres wide. From there, we followed back-country bitumen roads Lee aptly described as 'shake,

rattle and roll'. We spotted three emus staring at us from a paddock, likely wondering why anyone would choose these roads. We wondered the same thing. We noticed cactus plants scattered among native vegetation. What an odd sight in the Australian landscape.

We stayed at the Kingaroy Showgrounds and enjoyed the grassy sites and excellent facilities.

9 –12 October 2024 – Kingaroy to Maleny, QLD: 24°C

Our day began at the Kingaroy Information Centre, opposite the massive peanut silos, each capable of storing 5,000 tonnes.

The Information Centre houses the Kingaroy Museum, where we watched an interesting video about the history of peanut farming and processing, then walked through the comprehensive and fascinating display of bygone life. What an impressive museum, covering so much history, so well presented.

A fellow traveller had recommended stopping at the Blackbutt Bakery. As luck would have it, a car pulled out just as we arrived, and we cheekily occupied two parking bays right in front, which allowed us to keep an eye on the caravan while enjoying a meat pie and some very sweet slices. Unfortunately, they were a little too sweet for our taste.

Rain followed us towards the Glasshouse Mountains. At Maleny Showgrounds, we set up quickly and pegged everything down as wind and heavy rain were forecast. The night was wild, with wind rocking the caravan and rain pouring down relentlessly. Due to the bleak weather, the following day's 30-kilometre round trip to Montville was misty and tense, with beautiful scenery hidden behind clouds.

My brother Roger and sister-in-law Jan were doing their own Lap of Oz at the same time, and we all conveniently arrived in Beerwah together. Given the very wet weather, meeting for coffee and a catch-up seemed like a far happier choice than sightseeing on such a miserable day.

Thankfully, the following day dawned clear and sunny, which was perfect for a visit to Australia Zoo. We arrived at 10.00 am, just in time for the daily tortoise talk, then spent the entire day exploring. The gardens are exquisite, the enclosures thoughtfully designed, and the main show in the Crocoseum was outstanding. Robert Irwin and his talented co-presenter, Dave, introduced Bluey the crocodile to a very full house. We spent the entire day at the zoo, as there was so much to see and do. It houses over 1,200 animals from more than 100 different species, and includes Bindi's Island, which is beautifully landscaped. Australia Zoo is well worth a visit. By the end of the day, we had clocked 14,500 steps and were utterly exhausted.

The next day was also beautiful and sunny, so we drove along the Sunshine Coast, starting at Caloundra, then up to Maroochydore, and on to Noosa Heads. Parking in Noosa was chaotic, but persistence paid off. We eventually found a spot and rewarded ourselves with a delicious lunch at Betty's Burgers.

Driving back through the Glasshouse Mountains on a clear day was spectacular. We stopped at Doolong Lookout, then revisited Kondalilla Falls, a place where we had swum with our children 38 years earlier. Some places are worth a second look.

We packed up that evening in preparation for an early getaway the next day.

NEW SOUTH WALES – along the coast

Due to the unexpected car troubles that had set us back by two weeks from our original itinerary, we found ourselves in a race to reach Geelong in time to board the Spirit of Tasmania ferry, a booking we had made a year in advance. Considering the unforeseen delays, we had no choice but to take the most direct route, prioritising speed over sightseeing. This meant sacrificing the chance to explore inland New South Wales and Victoria, which we had initially planned to enjoy. Instead, we headed straight down the coast to ensure we arrived on time.



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

**13–14 October 2024 – Maleny to Noosa, QLD to Ballina, NSW:
22°C**

Rain returned overnight, and we were grateful that we had partially packed up the previous afternoon. Mid-pack the next morning, the rain

bucketed down again, leaving us wading through puddles and sodden grass. The resident ducks were delighted.

We continued south to Ballina, where we planned to spend a few days catching up with Jim and Coleen, old friends from Perth, who now live in a beautiful home on the canal. It is such a picturesque setting, with still water and boats moored or gently travelling along the waterways. It was wonderful to spend time catching up once again.

They took us for a drive through Ballina, stopping for a walk along the Ballina Boardwalk where we watched fish leap from the water while birds hovered above, poised to swoop at just the right moment. Nature's timing was impressive and entertaining.

We then visited several lovely local beaches along the coast, including Lennox Head which is home to world-renowned surf breaks and golden beaches. We stopped in at the Teven Valley Golf Club where Jim is a member. It is a spectacular setting, and the golf course is absolutely magnificent. It was worth visiting for the views alone, even though we did not play a round of golf.

Our stay in the area included a drive through Lismore. Seeing buildings that had been completely submerged during the February 2022 floods made it difficult to comprehend the devastation residents endured. As we stood on the grass below the Lismore Bridge, it was almost impossible to imagine that floodwaters rose 14.4 metres, high enough to cover it. The river now sits far below that level, calm and unassuming, masking the destruction it once caused. It was heartbreaking to think how quickly lives can be turned upside down by natural disasters.

We stopped for lunch in the historic little town of Alstonville and enjoyed what may well have been the best fish and chips of the trip. We also had a good laugh at a clever sign outside a nearby shop that read: *'Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he'll waste hundreds of dollars on equipment he'll only use a few times a year.'* A bit of humour always makes the day better.

15–16 October 2024 – Daytrip from Ballina to Crystal Castle, NSW: 22°C

With Jim and Coleen as guides, we headed to Crystal Castle Shambhala Gardens at Montecollum, a truly remarkable place filled with magnificent gardens, towering bamboo forests, and an extraordinary collection of crystals and geodes of all sizes.

We walked barefoot around the Kora, spinning each prayer drum, which is said to release 1,300 prayers for peace per spin. I sincerely hoped that some of those prayers would reach the many troubled places in the world.

The Kora path is lined with pebbles, and walking barefoot on them was far more challenging than I had expected. My feet were protesting long before the first circuit was finished, and I honestly could not imagine completing the recommended three laps. I was quietly impressed that others managed it without complaint. My feet are clearly not as tolerant of discomfort as others.

The bamboo forest was stunning. The stalks rose high overhead, forming a natural archway that felt almost like walking through a tunnel. This place radiates calm and is absolutely worth a visit for anyone travelling through the area.

On the way home, we stopped at Bangalow, another charming historic village, and enjoyed delicious pies from the bakery for lunch that rounded out the day perfectly.

We started the next day with a visit to Broken Head Beach, where a helicopter was busy transferring equipment between locations. The weather was a little cool, and the beach was quiet, creating a peaceful scene.

On arrival in Byron Bay, we went to the lookout, where we had a fantastic view of the breaking waves, many kayakers, a few surfers, and someone practising on a foil board, with several inevitable falls into the water. We could see across to Wategos Beach, where the

homes are worth around \$10 million each. The rugged coastline between the lookout and Wategos was striking, with trees growing out of rocky cliffs in seemingly impossible places.

We stopped for morning tea at The Pass Café and were joined by some of the local wildlife, who clearly felt entitled to share our table.

After some shopping in Byron Bay, we had lunch, then headed to Wategos Beach for a closer look at the beach and the impressive homes. Our next stop was the Byron Bay Lighthouse, where we visited the museum that offers an interesting historical perspective on the area.

17 October 2024 – Ballina to Nambucca Heads, NSW: 22°C

After three wonderful days enjoying our friends' generous hospitality, it was time to hit the road again. They had suggested we drive through Grafton on our way to Nambucca Heads, which was excellent advice.

Grafton is home to around 1,700 jacaranda trees, planted in the 1880s as part of a beautification project. They were in full bloom, looking spectacular as they lined the streets with vibrant purple blossoms. Timing this visit during jacaranda season was pure luck.

We stopped at Woolgoolga Head and admired the beautiful beach. Three whales were frolicking far out to sea, their splashes just visible in the distance. A local told us that one had been much closer the previous day, repeatedly slapping its tail on the water as it dived. That would have been a wonderful thing to witness up close.

We arrived at the BIG4 Caravan Park in Nambucca Heads, where a short bush track led directly to the beach. It was a pleasant beach, and after a long drive, we were happy to sit quietly on the sand and relax. Sometimes that is exactly what is needed.

18–20 October 2024 – Nambucca Heads to Bulahdelah, NSW: 24°C

We stopped in Bulahdelah for a few days to rest, and the BIG4 Caravan Park there turned out to be one of the best we stayed in. The facilities were exceptional: two pool tables, table tennis, tennis courts, putt-putt golf, a swimming pool, jumping pillow, canoes on the river, stylish lounges, one for kids and one for adults, comfortable covered seating areas, and huge, immaculate bathrooms. The only downside was the shower; the spray was so fine and wide that it was surprisingly difficult to get properly wet. A minor complaint in an otherwise outstanding park.

21 October 2024 – Bulahdelah to Hunter Valley, NSW: 21°C

The drive into the Hunter Valley took us through magnificent scenery dotted with vineyards and wineries. We stopped for lunch at the café next to the Hunter Belle Cheese Room and parked in front of a striking spotted gum tree. Our shared ploughman's lunch for two was very tasty, with fabulous bread, and far more food than we needed.

They had some interesting knick-knacks for sale, including a sign that would be useful in many of the unisex toilets we have had the misfortune to encounter: *'If you sprinkle when you tinkle, please be neat and wipe the seat.'*

We then drove up to Audrey Wilkinson Winery, perched high on a hill overlooking vineyards and dams. The views were spectacular and made the visit worthwhile.

22 October 2024 – Hunter Valley to Umina, NSW: 24°C

Our next stop was Umina, where our son-in-law Shaun is from. We drove in along a very winding road with lovely vegetation lining the sides. Google Maps then led us under a narrow bridge, which appeared suddenly around a corner. Known as the Woy Woy Viaduct, the clearance height was 2.5 metres. With no early warning signs and nowhere to reverse, we would have lost our roof if our caravan had

been any higher. Fortunately, we knew our van was just a little lower than that.

We visited Shaun's mother, Gayleen, who still lives in Umina, and she told us that many caravans and vehicles have come to grief at that spot, often because drivers forget to account for roof air conditioners and the like.

We stayed at the NRMA Caravan Park right next to the beach, a spacious park with excellent facilities, including a jumping pillow, swimming pool, playground, and sheltered BBQ areas. It is particularly well-suited to families.

After lunch, we walked from the caravan park to the beach and were quite impressed, even though the sand was not as white as we are used to in Western Australia.

23 October 2024 – Umina Beach, NSW: 28°C

The weather was beautiful, so we picked up Gayleen and spent the day touring the Central Coast with her as our personal guide. Bouddi National Park was lush and green, McMasters Beach was spectacular, and Avoca's streets were lined with stunning homes. We stopped for morning tea at the Crowne Plaza Terrigal, and enjoyed lemon scones and muffins on the veranda with its magnificent outlook.

The Edogawa Japanese Gardens were a standout. The bushes are meticulously trimmed, and the koi in the ponds are enormous. As they swam beneath the ducks, it looked as though the ducks were walking on top of them. We even witnessed a couple of rather spirited duck arguments.

A relaxing picnic lunch near the Gosford Yacht Club was next, and we finished the day with a walk at Woy Woy Memorial Park, watching pelicans perched on the Fisherman's Wharf roof, patiently waiting for their afternoon feed.

24 October 2024 – Umina to Gerroa, NSW: 18°C

We left Umina at 9.20 am for a five-hour drive to Gerroa. The M1 highway was impressive, carved into the mountains with cliff faces flanking both sides. Road trains struggled uphill but thundered past us on the descents. The nine-kilometre-long North Connex Tunnel seemed endless, and traffic remained heavy despite bypassing Sydney. Lee had to stay extremely alert as he followed navigation instructions to the correct lanes and navigated the traffic.

We took the turn-off to Stanwell, but Google Maps sent us on a loop, then back onto the M1 instead of along the coast to the Sea Cliff Bridge. We stopped for coffee at Altitude 1148, an unplanned but excellent decision, thanks to the incredible views over Thirroul. It was absolutely worth driving down to Thirroul, crossing the Sea Cliff Bridge, then turning around and travelling back over it again. What an engineering marvel! To truly capture its scale, you would need a drone. The weather was cold, grey, and drizzly, but the coastline hinted at what its true beauty would be like on a sunny day.

We were unable to book a caravan park in Kiama, as they were all full due to an arts festival, so we continued south to Gerroa and were grateful to secure the last available site at Seven Mile Beach Caravan Park, right next to the jumping pillow and under a massive Moreton Bay fig tree.

Getting the van into position without hitting the fixed rubbish bins across the road was challenging — one of the downsides of arriving without a booking when a park is full.

25 October 2024 – Day Trip from Gerroa to Kiama, NSW: 19°C



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

We drove back up to Kiama and stopped at the famous Blowhole. The blows were quite regular, sending plumes of water skyward every few minutes. A group of kids stood nearby, screaming with delight every time it happened, which made the experience even more entertaining.

While we were there, Lee decided to research how to pronounce 'Kiama' and discovered we had been saying it wrong all along. It rhymes with 'I am a' — one of those small but satisfying pieces of local knowledge that feels important to get right.

We continued driving around the headland, past the little old harbour and into town. Kiama is very quaint, with a relaxed coastal charm and a real sense of history.

From there, we drove to Bombo Headland and followed a well-kept grassy path along the top of the rocks. The coastline is rugged and dramatic, with the Cathedral Rocks rising sharply from the sea. It was a cool, extremely windy day. At times, we were literally leaning into the gusts to stay upright. We climbed down among the Cathedral Rocks

themselves and watched the waves crash and surge through and around the formations. They are endlessly fascinating, shaped by force over time, and worth exploring up close.

26 October 2024 – Day Trip from Gerroa to Robertson and Berry, NSW: 16°C

Wow! What a day! It began early at 6.30 am with happy children screaming on the jumping pillow right next to our caravan. Not the most restful wake-up call, but it got us up and ready for a full day.

The roads along the loop through Budderoo National Park in the foothills of Saddleback Mountain were narrow, with many winding sections, including hairpin turns as the road climbed up and down through thick greenery. It was a challenging drive for Lee, but he handled it beautifully and got us home safely, leaving only minimal claw marks on the dashboard from me. Not all scenic routes are relaxing ones.

We passed through the quaint town of Jamberoo and continued to the Minnamurra Rainforest. The drive was spectacular; however, we decided not to walk to Minnamurra Falls as the track would have been steep and slippery, taking around two hours to return. Having already completed many rainforest walks on this trip, we opted to continue towards the Illawarra Fly Treetop Walk instead.

On the way, we stopped at Jamberoo Lookout, which offered an incredible view across the landscape. Unfortunately, the cicadas were so loud, they were almost deafening. Conversation was almost impossible.

When we reached the Illawarra Fly, the zipline was closed, and the view from the treetop walk itself was similar to what we had already seen from the lookout. We changed plans and headed to Carrington Falls instead, which turned out to be an excellent decision. The falls are spectacular, tall and powerful, plunging into a beautiful valley below. The 570-metre loop walk, though undulating, was well

maintained and very manageable, and absolutely worth the effort.

By the time we rejoined the highway, it was well past lunchtime, and right on cue, we were greeted by the Robertson Famous Pie Shop. Naturally, we could not resist testing the claim. While the pies were quite tasty, we both agreed that ‘famous’ was probably more a triumph of marketing than merit.

We then crossed the Hampden Bridge, a superb single-lane suspension bridge over the Kangaroo River. Only one car is allowed on the bridge at a time, so traffic coming the other direction had to wait while we crossed.

Google Maps then sent us to Berry via one of its infamous shortcuts. The scenery was stunning. Lee drove white-knuckled along steep, narrow, twisting roads yet again while I got to enjoy the scenery. He did say that he was getting used to these kinds of drives, which is just as well, given that Tasmania awaited us the following month. Berry was beautiful, with pink everywhere in support of the McGrath Foundation.

27 October 2024 – Day Trip from Gerroa to Jervis Bay, NSW: 27°C

After a few cool days, the weather warmed up and was again perfect for sightseeing. We headed south, and our first stop was meant to be the start of Ben’s Walk, a 5.5-kilometre track around the river. Google Maps led us to a rather desolate spot, which did not inspire much enthusiasm. We met another couple who decided to take on the full walk, but after a quick look at the Shoalhaven River, which was very pretty and surrounded by bush, we chose instead to drive to Hanging Rock Lookout at Nowra. We were enjoying lunch there under a huge tree when the other couple eventually walked past. Lee cheekily asked what had taken them so long. They laughed, but their reply confirmed to us that we’d made the right choice for the day.

Hanging Rock Lookout is part of Ben’s Walk, so we explored a section of the track starting from there. This part was much more appealing,

with rocks of all sizes, exposed tree roots, and a suspension bridge crossing the river. It felt adventurous without being overly demanding.

We had hoped to visit the heritage-listed Meroogal House Museum and Bundanon Homestead, the former home and gallery of the artist Arthur Boyd, but unfortunately, both were closed that day.

Next, we headed to Jervis Bay and stopped at the information centre, where Lee bought some lovely shells. The staff were very helpful and explained that, of the hundred-plus beaches in the area, the top three were Collingwood Beach, Chinaman's Beach, and the famous Hyams Beach, though it remains unclear why Hyams is quite so famous.

We thought Chinaman's Beach was the standout. The sand is often described as the whitest in the world, and while it was white and beautiful, we agreed that Western Australian beaches are every bit as white and beautiful. The water, however, is something else entirely — an astonishingly clear turquoise, truly stunning.

28 October 2024 – Gerroa to Moruya Heads, NSW: 18°C

We headed towards Moruya Heads Caravan Park. Along the way, we drove into Lake Conjola, thinking we were heading to a lookout. Instead, we found ourselves at Pattimores Walking Track. Unsure whether the caravan could safely go further, we parked and walked, eventually arriving at the beach, which was a happy accident. A real bonus was spotting a little echidna on the side of the track. It was so endearing and completely unbothered by our presence.

We never did find the lookout, but we could see it in the distance as we drove back to the highway. We continued to Ulladulla and stopped near the wharf before heading to the Warden Head Lighthouse. Unsure whether there would be room to turn around with the caravan, we parked in the overflow area and walked the rest of the way. Ironically, there was plenty of room to turn around, so we took the extra walking as bonus exercise.

The lighthouse itself did not offer much of a view, just open ocean, but

the overflow area provided a better vantage point of the coastline. Another highlight was spotting a pair of fairy-wrens, one blue male and one brown female.

We finally arrived at Moruya Heads Caravan Park, an older park that is very well kept, clean, comfortable, and welcoming.

29 October 2024 – Day Trip from Moruya Heads to Mogo, NSW: 18°C

The day started with a walk to Dolphin Beach, just across the road from the caravan park and along a short track.

From there, we drove to the very quaint little town of Mogo and enjoyed browsing in its unique shops, including a wonderful gallery showcasing the work of talented local artists. There was a fantastic leather shop where everything from saddles to belts, bags, wallets, and shoes is made on site. Lee needed a new belt and found a particularly nice one.

The main street features a beautiful cottage garden, adding to the town's charm. Mogo was heavily affected by the devastating fires in December 2019, which destroyed much of the town. Sadly, many businesses never reopened, which is so heartbreaking for this quaint town.

A duck family crossed our path at one point, strolling along as if they owned the street, completely unconcerned by traffic or people.

We continued to Batemans Bay, where we bought a new stool to replace the one I had left behind at a servo a few days prior. While Lee was filling up the car with diesel, I retrieved the stool from the caravan entrance to use as a step to make it easier to go inside and get some supplies. Meanwhile, the car at the pump in front of us finished filling up and drove off, but a particularly inconsiderate driver could not wait in the queue and reversed in beside that fuel pump, blocking our exit and distracting me enough to forget the stool entirely as I told the driver exactly what I thought of him. Perhaps he was the real winner if he needed a new stool as we drove off without it. Lee had customised

it with fake grass on top, making it quite flash!

On the way back to the caravan park, we stopped at several beaches that were all lovely, though quite similar, and by then we were content to simply enjoy the drive.

30 October 2024 – Moruya Heads to Narooma, NSW: 18°C

Narooma is a stunning part of the NSW coastline. The water is incredibly clean, with beautiful shades of blue and aqua that change with the light.

The golf course perched on a hill overlooking the ocean was quite impressive and offered amazing views of the coastline. Further along is Narooma Surf Beach, where the Glasshouse Rocks rise dramatically from the sand and water at the edge of the headland.

When we walked out onto the groyne, we were met by seals lazing in the water and on the rocks. This is also where Australia Rock is located, and I could not resist climbing out for a special photo.

31 October 2024 – Narooma to Merimbula, NSW: 18°C

It was a very pleasant drive to Merimbula, passing through rolling green hills and the charming historic towns of Central Tilba and Tilba Tilba.

We stopped in Bega to visit the Bega Cheese Factory and Museum, which was surprisingly interesting. Naturally, we sampled the goods, ending up with some delicious Kameruka cheese, available only from Bega. We also tried their milkshakes, scones with jam and cream, and a very rich Baileys cheesecake.

1 November 2024 – Merimbula, NSW: 18°C

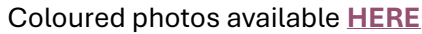
Upon our arrival at Merimbula Lake Holiday Park, we noticed that all the lawns were covered in kangaroo droppings. The kangaroos come out at dusk and can be seen all around the park and surrounding areas.

A drive through Merimbula took us out to Bar Beach, where we found some incredible lava rocks scattered along the shore. Photos do not do the colours justice. The deep reds, greens, and dark tones look almost unreal.

Oyster farms line the centre of Merimbula Lake and are visible from many vantage points. These oysters are highly regarded for their pristine water conditions. Navigating the channel near Bar Beach depends heavily on the tides.

The Bar Café overlooking the lake offered a fabulous lunch and coffee. We were joined at the table by a very tame seagull who sat opposite, clearly hoping to be included.

On our drive to Eden, we stopped at Pambula Beach, which is both scenic and unspoilt. We visited the lookout in Eden, hoping to spot migrating whales with calves, but had no luck.



Near the car park, we noticed dead-looking sticks rising above the surrounding bush. We assumed this area had been affected by the Black Summer bushfires of 2019–2020, with the green vegetation representing new regrowth. It was a quiet but powerful testament to resilience and recovery.

3–6 November 2024 – Mallacoota to Lakes Entrance, VIC: 15°C

We arrived in Lakes Entrance and set up camp at the very pleasant Silver Sands Holiday Park. We planned to stay for a few days and enjoy a touch of luxury, with excellent amenities, a heated bathroom, and even our own washing line. I did have to clear the cobwebs off it before using, but that was a small price to pay.

After lunch, we walked down to the Rotunda on the foreshore to visit the markets, only to discover that most of the stalls were already packing up. The markets had been incorrectly advertised online as running until 3.00 pm, when in fact they finished at 1.00 pm. A little disappointing, but not a total loss as Lee still managed to find a beautiful multicoloured New Zealand Paua shell to add to his collection. The foreshore is a lovely place with lawn, trees and places to sit, as well as a .

Black swans floated peacefully on the lake, drinking from trickles of water running from the retaining wall. On our way back to the caravan park, we passed Big Bears Donuts, which had a long queue out front. Naturally, that piqued our curiosity, so we joined it. The donuts were certainly fancy and very pretty, but we both agreed they were a bit too sweet. Conclusion: We prefer our donuts plain and simple!

The weather warmed up over the next couple of days, and we thoroughly enjoyed relaxing at Lakes Entrance. The town has several interesting little shops, and Lee even found himself happily browsing through them, which was an unusual situation.

There are plenty of fish and chip shops in town, but Wild Catch Fish

and Chips claims to have the best. We decided to test that theory and can happily report that they are absolutely on par with the best fish and chips we have ever had.

From the lookout, the view across the water was stunning. The lake was a vibrant turquoise colour, dotted with boats coming and going.

We took a stroll along the Esplanade and stopped in at the Shell Museum, which was nothing short of amazing. The variety and beauty of shells on display and for sale were extraordinary. Lee was in his element and had an extremely tough time deciding which ones to add to his growing collection.

