



Newsletter No. 44 August 2017

*G'Day, Outback Vic here.* It has been a few months since my last newsletter and as usual there has been a lot going on, in fact, probably more than usual in the Great Divide Tours Camp.



*Namibia 4WD Tour*

Possibly the biggest news to date (if I don't count my daughter's wedding, which I probably should) was our inaugural 4wd trip to Africa. Just to recap, as you know I was born in 1954..... OK, so I don't need to recap back that far! This year GDT (Great Divide Tours) teamed up with world 4wd travel company Self Drive Adventures to run an exclusive 19 day tour through Namibia in Africa. I chose Self Drive Adventures (SDA) as they are an Australian based company operating tours into Africa, Iceland and Sth America (Yep, I've got my sights set on a few of these places also!). You may have met the owners of SDA at various 4wd shows around Australia, Linda and Mike are delightful people, with a Sth African background and now several years of running these tours under their belt, I felt the time was right to expand our business to these far flung locations. On top of that, Brian and Kirsten Sommerville who own GPS OZ and who also lead tours for me here in Australia had independently completed an African tour with SDA, so I felt very comfortable that we were aligning

ourselves with a reputable organisation, I'm pleased to say now after my first trip to Africa this has proven to be correct.



**Yes, this is real, this elephant walked right in front of us!**

This was to be my fist trip to Africa, and whilst I have done a little overseas travel (Yes, I've been to New Zealand about 10 times now leading 4wd trips, but that is like another state of Australia, isn't it?) I would classify myself as a bit naive to travel in foreign countries. There was the fear of what if I get ill, what if I get lost or injured, will I be taken hostage by terrorists, and will aliens abduct me? Now that I have done my first trip to Africa I realise that I may have over reacted and worried a little too much.



**Lots of long necked Giraffes**

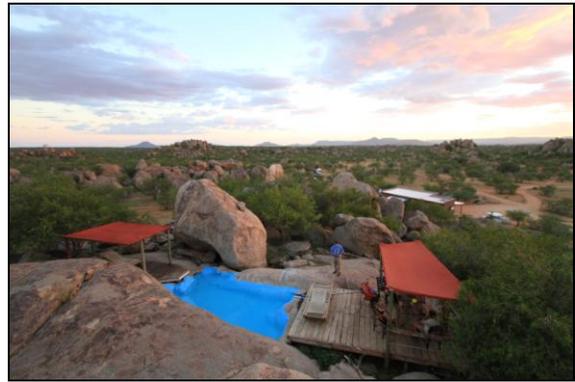
I have to say that the many emails that exchanged between the GDT office and Linda at SDA especially between my ever faithful PA Jenny, proved to be invaluable in helping us to prepare ourselves for a trip of a lifetime. Of course, it wasn't just me doing this amazing 4wd adventure, we were taking some of our customers too, so we were coordinating all the necessary bits and pieces for 5 other couples as well. So here is a bit of run down on what I experienced.



**Camping in Africa is easy with these roof top tents**

The first obstacle was understanding that we were travelling into remote locations which meant we had to address various health issues. I'm not big on needles just to avoid catching something, in fact I have this dumb idea that the Doctors actually make you sick by giving you inoculations against these deadly diseases just to get you to come back and spend more money with them, paranoid? Not me! See the aliens reference above. Anyway, after speaking with my GP and googleing where we were travelling and what health issues needed to be addressed I found it wasn't as bad as I had imagined, a couple of jabs with a needle or two and a few malaria pills whilst on the trip and all was good, I

came back in one piece so it must have worked.



