

National Caravan Clubs Rally Barmera 2023

When you think of going to the national rally it is usually with 2 or 3 years to get ready or prepared.

We had planned along with other members of our club to leave Perth around the 15th of March. That's still 12 months away, no need to start getting things together just yet. Then before you know it October is here and we are off on an extended rally with our club to Esperance and Condingup. While we were away a Farmer with whom we had expressed an interest in helping over harvest, rang to say will you be right to start on the 1st of November? Well that kept us busy right up until Christmas. Still no worries we have got plenty of time to get the brakes done, the van serviced and packed. Then a phone call "you said some time ago you could get a yacht to Hobart by road". Yes I said a little apprehensively, well you guys are booked on the Spirit of Tasmania and it is all go.

We are now down to 3 weeks to get the Van and ourselves ready. No worries we can still do that. Then the phone rings, do you think you guys could go over to Melbourne and pick up a couple of caravans for the show. Phew we are now down to 3 days to get our SH!! together. Thanks to Michael and the crew at Cameron's we get all the jobs done by the night before which gives us the day we are due to leave to pack and get the van ready for an extended trip of up to 2 months or so. We arrive in Tammin around 7pm, the last of our club members to arrive. (better late than not at all). Well Thursday dawned fine and warm, in fact by the end of the day very warm. After track notes the first stop for the day was Merredin for coffee and cake and then on to Karalee Rocks for lunch and a bit of a spell. It is our first day after all. By now the temperature has climbed to around 38 and by the time we get to Coolgardie R.V camp the temp has climbed to 44. I can assure one and all that a few cold beers, a nice meal and an entertaining chat with an old time miner made for a very pleasant evening.

Friday 17th saw us all in Norseman to top up Water and fuel tanks. After a cuppa we pointed the Landcruiser on an easterly direction and headed out yonder. The weather has cooled down quite considerably and we made good time with a stop at Balladonia to inspect the small but interesting museum reaching our planned overnight camp in good time. For those of us who have travelled the Nullarbor before you may have experienced a really black night where there is not a cloud in the sky but it is so dark that you can not see your hand in front of you. That was tonight.

Next morning we were up and at it by 8.30am. Track notes were at 8am and by now, had come to be an important start to the days drive. Unfortunately the Track Master got his kms slightly wrong on the odd occasion and the odd true story was a bit hard to believe, but the boys were quick to point out the error of his ways.

By now we are well out into the paddock and have crossed into SA on Saturday and what has gone wrong with the world? It's 7.30am and still dark...Daylight saving of course!!

Some of the ladies only just made it to the 8am start line, but as we only have 60kms to go to Nullarbor Homestead, all decided that a cooked breakfast at the roadhouse would go down really well.

By now we are running ahead of time, so decided to spend the night in Ceduna. Only problem was there were no caravan sites available. One of the park owners let us camp in his back paddock. No

power or water and the paddock was on the side of a hill. (well...not quite). We all managed ok. Ceduna was full of caravans either coming or going to WA.

After the obligatory visit to the bakery, we were happy to be on our way. Arrived in Streaky Bay early afternoon and got settled. The weather is a quite pleasant 23 degrees and we had a shower of rain during the afternoon.

The Streaky Bay hotel is renowned for their hospitality and meals, the bus came to pick us up for a "night on the town". A lovely meal and a few drinks and they returned us to our caravan park. Tuesday was a lay day for us, so we caught up on shopping and washing and a drive around the area. Happy hour was well attended and was a pleasant evening.

Wednesday saw us moving on to Port Augusta. We stopped at Wudinna and caught up with Tony and Tilly, who had left after us. Arrived in Port Augusta for happy hour and dinner. Pleasant day with cool evening. Thursday was spent washing, shopping, refuelling, small maintenance on vans.

Friday, after a casual start we travelled to Burra. Lunch at the pie shop and a walk around Crystal Brook town was the order of the day. We are staying at the back of the Bon Accord pub, a bit ordinary, but all that we need. Dinner at the Royal Exchange hotel rounded off another good day.

Saturday we decided we would do a mini tour to Clare, but not before we checked out the shops and sights in Burra. On the way to Clare we stopped at a small railway siding, which is closed now and saw the magnificent Silo art featuring the last ever train to pass this way. Picnic lunch, a walk around the shops, a visit to some local wineries and miniature railways and the day was nearly done. Happy hour in the pub, which was enjoyable.