Continuing along the Esplanade, we came across six World War I memorial sculptures carved by chainsaw artist John Brady in 1998. They were created from the original cypress trees planted as an Avenue of Honour for those who lost their lives in the war. Those chainsaw sculptures are quite remarkable and very moving.

Lee later wandered across the footbridge and discovered a lovely beach just a stone's throw from town, assuming you have a good throwing arm. We were told that Lake Tyers Beach was also worth a visit, so we drove the ten kilometres out there, only to be quite disappointed. I suppose some people simply have not had the luxury of experiencing truly exceptional beaches, and expectations vary accordingly.

7 November 2024 – Lakes Entrance to Moe, VIC: 22°C

We drove inland to Moe, pronounced 'Mo-wee' by the locals, not 'Mow' as Google Maps insists. Mind you, Google Maps also calls the Princes Highway the 'Prance' Highway, which never fails to make us smile.

We stayed at the Moe Gardens Caravan Park for the night before heading to Melbourne the next day. The facilities are very good, though they are located at the back of the park among the long-term residents, making it a bit of a hike for short-term visitors. Still, it is clean and perfectly adequate for a stopover.

8–10 November 2024 – Moe to Springvale, Melbourne, VIC: 19°C

What a welcome to Melbourne: drizzle, cold, and wind, followed briefly by a teasing burst of sunshine. The previous day's drive along the Princes Highway was thankfully uneventful and took only about an hour and a half.

Once we had set up, the heater went on, and we soon felt warm and cosy again. We attended the National Rose Show in Mount Waverley and caught up with members from the WA Rose Society who were also attending. We enjoyed spending time together and admiring the beautiful roses on display. It was a lovely way to spend the day despite the moody weather.

11–12 November 2024 – Melbourne, VIC: 19°C

Our car was booked for a routine \$250 service. Unfortunately, that figure quickly became irrelevant, as the final bill was ten times that amount.

We were told that the car needed new brake discs, brake pads, wheel bearings, and two new tyres. While it was a shock, there was really no choice. Reliable brakes and good tyres are non-negotiable, especially with Tasmania's winding, mountainous roads waiting for us. We now had peace of mind for the next 10,000 kilometres.

Some of the required parts were not available until the next day, so we used the courtesy car to return to the campground, cancelled the caravan service booked for the following day, and stayed an extra night in Melbourne so we could pick up the car in the late afternoon. The caravan had to wait to be serviced in Tasmania.

Travelling had also chewed through the data on my phone, so we bit the bullet and bought a new one. Next came the less enjoyable part of figuring out how to use it. Not fun at all.

13 November 2024 – Melbourne to Geelong, VIC: 19°C

The morning began with steady drizzle. Driving out through Melbourne was an experience in itself, but Lee handled it brilliantly and did not take a single wrong turn. I am not the world's best navigator, which has caused some tense moments during the trip, but for once, I managed very well.

By the time we reached Geelong, the weather had improved, and the day turned out quite dry. We drove past Geelong's AFL ground, which is an imposing sight with its enormous lights towering over the city. We chose to stay at the Tasman Holiday Park as it is less than 25 minutes from the Spirit of Tasmania ferry terminal.

I had to contact Apple again to sort out phone settings. Not being able to reliably access the internet or send messages had become incredibly frustrating.

14 November 2024 – Geelong to Spirit of Tasmania Terminal, VIC: 18°C

It was an early start — up at 5.00 am and at the ferry terminal by about 6.15 am. From there, we sat in the queue until boarding finally began around 8.00 am. The start was delayed by roughly half an hour, though no explanation was given. There were around twelve rows of cars waiting to board, which was itself a slow process.

Once on board, however, the crossing was smooth. We settled into the Recliner Lounges we had booked, which made the journey comfortable and relaxed.

The late start meant a delayed start to our Tasmanian chapter.

TASMANIA



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

14 November 2024 – Geelong, VIC to Devonport, TAS:18°C

The ferry finally docked in Devonport at 7.30 pm, and the announcement over the loudspeakers asked passengers to return to their vehicles, ready for disembarkation. The driver of a car several vehicles ahead of us failed to return promptly, despite repeated, very clear requests. Their delay held everyone up.

Directly in front of us was a vehicle carrying a family of German Shepherds — mum, dad, and four very vocal and amusing puppies. The noise was enthusiastic and impossible to ignore. After a long day

of travel, the combination of delays and noise added to the fatigue that inevitably comes with life on the road.

By the time we were finally able to disembark, darkness had set in. We arrived at Abel Tasman Caravan Park, only five minutes from the ferry terminal, at 8.30 pm. What struck us most that night was not the inconvenience but how little it actually fazed us.

Despite the late hour and low light, we set up quickly and efficiently. After more than four months on the road, the once-daunting process of parking, levelling, and setting up the caravan had become second nature. That evening marked the beginning of five weeks in Tasmania, but it also quietly highlighted one of the less obvious benefits of long-term travel: competence.

15–16 November 2024 – Devonport to Launceston, TAS: 22°C

The morning after our arrival in Devonport began with what felt like extraordinary good fortune. While chatting with our neighbours, a family from Albany, also travelling around Australia, attention turned to the Purpleline motorised caravan mover on our caravan. Our new friend took a closer look and casually ran his hand along the inside edge of the tyre. What he found shocked us. The tyre was so worn that the wire was protruding through the rubber on the inside, something we had not noticed at all. The realisation of what could have happened hit immediately. It was on the driver's side, and the thought of that tyre blowing at highway speed, with traffic rushing past, was sobering. The potential for damage and our safety could have been significant.

It was a classic example of how quickly the mind can catastrophise, yet in this case, the concern was entirely justified. It felt like we had very narrowly avoided a serious accident.

Fortunately, the solution was straightforward. Lee changed the tyre calmly and without pressure in the comfort of the campground. From there, we drove to Launceston and purchased another spare tyre. The situation had been resolved before it became a problem, thanks entirely to the kindness and attentiveness of a stranger.

The drive to Launceston was a pleasure. The landscape unfolded into rolling hills, lush green paddocks dotted with cows and sheep, and stands of tall pine trees. After the morning's discovery, the beautiful scenery felt restorative.

At Launceston Holiday Park in Legana, an unexpected personal connection added another memorable moment. When I gave my surname at the reception, the man behind the counter was visibly surprised. His name was Colin Van Bohemen, almost identical to ours, just one less 'e'. He was 70 years old and shared that his family had emigrated from Rotterdam to Melbourne when he was five, later settling in Launceston after falling in love with the area on a holiday. He also mentioned that at 18, he had changed his name from Cornelius, the same name as one of Lee's brothers. It was a small connection in such a vast country.

Launceston immediately impressed us. It is a character-filled city, with older homes built into steep hillsides. Some driveways are so steep that they make our own steep driveway at home look flat by comparison.

The following day, we began with a visit to the Harvest Markets in town, with a wide assortment of food stalls offering plenty of local produce. From there, we wandered through the beautiful Launceston City Gardens with its mature trees and beautifully manicured lawns. We are drawn to roses, and those in the garden were carefully tended.

The gardens also house an enclosure for Japanese macaque monkeys, which proved entertaining and drew a steady crowd.

The prevalence of white Iceberg roses in gardens and businesses across the city, with their enormous and prolific blooms, made a striking impression.

A clear highlight of our time in Launceston was the chairlift over Cataract Gorge. The scale, as seen from above, was breathtaking. Trees and plants from around the world have been carefully introduced, creating a spectacular landscape. At the top, vibrant

rhododendrons greeted us in full colour.

The gorge is home to around 70 peacocks, and they are impossible to ignore. Their calls are extraordinarily loud, echoing through the gorge and audible even while we were descending on the chairlift. One particularly confident peacock put on a display for nearly 30 minutes, spreading his tail feathers and clearly enjoying the attention. We also noticed younger males practising their displays, their bodies already colourful, though their tail feathers were still brown and undeveloped.

We walked along the path on the edge of the gorge, taking in the sheer size of the boulders and cliffs. Wallabies grazed calmly near the top of the chairlift, completely unfazed by people. In the nearby café, signs warned visitors to guard their food as the peacocks roaming between tables were more than willing to help themselves.

To see the gorge from another perspective, we boarded the *Lady Launceston* for a river cruise. From the water, the scale of the gorge was doubly impressive, with massive rock faces rising on either side. Beautiful homes were perched along the hillside.

If we were to recommend just one activity in Launceston, it would be the chairlift up to the top of Cataract Gorge. It captures the beauty and character of the place in a way that stays with you.

17 November 2024 – Launceston to Longford, TAS: 19°C

We began the day at the Evandale Markets, passing a statue of the well-known colonial artist, John Glover, at the park's corner. Inside the market hall were an overwhelming number of second-hand knick-knacks, which we viewed as pretty dust collectors that didn't appeal to us. Instead, we took a leisurely walk through the charming streets of Evandale. The historic buildings and homes are beautifully preserved and framed by immaculate cottage gardens, with roses featuring prominently. The shops maintain an old-world appearance, and stepping inside the general store felt like going back in time, complete with genuine country charm.

From there, we headed to Woolmers Estate. We spent some time wandering through the extensive rose garden, which was bursting with magnificent blooms. Unfortunately, Woolmers House itself was not open to the public that day, but we were still able to walk around the exterior and explore the other convict-built buildings scattered across the estate. Even without access to the house, the site gives a strong sense of Tasmania's colonial history.

On our way back to the caravan park, we detoured through the small town of Perth. There was not a great deal to see, but we did come across a very imposing Baptist church and, once again, noticed roses flourishing in the gardens.

18 November 2024 – Daytrip to Bridestowe, TAS: 19°C

What a brilliant day! We started at Hollybank Treetops Adventure and tackled the Zipline Tour. The experience began with a 15-metre zipline, followed by four progressively longer runs, then a 200-metre line and finally the longest at just over 400 metres. At times, we reached speeds of around 70 km/h and were suspended roughly 50 metres above the ground. Flying through towering trees was exhilarating, and we both thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I was the only one who needed a windproof jacket, clearly the resident wimp.

Our next stop was Lilydale Falls. On the way, we passed through the town of Lilydale, where we noticed a unique style of war memorial: many black poles, each displaying photographs and details of local soldiers who did not return, with some poles bearing two or three photos. It was simple, personal, and deeply moving.

The ten-minute walk to the falls along a fern-lined track beside the river was utterly gorgeous. There are two falls, not huge, but very pretty. Lee could not resist balancing across a broken log to get the perfect shot. Anything for the photo!

From there, we drove on to Bridestowe Lavender Estate. Sadly, the lavender does not bloom until December or January, so we missed the famous purple fields. Even so, the neatly planted rows of green

lavender shrubs still made a pretty picture. As luck would have it when we were leaving, we found one lavender shrub in bloom near a fence. As purple is my favourite colour, I was delighted to also find a much-needed windproof jacket in the same shade.

19 November 2024 – Launceston to Beauty Point and Low Head, TAS: 19°C

We started the day with an unexpected issue: the microwave had cooked itself the previous night and was emitting a terrible smell. Lee removed it first thing, and we picked up a replacement on our way to the BIG4 Low Head Caravan Park.

The caravan park was excellent, with lush green lawns and fantastic amenities. We toured the area, crossed the Batman Bridge, and continued to the Beaconsfield Gold Mine Museum. The museum houses an extensive collection of mining machinery and equipment, along with interesting displays from Tasmania's mining past. One particularly heart-rending section detailed the 2006 mine collapse. Of the 17 men underground at the time, 14 escaped immediately. One man, Larry Knight, was killed, while Brant Webb and Todd Russell survived after being trapped for two weeks in a tightly confined space. It was hard to comprehend the resilience required by those two men to endure that situation.

Next stop was Seahorse World, which turned out to be fascinating. Seahorses are bred on-site, and we saw them at every stage of life, from one-day-old juveniles to adults. We were even given the chance to hold a seahorse, which felt surprisingly wriggly and bony! There were also other marine species on display, including Boris, a huge Eastern Rock Lobster sharing a tank with a few companions. I particularly loved the spectacular little sea dragons. They looked delicate and almost otherworldly.

Tasmania clearly has more than its share of talented chainsaw artists. The late Kenneth Plumstead, previous owner of East Beach Tourist Park at George Town, engaged chainsaw artist Eddie Freeman to

transform the ageing macrocarpa trees along the front of the park into detailed carvings. The level of craftsmanship is remarkable.

While waiting for the Fairy Penguin Tour at 8.30 pm, we visited the nearby lighthouse, only to find it closed at 5.00 pm. When it was time to walk to the beach to see the penguins, we were rewarded with a lovely surprise. We came across a family of wallabies grazing near the bushes.

The guide explained that conditions were not ideal for penguin sightings that night. The moon was bright, the wind was still, and the tide was low. All three factors that make penguins hesitant to come ashore. Despite that, during the hour and a half we spent freezing on the beach, we were lucky enough to see a few penguins making their way carefully across the sand towards their nests. Seeing even a handful felt special, and we hoped the remaining penguins made it safely to their nests to feed their young.

20 November 2024 – Low Head to St Helens, TAS: 21°C

We drove to St Helens through the beautiful countryside of rolling green hills dotted with cattle, all thankfully fenced in. The roads were mostly narrow and winding, sometimes skirting steep, forested cliffs that I could see from the passenger side. Lee had to keep his eyes firmly on the road. We passed through the Myrtle Forest and stopped roadside for lunch along the way.

After that drive, Lee was glad to arrive at St Helens for a rest. As BIG4 members, we were welcomed with a bag of bite-sized Mars Bars, which did not last long! The caravan park is lovely with wide grassy sites and even complimentary floor mats in the showers, a rare and very welcome touch.

21 November 2024 – Day Trip to Bay of Fires, TAS: 22°C

We drove about 23 kilometres to the Bay of Fires, stopping at Binalong Bay and The Gardens. Due to an abundance of wildflowers, the latter was named by Lady Jane Franklin, wife of Sir John Franklin, Lieutenant-

Governor of Van Diemen's Land, later named Tasmania. Sadly, though, none were blooming when we visited.

The area is undeniably beautiful, with brilliant blue water, white sand, and orange-streaked granite rocks caused by iron oxidation. While it was certainly impressive, we felt our expectations may have been set a little too high by glowing recommendations. Still, it is a very distinctive and striking coastline.

22 November 2024 – Day Trip around St Helens, TAS: 23°C

What a day! We set off with the intention of visiting Columba Falls. Our planned first stop was Evercreech Falls, but Google Maps led us astray onto a gravel road that deteriorated into a narrow, potholed track, which then became completely impassable due to fallen trees. With no internet connection and no maps to fall back on, we had no way of finding Evercreech Falls, so we made our best guess for the way out and ended up in Ringarooma, a long way from our ultimate destination of St Columba Falls.

Finally, back on the highway, we passed through Ledgerwood and were rewarded with more chainsaw carvings by Eddie Freeman, commemorating fallen ANZAC soldiers.

We stopped for lunch in Derby and discovered it is a major hub for mountain bikers. We chatted with a group from Perth and learned that the trails in Derby are among the best-maintained in Australia, which is why they draw riders from all over the world. Without the caravan on the back, Lee felt comfortable travelling on the familiar but winding road and likened himself to a rally driver, hurtling around the many bends while I clung on, white-knuckled.

Making our way to St Columba Falls, we stumbled upon the Pub in the Paddock, which seemed to appear in the middle of nowhere. We stopped in for a drink and watched a helicopter take off with guests, likely flown in for lunch.

Due to a recent storm, fallen trees blocked the track to the falls, and

the falls were closed to the public. We were told that you could see the Falls from the road, so we drove up on the sealed surface all the way. We could not resist a very careful walk to the falls, and the reward was overwhelming. The track was lined with the most extraordinary tree ferns all the way to the falls. The sight of the falls was spectacular: a stunning 90-metre waterfall, the tallest in Tasmania, surrounded by lush ferns.

23 November 2024 – St Helens to Bicheno, TAS: 30°C

What began as a pleasant coastal drive turned suddenly stressful when one of the caravan tyres blew about 25 kilometres from Bicheno, on a bend where the speed limit was 100 km/h. It was the old spare tyre from Devonport, which looked brand new and had been on the back of the caravan for many years, never having been used. We concluded it must have perished with age. The tread had wrapped around the axle. Lee required gloves to protect his hands from the wire while he untangled it. He changed the tyre while I directed traffic to slow down and keep a safe distance.

The bigger concern now was having no spare, with another tyre of similar age still fitted to the other caravan wheel. Our travel plans changed instantly. We had intended to spend only one night at Bicheno, but now had to be there for at least three, as it was Saturday, and we would have to wait until Monday to source new tyres.

As if that were not enough, when we parked the van in Bicheno, we discovered the caravan's handbrake cable had been severed by the blowout. Until it could be repaired in Richmond, near Hobart, we had to rely on the motorised caravan mover brakes whenever we were parked.

After setting up, we visited the Bicheno Blowhole, which was underwhelming, so we explored some local beaches. They were pleasant, but not spectacular. Our main reason for staying in Bicheno was to see the ocean bioluminescence at night, but a local told us it hadn't been seen there for some time. How disappointing!

24 November 2024 – Day Trip from Bicheno to Freycinet National Park, TAS: 19°C

Being Sunday meant no tyre shopping, so despite an overcast sky, mist, and occasional drizzle, we decided to make the most of the day and headed to Freycinet National Park.

Our first stop was Friendly Beaches. The car park sits at the end of a winding gravel road, and from there a walking track leads down to the beach. The track itself was lovely, lined with greenery and dotted with bushes bearing delicate white flowers. Near the end of the walk, we noticed a tangle of exposed roots crisscrossing the path, despite there being no obvious trees nearby — one of those quiet natural curiosities that makes you stop and wonder. On a clear, sunny day, this would be a beautiful swimming spot, but that day the mist muted the colours and the ocean did not look all that inviting.

We then drove on to what we initially thought was the Mt Amos car park, only to discover it is the main trailhead for several walks, including Mt Amos, Coles Bay, and Wineglass Bay. Faced with a three-hour hike to the top of Mt Amos, we opted instead for the Wineglass Bay Lookout walk, reassured by the sign stating it was a ‘two-hour return walk’, up 800 steps!

The climb was steady and demanding. About halfway up, we reached Coles Bay Lookout, where the view was spectacular, even though partially obscured by mist. It gave us a taste of what lay ahead. The track itself wound through massive boulders, some towering high above us, and we could not help but wonder how they had remained in place for thousands of years without tumbling down the mountain.

By the time we reached the Wineglass Bay Lookout, we were thoroughly exhausted, but the view was worth every step. Even under cloud, the curve of the bay and the pale sand against the water made it clear why this is one of Tasmania’s most iconic sights.

After the walk, we drove out to Cape Tourville Lighthouse, but fatigue won the day, and we skipped the walk from the car park, opting instead

to head into Coles Bay. It is a very pretty little town, and somewhere we had hoped to spend a couple of nights, but because of the situation with the caravan tyre, we were unsure whether it could make it this far. With no spare, it was not worth the risk. An ice cream from the Ice Creamery was a reasonable consolation.

25 November 2024 – From Bicheno to St Helens and back, TAS: 22°C

Relief at last! Bridgestone in St Helens had a suitable caravan tyre in stock, so Lee set off early for the hour-long drive back, while I stayed behind to do some laundry. He had the new tyre fitted to the caravan rim, which thankfully had sustained no damage, and did some food shopping before returning to Bicheno in time for lunch. A busy and productive morning.

The weather remained misty and drizzly, making it easy to take the afternoon off. After the previous few days, doing very little felt entirely appropriate.

Perception is everything. When we first arrived at Bicheno East Caravan Park, I was the first to inspect the amenities and returned enthusiastically, reporting that the bathroom was fabulous — clean, relatively new, with fantastic water pressure and everything contained in one private room.

Lee's experience, however, was quite different. He hit his head on the too-low curtain rail, had to stoop awkwardly under a low shower head, and discovered that the mirror was mounted so low that the top half of his head completely disappeared as he tried to shave. He emerged with a sore back, a bumped head, and a rather different assessment of the facilities.

A humorous reminder that what works beautifully for one person may be utterly impractical for another, particularly when height, or the lack thereof, is involved.

26 November 2024 – Bicheno to Port Arthur, TAS : 21°C

We left Bicheno under misty drizzle, with the weather alternating unpredictably between sunshine, mist, and light rain throughout the drive. True to form, Google Maps sent us on a ‘shortcut’ that started as a reasonable gravel road but then turned into a corrugated nightmare, riddled with potholes. There was nowhere to turn around, so all we could do was press on, gritting our teeth. What should have been a straightforward two-and-a-half-hour drive stretched out to three-and-a-half hours.

By the time we reached Dunalley around lunchtime, the sun was shining, which lifted our spirits. Port Arthur greeted us with lovely weather, which helped soften our first impressions of the NRMA campground, though only slightly. The sites were level, but there was no TV reception or Wi-Fi, and the amenities were a solid uphill walk away. With so much to see around this area, we had booked this campsite as our base for five nights. Our stay there was a test of patience and endurance, which ultimately failed as we left after four nights.

27 November 2024 – Day Trip to Port Arthur Historic Site, TAS: 19°C

We visited the Port Arthur Historic Site, a place steeped in history and heavy with tales of horrific torture. The grounds and gardens are beautifully maintained, creating a striking contrast with the harsh realities of life there in the mid to late 1800s.

The site is extensive, with buildings ranging from a penitentiary to churches, workshops, and homes for those who lived and worked there. Originally established as a flour mill before becoming a prison for the worst offenders, Port Arthur’s layered history was evident everywhere we looked.

The ruins of the penitentiary still reveal the individual cells where prisoners were confined. The Government House Gardens are spectacular, and the Commandant’s House offers insight into

domestic life for the Officers at that time, including the room where ladies withdrew after dinner while the men remained to drink and smoke.

We took the 20-minute harbour cruise, which included a circuit around the Isle of the Dead, where 1,100 people are buried. The more recent tragedy, the massacre of 28 April 1996, was also impossible to ignore. A simple cross marks the site of the Broad Arrow Café, and a water memorial honours those whose lives were lost and forever changed.

Light drizzle followed us throughout the day, but it did little to distract from what was a deeply moving visit into the dark history of Australia's most brutal penal colony, where cruelty knew no bounds.

28 November 2024 – Day Trip to Eaglehawk Neck, TAS: 16°C

We dedicated the day to exploring the rugged coastline of the Tasman Peninsula, but not before our first stop at the Chocolate Factory. As expected, it was expensive, but we could not resist a few small caramel frogs at \$3 each, which were delicious. We also could not resist a small fridge magnet that really appealed to us, with the words, *'I could give up chocolate, but I am not a quitter.'*

From there, we headed to Waterfall Bay. The gravel road was tolerable by Tasmanian standards, though dotted with water-filled potholes. There wasn't much of a waterfall, but the dramatic coastline more than made up for it.

Tasman Arch was next. What an extraordinary natural formation, just a minute's walk from the car park. From there, the walking trail to the left led us to Cliff Lookout Point with sweeping coastal views, while the trail to the right took us to Devil's Kitchen, where swirling water churns at the base of rugged cliffs.

Fossil Bay Lookout offered stunning views in both directions, and although the Blowhole was subdued due to calm seas, the surrounding rock formations remained imposing.

Finding the Dog Line statue at Eaglehawk Neck proved frustrating due to misleading signage. After wandering aimlessly, a local finally pointed us in the right direction, well south of the sign we had found, and past the Community Centre. This bronze statue depicts a chained, teeth-baring guard dog, with a wine barrel for a kennel. It is a monument to the guard dogs who were chained just far enough apart so they could not fight. They would bark and growl when anyone approached, alerting soldiers and preventing prisoner escapes from Port Arthur.

Further north along the Arthur Highway, we passed an old officers' building dating back to 1832.