**Yep! This was one of our remote bush camps.**

Next issue was the air flights to Africa, when I initially looked there was nothing direct to Johannesburg, this meant a layover of a few hours in Perth, no big problem except that the all up travel time just to get to Africa was approaching 20 hours, I'm happy to sit in my 4wd for 12 hours but not so keen on doing that in a plane. However, when I finally got around to booking my flights there was now a direct flight from Sydney to Johannesburg of 14 hours, but no layover so that was a win in my books. My helpful travel agent (Tom at Flight Centre in Mona Vale) suggested I book a seat at the rear of the plane which would give us more space and meant just two seats instead of the usual three along with a window seat (I had to see where I was going, can't help trying to be in control). I mentioned "us" above, so who was "us". Well, I had intended for my wife Julie and I to accompany our clients on our Namibian 4wd tour, (it is my intention to have all of our overseas 4wd tours accompanied by a GDT representative). As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter my beautiful daughter, Emma, was getting married on

28 April, just 4 days after we were due to return from Africa, so as you can imagine Julie was in doubt that she wouldn't miss the lead up to the wedding for anything, so either I was on my Pat Malone on this trip or I needed to find a friend in a hurry. End result is that Ian Sheppard, one of my guides and 4wd trainers was able to accompany me. This proved a good thing as now my role went from protector (of Julie) from the marauding wildlife to one of being protected by Ian! A win win situation if you ask me.



**Julie missed this for a wedding preparation? What a loser!**

So off we went, the 14 hour flight passed in about 14 hours, along with 3 movies and no sleep. I loved the two seats at the rear of the A 380 as we had heaps of space and it was easier to disturb Ian than some unknown when I need to visit the loo. And I had a window to watch the high country in Victoria pass under us before we travelled the rest of the distance over water until we reached Africa.

Johannesburg airport was a real eye opener; it is huge compared to our airports, and before we could say G'Day mate two fellows of large black appearance had grabbed our bags and

were walking us to our shuttle bus for our hotel. These "Porters" are not actually employed by the airport but they are locals who wear a Porter badge and make a living from the tips you give them for carrying your bags. First lesson, always carry small denominations of local money from the get go to avoid asking for change when you tip a Porter!



**Just one of our many beautiful bush sunsets**

The Johannesburg hotel was just 5 mins away from the airport, I had been warned that Jo'burg was a place that you didn't wander aimlessly about, so Ian and I stuck with our hotel for the rest of the day. Next morning we were back at the airport on our flight to Windhoek in Namibia. Our 4wd trip of Namibia was to start and end in the capital of Namibia, Windhoek. It was upon stepping off the plane at Windhoek that all of the arrangements for our trip were then taken care of as part of our Namibian tour. We had a shuttle bus waiting exclusively for us, which took us for the hour long drive from the airport to our accommodation in the city. I couldn't believe that the airport was so far away and located in the middle of the African bushland, we even saw our first Giraffe and Baboon as we drove towards the city. That was pretty exciting, it

certainly made us realise we were definitely in Africa now.



**From wild animals to amazing mountain scenery Africa has it all**

We met our personalised guide, Dave, for our tour, Dave has been working for SDA for 5 years and knows the land like the back of his hand. He proved to be extremely helpful and was admired by all on the trip. That evening in our very luxurious Country Club Resort we met our fellow travelling companions, some who had travelled with us previously and others that had seen our trip advertised via our website. The next day was spent collecting our 4wdrives from Avis in Windhoek, fully kitted with roof top tents, cooking gear and recovery gear. We then went in convoy to the local supermarket to do our shopping for the 19 day adventure. For Ian and I that was a bit of a challenge, both of us are unfamiliar with supermarkets let alone a Namibian one. We had planned our meals prior to leaving Australia so we knew what we needed, its just that not everything as we know it is the same in Namibia nevertheless, we loaded up with enough food to feed a small army. Then we looked at each other and asked who was going to cook it! I soon learnt how to cook as it was obvious I was going to starve if I left it to Ian.

The following day the big adventure kicked off and we left Windoek in a convoy of 7 vehicles. The first day was all on sealed roads, a transport stage of 500 k's north to Etosha NP. The driving was easy, they drive on the left side of the road and the cars are right hand drive, not like my ugly experience last year of trying to drive in Europe. The countryside is similar to outback Australia, general dry with little vegetation. The towns are quite different, and it is obvious that the country and its people are quite poor and yes, without sounding racist, everyone is black, and that in itself takes some time to get familiar with coming from a predominantly white country.