Sunday and it was off to Lake Bonney, just south of Barmera. There was a compulsory stop at the Morgan bakery for coffee and vanilla slice which Glenda gave a 10/10 and then on to the ferry to cross the mighty Murray river. Only a month or so before the Murray had been running in full flood and it was amazing to see the flood levels marked on the side of the buildings and trees. It is back to normal now. We arrived mid afternoon and caught up with Neil and Karen (who have been travelling around our great country).

Monday morning and we arrived at the Riverland Events Centre for the 18th National Caravan Clubs Rally. 350 vans to be checked in, well organised and despite inclement weather we are soon on our sites and getting organised. The rest of the day was registering and looking around our new surroundings, which will be our home for the next 9 days. Monday night's entertainment was provided by Amber Joy Poulton, a country and western singer and a very enjoyable evening.

Day 2 activities included a talk by author Wendy Altschuager on getting started on writing your own book, Dog obedience demonstrations and in the evening the entertainment was provided by Kehau Jackson, a comedian and Jazz quartet.

Day 3 highlight of the day for me was a talk given by Derek McManus, an inspirational Police Officer who was shot 14 times during a criminal arrest that went very wrong.

Day 4, undoubtedly one of the highlights of the rally was the concert given by the SA Police Concert Band. No wonder they have performed at the Edinburgh Tattoo. In the Marquee the evening

included a presentation by the NSW 19th National Rally committee. Great to see them hard at it already...it brings back memories.

Day 5, today all of our club members travelled to Overland Corner Hotel about 60km from rally site for lunch. A very interesting old pub, situated close to the Murray river and on an old Drovers stock route. Nights entertainment was a country rock band which was good.

Day 6 today's highlights was the opening of the Trade fair. Although a little disappointing as there was not many exhibitors present and mostly Riverland wineries. If you are a wine drinker, there were some bargains and the Supreme caravans looked pretty good. Most of our club members have been spending time sightseeing around the Riverland area as there is a lot to see and do. Karen and I drove down to Loxton about 30km away and as with most of the towns they have lovely gardens and lots of green lawns. Down by the river they have restored Pioneer village. Well worth a visit and need some time to view thoroughly.

Day 7, today was market day and we were pleasantly surprised by the large number of stalls. Arts and craft, caravans, food trucks, honey, drinks and more wines and lots of people including locals. We wandered down to look at the photo display and competition and of course we voted for Neils entry, which I thought was really good. Tonight we were entertained by a group called "Me'N Me Mates" Aussie music and jokes.

Day 8 this morning we wandered down to the function pavilion to look at all the items, made by the caravanners and donated to charities. Well done to everyone. Karen and I then went for a drive to Berri and on to Renmark. Both lovely towns on the banks of the Murray river. In the afternoon we attended happy hour organised for all the WA attendees. I think just about everyone attended. WA had the largest number of clubs represented, considering we all had to cross the Nullarbor, I think we did pretty well.

Day 9 is our last day at the rally. Gee that came around pretty quick. A presentation by SA Police on caravan security and the closing ceremony was followed by dinner in the Marquee. The buffet was served to us and was very well organised and nice meal. The evening was concluded with entertainment by a group called Chunky Custard.

Day 10 and we were packed up and after all our goodbyes were on our way to Adelaide where Adelaide RV were going to do a small job on our van.

After our visit to Adelaide, the trip home for Karen and I included 2 days in Port Pirie, where we stayed at "The stories from the road" Museum and caught up with old friends. Overnight at Port Augusta, a visit to Whyalla (why did they stop building ships?) and on to Cowell. Then on a visit to Smokey Bay...not too much to see and do, but if you are a fisherman it is right on the shores of the Southern ocean. Up and at it first thing in the morning and a compulsory stop at Ceduna bakery and top up with fuel and water. We love being on the Nullarbor, there are so many great camping spots. This trip we overnighted at Moondine Bluff, south east of Madura. Then on to Norseman free camp right in town. They have a great overnight free stay area with nearby dump point and water facility. \$1 token gives 60L of water. Tokens can be bought at Information centre or IGA. The night we stayed I counted 35 vans. Next we travel down to Esperance via Gibson Soak Hotel for lunch. Overnight with rellies and on to Albany to catch up with friends and have a couple of jobs done on the van at

Cameron Caravans. Next day we are off home and so looking forward to having some down time at home and with family.

Derek Nathan

Freedom Caravanners