Next, we headed to Remarkable Cave. From the top of the cliff, Maingon Bay stretched out below, and a well-designed walkway led us down to the cave itself. Looking towards the ocean, through the tunnel-shaped cave opening, we could clearly see the outline of Tasmania.

Having seen all the sights we came to see in this area, we decided to leave the campground a day early, after the next day's boat tour.

29 November 2024 – Day Trip – Damo's Wild Ocean Tasmania Tour, TAS: 15°C

This day delivered one of the most extraordinary experiences of our entire trip. We joined Damo's Wild Ocean Tasmania tour, led by a fiercely passionate wildlife conservationist. Damo openly shared his story of choosing to live modestly in a shed so that the profits from his tours could eventually fund a wildlife hospital and sanctuary. His knowledge of the coastline and its geology was exceptional, and his boat-handling skills were something to behold.

The boat seats were padded and designed to be straddled, with bars to hold on to, which was essential, given the force of the boat hitting the tops of the waves, then landing with a thud on the other side before racing to the top of the next wave. While many sat, we preferred to

stand and use our legs as shock absorbers. Lee's back, however, did not appreciate the pounding, and he was grateful whenever we slowed to observe the cliffs, caves, and wildlife.

We saw black-faced cormorants perched on rocks, seals floating with a single flipper raised to regulate their temperature, and others sunning themselves on sheltered ledges near Cape Hauy. Rounding the cape, we spotted three rock climbers scaling the Totem Pole, looking like ants against the vast sea stack.

Then came the magic. Damo noticed birds swarming above the water and raced over to find bluefin tuna feeding. The opportunistic birds were flying overhead, hoping to steal some of the fish the tuna were corralling. Some were successful.

Moments later, he spotted two humpback whale mothers with their calves feeding nearby. He sped over, and we stayed with them for more than an hour as they swam beneath and alongside the boat. Damo was beside himself with excitement, narrating their behaviour in real time.

Astonishingly, on the return journey, we encountered a pod of more than 100 dolphins, perhaps more, leaping and racing alongside us.

Our two-hour tour stretched to three and a half hours, and no one wanted it to end, least of all Damo. We were so privileged to see all the wildlife we did on that very special day and can highly recommend Damo's Wild Ocean Tasmania tour.

Despite the physical toll, Lee said he would do it again — which says everything.

30 November 2024 – Port Arthur to Hobart, TAS: 21°C

We drove from Port Arthur to the BIG4 Hobart Airport Caravan Park, arriving just over an hour later and fortunate enough to check in early. It is a pleasant, green park and gave us time to catch up on washing before the weather turned yet again.

Tasmanian weather is entirely unpredictable, with sunshine followed by drizzle, and forecasts rarely match reality.

1 December 2024 – Day Trip from Hobart to Richmond, TAS: 26°C

We drove out to Richmond and immediately felt as though we had stepped back in time. This is what a truly historic town looks like. Richmond is beautifully preserved, with an extraordinary collection of Georgian buildings from the nineteenth century, all immaculately maintained. It has a calm, almost storybook quality that makes wandering its streets a real pleasure.

We parked near St John's Catholic Church, perched high on a hill overlooking the town. Built in 1836, it is the oldest continuously operating Catholic church in Australia.

From there we walked down towards the Richmond Bridge, recognised as the oldest stone arch bridge in Australia, completed in 1823. It is wonderfully picturesque, arching gracefully over the Coal River and surrounded by lush grass and gardens. Lee was immediately drawn to the nearby rose garden, delighted to find it full of white Iceberg roses in bloom.

As we continued walking, we came across a group of people dressed in 1800s-style clothing gathered around a maypole near the courthouse. It turned out to be a private function, but it reinforced the feeling that Richmond quietly lives in its own historical bubble.

We next visited the Richmond Gaol, where more people were dressed in period costume, though it was not immediately clear why. The gaol is confronting. Prison life back then was harsh and unforgiving, and it does not take much imagination to feel how grim existence must have been within those walls.

Richmond is also home to many charming, quirky little shops, making it easy to lose track of time while browsing.

One of our stops was the Old Hobart Town Model Village, a detailed replica of Hobart as it appeared in 1820. Walking through it made us profoundly grateful not to have lived two centuries earlier, and we appreciated that progress has many advantages.

By mid-afternoon, we decided it was time for coffee and a vanilla slice from the bakery. Both were excellent and thoroughly enjoyed.

Before heading back to camp, we drove to St Luke's Anglican Church, built in 1835, another fine example of the town's architectural heritage.

On the way home, we detoured into Hobart to scout parking for the next day, as our friends Dee and Rod would be arriving early on the Royal Princess and we had planned to spend the day exploring the city with them.

Back at the caravan park, we were greeted with a 'Merry Christmas' sign and large blow-up Christmas characters all around the entrance.

2 December 2024 – Hobart, TAS: 25°C

Dee and Rod arrived aboard the Royal Princess, and we met them at the wharf. First things first — coffee and a long-overdue catch-up before boarding the Hop-on Hop-off Red Decker Bus.

The bus took us past many of Hobart's historic buildings, most dating back to the 1800s, reinforcing the city's rich history. We also noticed some striking artwork displayed on the city's light boxes, adding a contemporary contrast to the heritage architecture.

We hopped off at the Cascade Brewery, set among beautiful gardens. The boys enjoyed their stout before we wandered through the lush Cascade Gardens, which were alive with greenery and home to a resident duck family.

From there, we walked down to the Cascades Female Factory. We found it disappointing as much of the original structure has been lost since the site was sold in 1905 and later redeveloped. That said, the history is still very confronting. There are harrowing stories of the

suffering endured there by women and children, some as young as ten, subjected to brutal conditions. Those rewarded for good behaviour were often sent to work as servants for the wealthy, only to be punished if they became pregnant, which frequently happened through abuse. They were then sent back to the factory to give birth, where their babies were taken from them after three months. One in four infants died. It is a deeply disturbing chapter of history.

We rejoined the bus and hopped off at the next stop, walking a little further to an unassuming café called Bear With Me. What a find! The lunch was outstanding and easily one of the best meals we had in Tasmania. We highly recommend this charming café.

While we waited for the afternoon Hop-on Hop-off Bus to the top of Mt Wellington, we were warned that it is around 10–15°C colder at the summit. Dee had a couple of extra jackets on the ship, so she walked back to collect them for us. While we waited, we watched a sailing ship glide into the harbour. From the top of Mt Wellington, we had spectacular views over Hobart and beyond, though the wind was biting, and we were extremely grateful for those extra jackets.

Back at the wharf, we shared a farewell drink with Dee and Rod that evening, before the Royal Princess departed for Port Arthur.

3 December 2024 – Hobart, TAS: 25°C

It was wet and drizzly, so we had a quiet morning, choosing to rest up for the morning as Lee had woken with back spasms, almost certainly a delayed consequence of the pounding he had taken on the Wild Ocean boat tour. As incredible as that experience was, and still a highlight of our trip, anyone with existing back issues should probably think twice before embarking on it.

When the weather cleared later in the day, and Lee's back pain had eased, we drove to the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens and made use of the remaining time on our two-day pass for the Hop-on Hop-off bus by doing another round.

We stayed on the bus for the entire circuit and ended up back at the gardens. Some areas were under renovation, but overall, the gardens were peaceful and beautifully laid out. We thoroughly enjoyed our leisurely stroll through them.

We then drove to the University Rose Garden with its stunning roses, and were surprised to see a couple of rabbits hopping about so close to the city. As we prepared to leave, Lee dropped his AirPods case under the car and had to stretch awkwardly to retrieve it.

Our next stop was Rosny Lookout, which offered an expansive view across the Tasman Bridge as we watched the magnificent *Celebrity Edge* cruise ship depart.

Back at the caravan, we cooked dinner, and later Lee decided to listen to the news, only to discover his AirPods were not in the case. We searched the caravan, the car, and his pockets before concluding that they must have fallen out of the case when he dropped it.

It was a 25-minute drive back to the University Rose Garden in near darkness. Amazingly, there were the AirPods, undamaged and lying exactly where we had been parked. We could not believe our luck.

4 December 2024 – Day Trip from Hobart to Sorell, TAS: 25°C

As the caravan was being serviced that morning, we enjoyed some rest time. After lunch, we stocked up on supplies for the remainder of our time in Tasmania.

We then drove east to Sorell, crossing two causeways over Midway Point, a narrow landmass extending into the sea. The drive itself was pleasant, though Sorell didn't leave a lasting impression.

On the way back, we stopped at Seven Mile Beach, which was underwhelming, with little of note to see.

Back at the caravan park, the managers had begun installing their Christmas lights. Staff were working and hammering right up until the 10.00 pm noise curfew, making an early night impossible, even with

earplugs. Thud, thud, thud — relentlessly.

5 December 2024 – Hobart to Huonville, TAS: 27°C

We drove south into the Huon Valley and checked in early at the Huon Valley Caravan Park, allowing us a full day of sightseeing.

Our first stop was the Wooden Boat Centre in Franklin, where people can learn the craft of traditional wooden boat building. Courses range from six to ten weeks, at varying prices, and you leave with a hand-crafted boat at the end of the ten-week course. It was fascinating to see the craftsmanship of this calibre still being taught.

Next, we visited the Geeveston Information Centre, where we learned that 14 platypuses live near a small bridge. We searched in vain, and once again we saw none. Our platypus sighting tally remained stubbornly at zero.

There are numerous chainsaw carvings around Geeveston depicting notable locals, though sadly, many are deteriorating.

We then headed to the Tahune Airwalk. Walking 30 metres above the forest floor and out onto the cantilever, suspended 50 metres above the Huon River, was an impressive experience. From there, we completed the circuit through the forest, along the river, and across two swing bridges, which took about an hour in total.

The devastation from the 2019 bushfires in this region is still evident. Many massive trees were burnt, some still standing, others toppled. The girth of one fallen trunk was as thick as Lee is tall; he stands six foot three. Someone had thoughtfully carved seats into some of the other dead logs.

It was a muggy day, and when we saw a sign for Havaganda Beach, curiosity got the better of us. A short descent led to a tiny river beach where we waded in just far enough to cool our feet, including shoes and socks. The water was icy cold and stained brown with tannin, but incredibly refreshing.

By the time we returned to the exit just after 4.00 pm, it was closed, but we had been shown where to leave through the closed gate if we returned after hours.

On the drive back, a roadside sign advertising cherries led us 800 metres up a pothole-filled dirt road. Tasmania is known for its high-quality cherries, and these lived up to their reputation. They were worth every bump.

6 December 2024 – Day Trip from Huonville to Hastings, TAS: 20°C

We headed towards Hastings, the southernmost point of our Australian travels, and detoured via Police Point, past the salmon farms to Dover, a route recommended by the Geeveston Visitor Centre. The coastline was beautiful, gentler than the rugged East Coast cliffs, but no less impressive. Tasmania's roads remained relentlessly winding, and any straight stretch felt like a luxury. We were glad we had had our brakes fixed before going to Tasmania.

Having finally found the Hastings Visitor Centre, we booked a 45-minute guided tour of Newdegate Cave, which involved around 500 steps. The ticket also included access to the heated thermal pool at 29.5°C, which made us regret we had forgotten our bathers. We felt the water, and the temperature reminded us of our heated pool at home.

The idyllic garden setting by the pool was the perfect place for our picnic lunch. We then crossed a small bridge and walked along lush walking tracks. One walk was optimistically called Platypus Walk, but once again, we saw no platypuses.

The cave itself was a further 15-minute drive, near the base of Adamsons Peak in Hartz Mountains National Park. It is Australia's largest dolomite cave and the only one in the south, with the rest being found in the Northern Territory. It was opened in 1939 and maintains a constant temperature of 9°C, making jackets essential. Thank goodness we had some in the car.

Inside the cave, the formations were stunning: stalactites, stalagmites, columns, and curtains. The chamber known as The Palace was spectacular. The largest stalagmite is called Jabba the Hutt, and along the way, we successfully navigated around Headache Rock and Concussion Rock.

Back at the caravan park, which was a working farm, we attended the 4.00 pm show. A cow named Mel was milked, producing a full bucket. Lee stood watching, close enough to be splattered when Mel suddenly felt the urge to relieve herself, causing immediate chaos and laughter. When Mel followed up with a number one, the crowd scattered once again with more panic and gales of laughter.

I held a two-day-old chick, who alternated between chirping and falling asleep. It was extremely cute.

We then watched the feeding of three elderly Tasmanian devils, rehomed there after leaving the breeding program. Next, we watched the feeding of the farm's two cows and Mel's calf.

Lee attempted a shower before bed. He put his \$1 coin into the machine and received cold water. He adjusted the taps, turning them off and on several times, but the water remained stubbornly cold. Finally, it warmed up, so he quickly jumped back in and lathered up, only for it to go cold again. He was not impressed.

7 December 2024 – Huonville to Hobart, TAS: 22°C

Lee tried again for a hot shower, armed with two \$1 coins. He got the same result — cold water only. Given this was one of the most expensive caravan parks we stayed in, at \$55 per night, or \$65 for a river view, plus \$1 per shower, his frustration felt justified.

Lee reported his experience to the owner, who dismissively blamed 'operator error' and offered no solution. This was not the level of customer service we expected, and we were deeply disappointed by the owner's response.

Unfortunately, the morning brought not drizzle but proper torrential rain. Packing up was miserable, and the drive back to Hobart in thick fog with poor visibility was challenging.

We checked in at the Hobart Showgrounds, chosen for its proximity to MONA. The campground was waterlogged, and we set up in puddles.

After lunch, we drove to MONA, entering through their vineyard. Finding the building's entrance was an experience in itself. The museum is certainly distinctive with its striking architecture, bold installations and unconventional spaces.

Lee was interested in the Torana exhibit — memories of a bygone era — and there was a weird-looking, deflated replica Russian tank made of leather hides, lying crumpled on the floor. There are no labels on any of the exhibits, and you must download 'The O' app to get information.

Some pieces baffled me entirely, such as a box of elastic bands scattered across a round white disc. There was an interesting machine that 'draws' the wind, producing a series of circles on paper that are then displayed on a wall. There was also an intriguing circular sound tunnel that must have cost a fortune to build, though I am still not sure what it represented.

Outside, metal truck sculptures filled the entrance area. Elsewhere, a large octopus structure sat proudly over part of a children's play area.

We found the experience interesting in parts, but overall, not really our cup of tea.

8 December 2024 – Hobart to Left of Field, TAS: 19°C

The rain eased to light drizzle as we arrived at Left of Field Camping Gardens, on the edge of Mt Field National Park.

The campground was rustic — very rustic. Our site sloped severely, requiring the caravan to be jacked up to the maximum on one side, but it was still not quite level. Wallabies had generously decorated the area with droppings, which had to be cleared before we could set up.

The amenities were minimal and scattered. Two unisex toilets were in a wooden building a fair walk from our site, and one portable shower was further down the track. The other portable shower was housed in a tin enclosure in another direction entirely.

After lunch, we drove to the visitor centre before deciding to visit Russell Falls, a beautiful, tiered cascade reached by a mostly flat 45-minute return walk. From there, we climbed many steps up to Horseshoe Falls. I counted them on the way down, and there were 230. The vegetation was magnificent, with towering trees and huge tree ferns.

About two kilometres further along, we found the Tall Trees Walk, where the scale of the forest is humbling. Fallen giants lay carpeted in moss and ferns.

A quick stop in Maydena followed, where we grabbed coffee at Fika Time Café.

That night's shower was unforgettable. The portable shower sits inside the tin enclosure, complete with trees and shrubs. A white plastic chain across the entrance signals whether it is occupied, something I only realised after walking in and having to retreat quickly. You shower in the portable shower, and dry off and dress in the open enclosure. Certainly, a new experience. Privacy was minimal, but the water was hot and plentiful.

9 December 2024 – Left of Field to Lake St Clair, TAS: 20°C

This day was a challenge from the start. While packing up, we dodged wallaby droppings deposited overnight, and despite our best efforts, our shoes were soiled, requiring several attempts to clean the soles with sticks, grass, and paper towels.

At the boom gate, Lee got out of the car to enter the exit code and stepped directly into a pile of wallaby droppings again, with both feet. There was no way he was getting back into the car like that, so we stayed parked and each cleaned one of his shoes, picking the

droppings from the tread of his sneakers with sticks and wiping the soles on clean grass. Thankfully, no one needed to leave or enter while we were stuck there.

During this activity, Lee's phone slid into the back of the car unnoticed. After ten minutes of driving, we discovered his phone was missing. Panic set in, and we immediately turned back, convinced it had been dropped at the exit fiasco. I should have dialled his number before turning around because, when I did, we heard it ringing from somewhere behind us in the car. Unfortunately, there was nowhere we could turn around until we got back to the campground. Lesson learned: when in doubt, ring first — then panic.

The drive to Lake St Clair was very scenic, passing farmland dotted with sheep and cows, heavily wooded forests, and the Tasman Hydro Station at Nive River, with enormous pipes climbing the mountainside.

We stopped at *The Wall*, Greg Duncan's extraordinary carved timber installation depicting Tasmania's settlement history. This is an absolute must-see, and one of the many highlights of our trip. Unfortunately, photography of the installation is not permitted.

Our stay at Lake St Clair was disappointing. There was no phone reception, barely any water pressure in the showers, or at the tiny, muddy sites. There was no way a larger caravan could fit alongside a car. At \$48 per night plus \$1 showers, we felt it was overpriced.

We walked the 1.5-hour Platypus Bay Circuit, crossing Watersmeet Bridge over a fast-flowing river rushing over rocks, under the bridge and into Lake St Clair, but we never really saw much of the lake. Once again, we saw no platypuses. We spotted a kookaburra in a tree, and a wallaby that ran across the track and disappeared into the bush. This stop was a disappointment as we had expected so much more.

10 December 2024 – Lake St Clair to Queenstown, TAS: 19°C

On the way to Queenstown, we stopped at Nelson Falls, a thundering, fast-flowing waterfall. The drizzly day, combined with mist from the

falls, made it feel as if water were everywhere. The walk in, surrounded by lush rainforest, was stunning.

The sudden sight of barren landscape as we drove into Queenstown was confusing and totally unexpected. It was spectacular in an odd sort of way. Queenstown is famous for its gold, silver, and copper mining, with its history dating back to 1801. The stark and barren landscape is the result of historical mining pollution and acid rain, a jarring contrast to the rest of Tasmania.

On arrival in town, we passed the pink home of a passionate Geelong supporter, with a sign and crests proudly displayed, but we were not quite sure what his extensive gnome garden had to do with the AFL.

The Queenstown Cabin and Tourist Park was old but had clean, functional amenities, including single-use shower floor mats. The rain, however, never relented, and locals told us that this is normal for Queenstown. The weather felt chilly, but many locals wore only t-shirts and shorts, while we were rugged up in many layers.

After setting up, we had dinner at the Empire Hotel, recommended by Dilly from the caravan park. The grand staircase is magnificent and was carved in London from Tasmanian Blackwood and then shipped back. Many famous people have dined at the hotel over the years, and the staircase is a favourite location for wedding photos. Known as the 'grand old lady of the west coast', it was designed to impress, and continues to do so.

Once home to 14 pubs, Queenstown is rich with gritty history. Now all but two of the pubs are gone.

11 December 2024 – Queenstown, TAS: 12°C

It was rain, rain, and more rain, the kind that settles in and makes itself at home. We did the washing and hung it under the annexe, hopeful rather than confident that it might dry before we left on the following Friday. The forecast suggested the rain would not ease until Sunday, which made that optimism somewhat naïve. It quickly became

obvious that the dryers would have to be deployed.

Despite the weather, we decided to try some sightseeing because it felt wrong to waste an entire day, even if the west coast was doing its best to discourage us.

Our first stop was Spion Kop Lookout, named by soldiers after a battle in the Boer War, with cannons mounted on the hilltop. Reaching it required us to channel our inner mountain goat. The walkway was brutally steep, easily the steepest we encountered anywhere. Just when we thought it must surely end, it kept going. And going. On a sunny day, we could imagine the view over Queenstown would be spectacular, but that day everything was dark, moody, and cloaked in thick mist.

Next, we drove to Iron Blow Lookout, which overlooks the vast open-cut mine. The mist mercifully stayed just high enough to allow the mine and the landscape below to be seen. The scene was stark, confronting, and strangely beautiful — scarred terrain shaped by mining in the name of progress. The surrounding barren rock, devoid of even a blade of grass, clearly showed the environmental consequences of mining in the area around Queenstown.

Close by the Iron Blow Lookout, on the other side of Lyell Highway, we had hoped to walk along the boardwalk clinging to the side of the mountain to view Horsetail Falls, which plunge 50 metres down the rock face. But visibility was so poor we could barely see the start of the track, let alone the falls themselves. Reluctantly, we turned back towards Queenstown.

On the drive back, we stopped at a roadside spot where you would normally have a clear view of the falls. Instead, we were met by a wall of mist so thick we could barely make out the waterfall in the distance. The cliff and the boardwalk to the falls were completely swallowed by the thick mist. The west coast had well and truly decided that it was not a sightseeing day.

12 December 2024 – Queenstown, TAS: 13°C

We were told that, as the chance to ride a steam train through ancient rainforest is a bucket-list experience for many, it is often booked out well in advance. However, we were able to purchase our tickets and boarded the historic steam train. It travelled deep into the rainforest, stopping at Lynchford and Rinadeena Stations before returning to Queenstown. Once upon a time, this railway was Queenstown's lifeline and the only connection to the outside world.

The railway climbs a 124-metre incline from Queenstown to Rinadeena using a rack-and-pinion system, though from the comfort of our carriage, the ascent felt deceptively gentle. The train's top speed is a thrilling 20 km/h, which does give plenty of time to admire the rainforest rolling past the windows.

At Lynchford Station, once a bustling gold-mining settlement, we tried our hand at gold panning. Unsurprisingly, and to much laughter, we found absolutely nothing. The water was icy cold on our hands, and enthusiasm waned quickly.

Our tour guide, Bec, was wonderful — engaging, informative, and laced with dry humour. A true local, she genuinely loves the rain. When asked about the constant rain, she replied, '*What rain?*' Clearly well-adapted to West Coast life.

The steam engine pulling us was *Puffing Billy Number 2*. There were originally five steam engines running on this line during its working life. Beside the track, the river flows fast but is effectively dead, poisoned by mining runoff, and the water was a murky brown colour, though Bec said that it usually resembles pumpkin soup colour due to iron oxidation.

Queenstown is definitely worth visiting as it offers a very different experience from the rest of Tasmania. We lived in puddles at the campsite, and after three days on soggy ground, we found it hard to imagine how anyone chose this as a permanent lifestyle.

13 December 2024 – Queenstown to Strahan, TAS: 14°C

The drive to Strahan was breathtaking, as is so much of Tasmania. The road twists and turns endlessly, but thankfully, there are frequent pull-over bays for slower vehicles. Compared to Queensland's Gillies Highway near Cairns, with its 263 corners and dramatic elevation changes over 19 kilometres, Lee declared this drive a walk in the park by comparison.

The sun finally came out, despite the Bureau of Meteorology predicting rain, and fine weather prevailed into the next day. After days of relentless rain, the sunshine instantly lifted our spirits.

In Strahan, we drove down to the wharf to collect our boarding passes for the next day's Gordon River Cruise. We then visited Morrison's Huon Pine Sawmill, where skilled artisans create beautiful pieces from this ancient timber and sell them in their shop. It was impressive to watch a long slab being cut from a Huon Pine log using a massive reciprocating saw in their workshop.

Next was Hogarth Falls, or rather, the search for Hogarth Falls. Google Maps led us down a track blocked by a fallen tree and thick mud, so we abandoned that attempt. Back on the main road, we discovered a sign saying the falls were just 185 metres away, in the opposite direction. Frustrating!