**A vast landscape**

Our first camp made a great impression, I found that there are hundreds of established camps for tourists like ourselves all over Namibia, they are found in the remotest country, where at time it seems like the last thing you would find. They all have flushing toilets, hot showers, mostly heated by burning wood in the "Donkey" and some even had swimming pools and bars for cold drinks. This was definitely civilised camping. But, we were warned about wandering off too far from camp, either we had a high wire fence surrounding us

or not, the fence was to keep out the Lions, Elephants, Wilderbeast etc, so where there was no fence, .... well you took your chances if you wandered away from camp.



**Rocky Road Namibia style, nothing to do with chocolate coated marshmallow!**

This style of camping was vastly different to what we do in Australia. In one camp I went off just before sunset to capture some great photos of the red dunes and when about 200 metres from our camp I noticed the paw prints of a large cat (read leopard I guess) I decided 200 metres from the safety of my 4wdrive was a tad too far.

We spent the next two days exploring Etosha NP, in fact those two days were just reward for the cost of the trip. We saw Lions, Rhino, a Leopard, and lots of Elephants, thousands of Antelope, Springbok and Zebra not to mention the Wilderbeasts and many other wild animals. One chance encounter with a large Elephant in a water hole, was simply amazing!

After a couple days in the Park we moved west towards the Atlantic Coast, we had many adventures over those few days, including driving through

extremely desolate countryside where there were more rocks than I have ever seen and some incredibly deep bull dust that virtually engulfed the 4wdrives. We were definitely in 4wd country on many of the tracks and at other times on good gravel roads, not much bitumen. All the time surrounded by giant mountains and deep valleys, very different in that respect from driving in Australia. What was also different was that at any given time you would see a herd of giraffes or a group of Zebra and similar wild animals, the best we get in Australia is the occasional kangaroo or emu and if we are lucky a camel.



**The striking Namib National Park, makes Big Red look small**

The other striking feature was the local villages where their homes were just mud brick construction with corrugated iron roofing established in a sea of rocks, there are a lot of rocks in Namibia. They were obviously extremely poor people but always happy to see you and they seemed content with their harsh life, I guess the reality is they know no different; certainly an education for me. Its appropriate that I mention the climate we were experiencing. It is worth noting that Windhoek and therefore all of the areas we travelled throughout are in fact above the Tropic of Capricorn. Of

course in Australia anything above the Tropic of Capricorn is seen as being a warm temperate climate, even hot in winter. In April, when I did this trip, it was hot, we had most days in the low 30's with one day reaching 40 degrees. The nights did cool down and I was pleased I had an extra blanket in my roof top tent. However, all of that changed when we hit the Atlantic Ocean on the Skeleton Coast. The sea temperature here is around 10 degrees, and the coastal strip experiences much cooler conditions, with day time temps in April around the late teens, and there is often a sea mist sometimes all day. A bit like London; and a huge contrast to the previous 10 days in the deserts.



**It was easy to get a great photo at sunset**

The rocks had given way to huge white sand dunes and the gravel roads were now slick salt roads always damp due the constant mist. We travelled down the coast to the next largest city in Namibia known as Swakopmund. Here the German influence was obvious with many items in the supermarkets identified in German, didn't help me identify what I was buying, but that was part of the fun. We spent a couple of nights in a luxury hotel all part of the tour and even explored the giant sand

dunes on a guided quad bike tour over 5 hours. Most of us had never ridden a quad bike previously, but under the guidance of our expert leader we were soon all proficient at going up and down some rather steep sand dunes, it was blast! Our guide lead us to a burial site in the dunes estimated to be thousands of years old, and even showed us human skulls and other assorted bones, that was quite amazing.



