



High Range 4WD Club of SA Inc

www.hr4wdclubsa.org.au

Gawler Ranges

Saturday 4 October 2008 to Monday 6 October 2008
Submitted by Helen (Highwater) and Phil (McCracken)

The Gawler Ranges are a range of mountains in South Australia to the north of Eyre Peninsula. The ranges were named by Edward John Eyre after the Governor of South Australia, George Gawler in 1839. This was on one of Eyre's earlier expeditions before his famous crossing of the Nullarbor Plain further west. Vast hill and gully complexes, with rocky gorges and seasonal water flows, create a stunning landscape of natural beauty. The park is home to a diverse range of plants and animals including 21 rare and threatened species.

This trip, planned for the October long weekend was put together by Carolyn and her brother Lyle 'Legs'. We were to meet on Saturday at Iron Knob at 10.00am. However because the journey to Iron Knob from Adelaide was around 5-6 hours, depending on where you lived, most of the travelers decided to make the trip to Port Augusta on Friday, stay at a cabin and then make the one hour journey to Iron Knob on Saturday.

For this journey, Phil and I were joined by our kids, Jim and Anton. We departed Adelaide around 2.00pm (after slight panic on discovering that the camper trailer we had been borrowing for over a year was unregistered!) The weather was cool and raining steadily. Bit of swearing from the packers. As I was recovering from knee surgery, I was supervising very nicely!! The journey to Port Augusta went well. I had not been to Port Augusta since probably childhood, so I was very aware of the housing development and progress which was evident. The wind farm was very eerie, as it was getting on to late afternoon and with the constant rain, the windmills looked like something from science fiction. We made it to Port Augusta around 6.30pm after being random breath tested and car checked at the truck station just before Port Augusta (pew lucky we got the trailer registered!). We were staying at the Big 4 Caravan Park, so after quickly unpacking, we met the other club members for a lovely counter meal at Stirling North pub. We heard about everybody else's journey (I think most people were breath tested) and we were a little glad we were staying at the Big 4, rather than the caravan park Cuffs, Barb and Rob were staying in!!, peacock and all! I think that Cuffs found the toilet, after trying to relieve himself in the wardrobe!! Eight vehicles journeyed to Port Augusta that night.

Next day, Saturday, after a restful night (the cabin was very nice and clean and we enjoyed the stay), we journeyed to Iron Knob for the rendezvous at 10.00am. We were soon joined by the other club members. John and Neil and David journeyed up separately on the Saturday morning. Soon the 10.30am deadline passed and we realized that Henry and Helen had not arrived. Because they were at dinner with us the night before, we did know that they were meant to join us!! After calling them by phone and radio, with no luck, and becoming aware of time passing, we had to reluctantly leave without them at 11.15am.

The convoy was supposed to be 10 vehicles, but minus Helen and Henry, we were 9 vehicles. From Iron Knob we journeyed through the back roads to Lake Gairdner. After following a few false trails, we finally made it at around 1.00pm

for lunch. Lake Gairdner is a large endorheic lake in central South Australia, and is considered the fourth largest salt lake in Australia when it is flooded. The lake is over 160 km (100 miles) long and 48 km (30 miles) across with salt over 1.2 metres (4 ft) thick in some places. Lake Gairdner was named by the Governor of South Australia, Richard MacDonnell in October 1857 after Gordon Gairdner, a Chief Clerk of the Australian Department in the Colonial Office. It has been a site for various land speed record attempts on its salt flats. The weather, when we got to Lake Gairdner, was very hot and dry, with clear blue sky. Geoff and Nick got the opportunity to discover a geo cache. By this time, it was getting late, so we continued the journey to the campsite at Yandinga. We arrived at the campsite at around 5.00pm and guess what!! We heard the voices of Henry and Helen, our errant convoy members whom we missed at Iron Knob that morning. They had somehow found their way to the campsite (well done!!) and had not only found the site, but had set up camp. After being amazed at finding them, we discovered that they had thought the meeting place was at Kimba and that is where they were waiting for us! Ok. Never mind, at least they had found us. And apparently done the 4wd tracks already, trying to find the site!! We were mighty relieved to find them. But they did have to take down their tent and re-erect it again closer to us. After that however, they had to endure the ribbing from the entire crew about getting lost. They took it really well and went along with the fun.

We set up camp hastily, before dark, had dinner and enjoyed each other's company around a fantastic campfire. Nick kept us entertained with his fireworks display. It was fairly early to bed, especially for John, Neil and David who had travelled from about 5am that morning.