Eventually, we found the correct starting point for Hogarth Falls in People's Park. The walk itself was glorious, with lush vegetation and puddles from recent rain – no surprise there – plus several sections of wooden boardwalk with artificial grass underfoot, which made avoiding the water much easier. The waterfall was powerful, with sections of vivid orange water foaming over the rocks. Whether the colouring is due to tannin or iron oxide from mining, Google offered no definitive answer.

14 December 2024 – Day Trip – Gordon River Cruise, TAS: 16°C

We boarded the red boat, *Harbour Master II*, for our cruise along the

Gordon River. It was a comfortable, unhurried way to experience the area, and there were surprisingly few people on board.

Our first stop was Hell's Gates, the narrow 80-metre-wide entrance to Macquarie Harbour. The name comes not only from the treacherous navigation and many shipwrecks around the harbour entrance, but also from its grim history as the gateway for convicts bound for Sarah Island, which was known as 'hell on earth' between 1822 and 1833.

We passed a cluster of houses on the mainland near Entrance Island, built to service the lighthouse marking the harbour entrance. With no road access, these homes are now holiday shacks reachable only by boat.

We disembarked at Sarah Island for a guided tour of the ruins. The stories were sombre. One in four prisoners tried to escape, only to be recaptured and flogged with 100 lashes. Despite the brutality, a highly successful shipbuilding industry operated there, constructed entirely with convict labour. The wooden buildings are long gone; only a few brick remnants remain.

The Gordon River is densely lined with Huon Pines, Celery Top Pines, Blackwood Trees, Sassafras, and Myrtle, and we noticed a striking absence of ferns and tree ferns compared with other forests we had visited.

At Warner's Landing, we walked through the forest where fallen trees lay thick on the ground. Piners (those employed to fell Huon pines and transport the timber) once used these horizontal trunks as walkways while searching for trees to cut down. One enormous fallen log has been dated at 2,400 years old and now supports new life growing from its decaying body.

That evening, we attended *The Ship That Never Was*, an uproariously clever play recounting the true story of Sarah Island convicts who stole a ship and escaped all the way to Chile. Audience participation was compulsory and hilarious.

15 December 2024 – Strahan to Tullah, TAS: 24°C

It was a beautiful sunny day, and more spectacular scenery greeted us on the drive to Tullah. Mountains rose ahead of us, magnificent and imposing, though photographs fail to do them justice.

We camped at Tullah Lakeside Lodge. The site itself was not ideal, with blue metal and gravel underfoot, and the amenities required a steep dash up a small hill, but while old, they were clean and functional. We were, however, spoiled with a stunning view across Lake Rosebery from behind the caravan.

That afternoon, we decided to drive to Corinna. Having missed the turn-off, we continued the long way via Waratah and Savage River. The scenery flattened into a landscape of buttongrass plains and shorter trees. Unfortunately, the final section of the road from Savage River to Corinna was unsealed. While it started reasonably well, the last five kilometres were dreadful, and we had to navigate deep ruts and huge potholes.

The walk along the Pieman River did not quite meet expectations. We had hoped to see large Huon Pines, but only spotted a few smaller ones and some interesting fungi. Apparently, the tall trees lie much deeper in the forest.

We met Chris, the barge driver who ferries vehicles across the river. From South Australia, he was caravanning around Australia, working temporarily in Corinna. In conversation, he mentioned house-sitting for five days on a farm in Gabbin, WA. We were stunned as very few people even know where Gabbin is, let alone stay there! What we found even more remarkable was that he had stayed at the farm my parents had owned and worked for decades before selling it in 1974. What an extraordinary coincidence.

On the return trip, we passed the Reece Dam and more barren hills, likely scarred by mining and fire.

16–17 December 2024 – Day Trip from Tullah to Cradle Mountain, TAS: 29°C

We headed for Cradle Mountain, passing numerous massive Huon Pines along the way. We could have saved ourselves the trip to Corinna the previous day, but then we would have missed meeting Chris from Gabbin!

Upon arrival, thick mist engulfed everything. Inside the Visitors Centre, one staff member thought it might clear by early afternoon. There are many surveillance cameras dotted around Cradle Mountain, and the one at Dove Lake showed only white; there was nothing to see at all because of the heavy mist. After coffee at Elements Café and several hours' waiting in the car, making phone calls to family, the mist had still stubbornly refused to lift. With storms forecast for later, we abandoned the idea of visiting Dove Lake that day and headed back to Rosebery to do some shopping.

Ironically, the sun came out on the drive back, though Cradle Mountain remained completely shrouded. Clearly, a trek around Dove Lake was not our destiny that day!

On our way back to Tullah, we caught a lovely, clear view of Mount Murchison from the road. Due to continued poor weather, we declared the next day a rest day and stayed put, relaxing in the caravan.

18 December 2024 – From Tullah to Cradle Mountain to Stanley, TAS: 18°C

At last, a beautiful, clear, sunny day. After the gloomy, wet days we had endured, this felt like a gift. This was our final attempt to see the famous Cradle Mountain, and we were hopeful it would justify the three nights we had spent in Tullah waiting for the weather to cooperate.

It was never our goal to climb the mountain, but we did have high expectations for the area. In truth, our experience was underwhelming, and both felt a little disappointed. Perhaps expectations played a role,

or perhaps Cradle Mountain simply resonates more with those who enjoy alpine landscapes and serious hiking.

Dove Lake is undeniably pretty. The water was calm, surrounded by alpine vegetation with the mountains rising behind. However, the starkness of the landscape did not move us as much as forests do. Large trees simply cannot grow there due to the cold; in winter, temperatures can plunge to -20°C. We walked partway around the lake, just beyond the boathouse, before deciding we had seen enough.

We caught the shuttle bus back to the very informative Interpretation Centre and watched several engaging videos with excellent content about the national park. We looked for the walk to Knyvet Falls but somehow missed it and ended up on the Enchanted Walk — a happy accident. The track followed Pencil Pine Creek and led us past small waterfalls, mossy rocks and delicate vegetation. Along the way, a very confident raven came uncomfortably close, clearly hoping for a snack. Nearby, we spotted a wombat calmly grazing close to the path. It was our first time seeing one of these furry creatures in the wild, and as we stood and watched, it seemed completely unfazed by human presence.

Button grass grows everywhere in this region, and the shuttle bus driver explained that it contains oils that leach into the waterways, giving the water its distinctive brown colour, something we had noticed repeatedly across Tasmania.

As we returned to the car, an echidna wandered through the car park, clearly seeking shade. He eventually wedged himself behind the wheel of a parked van — not exactly a wise life decision. What a silly little muppet, but undeniably cute. We hoped it would move on before the vehicle's owners returned.

From Cradle Mountain, we headed north towards Stanley on the northwest coast. Long before we arrived, The Nut was already visible. It is a massive volcanic plug rising abruptly from the ocean's edge, dominating the horizon, with the town at its base.

Our caravan park sat right next to The Nut, making its presence even more imposing. That evening, just before dark, we went to the beach opposite the caravan park to wait for the penguins. Daylight saving made it strange to be standing there at nearly 9.00 pm. The tide was well out, meaning the penguins had a long, slow waddle ahead of them. Right next to the footpath, in some rocks, we saw a few babies waiting patiently for their parents to return with food, but we didn't stay too long as the temperature dropped quickly.

Later, we heard penguins calling nearby. We could not see them, but were told they nest under cabins and are known to keep light sleepers awake with their nighttime antics.

19 December 2024 – Stanley, TAS: 16°C

We set out to explore part of the inland Tarkine Drive, an area known for its ancient rainforest and remote beauty.

Our first stop was Sumac Lookout, an easy five-minute walk from the car park that delivered expansive views towards the Arthur River in the distance. The vastness of the landscape hinted at how wild and untouched this region remains.

We bypassed Julius River and continued to Lake Chisholm, a water-filled sinkhole. The thought of the earth simply giving way beneath you is unsettling. The lake, surrounded by forest, appeared calm and oddly beautiful, with a prehistoric feel suggested by the twisted shapes of fallen trees draped in moss and the many fallen logs extending into the lake, blanketed in green.

The walk down to the lake was graded moderate, mainly due to the maze of exposed tree roots and the fact that what goes down must inevitably come back up. The forest there was magical, lush and green, with dense ferns, massive trees that towered above us, magnificent tree ferns, and interesting fungi. Many fallen giants were blanketed in moss.

We had planned to stop at Rapid River for lunch, but completely missed the signage and did not realise until we reached the Sinkhole turnoff, the next stop on our list. Unfortunately, the small car park there was already full and perched dangerously on a bend, so we continued rather than risk a U-turn and parking on the edge of the road.

Driving the Tarkine was a real challenge, with fallen trees partially blocking the road in some places. Occasionally, a sign would announce 'Traffic Hazard', but more often, there was no warning at all. We found that quite surprising, given how popular this route is, especially leading into the Christmas period.

A much-needed toilet stop took us down a rough, three-kilometre, potholed dirt road to Milkshake Hills. Thankfully, it rewarded us with a picnic table for lunch, nestled in a beautiful rainforest. We skipped the walks but could easily imagine how lovely they would be.

When crossing the Tayatea Bridge over the Arthur River, we spotted kayakers being collected after their paddle — clearly a popular river for paddlers.

Our final stop on the Tarkine Drive was Trowutta Arch, which was majestic. The 30-minute walk felt different. It was more open, but still with towering tree ferns, tall trees, breathtaking greenery, fascinating root systems, and fallen giants creating natural sculptures. A perfect way to end the day's exploring.

Back in Stanley that evening, we dined at Hursey's, reputed to be Australia's number one seafood restaurant, and conveniently located right next to the campground. Our Fisherman's Plate more than lived up to its reputation: prawns, salt and pepper squid, crumbed scallops, and grilled gummy flake. My vegetables were every bit as delicious as the seafood, and Lee thoroughly enjoyed his chips and salad. An outstanding meal, and this restaurant is absolutely deserving of its esteemed reputation.

20 December 2024 – The Nut, Stanley, TAS: 17°C

We drove up to the car park at The Nut. Before boarding the chairlift, I realised I had forgotten my hat and windproof jacket in the car, which were essential, given the conditions. I put the car key down inside the car as I grabbed what I needed, then shut the door. ‘Click’. The car locked itself with the key inside. That was not supposed to happen!

With no immediate solution, we decided to carry on and not let it ruin the day. We took the chairlift to the top and walked the circuit track. The views were magnificent. Stanley spread neatly below, with the coastline curving away and the ocean stretching endlessly beyond.

The spare car keys had to be retrieved from the caravan, which involved a rather long walk. Once reunited with our car, we treated ourselves to afternoon tea at a quaint café in Stanley. By then, it was too late for lunch, but scones with jam and cream, plus a pear-and-almond slice with cream, more than compensated. Excellent coffee sealed the deal.

Stanley continued to impress us. It is immaculately kept, full of charming cottages and historic buildings, with a gentle, welcoming atmosphere.

Later, we drove around to the western side of The Nut and discovered the Highfield Historic Site, built in 1826 using convict labour. Unfortunately, it had just closed when we arrived, but the view back towards Stanley and The Nut from that angle was stunning.

21 December 2024 – Stanley to Turners Beach, TAS: 24°C

In the morning, we were genuinely sad to leave Stanley. It is one of those beautiful places that quietly works its way into your heart.

After setting up at Turners Beach, we set off to explore Sheffield. We embarked on a pretty drive through peaceful, rolling green hills dotted with cows. Sheffield surprised us with its many painted murals, turning the town into an open-air gallery.

Next stop was Leven Canyon. At 250 metres deep, it is undeniably impressive, but frustratingly, from Cruickshank's Lookout, we could not see the river below. We did not feel that the trip there was justified. The 697 steps built by Stephen McTurk and his crew to reach the canyon floor were not something we felt compelled to test.

Back at Turners Beach, we were initially shocked to find the shoreline covered in pebbles. That is not what we expected to see on a beach described as among Australia's best. However, later that evening, we walked back to the beach to witness the sunset and, on the other side of the dunes, discovered the tide had gone out, revealing beautiful sand. Lee managed to capture a final Tasmanian sunset — a fitting farewell to this lovely island that proved to be one of the highlights of our trip.

22 December 2024 – Turners Beach to Devonport, TAS to Geelong, VIC: 21°C

We had to make an early start at 5.30 am to pack up and make the short 16-minute drive to Devonport to board the *Spirit of Tasmania* back to the mainland.

We had recliner seats on the crossing, which made for a comfortable, relaxing day. The highlight was passing the sister ship heading in the opposite direction. It felt like a perfectly fitting moment as we farewelled Tasmania and marked the end of an unforgettable chapter of our journey.

The crossing was smooth all the way, and we arrived in Geelong right on schedule at 7.00 pm. We drove straight to the Geelong Showgrounds, and after the long day, it was a relief simply to pull in, set up, and unwind.

Re-entry to VICTORIA – heading north (inland)

On returning to the mainland, we set out to see more of central Victoria and New South Wales, travelling north to Lightning Ridge, then looping back south to Melbourne and continuing to South Australia.



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

23 December 2024 – Geelong to Coburg North, VIC: 23°C

The drive from Geelong went smoothly, with no wrong turns through Melbourne's busy multi-lane highways. That felt like a very satisfying achievement.

We stayed at a BIG4 caravan park in Coburg North. Even with our BIG4 discount, it was expensive for what it offered. The sites and facilities were small and cramped, and the water tasted dreadful, even after being filtered.

The reason we chose this caravan park was its location. It is only about 30 minutes by train into the city, which allowed us to catch up with Lee's sister, Willy, and her husband, John, for lunch. We had a lovely reunion and spent a wonderful afternoon together, thoroughly enjoying

their company.

Woolworths and BWS were conveniently close to the caravan park, so we did our Christmas shopping in preparation for our stay in Cobram with Heather and Wayne, parents to our daughter-in-law Caroline.

24–25 December 2024 — Coburg to Cobram (Yarroweyah), VIC: 40°C

After the cool weather in Tasmania, we really noticed the severity of the summer heat as we headed for Cobram.

We arrived safely in Cobram and were warmly welcomed by Heather and Wayne. It was wonderful to see them again and to meet their friend John, who arrived later in the day. One sign on their wall immediately caught our attention: *‘Don’t take life too seriously. Nobody gets out alive anyway.’* A philosophy we can all appreciate.

Christmas Day was a true team effort. Together we prepared a generous lunch for the five of us, with roast beef, prawns, ham, roast turkey, roast vegetables, and all the trimmings. Heather outdid herself with a beautiful lamington wreath and a rich plum pudding with custard for dessert.

On Christmas day, we managed to catch up with all our children and grandchildren on FaceTime. Traditionally, Lee wears the Christmas hat and hands out presents from under our family Christmas tree. This year, he had to improvise. Via FaceTime, he chose presents one by one from those he could see under the tree in Perth, while our grandson Joshua retrieved and handed them out. It was a clever solution and made us feel surprisingly connected, despite the distance.

Later in the afternoon, we all cooled off in the pool and enjoyed a lively game of pool volleyball. It was a vastly different Christmas for us, but one we thoroughly enjoyed.

26 December 2024 to 1 January 2025 – Cobram, VIC: 40°C

Wayne introduced Lee to his three lawn mowers the next morning, and together they mowed the paddock beside the house in preparation for a cricket pitch that would be needed on 28 December when more than 20 family members and friends were expected for lunch and a Christmas barbeque. There were already plans for multiple games to keep everyone entertained.

After lunch, Heather and Wayne took us for a drive through Cobram. It is a surprisingly large town with all the facilities the community needs. We enjoyed a coffee at the club before heading back. With the temperature again soaring to 40°C, Lee and Wayne cooled off in the pool later in the afternoon.

After celebrating Christmas with the family in Perth, our son Blair returned to work in Port Hedland, so Caroline flew into Melbourne with our grandchildren, Kai and Ayla. Heather and Wayne collected them from the airport so they could spend a few days together in Cobram.

Conveniently, the weather cooled, making for a pleasant day when we all gathered on 28 December for a belated Christmas celebration with family and friends. The day flowed easily with chatting, eating, swimming, and games, and carried on into the evening. It was a thoroughly enjoyable gathering.

2–14 January 2025 – Cobram, VIC: 35°C

With Caroline's sisters and their families also staying for a few days, the house was full and lively. We cherished the time with them.

Unfortunately, Lee had developed an ulcer on the front of his leg and was being treated at the Cobram Medical Centre. As a bonus, he enjoyed the attention from the three nurses in the family who conferred over his wound and changed the dressings when needed.

We went out for dinner on New Year's Eve at the Barooga Hotel and enjoyed a lovely meal, but were home and in bed well before midnight.

In the morning, Heather and Wayne were setting off in their Winnebago, taking Caroline, Kai, and Ayla back to Perth, with plans to spend some time there before returning. They were gone for almost six weeks in total, and we stayed behind to look after their home until they returned. We needed a rest after the intensity of our trip through Tasmania, so it was a perfectly timed arrangement, and Lee benefited greatly from consistent medical care in one place.

After days of constant activity and people, the house felt very empty once they left. Suddenly, it was just the two of us again.

15-16 January 2025 – Cobram, VIC: 33°C

We took things very easy over the next couple of weeks. Lee was a very compliant patient, elevated his legs whenever possible, and made multiple visits to the Cobram Medical Centre for dressing changes. The pain was easing, which we hoped was a good sign.

Heather and Wayne's rural property of almost 2.5 acres was lovely, with a large garden full of mature trees and nearby orchards. Canals fed by the Murray River supplied water to the orchards, and large fish could be caught less than 100 metres from the house.

Jimmy, their Ragdoll cat we cared for, was a beautiful, affectionate boy who loved cuddles and being brushed. It was something I enjoyed doing and found very relaxing, and I'm sure Jimmy loved the attention.

Lee kept himself busy maintaining the pool, trimming plants that overhung the paths, and mowing the lawn on the ride-on mower. He worked at his own pace and thoroughly enjoyed himself.

17-19 January 2025 – Day Trip from Cobram to Echuca Moama, VIC: 32°C

On arriving in Echuca, a charming town filled with historic buildings, we headed straight to the wharf for a one-hour cruise along the Murray River aboard the *Canberra* paddle steamer, reportedly the oldest operating tour boat in the world.

After leaving the dock, we passed numerous houseboats, a log haulier, and the *Pevensey* and *Emmylou* paddle steamers along the way.

Upon returning to Echuca, we had lunch at *The Honey Shop*. The food was good, but by the time it arrived a full hour after ordering, I was getting decidedly hangry.

Walking along the historic wharf with its adjacent shops, we watched a carriage full of passengers being drawn by two horses, a moment that felt like stepping back into another era entirely. We also visited the museum, which houses a collection of old steam engines.

20 January – 2 February 2025 – Cobram, VIC: 36°C

We continued to relax while we could, knowing we would soon be back on the road. Lee's ulcer was not improving despite ongoing dressing changes. Luckily, it wasn't painful. He needed a blood test and an X-ray on his leg, which meant another waiting game for the results.

He started seeing a physiotherapist to address his back pain, and we were forever hopeful that this would bring him some relief.

The peach orchard across the road was a wonderful neighbour to have and we enjoyed our morning walks along the tracks, regularly seeing kangaroos who viewed us suspiciously as we approached before hopping away. One morning, the orchard owner stopped to chat with Lee and generously told him to help himself to the fruit. The pickers only take the largest peaches, and the rest go to waste — a shame we tried enthusiastically to remedy. The ripening peaches were delicious.

We planned to head up to Lightning Ridge, where we expected high temperatures, so while we were stationary in Cobram, we decided to have an air conditioner fitted to our caravan and have one of the struts under the bed repaired. We chose Solar City Caravan Services in Shepparton as they had some decent reviews. Craig, the owner, seemed very obliging as we discussed what we needed. Unfortunately, our trust was misplaced, and the service we received was extremely substandard. The bed base was damaged during the installation, the

remote-control receiver was inconveniently installed under the bed, as were the vents, too low to be as effective as we had been promised. His invoice was a shocking \$3,331, with no breakdown of how each item was costed. Our complaints were met with a wall of silence from Craig, who took absolutely no responsibility for anything. Lee was able to relocate the remote-control receiver and fix the bed base, but relocating the vent outlets was beyond our capabilities while travelling.

3-6 February 2025 – Day Trip from Cobram to Yarrawonga, VIC: 34°C

We took a short drive to Yarrawonga, a lovely town on Lake Mulwala. Along the way, we passed several Cobram Olive Oil orchards. We often buy Cobram Extra Virgin Olive Oil, but we had never even considered where it comes from. We passed the heritage-listed Yarrawonga Town Hall, built in 1930 where locals are proud to be able to say that they have a century old clock tower still chiming.

Lunch at Tame Café was excellent. We then crossed the bridge into Mulwala, NSW, as the two towns blend seamlessly.

Of course, we stopped at Bunnings — how could we not? Lee bought timber to secure our ‘new’ microwave, bought in Tasmania, to prevent it from moving while in transit.

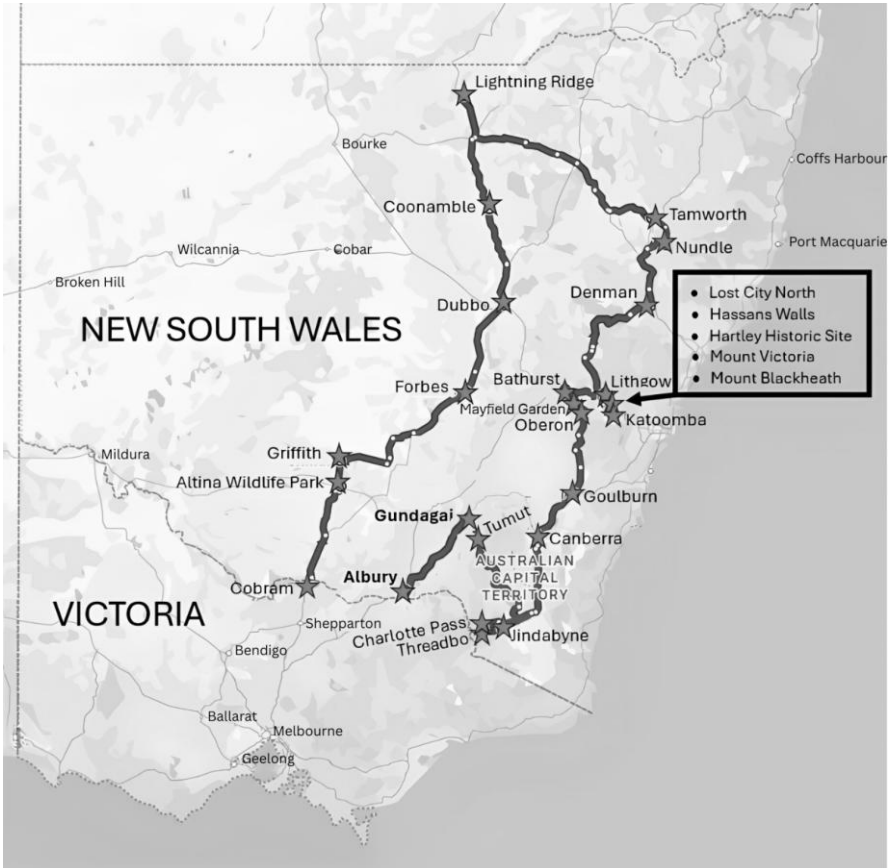
7-8 February 2025 – Cobram, VIC: 34°C

After many visits to the Cobram Medical Centre, Lee’s ulcer finally started to heal, and he began wearing a compression stocking to manage the swelling in his ankle and improve his circulation.

Swimming, however, was off-limits because it could cause infection in the open wound.

Heather and Wayne returned home to a hot and muggy afternoon. Lee had just finished skimming leaves from the pool for the second time that morning when they arrived. With so many beautiful trees on the property, it was a never-ending job.

Re-entry to NEW SOUTH WALES – central loop



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

9 February 2025 – Cobram, VIC to Narrandera, NSW: 33°C

Our time in Cobram had come to an end. It is such a peaceful place, surrounded by orchards, canals, and greenery. On one of his final morning walks, Lee could not believe it when he spotted two boxing kangaroos in the orchard.

On our final night, we took Heather and Wayne to the Cobram Hotel for our ‘last supper’. The boys’ meals arrived promptly, but Heather and I waited patiently for ours until a waiter eventually asked if we planned

to order. Upon investigation, he found that our meals had not been added to the order. Once the error was remedied, the meals arrived promptly and were thoroughly enjoyable.

We drove out through Heather and Wayne's gates for the last time and headed towards Narrandera.

At the Showgrounds campground in Narrandera, we encountered a self-check-in machine that tested every ounce of my patience. The faulty keypad barely worked, and after finally entering all my details multiple times, the credit card reader failed. We gave up and drove to the nearby G'Day Caravan Park, where we were immensely relieved to be greeted by a real person and a lovely green setting with excellent facilities.

After setting up, we visited the beautiful Water Tank Art Trail and drove around town. We passed the railway station and several old pubs, and stopped at the Koala Sanctuary, which is home to over 100 koalas descended from just four originals: three females and one male. We completed the 2.5-kilometre walk but saw only kangaroos — not a single koala.

As we left, we noticed an interesting water control gate on the Murrumbidgee River, calm on one side and raging on the other.

10 February 2025 – Narrandera to Altina Wildlife Park and Griffith, NSW: 31°C

When we booked a 2.5-hour safari tour at Altina Wildlife Sanctuary, we were very lucky to be the only guests, meaning we had the entire padded motorised vehicle to ourselves, which was a blessing for Lee's back.

We began the tour by walking through the Animal Education Museum, which houses preserved animals that passed away naturally. It was fascinating and extremely informative.

From there, it was on to the animal enclosures where meerkats, rock wallabies, golden lion tamarins, and other smaller animals are kept. Next, we boarded the motorised vehicle to see the larger animals from around the world, many of which are endangered. It was great to hear that Altina's breeding programs are genuinely making a difference. The level of care and training we witnessed was remarkable. It was incredible to witness the lions and spotted hyenas willingly presenting themselves against their fence for paw and dental checks.

We never really thought much about it, but we were shocked to learn that zebras are among the most dangerous animals, largely because people underestimate them.

Altina was a truly special experience, and we highly recommend it.

We continued to Griffith, where murals decorate many buildings, including the water tower, which was especially impressive.

Less inspiring, however, were the oversized wine bottles alongside the road, representing local wineries.

We visited Hermit's Cave, where Italian migrant Valerio Ricetti lived from the 1920s, creating an extraordinary home carved into the hillside, complete with gardens. The terrain was rough, requiring careful navigation. Despite being wrongly imprisoned during WWII due to his suspicious lifestyle, he left behind a remarkable legacy. In 1952, he bought a return ticket to visit his brother in Italy and died while he was there.

Dinner was pizza, followed by a visit to the 2016 centenary granite sculptures in IOOF Park. There are seven abstract granite works by international sculptors.

11 February 2025 – Griffith to Forbes, NSW: 30°C

We arrived in Forbes and spent time driving around the town, admiring the many historical buildings that have been well-maintained and are still very much in use. There is a real sense of pride there that clearly

shines through in the effort made to carefully preserve the town's heritage.

We particularly enjoyed walking through the beautifully tended Victoria Park, with its lush green grass and a large fountain at its centre.

There are several interesting sculptures around town, including the Big Goanna located further out of town.

Forbes has a strong connection to bushranger history. Ben Hall, leader of the local bushranger gang known as 'The Boys', was shot and killed by police in the 1860s at just 27 years of age. We visited his grave and saw plaques commemorating other bushrangers who also died young, most in their twenties. It was staggering to reflect on how short and violent those lives were.

We learned about Kate Foster, Ned Kelly's sister, who lived in Forbes. She was found drowned in Lake Forbes at just 36 years of age. It was unclear how she came to drown. Her life had been a difficult one, marked by hardship and a brutal marriage to William Foster.

12-13 February 2025 – Forbes to Dubbo, NSW: 32°C

We travelled through Yeoval and Wellington on our way to Dubbo, where we stayed at the G'Day Caravan Park for a couple of nights.

Our site was close to the pools. There were two: one cold and one heated to a luxurious 30°C year-round. Lee could not resist a swim. After being denied for so long due to his leg ulcer, a swim felt long overdue. His ulcer was starting to heal, so we bought large waterproof bandages and carefully covered it, hoping it would stay sealed. It worked a treat. We tested the cold pool first, then quickly decided the heated pool was our preferred option.

The next day, we visited the Old Dubbo Gaol, located on the main street, right in the middle of town, surrounded by shops and cafés. When the gaol was operational, many locals were unhappy that it was the first thing visitors saw upon arriving in town and fought to have the

main street entrance closed, with access moved to the rear.

When the gaol closed in 1966, the original main street entrance was reopened for tourism.

Eight people were hanged at the gaol, including one woman. In one of the yards, there was a display of a hangman's noose, typical of those erected when needed. Standing there, it was impossible not to imagine the terror that must have been felt by prisoners on death row as they heard the structure being built. It was quite confronting.

In the afternoon, we visited the Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitor Centre, which was both fascinating and informative. A large circular interactive table featured recorded stories from people living in remote areas who rely on the RFDS. There was also a detailed aircraft display, including a complete plane on site. It gave us a deeper appreciation of just how critical this service is to outback Australia.

14 February 2025 – Dubbo to Lightning Ridge, NSW: 34°C

We headed for our most northerly destination in NSW on this leg of the trip, Lightning Ridge. To get there, we travelled along both the Newell and Castlereagh Highways, which were shockers. The road surfaces were so rough it felt like being inside a washing machine — imagination required, but not much.

About an hour out of Dubbo, we encountered a large herd of escaped cattle grazing on both sides of the road, with the occasional cow wandering across without any concern for traffic. Further on, we came across a second herd being actively rounded up by a farmer and his dogs. Even then, some cows wandered back across the highway, completely oblivious to the line of cars waiting patiently.

We passed through Coonamble and stopped to admire the beautifully painted pink and grey galahs on the water tower. It was yet another wonderful example of water tower art.

We pulled over in a clearing for lunch in our caravan before continuing to Lightning Ridge.

The BIG4 Opal Caravan Park was our destination. The ground was mostly dirt and stones, with very little grass. The amenities were quite new, and the cost of a load of washing was \$7 — the most expensive we found on the entire trip. Presumably, this reflects the high cost of water in such a dry area.

After setting up, we visited the Information Centre and bought information sheets for \$1 each, only to discover that most of the town's attractions are closed throughout February. Many operators take the month off after the busy festive and school holiday season. This was extremely disappointing and poorly advertised, something that really should be made clear to travellers.

We drove around town and saw Cooper's Cottage, another old cottage, the former hospital, and several murals. We had been looking forward to seeing the hand-carved sculptures in the sandstone walls of the Chambers of the Black Hand Mine, but it too was closed.

Initially, it felt like we had driven a very long way for little reward, but that changed when we did the Red Car Door Tour. This self-drive route revealed humpies (makeshift shelters) built on opal mining sites. Some of the homes were constructed from unusual materials. One house, built from bottles, cans, and rocks, looked surprisingly livable. We could not help but wonder just how much beer was consumed in the name of architecture.

Unfortunately, both the Ridge Castle and Amigo's Castle were closed, so we could only view them from the outside. They were very interesting structures, and we would have liked to see inside.

We then followed the Yellow Car Door Tour, which took us to the Lunatic Hill Open Cut Mine, a massive excavated site. There were visible metal air vents that supplied oxygen to miners while they worked 20 metres underground.

15 February 2025 – Lightning Ridge, NSW: 31°C

In the morning, we followed the Blue Car Door Tour and visited the Walk-in Opal Mine. This mine ceased operation in the 1990s and is now open to tourists. Visitors are issued hard hats — and for good reason! A sign at the entrance to the mine reads: ‘*Watch ya noggin mate*’, which was especially relevant for Mr Six-foot-three Lee.

It was fascinating to see how opals were mined. It is very dangerous, exhausting work for what often seems like very little return. This lifestyle attracts people who enjoy living outside the norm, and many have a highly developed sense of humour. They genuinely love the freedom, the life, and the digging.

We learned that cave-ins are common, and if a miner was killed underground, their body was often not recovered because it was too dangerous to risk more lives. The mine was simply filled in and sealed. Even more disturbing was learning about ‘ratters’, the people who sneak in at night to steal timber supports, destabilising the mine and endangering lives. It is beyond belief that anyone could be so reckless and cruel.

Our next stop was Bevan’s Cactus Garden, an enormous and fascinating collection, with some cacti reaching 13 metres tall. A severe hailstorm just days earlier had caused noticeable damage to both the plants and cars around town.

We then visited the artesian bore pool, kept at around 40°C, but somehow, it felt even hotter than that. I could only manage a short soak before needing a cold shower, but Lee stayed in for about 15 minutes. When he tried to get out, he became weak and started to fall backwards into the water. Thankfully, several people nearby helped me get him out. I could not have managed alone. We later learned that the recommended immersion time is about five minutes, followed by cooling down with a cold shower. This useful information is displayed near the showers, nowhere near where we entered the pool.

At 7.30 pm, we headed out on the Green Car Door Explorer Tour to Nettleton's First Shaft Lookout to watch the sunset. We were not disappointed. The colours were vibrant, and the landscape glowed red as the sun dropped. Along the way, we passed a caravan with teddy bears seated outside it. Lightning Ridge certainly attracts some interesting characters.

16 February 2025 – Lightning Ridge to Tamworth, NSW: 26°C

On leaving Lightning Ridge, we passed Stanley the Emu, an 18-metre-tall sculpture made from old VW Beetle cars and satellite dishes, designed by artist John Murray. When we first saw Stanley on our way into Lightning Ridge, we had wondered what on earth it was. Clearly, our artistic appreciation needs work. Once we knew what it represented, we could appreciate the skinny legs.

We detoured through Walgett to see the stunning portrait of Jimmy Little painted on the water tower. It was skillfully executed and well worth the stop. Jimmy Little was a celebrated Australian Aboriginal musician, actor and advocate whose career spanned six decades

Then it was back onto those dreadful highways for more stomach-churning driving as we continued towards Tamworth. We briefly considered stopping at Wee Waa, pronounced 'Wee War', but as it was Sunday and everything was closed, we decided to press on.

17 February 2025 – Tamworth, NSW: 29°C

The weather was perfect as we pulled into the Paradise Tourist Park in Tamworth, and we were able to catch up on washing and grocery shopping before heading out to explore Tamworth.

We had missed the famous Country Music Festival, which ended a few weeks earlier, but our first stop was the Big Golden Guitar outside the Wax Museum. Inside were wax figures of well-known country music stars and a collection of famous guitars, making this a very interesting visit. I was reminded of attending a Slim Dusty show in Koorda, WA, when I was a child.

We then visited the Hands of Fame Park, though we did not recognise any of the names.

Next was the Waler Memorial Park, a moving tribute not only to Australian servicemen and women, but also to the 500,000 Australian horses that served in wars. Only one returned home. That fact alone is heartbreaking.

There is also an impressive children's playground beside the memorial.

Our final stop was Oxley Park Lookout, high above the town, with sweeping views across Tamworth and the Great Dividing Range beyond. It felt like you could see forever.

18 February 2025 – Tamworth to Denman, NSW: 28°C

On our way towards Denman, we called in at Nundle to visit the famous Nundle Woollen Mill. It is a tiny town with a population of around 300, and is one of the last spinning mills still operating in Australia. The team there continue to use traditional machinery, some of it more than 100 years old.

I was particularly fascinated by the carding machine, which transforms a chaotic, messy pile of raw wool into beautifully aligned fibres, all running in the same direction, ready to be spun into yarn. Watching the process made it much easier to appreciate just how labour-intensive and skilled this craft really is.

Afterwards, we stopped for morning tea at the local café and shared a very sweet brownie topped with roasted almonds. The lady behind the counter cheerfully announced she would 'tart it up' for us by warming it in the microwave, adding cream, and finishing it off with a generous dusting of icing sugar. We liked her sense of humour immediately, and the brownie was pretty good too.

They also sell what they call a 'diet' chocolate chip cookie. It is the size of a dinner plate, ensuring that only one is enough for those trying to

limit the number of cookies they consume. And, of course, there was a T-shirt that summed up Nundle perfectly: *‘Nundle? Nundle? Where the f**k is Nundle?’*

When we arrived at Denman Van Village, we were cheerfully welcomed by a Minion statue at reception, the blue and yellow cartoon character. We proudly perched our grandson Kai’s soft toy ‘Volk’ on top of the Minion’s head, which gave us a good laugh and a great opportunity to send a photo to Kai.

The park has en-suite sites and is located in a lovely spot, set right on the river. After settling in, we walked along the Memorial Walk towards town for dinner. Along the way, we spotted a striking Australian King-Parrot perched in a tree, its vivid colours clearly visible in the late afternoon light. We also passed a large and rather impressive sculpture of a kookaburra.

We had been looking forward to Chinese food at the RSL, only to discover that it does not serve dinner on Mondays or Tuesdays. Instead, we ended up at the pub. Not quite what we had planned, but still an enjoyable evening.

19 February 2025 – Denman to Lithgow, NSW: 20°C

On our drive to Lithgow, we once again encountered a herd of cattle being moved along the road. The dogs were doing a magnificent job of keeping the cows to the side, while traffic crawled patiently behind them. This was now becoming a familiar rural sight on our travels.

We had read mixed reviews about campgrounds in and around Lithgow, and this was the first time on the trip that we genuinely struggled to find somewhere we felt comfortable staying. The campground in town had reviews ranging from glowing to alarming, so we decided to seek advice from the Information Centre.

They recommended Lake Lyell Campground but neglected to mention several crucial details. It was only after almost completing our set-up that we discovered there was no running water to the sites, and the

only drinking water tap was located behind the amenities block on top of the hill — and that water had to be boiled before use. Showers operated on a timer: \$1 for three minutes, with no warning before the water shut off. My shower worked as expected, but Lee's was barely lukewarm. He seemed to have a knack for avoiding hot water in the showers.

Needless to say, this campground did not meet our expectations for a comfortable stay. However, having already paid for two nights, we decided to make the best of it, especially as other options did not present themselves. We boiled several kettles of water, poured it into a specially cleaned bucket, and used it as needed for drinking and washing dishes. At least there were toilets, showers and power. Sometimes gratitude really does come down to small mercies.

Despite the campsite frustrations, we headed out to do some sightseeing. Our first stop was Hassan's Walls, which offered sweeping views over the Hartley Valley and the Pagoda Rocks, which are striking formations where the soft Narrabeen sandstone beneath has been partially protected from erosion by a much harder ironstone cap.

Next, we visited the Lost City North lookout in the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area, where even more unusual rock formations stretched across the landscape.

On the way back to Lithgow, we stopped at the remains of Australia's very first blast furnace, built between 1906 and 1907. Iron ore was smelted there and transported to the steelworks just one kilometre away. For about seven years, it was the only producer of iron ore in Australia. High costs and the Great Depression eventually led to its closure, with the last workers dismissed in 1932.

20 February 2025 – Day Trip from Lithgow to Katoomba, NSW: 21°C

We woke to an overcast sky and hoped the weather would improve for

our planned sightseeing. Unfortunately, it did not, but we pressed ahead anyway.

Our first stop was Hartley, with its expansive green paddocks dotted with horses and alpacas. From there, we continued to Hartley Historic Village, where we watched a short photographic presentation featuring old images of the area. One standout was an extraordinary early car capable of carrying up to 12 passengers on day trips to the Jenolan Caves.

Sadly, the Jenolan Caves were temporarily closed due to sinkholes and urgent structural repairs and would not reopen for at least another six months.

We met the owner of the antique store in Hartley, whose shop was overflowing with beautiful, well-priced items. It was hard to believe she had only been operating for 13 months. It looked like a long-established business. Her stunning 1958 red Mercedes parked out front completed the scene perfectly.

Hartley was established in the 1850s as a law-enforcement town, complete with a courthouse. Most offenders were petty criminals, though bushrangers also featured. Lashing was a common punishment, even for public swearing. It emphasised how much times have changed!

We wandered through the historic buildings, then stopped for coffee in the charming café that once served as the post office.

From there, we headed to Mount Victoria Lookout, followed by Blackheath Lookout, where the weather finally cleared, just a little. At Katoomba, however, we found ourselves driving through drizzle and mist that could actually have been low cloud. At Echo Point, where the Three Sisters should have been visible, we could see little but thick fog. Thankfully, we had seen the impressive Three Sisters on a previous day trip from Sydney, many years ago, so we turned around and headed back to Lithgow.

The Gang Gang Farmers Markets held in Lithgow on Thursdays proved small but worthwhile. We picked up some exceptional croissants and a delicious fruit-and-nut loaf.

Driving through town, we unexpectedly came across a statue of Marjorie Jackson, nicknamed 'The Lithgow Flash' due to her impressive athletic achievements. At the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, she became the first Australian woman to win an athletics gold medal, for both the 100m and 200m. She was part of the 4 x 100 m relay team, but a dropped baton saw the team finish fifth instead of the expected first. At the 1954 Vancouver Commonwealth Games, aged just 23, she won three gold medals before retiring to focus on her marriage.

We could not have been happier knowing we were leaving this campground the next day. Lee returned from the facilities with steam metaphorically coming out of his ears. He had just had his second cold shower in two days and was not a happy camper.

21 February 2025 – Lithgow to Bathurst, NSW: 25°C

Our departure was hastened when a worker on a ride-on mower began cutting grass right next to our caravan, sending rocks flying. We made a very quick decision to leave before any damage was done to either the car or the caravan.

After arriving in Bathurst and setting up camp, we visited Chifley House, the modest former home of Prime Minister Ben Chifley (1945–1949) and his wife Elizabeth. It was refreshing to learn about a politician and his wife who lived simply their entire lives, and the house certainly reflects that.

It seems they spent most of their time in the kitchen, sitting around the Laminex table. The sink area held an electric mixer, a hand mixer, and a rolling pin, instantly transporting me back to my own childhood on our farm.

An old cane chair stood on the front veranda, where Elizabeth would sit and chat with passers-by. One interesting piece of furniture on display

was their clever 1940s lounge suite, complete with armrests for holding drinks. Once again, it transported me back to our lounge suite during our farm days. It is a surprisingly practical touch that our furniture lacks these days.

We then drove a couple of laps around the Bathurst racetrack at a very sedate 60 km/h. Anyone can drive there when there are no races on. The steep gradients and sharp turns gave us a genuine appreciation of just how demanding the circuit is.

22 February 2025 – Bathurst to Oberon, NSW: 28°C

We set off for Oberon, stopping at Mayfield Garden on the way. All I could say was: Wow! Wow! Wow!

Mayfield Garden spans 65 hectares. Belonging to the Hawkins family, these privately owned cool-climate gardens are simply magnificent and are among the largest in the world. The long road in was impressive, lined with trees that must be breathtaking in autumn colours.

Inside, the gardens unfold into countless nooks and crannies: water gardens, a grotto with a waterfall, bridges, slate walls and buildings, hedges, a gallery, a rose garden, a maze, a croquet lawn, an amphitheatre, and meticulously laid stone pathways throughout. Everything is beautifully designed and immaculately maintained.

We walked through many sections, eventually reaching the highest point where a chapel sits quietly overlooking the grounds. Further along is a beautiful aviary housing a Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and other birds. The family's private residence lies beyond the lake at the rear of the property.

We spent nearly three hours wandering through this magical garden, then enjoyed a delicious lunch at the café before continuing to Oberon.

We had planned to stay at the showgrounds, but on arrival, we

discovered it was Oberon Rodeo Day, which made that impossible. Thankfully, we secured the last powered site at Jenolan Holiday Park. After such a big walking day, we were more than happy to relax for the rest of the afternoon.

23 February 2025 – Oberon, NSW: 30°C

We drove through Oberon and admired a magnificently restored Art Deco building, a real standout in the town.

We then visited the Information Centre to hire fossicking gear and try our luck at sapphire hunting. Following their advice, we drove out to a loop near Riverview Forest Road. The result? A collection of completely unremarkable rocks! Not exactly the treasure haul we had hoped for.

Gold, we decided, would have been much easier because it at least stands out and sinks to the bottom of the pan. We were told that Sapphires mingle in among everything else, so we have no clue if we found anything valuable. We just did not know, which made the process frustrating rather than fun. Having found nothing of value that we could see, we returned the equipment.

On the upside, the area is filled with towering pine trees, and the drive there was very picturesque.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

24 February 2025 – Oberon, NSW to Canberra, ACT: 32°C

We headed towards Canberra, amid scenery that shifted from rolling hills to deep valleys and winding roads. At Taralga, we paused for a while and took the opportunity to reserve a car service for when we reached Mansfield. It is remarkable how many Isuzu dealerships are booked out weeks in advance all over Australia.

Road conditions varied wildly — from excellent highways to narrow, bumpy bitumen roads riddled with potholes, some sections under repair.

Passing through Goulburn, we were greeted by the enormous ram ‘Big Merino’ on the roadside, which stands just over 15 metres high. It is impossible to miss as you drive along the Hume Highway.

25 February 2025 – Canberra, ACT: 24°C

We began the day with a visit to Parliament House, entering through the spacious marble foyer with its towering pillars and grand staircases.

We joined the Best of Parliament House Tour, which took us into the House of Representatives (the green chamber) and the Senate (the red chamber), as well as through public areas and past portraits of former prime ministers.

The Speaker’s Chair in the House of Representatives is intricately carved and almost an exact replica of the one in the Palace of Westminster in the UK.

We sat in on a Senate Estimates session and listened to Senator Michaelia Cash asking questions that were clearly unwelcome and unlikely to be answered. Unfortunately, the gallery microphones were not quite loud enough to hear everything distinctly.

The Australian flag on top of Parliament House is far larger than it appears from below. It flies 81 metres above the grassed roof and is roughly the size of a double-decker bus. Due to wear, it must be replaced monthly, a task carried out by two very brave people who ride a cart up one of the supporting beams.

In an interior courtyard stands a Canadian maple known as the Budget Tree, which turns bright red in autumn around budget time.

Our next stop was the ACT Electoral Office, where we voted in the WA election, followed by a quick visit to the Royal Australian Mint, which, in truth, was rather uninspiring.

By contrast, our visit to the Australian War Memorial was deeply moving. We spent several hours looking through the comprehensive record of Australia's involvement in war. The WWI trench dioramas were particularly confronting, vividly illustrating the mud, cold, and sheer horror endured by soldiers.

The visit was made even more personal by seeing a cornet like the one my father owned, now proudly displayed in a cabinet in our son Blair's home. A Spitfire aircraft and the magnificent domed Hall of Memory were also highlights.

We stayed on for the moving Last Post Ceremony, held in front of the Hall of Memory, where one person who gave their life in wartime is honoured. That day, Private John Peter Henry Olden was honoured.

We then headed up to Mount Ainslie Lookout for a perfectly aligned view over the War Memorial, Lake Burley Griffin, Parliament House, and the distant ranges.

26 February 2025 – Canberra, ACT: 32°C

Our first stop the next day was the Canberra Glassworks, where we watched glass artist Peter Nilsson working in the hot shop with two experienced glass blowers, shaping a glowing molten piece into an exquisite creation. We had hoped to see more artists working, but on

that day the studio was quiet.

We picnicked by the peaceful shores of Lake Burley Griffin and watched a pelican glide past while the Carillon's 57 bells rang out the Westminster chimes. At midday, it rang 12 times, echoing across the water. Nearby, a water jet commemorates Captain James Cook.

We then drove up to the National Arboretum, with its collection of rare and endangered trees from around the world, and where a striking steel bird-and-nest sculpture sits atop the hill.