Next morning, we were off early to visit the sites of the Gawler Ranges. 'Legs' told us about the settlements around the area and we enjoyed the scenery, There were plentiful photo opportunities. The spots we visited were The Organ Pipes, which were simply stunning. I am glad I made the hobbling journey to see this spectacular site. Another geo cache find for Geoff! Watching Jim trying to climb that steep stretch of granite, did not please me! Some intrepid members scaled the heights and it was great to see. Although the descent by some looked anything but gracious, hey Phil!! Bottoms up!! After a group photo of the guys and their organs, it was back to the car for the next stop, which was Old Paney Homestead. We discovered that this homestead was inhabited by a couple and their 11 children. Amazing. The conditions would have been very challenging. We stopped here for morning tea and then we journeyed to Policeman's Point. I did not see this site, as I couldn't walk the distance, but Phil said that it was like an amphitheatre. Jim kept me company and whilst we waited for the return of the crew, we spotted quite a few kangaroos. After that we went to Kolay Hut campground, which was well occupied by other campers, goodness knows how they got their camper trailers up there! This is where we got in some fantastic 4wd experience. It was brilliant. All cars did really well, with Henry and Helen telling us that they had already done the track on the previous day!! Yikes! We then took in Pondanna Homestead and finished with Conical Hill. Unfortunately there were no wildflowers, except at Organ Pipes, earlier in the day. It was on the descent to Conical Hill that trouble struck our group. Rob, in the Landcruiser could not get his car started. Several cars had already made the descent and his vehicle was blocking the path of others. After some time trying to rectify the problem, it was decided to see if Rob could descend the hill under no power.

Geoff in the RAV4 towed him backwards to give him a run up and Greg and Judy in the Pajero anchored him in the journey down the hill. With guidance from other members, Rob and Barb were able to safely descend the very steep rocky hill and for around 2kms steered to a standstill at the bottom of the hill (to our cheers!!) Greg and July then towed them back to camp. A few heads together soon found the problem (blocked fuel line I think). Because we got to camp late and by then an almighty gale had sprung up, it was a real hasty get together for dinner which was a shared affair. I was feeling sore and tired and the wind and cold did not help, so soon after dinner, it was bed for me. But not before we found out about Henry's hysterectomy!! Hmmm! Carolyn came up with the lovely idea of placing warm coals under everybody's seat which caused some hot bums!! Phil bought lovely corn on the cob and potatoes for everyone to share. Wrapping them in alfoil and placing them in the coals soon produced lovely sweet corn and potatoes to warm the cockles of the heart! I am not sure if Carolyn got through all the bottles of wine she brought with her, but she sure gave it a good crack. (Goodnight Ray!). Cuffs took the opportunity to thank all the members for coming and thank the indigenous people for sharing Australia. I think the last members gave in at around 12 midnight.

Next morning (after daylight saving change), we were up at around 7am. Jim remembered to wake Cuffs (howling like a teenage wolf on heat sort of passed for a dog bark, firstly outside wrong tent, then right tent). Sorry Cuffs!! As it was still very windy and it had rained throughout the night, we were very hasty in the packing up process. No breakfast for us, we thought we might stop on the way home. At around 9.30am we set off for Wudinna. Because Rob was still feeling fragile about the Landcruiser, he decided to by-pass the trip to Mt Wudinna and we thought we might travel with him. So after breakfast at Wudinna, we watched the rest of the convoy head of either home, or to Mt Wudinna. It is one of Australia's largest granite monoliths. I am assuming that members would have climbed to the top. Rob, Barb and our clan set off travelling at around 90km for Rob's vehicle. Phil then decided to let Anton drive, so from Kimba (yes Kimba where there is a big galah, hey Henry!!), Anton drove to Pt Augusta. This took two hours at 80km (learner driver speed). By then the rest of the convoy caught us up. We discovered that Len and Mary had stopped at the Big 4 Caravan Park for an overnight stopover. We left Rob at this stage and set off, with me driving (finally). I may have been lame on the land, but in my baby, I flew!! We arrived at home without incident at around 6.30pm.

Wildlife – lizards, kangaroos, emus (wandering through the streets of Iron Knob), parrots, sheep, eagles, hawks, crows, goats and plenty flies. Points of interest – wind farm, Wild Peach (quondong tree), which Nick managed to climb very well, how many flies did I swallow – well I sucked in one and managed to spit it out. I got off lightly!

Weather – Friday set off, wet and cool, Saturday – set off, cool and becoming warmer and drier. Sunday – dry, warm and very windy. Monday – cool, wet and windy.

Incidents – one breakdown, no other dramas. We did let our tyres down for the rock climbing and most members found this helpful. Two members lost, temporarily.

The Gawler Ranges was a very interesting journey. We would like to thank Carolyn and 'Legs' for a wonderful trip. Next time Helen and Henry are going to get a special itinerary printed in bold showing designated rendezvous point. Trip leader make note!!

Meanwhile, we look forward to the next adventure!!

Cheers

Helen and Phil

Members

Geoff, Christine and Nick (RAV4), Len and Mary (RAV4), Rob and Barb (Landcruiser), Helen, Phil, Anton, Jim (Territory), Cuffs (Xtrail), Henry and Helen (Santa Fe), John and Neil (Tucson), David (Xtrail), Greg and Judy (Pajero), Carolyn and 'Legs' (Xtrail) – 10 cars, 21 people.

Photo Gallery



waiting at Iron Knob (no Henry!)





Quondog Tree (Wild Peach)



Lake Gairdner



Our banner



The Organ Pipes



Wildflowers



Hair raising descent



The boys and their organs (Henry stop bragging!)



Old Paney h/stead



morning tea





Pheh hot!



Just before trouble



Rob anchored



Rob under own steam



There he goes!!