Our final stop was the National Gallery, where we saw works by the usual luminaries – Sidney Nolan, Jackson Pollock (*Blue Poles*), Claude Monet, Henri Matisse, and others, some of which left me completely baffled.

A shell sculpture by Lindy Lee, crafted from 24-carat gold, was breathtaking. It would most certainly be an eye-wateringly valuable item, given current gold prices.

Re-entry to NEW SOUTH WALES – heading south

27 February 2025 – Canberra to Jindabyne, NSW: 29°C

What a day! They say things happen in threes, but that day we had seven! Thankfully, all ended well.

Number 1: An impatient driver overtook us with a road train coming the other way, narrowly squeezing back in front of us just in time. We were furious, and so was the truck driver, who was flashing his lights. That was a frightening incident that could have ended very badly.

We then visited the Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre in Cooma. The displays were excellent, with a detailed diorama showing landscape, dams, tunnels, lakes, and power flow. The ten-minute film was particularly informative.

Number 2: Returning to the car, I noticed a flat rear tyre, caused by a screw in the tread. Lee pumped it up, and it seemed to hold, but then along came ‘Saint’ Tony from Shepparton with impeccable timing and a tyre plug kit. With perfect teamwork, Lee removed the screw, and Tony plugged the hole. We should have had our own kit, so we put it on our shopping list.

Number 3: Leaving Cooma, we encountered another dangerous overtaking incident. A slow little truck ahead was doing 80 km/h with multiple cars banked up behind it. Two cars from the back of the queue decided to overtake everyone, only to be confronted by an oncoming vehicle that was forced to slow down to avoid a head-on collision. In eight months of travel, we had never seen behaviour like this — and now twice in one day!

Number 4: Less than a kilometre from our Jindabyne campground, a police car pulled alongside us and motioned for us to pull over. The officer was unimpressed that we had not heard the siren, which we genuinely had not. Lee was asked to count into a breathalyser; he only

reached three before being told we needed to get our hearing checked and were waved on. It was a very strange encounter.

Number 5: We were looking forward to our campsite with views; however, it turned out to be extremely difficult to reverse into our spot due to a narrow road and steep drop-off. Eventually, Lee unhooked the caravan and used the remote-controlled motorised caravan mover to position the van — a saviour from much frustration. The lake water levels were very low, so the view was not quite what we had hoped for, though the shade trees were welcome.

Number 6: Lee's access code would not open the amenities door, but thankfully, a cleaner was there and let him in.

Number 7: After shopping, our swipe card would not let us back into the park. The office had just closed, but luckily, the staff were still there and replaced the card for us.

Seven challenges. Seven resolutions. And one very long day.

28 February – 1 March 2025 – Day Trip – Jindabyne to Charlotte Pass and Thredbo, NSW: 25°C

We set out early for Charlotte Pass, driving through the Snowy Mountains where the landscape was stark and exposed. The mountains here are rounded rather than jagged, shaped over millions of years by wind and rain. Red snow poles line the road like quiet sentinels, a reminder that in winter this place becomes something altogether different. Buried beneath deep snow, the road cannot be seen and must be clearly marked.

We climbed the steps to Charlotte Pass Lookout and took in the view. There is a softness to these mountains despite their harshness. They give a sense of endurance rather than drama. At this altitude, only Snow Gums survive. They are extraordinary trees, twisted, stunted, and sculpted by relentless weather. Their slow growth and short growing season mean every scar tells a long story. Many stand leafless and grey, appearing lifeless at first glance, yet very much alive, simply

conserving energy against the extremes of the climate.

On the return drive, we passed through Perisher Valley and the iconic Man From Snowy River Pub, a nostalgic marker of Australian folklore tucked into an otherwise sparse landscape.

Back in Jindabyne, we stopped for lunch before continuing to Thredbo. Although only about half an hour away, the difference between Thredbo and Perisher Valley was striking. Thredbo was greener and felt more sheltered, with noticeably lush vegetation. We took the chairlift to the summit lookout on Mount Kosciuszko, bracing ourselves against the cool wind at the top. It was surprising to find the Eagles Nest restaurant closed on a Friday, despite its advertised opening days of Thursday to Sunday. Watching mountain bikers jump off the chairlift at the summit, quickly retrieve their bikes while the chair kept moving, then race back down the slopes was entertaining. They were keenly focused on racing back down the slopes.

The drive back to Jindabyne was marred by another reminder of how reckless driving can turn these winding mountain roads into something far more dangerous than they need to be. Even though we drove at the speed limit along the winding road, one impatient driver tailgated relentlessly, only to overtake at the first opportunity. Thankfully, there was no oncoming traffic at that moment.

2 March 2025 – Jindabyne to Albury, NSW: 34°C

Our planned travel day was reshaped by the staff at the Information Centre in Jindabyne. We had planned to tow the caravan to Albury along the Alpine Way via Corryong, but staff strongly recommended against it due to narrow sections where one vehicle must reverse to allow another to pass. We rerouted via Tumut, a decision that proved both safer and still very scenic.

The drive through the Snowy Mountains unfolded into deep valleys and broad, rounded peaks. We were delighted to spot some of the famous Snowy Mountains brumbies grazing on open plains. The large trout sculpture at Adaminaby provided a cheerful roadside stop. Signs of

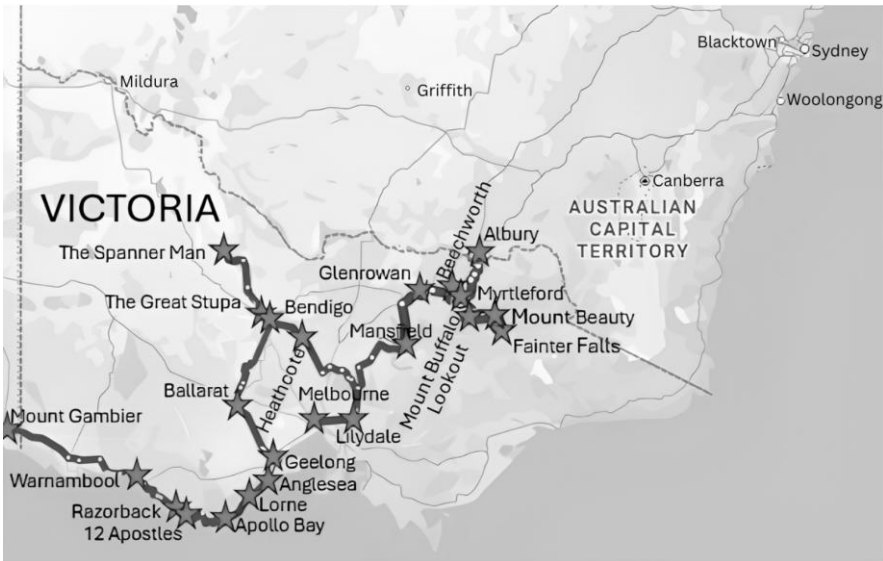
past bushfires were evident, with many tree trunks blackened at their bases, though it was unclear whether they were recovering or had succumbed entirely, as all were leafless.

Passing through Gundagai gave us the chance to see the Dog on the Tuckerbox — a small statue of Australian roadside heritage.

Once in Albury, we visited Lake Hume and the dam before strolling through the Botanic Gardens. Two kookaburras perched perfectly at opposite ends of a tall rose support, looking like feathered guards on duty. The roses were disappointing, but the garden still offered a pleasant pause. A large dinosaur sculpture in the children's area would no doubt be a highlight for younger visitors.

We finished the afternoon at Monument Hill, where the central memorial rises high in the centre and is surrounded by a ring of smaller tributes. It is very impressive in its quiet dignity.

Re-entry to VICTORIA – heading south, then west



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

3 March 2025 – Albury, NSW to Myrtleford, VIC: 31°C

Before leaving Albury, we walked part of the Yindymarra Sculpture Walk along the Murray River. The contrast was striking. One side of the river appeared healthy and inviting, while the other was stagnant and murky, but with lone trees growing like sentries in the stagnant water. A sign warning visitors not to touch the water seemed entirely unnecessary. Its condition spoke for itself. There were many interesting sculptures along the walk, and we were particularly impressed with the kookaburras.

Myrtleford truly is a town surrounded by its landscape, as it sits in a valley surrounded by pine-covered mountains.

4 March 2025 – Day trip from Myrtleford to Mount Beauty, VIC: 30°C

We set out early for a full day of exploring, starting with our furthest

destination, Fainter Falls. The mountain roads were narrow and winding, with steep drop-offs demanding constant attention. Access to the falls involved a rocky track crisscrossed with exposed tree roots and partially submerged rocks. Not far into the walk, Lee tripped on a raised rock and fell heavily onto his side. Though shaken, he managed to get up and insisted he was OK to carry on, possibly more hopeful than he should have been that no damage had been done.

Low rainfall in the region was evident everywhere. Fainter Falls had been reduced to a modest trickle, and the riverbed below was mostly exposed rock. It was still a pleasant walk that we could imagine would have been beautiful had there been a flowing river.

We stopped at Lake Guy in Bogong, not far from Mount Beauty, and found a peaceful picnic table under shady trees where we enjoyed lunch before visiting the Mount Beauty Pondage, part of the hydro scheme infrastructure.

From Sullivan's Lookout, we enjoyed expansive views of Mount Bogong, the highest peak in the area.

On the way to Bright, we met a lively woman selling fruit and nuts from the roadside. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and we left with delicious figs and roasted hazelnuts. The town of Bright was charming. We enjoyed coffee and a rich brownie beside the Ovens River, before wandering along the water's edge. A children's water-play area featured a large tipping bucket that discharged a startling volume of water. It was captivating to watch, but we wondered if it would be overwhelming for young children. We could imagine them being knocked off their feet.

Still no platypus sightings for us, but there was a painting of one under the bridge, so I suppose that will have to suffice for this trip.

Our final stop was Mount Buffalo Lookout. The winding road climbed steeply through rock and forest before opening onto dramatic views across a deep valley. The Mount Buffalo Chalet sat perched impressively at the summit.

5 March 2025 – Myrtleford, VIC: 28°C

The next day was deliberately slow. After the previous day's exertions, we devoted the day to laundry and rest. Myrtleford has an abundance of myrtle trees — the name has to come from somewhere, right?

Possibly due to his fall at Fainter Falls, Lee was suffering from back pain and needed to rest, so I ventured out alone. I visited the Phoenix Tree, an impressive, intricately carved sculpture of tree roots by Hans Knorr, symbolising rebirth. Later, I walked across the bridge over the Ovens River, through a grassy area, and towards a heavily treed park dotted with small mosaic artworks. Partway along the path through the trees, an uneasy feeling prompted me to turn back. I had just made my way out of the trees when I encountered a lone man approaching. He was harmless enough, but I felt relieved that I had listened to my inner voice.

Back on the original side of the river, I visited the preserved 1930s log tobacco kiln, a reminder of the region's agricultural past.

6 March 2025 – Day trip from Myrtleford to Beechworth, VIC: 34°C

Beechworth greeted us with heritage charm and well-preserved historical buildings. As regular buyers of Beechworth Honey back in Perth, visiting The Honey Shop was a must. We learned that honey from all Australian states cannot be taken into Western Australia unless pasteurised, due to the risk of parasites. Although WA-compliant honey was not available in-store, we enjoyed the tastings and purchased creamed honey and honey drinks to enjoy before crossing back into WA.

We wandered the main street, stopping at the Bee School, where a willing staff member took our photo as we peered through holes in the bee board. The bakery nearby was doing a roaring trade, and the quality of the food we ordered explained why. A small baker doll in the window tirelessly worked with a rolling pin, charming passers-by.

Next door, Beechworth Gold occupies the site of the original Bank of Melbourne. The preserved vault now houses a museum filled with fascinating and surprising gold rush facts, proudly presented. One panel declared: *'In 1854 – Gold was now flowing! With miners earning over 4 times the weekly wage, 7 pounds a week!'* Another panel noted: *'In 1855 – Daniel Cameron, a Government Official, rides around town with solid gold horseshoes on his horse.'* Jewellery displays gleamed nearby, while statues of Ned Kelly and a gold miner marked the entrance.

Beechworth left us thoroughly impressed.

7-9 March 2025 – Myrtleford to Glenrowan, VIC: 32°C

We moved on to Glenrowan for a quieter few days, intent on exploring Ned Kelly's history. A statue at the caravan park entrance made it clear whose legacy dominates the town.

Despite good online reviews, the Glenrowan Caravan and Tourist Park proved deeply disappointing. The amenities were poorly maintained, and the men's facilities were in desperate need of repairs: the urinal did not work, one basin was out of order, some toilet and shower doors were missing locks, there were no hooks to hang clothes, the rubber shower mats were filthy, and water pressure was very low. The ladies' block at least had working door locks and a few shower hooks. I was thankful for those small conveniences. It was a harsh reminder that online ratings do not always reflect reality.

Lee's back pain worsened significantly during the night, so the following morning we drove to Wangaratta Hospital, where, after hours of waiting and a CT scan, we received the reassuring news that there were no fractures. The likely culprit was an aggravated facet joint that was painful, but not catastrophic.

The next day, we visited the Ned Kelly Discovery Hub. It was very comprehensive and confronting to read details about the extent of Kelly's crimes and the lasting mythology surrounding him. As a bushranger, he and his gang robbed people and banks and killed

police. The whole town is built on one man's life of crime, with shops named after him, and a huge statue of him in the main street. We went into the ramshackle shack where his mother and sister Kate had once lived, now used to sell memorabilia.

The old police station and a lockup have been well preserved, and a plate of armour marks the spot where Ned Kelly was shot and captured at the age of 26. He was transported to Melbourne Gaol, tried, and hanged. His body was later taken to Greta, not far from Glenrowan, for burial. His final words were reported to be '*Such is life*'.

10-12 March 2025 – Glenrowan to Mansfield, VIC: 30°C

We arrived in Mansfield to meet Heather and Wayne, who kindly brought with them some items we had accidentally left at their home! The reunion was relaxed and enjoyable, though dinner at the pub tested our patience with a long wait and underwhelming food.

The following day, we dropped the car off for servicing, and Heather and Wayne took us to explore Mansfield Botanical Gardens and Lake Eildon in their Winnebago. Lunch at the Bonnie Doon Hotel on the shores of Lake Eildon was excellent. They dropped us back at the Isuzu dealership before heading home. Unfortunately, our car was not yet ready, so we had to sit and wait for an hour. New wiper blades and a freshly cleaned exterior made the wait worth it.

On the neighbouring site at the campground, we observed a family with three daughters aged about ten to fourteen, who arrived at 7.30 pm pulling a camper trailer with arms that swung out to create a tent around it. I had never seen anything like it. The girls set up their own pop-up swags in a flash, then showered while their father set up a bed on top of the trailer for the parents, and their mother cooked dinner. The girls were in bed by 8.30 pm. They all worked together with impressive efficiency, the children contributing seamlessly, and it was a delightful glimpse of family teamwork at its best.

13-14 March 2025 – Mansfield to Lilydale, VIC: 31°C

We said goodbye to Mansfield and made our way towards Lilydale, knowing it would be a busy stop given its proximity to Melbourne. Luck was on our side when we managed to secure the very last available site at the caravan park, and not just any site, it was an ensuite one. After weeks on the road, these small differences feel like unexpected luxuries. The afternoon was largely practical, devoted to shopping and rest, as we prepared for a full day in the city.

The following day was one of those that remind us why travelling slowly matters. We caught a bus from the campground, followed by a train into Melbourne, a journey that took over an hour and reinforced how far-removed Lilydale feels from the urban centre, despite being part of greater Melbourne.

We met Lee's sister Willy and her husband John in Hardware Lane for a long, unhurried lunch. The narrow laneway buzzed with conversation and the clink of cutlery as we sat talking for hours, comfortably losing track of time. It was an emotional goodbye, as it was our last chance to spend time with them on this trip.

After leaving Hardware Lane, we made one unplanned but memorable stop at 333 Collins Street. Originally the banking chamber for the Commercial Bank of Australia between 1891 and 1893, the building is an extraordinary blend of history and modern reuse. Standing beneath the impressive grand dome of the old banking hall, now a public foyer, was an overwhelming experience and a reminder of Melbourne's architectural ambition during the gold-fuelled boom years.

From there, we headed towards the MCG, following the Yarra River. Its banks were alive with people enjoying the mild evening. As the stadium came into view, the energy began to change. With 80,700 people in attendance, the AFL match was electric as Hawthorn defeated Essendon. The roar of the crowd and the surge of colour, mixed with thunderous music to highlight goals, made sure we got caught up in the shared emotion of the game, even though we are Eagles fans.

What should have been a straightforward trip home turned into an unexpected late-night saga. After catching the 11.35 pm train back to Lilydale, we discovered there were no buses running past our campground at that hour. Three attempts to book either an Uber or a taxi all failed. Not being familiar with the area, we were likely waiting at the wrong pickup point. A pair of security guards working the station kept us company, and their friendliness made the long wait easier.

While we were still waiting, Sonia, a bus driver working the night shift on a different route, joined the conversation to fill the time before her scheduled departure. When it became clear we were stuck, she took matters into her own hands, ordered an Uber for us and told us where to wait. When the ride finally arrived, she refused to accept repayment for the fare. Her help and generosity were unexpected and left a lasting impression.

We climbed into bed at around 2.20 am — far later than is sensible for us these days. To make matters worse, we already knew the campground was fully booked the next night, meaning we had to be packed up and gone by 10.00 am.

15 March 2025 – Lilydale to Heathcote, VIC: 36°C

The morning came far too quickly. Running on not enough sleep, we packed up and left Lilydale, but had to adjust our plans once again. Bendigo had been our intended destination, but it was fully booked due to the Frida Kahlo Mexican Festival. Instead, we secured a site at Heathcote Caravan Park, fortunate to find any space at all given that the Snowy River Caravan Club was holding a rally there.

All we wanted was rest. The heat was oppressive at 36°C and unrelenting. Inside the caravan, it reached a staggering 34.1°C. The air conditioner unit struggled valiantly but ineffectively. Without our Sirocco and portable fans, sleep would have been impossible. They proved their full worth that night.

As if the heat was not enough, the strut that had recently been installed came loose, adding another unwelcome repair job for Lee.

Working in tight spaces with a sore back was painful and made him extremely unhappy.

16 March 2025 – Day trip from Heathcote to Bendigo, VIC: 21°C

After the previous day's exhaustion, it felt good to wake up refreshed and ready to explore again. Our first stop was the Pink Cliffs of Heathcote, just a short drive away and absolutely worth the visit. The pink hues of the exposed earth were striking, and an old tree clinging bravely to the cliff edge with half its roots exposed looked both vulnerable and defiant.

We followed the walking path to the top, carefully navigating the bull ants, which were far more active than we would have liked. One managed to climb over my shoe and bite my ankle, which certainly encouraged a quicker pace. Along the way, Lee pointed out an unusual rock formation lying on the ground that he promptly named 'Sausage Rocks'. He always enjoys adding a moment of levity.

A recommendation from the Heathcote Information Centre led us to Mount Ida Lookout — an outing that proved deeply frustrating. After driving a rough five-kilometre four-wheel-drive track, we were forced to park and walk the final 200 metres up an uninviting hill, only to find a Telstra tower surrounded by trees that blocked any views. It was baffling that this was promoted as a tourist attraction.

Bendigo more than made up for it, though. Our timing with the vintage tramways was perfect, allowing us to ride out to the heritage-listed Bendigo Joss House Temple, the oldest Chinese place of worship in Australia, still on its original site. Celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2021, the temple was rich in history. Our visit was made even more memorable by the attendant, a passionate Fremantle Dockers AFL supporter from WA, complete with personalised number plates on his car. We are Eagles supporters — yes, rivals, but encounters like this never failed to surprise us and added humour to the day.

We really only needed about 15 minutes to see the temple, but it was an hour's wait for the next tram, so we walked to a nearby café, Giraffe and Fox. Not long after starting the walk, the weather dramatically turned. Rain poured down, the temperature dropped, and, without an umbrella, we arrived thoroughly soaked. After lunch, we caught the tram through town to the Central Deborah Gold Mine and tried our luck at gold panning. Not surprisingly, we were unsuccessful. We explored the site before taking the tram back to the station where we had parked our car.

Bendigo revealed itself as a city rich in heritage and beauty. We visited the Botanical Gardens, with their grand arched entry, then admired the enormous lotus-flower sculpture near the Yi Yuan Gardens. The garden's walls hid traditional Chinese structures, ponds, and water features. We were pleased that we stopped at the Bendigo Art Gallery to enjoy the exhibitions. The many churches scattered throughout the city added to its stately feel.

In the centre of town, the Alexandra Fountain stands proudly as a monument to the goldfields' success, while the Rosalind Gardens offer colour and calm. The day was bitterly cold, with an icy wind howling through the streets. It was hard to believe the dramatic weather change after the previous day's oppressive heat. It was a vivid reminder of Melbourne's famous four-seasons-in-one-day climate. That evening, we tested the caravan's reverse-cycle heater. It was modest, but functional enough to warm the space adequately.

17 March 2025 – Heathcote to Marong, Bendigo, VIC: 22°C

We moved on to the BIG4 Marong Caravan Park, settling in easily before lunch. The afternoon was devoted to practical problem-solving: a trip to Bunnings Hardware for supplies to repair the strut under the bed, followed by food shopping.

Lee struggled with the repair. Solar City Caravan Services in Shepparton had used screws with heads too small for the metal plate, allowing them to pull straight through. We could not believe how

unprofessional that company was. It was such a frustrating discovery. Limited space under the bed made movement difficult, and the pain in his back soon made it clear Lee could not finish the job. We reluctantly accepted that it might need to wait until our scheduled service in Ballarat, assuming Lee could hold out that long.

18 March 2025 – Day trip to the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion and the Spanner Man Gardens: 27°C

Our visit to the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion was deeply moving. We watched a video message from the Dalai Lama speaking about humanity's universal search for inner peace, regardless of religion or belief. The entire site radiates calm, with beautiful sculptures both inside and surrounding the main structure.

The Jade Buddha for Universal Peace was particularly striking. This is a place that invites stillness and reflection, and it is unquestionably worth visiting.

Lee's back pain made walking difficult, and we took frequent rest breaks, including lunch at the StupaView Café in the visitor centre.

Driving on through the small town of Boort, we spotted a Home Hardware. Lee seized the opportunity to buy properly-sized screws. Neither of us had honestly believed he would wait for someone else to fix the strut.

From there, we continued to the Spanner Man Gardens, where sculptures, made entirely from spanners welded together, are scattered throughout the family property, which is now eight generations old. The sculptures, created by John Piccoli from his imagination, are not only imaginative, they are also impressive. The property is now run by his son, who restores vintage cars and has several projects underway.

Even the toilet featured spanner-themed holders and shelves. Exotic pheasants and other animals roamed in large enclosures, completing the eccentric charm of the place.

19 March 2025 – Marong to Ballarat, VIC: 30°C

The night was brutal. Lee was in so much pain that he could not roll over in bed, and in the morning, it took more than half an hour for him to stand. With no vacancy available to extend our stay, I packed up the caravan so we could leave on time. As the morning progressed, Lee moved a little more and helped where he could, and we checked out by 10.00 am.

We passed through Daylesford, a charming historic town with beautifully preserved buildings. One was shrouded in scaffolding mid-restoration, while a gardener trimmed the creeper engulfing the Franco Hotel. There was a church for sale, something we had not seen before.

At the BIG4 Windmill Caravan Park in Ballarat, Lee rested most of the afternoon, but his pain only worsened. By evening, we decided to visit the Ballarat Emergency Department. After a long wait, we were relieved when the doctors conducted more extensive investigations than had been done previously: blood tests, a bladder scan, and another CT scan. Lee was admitted overnight as he struggled to walk, and given strong pain relief.

20-21 March 2025 – Ballarat, VIC: 22°C

The doctor who admitted Lee had been thorough and reassuring, explaining the possibilities clearly. We were hopeful of finding a solution. Despite exhaustive testing, everything came back normal again. While good news in theory, it was also disheartening because something was so clearly wrong. He managed to take a few tentative steps, so he was discharged from the hospital with instructions to rest and contact a physiotherapist. It was also recommended that when we returned home, he contact a particular specialist physiotherapist whose practice happens to be in Perth. This was the same recommendation he had received from the physiotherapist in Cobram.

Rest is a challenging concept when travelling in a caravan, but we resolved to do what we could. That evening, I handled most of the bending and packing as we prepared for an early start. The caravan

was booked in for wheel bearing replacement at Ballarat Trailer Hire by 8.30 am, a booking made a couple of weeks earlier, before we knew just how inconvenient the timing would become.

The service was excellent and refreshingly affordable at \$150, a stark contrast to previous charges elsewhere. While waiting, we went to the local shopping centre and shared coffee with a friendly local woman whose husband strolls the shopping centre each morning, chatting with shop staff before joining her. That day happened to be his 77th birthday.

We did some shopping before collecting the caravan, then headed to the NRMA Caravan Park, our site conveniently located near the spa building, opposite a playground. Later, at the undercover spa, we met a Sunshine Coast couple travelling with their three young daughters, aged 3, 5, and 6. They had been on the road for three years, starting when their youngest was just six weeks old. Their lifestyle choice amazed us, especially as we felt ourselves nearing the limits of long-term travel, though, to be fair, Lee's health was very much part of that reflection.

22 March 2025 – Ballarat, VIC: 21°C

Lee took things quietly. After lunch, I walked the short distance to Sovereign Hill, an open-air museum depicting Ballarat's first decade following the discovery of gold in 1851.

Dusty, hilly streets were lined with timber buildings, alongside a Chinese encampment area. Visitors tried their luck panning for gold, and I wondered whether a few flecks might have been discreetly added to encourage public enthusiasm.

Inside the antique shops, displays recreated life in the mid-1800s in remarkable detail. The gentlemen's department in the David Jones store impressed many male visitors, and an old wooden bowling alley told its own story. Balls once made of New Zealand oak were gradually worn from round to oval through constant use.

I watched a boiled lolly demonstration, from the molten toffee scraped and folded on a metal table, to brass rollers shaping uniform pieces. Samples were offered, though they were not quite to my taste.

A pedal-less bicycle race on the main street provided a moment of fun and humour, and the gold-casting demonstration was unforgettable. Gold melts at 1,200°C, and by the time it is transferred from the furnace and poured into the mould, it has lost 300°C, sending sparks flying when touched with metal. Touch it with a finger, however, and it is hot enough to vaporise it. I learned that overheated gold turns purple, though thankfully it can be remelted and salvaged.

23-25 March 2025 – Ballarat to Geelong and Apollo Bay, VIC: 21°C

We travelled to Geelong and spent a couple of quiet days there catching up on washing and shopping. The rest seemed to help Lee, and his back pain gradually improved.

From Geelong, we set off along the Great Ocean Road towards Apollo Bay, passing through Anglesea, past Split Point Lighthouse and the Grand Pacific Hotel overlooking the ocean on the outskirts of Lorne. Unfortunately, parking with a caravan in Lorne proved impossible, so coffee plans were abandoned.

The Great Ocean Road was breathtaking. Knowing it was carved into the cliffs by returning World War I veterans between 1919 and 1932 made it even more remarkable. Twisting hairpin bends, and an average speed limit of about 45 km/h slowed progress, but the scenery was unforgettable, with towering cliffs and sweeping beaches with crashing waves. Some cliffside homes seemed impossibly perched, including one elevated on a single pole with a walkway to another house set into the rock.

The BIG4 Apollo Bay Caravan Park was outstanding. The sites are huge, and the amenities are luxurious. After lunch, we explored the town, admiring the wooden sculptures in the park and visiting the harbour's

inviting fish and chip shop, complete with cheeky seagulls poised for theft.

That evening, a colourful light show at the park delighted guests with bubbles, smoke, and vibrant lights, captivating both kids and adults.

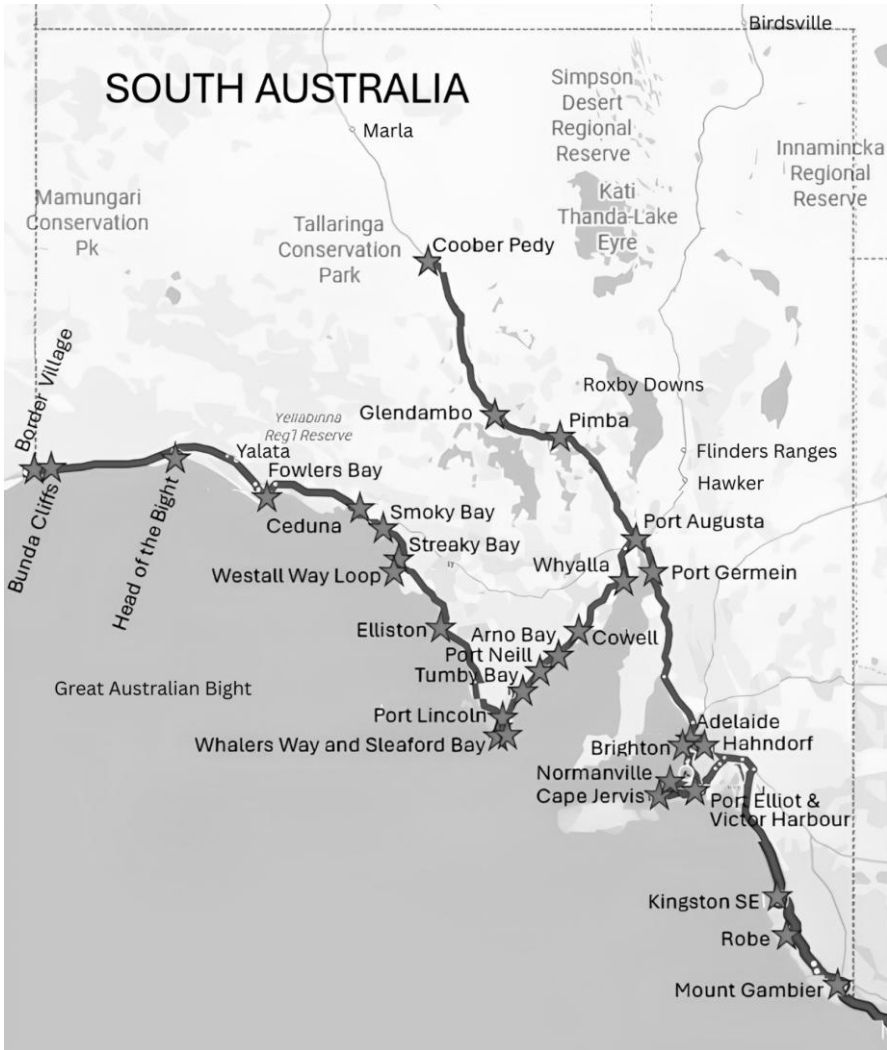
26 March 2025 – Apollo Bay to Warrnambool, VIC: 17°C

We continued along the Great Ocean Road expecting more coastline, but the drive wound inland through dense, fern-filled forests reminiscent of Tasmania. Road conditions deteriorated not far from Apollo Bay, with patched potholes that slowed us down.

Reaching the Twelve Apostles coast was awe-inspiring. The purpose-designed walkway along the coast was filled with tourists. Only seven of the rock stacks now remain on the western side, with two more to the east. The scale and drama of the formations are undeniable. Witnessing the waves washing away the base of the remaining Apostles was alarming. A short drive further brought us to the Razorback, another very large and striking offshore rock formation.

After checking into the caravan park in Warrnambool, I did a food shop to replenish our dwindling fresh supplies.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

**27 March 2025 – Warrnambool, VIC to Mount Gambier, SA:
26°C**

Well... this was not what you could call a fun day, and a big lesson in border awareness.

We drove through Port Fairy and continued to Portland, where we stopped for lunch at McDonald's. It had been a while since our last visit, and Lee was more than happy to indulge in a Big Mac meal. Unfortunately, it was not the best day to do so. I had stocked up on fresh fruit and vegetables the previous day in Warrnambool, completely forgetting that we would be crossing into South Australia the next day. As a result, all that fresh produce had to be surrendered to the quarantine bin at the border.

We sat in the caravan for a while and did our best to eat some of it before discarding the rest. We made a reasonable dent in the fruit, but after Maccas, there was only so much we could manage to eat.

The drive took us past large pine forests and countless logging trucks hauling timber. We checked into the BIG4 Blue Lake Holiday Park in Mount Gambier and were delighted to discover a heated pool kept at a very inviting 28–30°C. Even more surprising were the two water slides that we instantly recognised from photos of our grandchildren Kai and Ayla, who had stayed there in January on their way back to Perth.

Naturally, I felt compelled to prove that Nanna could still handle the slides. Lee was also keen, but I had to talk him out of it. The last thing we needed was another flare-up of his back, or worse still, another hospital visit before we made it home to Perth. He reluctantly agreed. Fun and challenge are always hard for him to resist.

28-29 March 2025 – Mount Gambier, SA: 32°C

The day started slowly with a lazy morning that seemed to suit Lee's back. Thankfully, it seemed to be showing small signs of improvement.

We made a trip to Jayco to buy new LED interior lights for the caravan. What a transformation! The caravan instantly went from gloomy to bright. The \$72 investment in four lightbulbs was well worth it.

After lunch, we headed out to the Blue Lake, and the view from the nearby rock tower was spectacular. The lake was a vivid shade of deep blue. A cheeky little fairy-wren fluttered over to say hello, clearly

unbothered by human visitors.

What came next astonished us: hundreds of ladybirds clustered around the Blue Lake sign, crawling over the sign, and over us — something we had never seen before.

From there, we drove to the Umpherston Sinkhole, a beautifully maintained sunken garden that attracts visitors from far and wide. Descending into the sinkhole felt almost magical, and tucked among the basalt rock walls, we even spotted a possum quietly watching the world go by.

Our next stop was the Cave Garden in the centre of town. It is a much smaller version of the Umpherston Sinkhole, but no less remarkable given its setting among urban buildings.

Before heading back, we made a necessary stop to replace all the fruit and vegetables we had donated to the quarantine bin the previous day.

Lee had been swimming over the past couple of days, but each evening he ended up in pain and needed pain relief during the night. He decided to skip swimming that day to see if it would affect his pain levels.

30 March 2025 – Mount Gambier to Kingston SE to Hahndorf, SA: 20°C

Lee was very pleased to discover that he had experienced no severe pain overnight and needed no medication. His back pain remained a mystery.

We chose what we thought would be a scenic coastal route to Hahndorf rather than taking the highway. Unfortunately, that turned out to be a mistake as we saw very little coastline, and what we did see was not particularly inspiring.

We stopped in Robe for lunch at the bakery, then continued to Kingston SE, where the Big Lobster sits proudly by the roadside. It

certainly is massive in real life. The coastal drive revealed a long, narrow strip of water with a beach on the far side, which later gave way to white salt lakes, including the so-called Pink Lake, though we could not see even a hint of pink.

It was a long drive of over five and a half hours, though broken up nicely by lunch in Robe.

The campground in Hahndorf was lovely, but because they were so busy when we booked, we were allocated a site at the bottom of a very steep hill, with the main amenities block at the top. Thankfully, we were close to the office, where there was an additional toilet nearby.

After setting up, we wandered into Main Street in search of German sausages for dinner. Along the way, we passed a statue of Hans Heysen. He was not only a renowned artist, but also a passionate conservationist who paid councils and farmers to preserve significant trees, including the enormous one still standing on the corner of Main Street near the road leading to his home.

We chose Haus Restaurant for dinner, drawn in by its warm atmosphere. We ordered two dishes to share: a German sausage with onion gravy, peas, and mash, and a pork belly dish with orange salad, along with garlic bread. I am not a fan of sausages, but being in a German town, trying a traditional sausage felt essential. The garlic bread was unlike any we had tasted before, and delicious, but the pork belly was unfortunately a little dry.

Main Street was buzzing with people and lined with charming shops and cafés reflecting strong German influence. Trees arched overhead, forming a beautiful canopy over the road, and with autumn just beginning, many were turning rich shades of red. We completely fell in love with Hahndorf.

31 March – 1 April 2025 – Hahndorf, SA: 23°C

We returned to Main Street in the morning, this time on a mission to find apple strudel. Success came at the Hahndorf Kaffeehaus, where

we enjoyed coffee and the best apple strudel we had ever tasted. Highly recommended.

There are several opal shops in town, but their stones come from Coober Pedy, so, as we would be visiting soon, we limited ourselves to admiring the jewellery. Lee, however, surprised me by buying me a beautiful pair of black ironstone earrings. Lucky me!

We drove the short distance to The Cedars, Hans Heysen's home, only to discover it was closed on Mondays. As we were already booked into the Brighton Beachfront Holiday Park for the next day, we had to leave Hahndorf in the morning. We decided to return the following afternoon, as we were keen to see inside Hans Heysen's home and studio.

With a late checkout and a short drive ahead, we thought the timing worked well. However, the drive through the Adelaide Hills was winding, narrow and rough in places, so we were relieved when we reached Brighton. Our site was fantastic, right beside the boardwalk, with the ocean just on the other side.

After setting up and having lunch, we rushed to do our laundry, then drove back to Hahndorf, arriving at 2.30 pm, only to realise we had missed the 2.00 pm tour for The Cedars. Despite feeling unwell, the kind tour guide agreed to give us a shortened tour later in the afternoon, which we greatly appreciated.

The property is named The Cedars because of the many cedar trees Hans Heysen planted around the home. At the time of our visit, a biennial exhibition of contemporary sculpture was on display in the grounds. Some pieces were confronting. Heads on sticks are not our idea of pleasing art, though a few more appealing works were on display. We were far more interested in the art of Hans Heysen and his daughter, Nora.

Nora Heysen was the first woman to win the Archibald Prize in 1938 at just 28 years old. She was the youngest winner to that point. A room dedicated to her work was a highlight. Hans Heysen's studio was fascinating, displaying his equipment, charcoal sketches,

watercolours, and oils. We were fortunate to be shown through the family home, though photography was not permitted. The restoration is beautiful, and the walls are adorned with original works, including a stunning oil painting of his wife Sallie seated at a sewing machine, said to be his most valuable work.

2 April 2025 – Brighton Beach to Adelaide, SA: 23°C

We walked about 15 minutes to Seacliffe Train Station and fluked the timing, arriving just as the train pulled in. On the way into Adelaide, we passed the distinctive green-and-white towers of the Royal Adelaide Hospital and, nearby, the striking SAHMRI building (South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute), locally known as the ‘Cheese Grater’ because of its appearance.

Once in the city, we boarded what we thought was a Hop-on, Hop-off tour bus, only to discover it was the free city transport bus with no commentary. After completing the loop somewhat cluelessly, we got off at the Adelaide Central Market, a recommendation we had heard repeatedly.

We wandered the market, had lunch, then visited the information centre to plan our afternoon. From there, we walked along Rundle Mall, past the famous pig sculptures, and the large balls titled ‘The Spheres’, but commonly called ‘The Mall’s Balls’, before heading to the Botanical Gardens.

By this point, Lee’s back pain had returned, so he rested on a bench beneath towering trees while I explored, although I must admit, I did hurry as I did not want to desert Lee for too long. The gardens were magnificent and made even more special by the Dale Chihuly glass exhibition. Seeing his vibrant, large-scale glass sculptures positioned throughout the gardens was breathtaking. To experience world-class art in such a beautiful setting, and for free, felt very fortunate indeed. Lee did see some of the pieces as he managed to walk a short distance, but I felt very sorry that he was unable to go further and appreciate more of those spectacular pieces.

We then walked to the Art Gallery of South Australia, where we saw works by Hans and Nora Heysen, as well as *Evening Shadows* by H. J. Johnstone, the famous teaching model copied more than 400 times. The most successful copy, by Louis Tannert, hangs beside the original.

After a much-needed coffee stop at the museum café, we walked across the bridge over the Torrens River towards Adelaide Oval. The view back towards the city was spectacular, and we were impressed by the thoughtful city planning to manage crowds after sporting events. The train station was conveniently located near the Oval, making the return trip to Seacliffe straightforward.

My watch recorded 20,792 steps that day. No wonder I was exhausted. The evening ended with another beautiful sunset over the ocean, a sight that reminded us very much of home.

3 April 2025 – Brighton Beach to Cape Jervis, SA: 18°C

We drove towards the Fleurieu Peninsula, and as we passed through McLaren Vale, the rolling vineyards stretched endlessly on either side of the road.

It rained for much of the drive, but when we reached our first stop, Horseshoe Bay in Port Elliot, the rain eased, though strong winds remained. From there, we continued to Victor Harbour, a quaint town with a charming but confusing road layout and a serious parking shortage.

After some circling, we found a spot to park and then eventually found the information centre. Nearby, we noticed a whale's tail fountain in Warland Reserve, though it was not operating at the time. The landmark, however, made finding our car again easier than expected.

Leaving Victor Harbour, we drove along a lovely pine-lined street before heading towards Cape Jervis. Rain returned, and looking across the dry hills, it was clear how desperately this region needed it. We tried to imagine how beautiful the Fleurieu Peninsula must look when those hills are green.

Cape Jervis sits at the end of an 11-kilometre turnoff to the coast and marks the departure point for the SeaLink ferry to Kangaroo Island. From there, we continued to Rapid Bay, where rolling hills tumble down towards the coast, and then it was on to Normanville.

4 April 2025 – Cape Jervis to Port Augusta, SA: 22°C

We headed north, following the coast. There was not much to see initially, but we soon encountered a convoy of about eight Morris Minor cars, travelling well below the speed limit, creating a long line of traffic behind them.

My first car was a Morris Minor, so seeing them brought back fond memories, though the nostalgia wore thin as the kilometres dragged on. Eventually, we passed each car, but when we finally reached the hot-pink lead car, it turned off in front of us, and every Morris Minor behind followed.

We stopped for lunch at Port Germein and enjoyed a lovely, relaxing meal at a café near the beach. With the tide out, the sand stretched far into the distance. As we rejoined the highway, we were stunned to find ourselves once again stuck behind the Morris Minors. They had also stopped for lunch, but had not lingered as long as we had.

The drive to Port Augusta was slow and frustrating, though the distant Flinders Ranges provided some visual relief. With the Masters Games multi-sports festival in town, accommodation was scarce, but we were fortunate to secure a spot at Augusta Caravan Park for the night.

5 April 2025 – Port Augusta to Glendambo, SA: 25°C

The drive to Glendambo was stark and barren. Aside from a few low ranges near Port Augusta, the landscape flattened out into near nothingness.

We passed roadworks, salt lakes, long freight trains, and one lone man walking along the highway pulling a cart, hundreds of kilometres from anywhere. We could not help but wonder where he was headed and

why he was walking. It seemed like that was an interesting story hiding in plain sight.

The amount of roadkill was shocking. There were two or three dead animals per kilometre. We were relieved to see a few live kangaroos hop safely away as we approached.

We stayed at the hotel's caravan park, where power was the only redeeming feature. The bore water was undrinkable, there was red dirt everywhere, and the amenities were poorly maintained, with green calcium deposits coating the taps. It easily ranked among the worst places we stayed during the entire trip.

While I was stuck without reception, Lee had internet access and was happy he could follow the footy (AFL) and check his tipping. Originally, we had planned to stop at Glendambo again on the return trip, given its convenient location, but after one night there, we decided we would rather push straight through from Coober Pedy to Port Augusta and split the seven-hour-plus drive between us.

6 April 2025 – Coober Pedy, SA: 28°C

We were glad to leave and continued our journey to Coober Pedy through more nothingness. As we neared the town, mounds of excavated dirt and rock appeared in the distance, the result of opal mining. The striking Coober Pedy Welcome Sign featured a sculpture of an old mining truck, raised high above the ground.

We checked into the Oasis Caravan Park. There was not a blade of grass to be seen, but thankfully, there was a long, covered area for caravans, which we appreciated. The amenities and pool area were modern and well-kept. The afternoon was spent checking out the local opal shops, where we finally purchased a small opal necklace for me.

7 April 2025 – Coober Pedy, SA: 28°C

We joined a tour with George from Oasis Caravan Park, and what a day it was. We began at an underground mine and museum, learning the

differences between hand-dug and machine-dug spaces. The sandstone is extremely hard, eliminating the risk of cave-ins, and all surfaces are sealed with clear lacquer to control dust. Hand-dug areas are uneven, while machine-cut spaces are far smoother. Ventilation comes from doors, windows, and ceiling pipes that lead above the ground. Lee carefully dodged the many low and irregular ceilings.

The museum displays explained opal formation, and there was information about the Great Inland Sea that existed there 70 million years ago, as well as ancient marine creatures, including a massive dark ammonite that resembled a misshapen tyre.

We visited the underground Catholic church, then the uniquely Australian golf course, where ‘greens’ are made from sand mixed with sump oil. George had brought along a club, allowing Lee to have a practice swing, as long as he didn’t hit the ball. He was delighted to discover that swinging a golf club caused no back pain at all. He was one happy golfer.

George’s afternoon tour took us to the Breakaways and the Dog Fence, a structure that stretches nearly 6,000 km across Australia from Ceduna to the Gold Coast, keeping dingoes on one side and sheep safely on the other. We posed for a photo beside one of the original posts — three seventy-year-olds standing proudly together.

We crossed cattle grids with alarm systems that deterred animals from crossing, passed countless mine shafts, and learned that the Breakaways were once thought to have broken away from the Flinders Ranges. This striking landscape has featured in films such as *Mad Max* and *Pitch Black*.

Back in town, there is a sign with ‘Coober Pedy’ spelled out on a hill, just like Hollywood.

If we were ever going to visit Uluru (Ayers Rock) on this trip, now would have been the ideal time, given its proximity. The journey from Coober Pedy to Uluru is roughly 750 kilometres and certainly not for the faint-hearted, taking around eight to nine hours by car and considerably

longer when towing a caravan. An overnight stop would have been needed in each direction, adding at least four more days of long-distance driving through the stark landscapes of central Australia.

As we were already exhausted from so many long days on the road, we decided that if we really wanted to see Uluru, it would be better to save it for another trip, perhaps flying in from Perth.

8 April 2025 – Coober Pedy to Pimba, SA: 29°C

We left Coober Pedy just before 9.00 am, heading south towards Port Augusta. Eagles and crows feasted on roadkill along the way. We had noticed that eagles were slow to leave their meal, but the crafty crows always put safety first and were long gone by the time we reached them. We had a heart-stopping moment when we approached one particularly determined eagle refusing to move until we were almost upon it. Thankfully, it finally took flight away from our car.

Unfortunately, we saw a few eagles among the roadkill, those that had obviously made one fatal miscalculation.

We stopped briefly at Glendambo for fuel, with no intention of staying again. About 40 km north of Pimba, we pulled into Lake Hart, a majestic salt lake shimmering beside the road. We walked up a sandy rise for a better view before continuing.

The rest of the drive was uneventful — long, flat, and shared between us. We arrived back in Port Augusta at 4.17 pm, tired but relieved after a very long day on the road.

9 April 2025 – Port Augusta to Cowell, SA: 30°C

Travelling from Port Augusta to Cowell, we passed through Whyalla, a town with a distinctly industrial feel, dominated by steelworks and shipbuilding: functional rather than pretty, but clearly central to the region's economy.

As we approached Cowell, the silo art immediately caught our attention from a distance. After setting up the caravan, we went for a

closer look. The artwork is beautifully detailed and depicts Lionel Deer, a local camel trainer, leading one of his camels. Silo art never fails to impress, but this one felt especially connected to its place and people.

The drive through the small fishing village led to Franklin Harbour, where locals launch their boats. The old buildings throughout the town appear well cared for and in remarkably good condition, giving Cowell a proud, but lived-in feel.

There were quite a few retirees staying at the campground, many from Queensland, planning to stay for three months purely to fish. One man casually mentioned he had completed the lap of Australia four times. We were stunned! We had enjoyed our trip so far, but decided once was more than enough for us. It had been fulfilling and unforgettable, but exhausting as well, and we were more than ready to head home.

10 April 2025 – Cowell to Port Lincoln, SA: 24°C

Because we skipped Glendambo on the return from Coober Pedy, we had an extra day up our sleeve and were not quite sure where to spend it best.

After leaving Cowell, we stopped at Arno Bay and immediately thought it would have been a lovely place to stay the previous night, right on the beach, quiet and inviting, but we continued to Port Neill, another charming coastal spot. Tumby Bay, however, stole our hearts. Pine trees lined the foreshore road, creating a picture-perfect seaside town. Even the public toilets along the waterfront were decorated with bright, cheerful artwork. In fact, Tumby Bay boasts some very impressive street art throughout the town.

We stopped for a morning coffee at the Bluewater Beach Café, a Greek-inspired café overlooking the ocean. We seriously considered postponing our Port Lincoln booking to spend our extra night in Tumby Bay, but that idea was quickly abandoned when we drove past the caravan park and saw two lines of caravans queuing to get in.

On our way out of town, we stopped at the Tumby Bay silo art depicting two boys jumping off the jetty. It is overflowing with of childish delight.

We arrived in Port Lincoln to discover we had secured the very last powered site for two nights. Our expectations were low, but the site turned out to be surprisingly good. It was level, with artificial grass underfoot, though right beside an old amenities block that was poorly maintained.

11 April 2025 – Daytrip from Port Lincoln to Whalers Way, SA: 22°C

We set off on a day trip to Whalers Way, at the southern tip of the Eyre Peninsula, where South Australia's rugged coastline once again took our breath away. The cliffs plunge dramatically into the ocean, again illustrating just how powerful this landscape truly is.

We also stopped at Sleaford Bay, equally rugged and windswept, with a wild beauty that feels completely untouched.

Later, while doing some laundry back at the caravan park, I ran into the couple from Albany whom we met in Devonport at the very start of our Tasmanian leg. He was the one who discovered the exposed wire on the inside of our caravan tyre, potentially saving us from a serious incident. Both our journeys were now drawing to a close, and it was genuinely lovely to reconnect and reflect on how far we had all come.

While we were grateful to have secured the last available site at this caravan park, the lack of maintenance was frustrating. The faded '*Gone Fishing*' mural on the wall of the old amenities block seemed unintentionally symbolic.

Once again, Lee's shower experience was memorable for all the wrong reasons. When he turned the tap on, cold water burst from where the shower arm meets the wall, spraying over the dividing walls of the cubicles. He immediately heard a stream of expletives from two stalls away, presumably from some poor man who was getting dressed and did not appreciate an unexpected icy drenching.

Sometimes all you can do is laugh. Or, as we were increasingly beginning to realise — go home. We had enjoyed some extraordinary experiences during our trip, mixed with a few less pleasant ones, and were beginning to yearn for the consistent comforts of home.

12 April 2025 – Port Lincoln to Streaky Bay, SA: 32°C

On our way to Streaky Bay, we stopped at Elliston, where strong waves crashed against distant reefs. Someone had thoughtfully placed a container of water on the grass near the car park for birds, a small kindness undoubtedly appreciated.

We continued along the Elliston clifftop drive, stopping at the seahorse sculpture and the oversized thongs — sadly not quite my size. Kai's little Volk made another appearance, sitting proudly on top of one of the thongs. Cape Finniss followed. It is a strikingly rugged headland at the southern edge of Anxious Bay.

We secured the last bay at Streaky Bay Islands Caravan Park. The ground was white and dusty, but the hedges between sites provided privacy and the ensuite-style bathrooms were clean and modern. The beach could be accessed via a path between the hedges at the edge of the park.

Our biggest disappointment there was the lack of phone and internet reception. We had come to accept that Optus coverage was unpredictable; however, Telstra let us down badly on this occasion.

After setting up, we headed out to drive the Westall Way Loop. Tractor Bay was underwhelming, but High Cliff was absolutely worth the stop. At The Granites, we followed a couple of surfers down countless steps to the red rocks below, where they surfed. We were impressed by their dedication, as they dealt easily with both the steps and the rocks.

Unfortunately, the rest of the loop did not live up to expectations. With no internet or reception, navigation became guesswork, and we somehow ended up back at Tractor Bay. At least we knew our way out.

Back in town, we had a drink at the pub and enjoyed a lovely sunset from the deck near the jetty, which was under repair. Proudly standing on the foreshore is a statue of Kerrin McEvoy, a local boy and winner of the 2000 Melbourne Cup on Brew.

13 -14 April 2025 – Streaky Bay to Fowlers Bay, SA: 29°C

We stopped at Smoky Bay, where the caravan park sits right on the beach, and wondered if it might have been a better overnight option than Streaky Bay. Still, had we stayed there, we might have missed the worthwhile parts of the Westall Way Loop.

After lunch in Ceduna and a short wander around town, we continued towards Fowlers Bay. The final 12 kilometres were on a dirt road, heavily corrugated and bone-rattling, again, best described as shake, rattle and roll.

The sunset that evening was deep red, and the full moon cast a stunning stairway across the water. It was one of those moments that make even the rough roads worthwhile.

We stayed an extra day at Fowlers Bay, cooking up a storm to use all our remaining vegetables and freezing meals for later. With a 120-litre freezer onboard, there was no way we were donating good fresh food to quarantine again.

We also revisited our chocolate map of Australia and decided we could eat a few of the broken pieces, which luckily represented the regions we'd well and truly covered. The rest of the chocolate map would be saved for Dunsborough, where we planned to surprise our granddaughter, Elise, on her eighth birthday.

Re-entry to WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Coloured photos available [HERE](#)

15 April 2025 – Fowlers Bay, SA to Eucla, WA: 25°C

The pull of home grew stronger as we headed for Eucla — and finally back into Western Australia.

Along the way, we passed a remarkable sight: a fully loaded bicycle being pedalled across the Nullarbor, complete with a dog perched on the back!

When we stopped at the Head of the Bight, I am not exaggerating when I say we were immediately assaulted by millions of flies. Lee quickly deployed the fly nets, turning what could have been unbearable into a wonderful experience. The \$10 adult (\$8 senior) entry fee was worth every cent. The walkways led us to breathtaking views of sheer cliffs to the west and dune-like formations to the east. The water was an extraordinary turquoise colour, though photos failed to capture its beauty.

Fuel at Border Village was the most expensive of the entire trip at \$2.75 per litre, costing \$165 to fill a very empty tank. Our previous stop at Nundroo had been a surprisingly cheap \$1.85 per litre. We had been warned that Nullarbor fuel pricing was brutal.

The border inspection was very thorough. Every cupboard, fridge, and freezer was checked.

In Eucla, we learned that check-in for the caravan park is done at the roadhouse, and after that, you can park wherever you like. We also noticed a relic of COVID times, a sign instructing visitors to self-quarantine for 14 days.

It was our 52nd wedding anniversary, so we celebrated with dinner at the Eucla Motel. My salt-and-pepper squid was tasty, though overly battered, while Lee enjoyed his fish and chips.

My shower, however, was a comedy of errors. In the first cubicle, I stripped off, sorted out all my things onto hooks, then went to put my \$1 into the machine for water, only to find it was out of order. In the second cubicle, I checked to make sure the machine was good to go, then hung up all my things, paid my \$1, and went to get under the shower, only to find it had no showerhead. Third time lucky. Not exactly the welcome home I had imagined.

16 April 2025 – Eucla to Balladonia, WA: 24°C

We left Eucla beneath spectacular cloud formations and went looking for the Bunda Cliffs, only to realise too late that they are east of Eucla, not west. No turning back!

Between Madura and Cocklebiddy, we were surprised by the amount of vegetation, as we had expected a barren desert reminiscent of the eastern start of the Nullarbor. This was a welcome contrast.

At Cocklebiddy, we visited two rescued wedge-tailed eagles housed in a large enclosure. It seemed that our presence made them very active, flying from one end of their enclosure to the other and crashing into the

netting. These birds were majestic, but sadly, could never be returned to the wild due to injuries sustained from vehicle collisions.

We refuelled at Caiguna (\$2.40 per litre) and considered staying for the night, but decided to push on to Balladonia instead, hoping for better facilities and perhaps even a hardware store. We needed a new bolt to attach the jockey wheel, which had finally given up. Upon arrival, we discovered that Balladonia has a population of 16, so that hope was quickly dashed.

Camping at Balladonia was an expensive disappointment at \$50 for power only — no water, no reliable internet, and a tiny, very rustic amenities block. One of the staff kindly let me use her personal hotspot, which worked perfectly. Her kindness stood out in stark contrast to the facilities. Lee was able to use his Telstra connection.

We were deeply unimpressed by the park, and equally wrong in assuming the next day's drive would be shorter.

17-18 April 2025 – Balladonia to Norseman, then Ravensthorpe, WA: 18°C

The sound of rain woke me at 5.45 am and set the tone for the day. It did not ease for over four hours, so most of the drive towards Norseman was done in steady, soaking rain. Water pooled along the roadside and filled the lakes that were about halfway to Norseman. As we approached the town, we were met by an interesting band of clouds with a small patch of blue sky showing through.

Our first stop in Norseman was meant to be practical. We drove to the address listed for the hardware store to replace the bolt for the jockey wheel, only to discover the building was completely deserted, with no explanation. Just one of those small but frustrating reminders that remote travel requires flexibility and patience.

We enjoyed the unexpected camel sculptures on a roundabout in town. It was quirky and very much in keeping with outback character.

After picking up fruit and vegetables at IGA and filling up with diesel at Ampol (\$2.01 per litre), we pulled into the caravan park next door, only to find it fully booked, so we pressed on to Ravensthorpe, another three hours and forty minutes away.

We stopped at a roadside park for lunch, but when we got back on the road, the afternoon drive tested everyone's patience. On the 110 km/h road towards Esperance, three vehicles formed a slow-moving convoy at around 80 km/h. They had multiple safe opportunities to pull over and allow traffic to pass, but chose not to. Another caravan joined behind us, followed by a growing line of cars. Some frustrated drivers made risky overtaking attempts, trying to pass everyone at once, creating some genuinely uncomfortable moments. The convoy vehicles travelled so close together that even if we had wanted to overtake, there was no safe gap for a caravan to merge back into the lane. We were stuck behind them for a frustrating 65 kilometres before they continued to Esperance, and we could finally turn off towards Ravensthorpe. So much for the shorter drive and catching up on laundry.

By the time we reached Munglup, a coffee break was non-negotiable. Not long after, we passed beneath the mining conveyor belt bridge, with a striking mural spanning the highway; though the light was fading, so we could not fully appreciate it.

Spectacular cloud formations dominated the sky as we drove directly into the setting sun as we approached Ravensthorpe. Visibility was poor, glare was intense, and I was very grateful for Lee's steady, careful driving. We arrived hoping to see a dramatic sunset, but the conditions, unfortunately, did not deliver.

The Ravensthorpe Caravan Park had its own quirks. There are no bookings. You simply drive in, press a button to lower the rope gate, choose a site, and wait for the caretaker to come around later to collect payment. We chose a spot we thought was close to the amenities block, but it turned out to be a cabin. The real amenities were on the opposite side of the park. After a day of rain, the ground

was thick with mud. Setting up was not pleasant, and knowing we would be trudging through that mud repeatedly over the next two days was deflating.

All up, it was a nine-hour day, including stops, and we were utterly exhausted. The next day was a planned rest day, and it could not come soon enough.

19 April 2025 – Ravensthorpe to Katanning, WA: 17°C

We were more than ready to leave the sodden mud behind at Ravensthorpe Caravan Park.

Our first stop was the Jerramungup Roadhouse, a decision we regretted almost immediately. The ‘coffee’ was from a self-serve machine using powdered milk, food options were minimal, and the toilets were appalling. The ladies’ toilet had a broken lid and a badly gouged, stained seat. The men’s was full of rubbish and completely unusable. This stop firmly earns the warning: avoid at all costs.

The drive improved as we passed through the quaint town of Gnowangerup. Murals brightened a wall near the Shire Offices, and ‘Lizzy’, the colourful historic steam tractor, added a touch of charm before we continued to Katanning.

The caravan park at Katanning was relaxed, perhaps a little too relaxed about site allocations. The first two sites we were offered already had caravans on them, with the suggestion that we could ‘squeeze in’. That was a definite no. Eventually, we were given a grassy spot beside the camp kitchen, which turned out to be an excellent option, and best of all, no mud.

Here, Lee tested a temporary fix for the thread-stripped jockey wheel bolt. Earlier, while he was driving, I guess he thought I needed a job, so asked me to wrap the thread of the bolt with tape so that it created a tighter fit into the jockey wheel bracket. With the addition of a clamp and some strategically placed wooden blocks purely for insurance, it seemed to hold. The timber blocks, gifted to us back in Perth by our

friend John, proved invaluable more times than we could count.

20 April 2025 – Katanning to Collie, WA: 27°C

About 12 kilometres out from Collie, massive coal mines appeared on both sides of the road. The stark, industrial landscapes felt worlds away from the bush we had been travelling through.

We set up camp and headed to Woolworths, where the murals at the store entrance caught our attention immediately. It was so unexpected, and they were beautiful in their black-and-white simplicity.

The highlight of the day, however, was Lee's shower saga. He undressed, turned on the shower, and discovered there was no hot water. Hearing someone showering next door, he assumed his stall was faulty, so he wrapped himself in a towel, gathered his things, and moved to another stall — also cold. Refusing a cold shower, he emerged just as the other man finished. Lee asked: *'Did you have a hot shower?'* The reply: *'No, mine was cold. I thought you were the lucky one.'*

Lee returned to the van and phoned the office. To their credit, the staff arrived promptly and fixed the issue, and Lee eventually enjoyed a very welcome hot shower.

21 April 2025 – Collie to Dunsborough, WA: 27°C

It was Easter week, and the family had booked into Southern Seas Caravan Park just outside Dunsborough. When we decided weeks earlier to head back to WA and learned they would be there, we were not sure if we would be able to secure a site at such short notice during such a busy period. We were incredibly grateful when a three-night booking became available.

We arrived around noon but could not check in until 1.00 pm, so we parked on the roadside and had lunch while we waited. The caravan park itself is beautifully maintained, with lush lawns and modern

amenities. The only downside is the red dirt roads. We thought we had left those behind us, but clearly, not quite yet.

Onnika and Shaun arrived around 2.00 pm, and unfortunately, Elise spotted us immediately as they were driving in, so our planned surprise was foiled. Still, the excitement made it irrelevant. Joshua and Elise had not known we would be there, and they raced over for hugs as soon as they realised.

Caroline and Blair arrived shortly afterwards and parked next to Shaun and Onnika. Kai and Ayla had not noticed that we were directly across the road, so we were able to surprise Kai by returning his toy, Volk, the little soft toy he had given us in Cobram and asked us to take it travelling. We had photographed Volk in various locations along our journey and sent Kai updates. Seeing us return both Volk and ourselves resulted in big reactions and even bigger cuddles.

Being surrounded by family again was just the best feeling. Kai's wobbly front tooth, loose back in Cobram at Christmas time, still had not fallen out, and he proudly showed it off.

Tegan, our son Jamie's daughter, had arrived with Onnika and Shaun, and we had planned for her to set up her swag under our annexe. We were impressed by how comfortable her set-up was. The rest of the day passed easily, filled with catching up and simply being together.

22 April 2025 – Dunsborough, WA: 25°C

It was Elise's eighth birthday, so we headed to the Hip Hop Brewery for a celebration lunch, only to find it completely full. Cars continued pouring into the overflow parking even as we left, destined for the same disappointment.

There are many wonderful wineries in the south-west of Western Australia around Dunsborough and Margaret River, and we had better luck at Bootleg Brewery, securing a table and enjoying a long, relaxed lunch. The food was great, and the kids had plenty of space to run around and made full use of the playground.

Later, it was time to trim Ayla's wispy hair ends, something I have done many times for my grandchildren. We also shared the final piece of our chocolate map of Australia with the family. It was a symbolic moment, given how close we were to home. That night, we sang 'Happy Birthday' again as Elise cut into her rainbow cake.

It felt like home because family has a way of making anywhere feel exactly that.

23 April 2025 – Dunsborough, WA: 22°C

It was a drizzly day. We walked to the dog park, where Bailey, Onnika's dog, who delights in water, so much so that she climbed straight into the dog water bowl with her ball — adorable, and predictably messy.

After the muddy walk back along the red dirt road, we made it into the caravan just as the drizzle picked up again. The rest of the day was spent inside, playing games and relaxing. We soon discovered that UNO rules are far less universal than anyone realises.

That evening, Blair and Caroline brought out marshmallows, and we enjoyed toasting them over a fire before bedtime.

Watching Ayla sleep, arms wrapped tightly around her big teddies, raised the quiet question: how is that even comfortable?

24 April 2025 – Dunsborough to Perth, WA: 20°C

Packing up meant saying goodbye to everyone in Dunsborough, though we were comforted by the knowledge that we would see them all again very soon. Tegan travelled home with us.

On the way, we stopped at Gelorup, near Bunbury, to visit my brother Roger and his wife, Jan. Their son, Ben, was there with his partner, Sen, their six-month-old baby, Stella, and their three dogs. We enjoyed a relaxed visit and barbecue lunch before leaving well after 3.00 pm, landing squarely in Perth's peak-hour traffic and a very slow drive for the rest of the way.

We arrived in Perth around 5.15 pm to drop Tegan off at home. She insisted that Jamie take us for a drive in his new Tesla. We were impressed by how smooth and quiet the drive was, and it was a stark contrast to our diesel Isuzu MUX. Tegan was excited for us to experience the Tesla Light Show: music, flashing lights, windows moving up and down, the boot opening and closing, and mirrors folding back and forth. It was impressively theatrical and very on-brand for Elon Musk.

The twins, Jayden and Hollie, were both at footy training, and Stacey was doing the weekly food shop. When they all returned, we enjoyed a welcome home dinner together before heading to Blair and Caroline's house. Setting up the caravan in the dark at 9.15 pm felt like a fitting final challenge.

It was a huge day to conclude an almost ten-month lap of Australia. We reflected on how far we had come, not just in kilometres, but in experience. This trip shaped us, tested us, and gifted us memories we will carry for a lifetime.

To travel is truly a daring adventure not to be missed. We have not been everywhere, but we enjoy being a work in progress.

THE END OF

10 MONTHS AROUND AUSTRALIA

PART 6 – CONCLUSION

Reflections on the trip

This really was the trip of a lifetime, for so many reasons. We saw extraordinary parts of our beautiful country and created countless special memories along the way.

Although we had travelled overseas many times, we had never ventured further north in Western Australia than Kalbarri. The long distances between destinations were absolutely worth it, offering magnificent gorges, lush national park waterfalls, and breathtaking coastlines. Highlights included the Horizontal Falls and the Bungle Bungles. Those experiences will stay with us forever.

Swimming beneath cool Northern Territory waterfalls was magical and completely different from the soothing warmth of the hot springs. Watching crocodiles leap from the Adelaide River to catch a dangling chicken carcass was simply astonishing.

Queensland dazzled us with its contrasts, from the surreal aqua-blue waters of the abandoned Mary Kathleen uranium mine to the underground hospital at Mount Isa and the lush, fern-filled rainforests with towering trees, waterfalls, and lakes. The stark landscape of the Undara Lava Tunnels was equally captivating. Spotting two cassowaries in the wild was unforgettable, and Paronella Park was yet another highlight. And then there were the chicken races in Tambo — wonderfully entertaining and all in the name of charity.

New South Wales offered endless beauty, from stunning beaches and coastline to dramatic mountains and waterfalls. The crystal-clear waters around Narooma were an unexpected standout, while Grafton's jacaranda-lined streets in full bloom created a breathtaking sea of purple. Lightning Ridge was fascinating, with its alternative lifestyle and unique character, though not ideal in February when many businesses close due to the summer heat and to recuperate after a

busy holiday season. Altina Wildlife Park, with its international breeding programs for endangered species, was truly special.

Tasmania delivered one highlight after another. It is rich in history, some shocking, but much of it is quaint. It is a spectacularly green island, except for the stark and striking landscape around Queenstown. The chairlift at Cataract Gorge in Launceston, surrounded by dramatic rock formations, beautiful gardens, and wandering peacocks, was a must-do. The narrow, winding roads through Tasmania's mountains continually left us in awe, every bend revealing another breathtaking 'wow' moment. Greg Duncan's extraordinary timber installation, The Wall, depicting Tasmania's settlement history, was unforgettable, as was Damo's Wild Ocean Tasmania Tour. And we completely fell in love with Stanley and its magnificent, sheer-sided Nut rising from the sea.

Our visit to Parliament House was interesting, while the Australian War Memorial was deeply moving, especially witnessing the Last Post Ceremony. Lake Burley Griffin, with its sweeping lawns and trees, is simply magnificent.

Victoria's pine-covered mountains were another delight. Highlights included the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion, a place of calm, beauty and deep reflection. The Spanner Man Gardens, filled with sculptures welded entirely from spanners, was a delightful surprise, and the Great Ocean Road coastline was breathtaking, especially the Twelve Apostles and the Razorback rising dramatically offshore.

South Australia offered more unforgettable sights, from the vivid Blue Lake and stunning sunken garden in Mount Gambier to the German charm of Hahndorf and the legacy of Hans Heysen. The Adelaide Botanic Gardens were exquisite, made even more special by the world-class Dale Chihuly glass exhibition. Coober Pedy, despite the long and barren drive, became a highlight with its underground homes, opal mines, and the striking landscapes of the Breakaways. The rugged South Australian coastline, especially at the Head of the Bight, was spectacular.

For those planning their own Lap of Oz, we encourage you not to overlook the many parts of our great country that we did not include this time. Our focus was on exploring places new to us, but there is so much more to discover.

If you have not already, be sure to include in your route:

- the south-west of Western Australia,
- the Whitsundays,
- Brisbane,
- the Gold Coast,
- Sydney, and
- The Blue Mountains.

These destinations are truly special and richly deserving of your time.

Despite several health challenges along the way, especially for Lee, we are deeply grateful that we found ways to keep going and experience so much. We met many travellers facing similar obstacles, and it was inspiring to see how people adapt and persevere to fulfil their dreams. It can absolutely be done, and we wholeheartedly encourage you to find a way to tick the Lap of Oz off your bucket list.

Some people we met had completed the journey several times and clearly embraced the lifestyle. For us, ten months on the road felt just right. While we treasured this wonderful experience, we were also grateful to finally settle back into the comfort of home, feeling enriched, inspired, and forever changed by the journey.

About the Authors

Family camping holidays have long been a tradition for Roseanne and Lee. What started as a two-week family holiday turned into ten unforgettable months travelling around Australia.

Roseanne and Lee set off on the adventure of a lifetime when they packed up their caravan and discovered remote outback roads, hidden country towns, tropical coastlines, and breathtaking national parks. Their journey became far more than a holiday — it evolved into a celebration of freedom, resilience, discovery, and the joy of sharing unforgettable experiences together.

Passionate about photography, storytelling, and preserving memories, Roseanne created this book — with Lee's help — to inspire others to explore Australia at their own pace. By sharing the practical lessons, unexpected challenges, and magical moments experienced along the way, she hopes to inspire others to embrace adventure and discover the incredible beauty of Australia.

Having always loved travel, they believe some of life's best memories are made in the simple moments shared with the people you love.

Roseanne and Lee live in Perth, close to their three children and seven grandchildren, and continue to dream about the next adventure.