**Magic moments in the Desert**

We had 7 days left on our Namibian adventure but in some respects the best was yet to come. I'm referring to our visit to the Namib National Park. This is a huge area of giant red sand dunes. Now when I say huge, I mean huge, it runs down the west coast of Africa is over 500 kilometres long and 100 kilometres wide, all giant red dunes. Oh yes, when I say giant I mean GIANT, these dunes make our Big Red look like a baby, Big Red in the Simpson Desert is 40 metres high, the dunes in the Namib are over 100 metres high. The closest you can camp to them, where we were camped, is 50 kilometres away. So after making camp we drove up the sealed road, yes it is sealed into the red dunes, being surrounded by these giant red dunes on a setting sun was just magical. Talk about a photographers paradise.

The next morning Ian and I both arose well before sun rise, we were determined to catch sunrise on these giant sand dunes, and that we did. If sunset was great, sunrise was stunning, just look at these photos. At the end of the sealed road the last 3 kilometres to Big Daddy (Namibia's version of Big Red, only 4 times larger) was deep soft sand and bull dust. Our Ford Ranger ploughed through and we successfully made it, just, can't say the same for a lot of the other tourists we saw there who weren't with us and were travelling on their own, the track was scattered with bogged vehicles and burnt out clutches.



**Sunrise was even better in the Desert**

Ian and I climbed a mini version of Big Daddy (on foot), the super soft sand and knife sharp windblown top edge made walking extremely difficult, but it again gave us some incredible photo opportunities, definitely one of the many stand out features of this incredible tour. Before we knew it our 19 days had passed and we were back in our luxury accommodation in Windhoek and saying farewell to our fellow travelling companions. Most of which had decided to spend a little more time in Africa exploring this amazing country. Ian and I had also decided to take advantage of our location and took a short flight to

Victoria Falls, where we spent 3 nights, during which time we visited one of the 7 wonders of the world, the Victoria Falls, got totally saturated walking around the top of the falls, we saw them from the air on a helicopter, took a cruise on the river above the falls and saw hippos and an elephant swimming across the river and spent 3 hours walking with the lions. What a trip this had turned out to be!



**This one looks amazing on the big screen!**

One lasting memory on the trip, part way through it we were driving up a dry river bed, when the second vehicle in our group broke through the sand into some wet quicksand, becoming bogged. A recovery was in order and thanks to our guide being well equipped with a winch and max trax, we had a plan to get the stricken vehicle out, it was about then that one of our customers pointed out the 20 centimetre wide lion foot print in the wet sand beside the bogged vehicle, sure made for a speedy recovery, all part of the African experience our cheery guide said to us.

I was so inspired by our African experience that we are offering three trips next year to this incredible location. We will be offering our Namibian trip

once again in May 2018, followed in June with a new tour into Botswana, where the wildlife is even more plentiful and the scenery equally stunning. In fact, we have had the Botswana trip listed on my website for a few weeks now and already have several bookings, hence the need to offer two trips running at the same time in opposite directions. We only have a couple of spots remaining on each of the Botswana trips, so if you are interested in joining us in 2018 on either Botswana or our Namibian trip drop me an email at [info@4wd.net.au](mailto:info@4wd.net.au) asap and I'll send you the itinerary and happily answer any questions you have.



**You will visit Victoria Falls on our Botswana Trip in 2018 and walk with the Lions!**



### *The Wedding*

I was only back in Australia 4 days and my daughter Emma was getting married to her fiancé Mike. All of you Mums and

Dads out there that have had the pleasure of giving their daughter's hand in marriage will know it is one of the proudest days in your life. No different for me and I can't express how proud I am of my daughter Emma (and my other daughter Lisa too) in how they have grown into wonderful mature adults. Emma looked stunning (of course she did, she is my daughter) and the wedding day was just fabulous throughout the whole event. I say that because I had hair and makeup people at my home from 7.30 am and not one of them was for me!



The Father of the Bride's speech was written on the plane on the way back from Africa, and it appears I did not embarrass Emma too much, and had the audience laughing and sharing a tear with me as I did my Dad duties. Whilst it would have been great to have Julie with me in Africa I can't express my love for her enough and am so grateful to her for assisting Emma in the lead up to the wedding to make sure everything went off as planned. Although sharing the African trip with Ian did have its moments like when we were booked into one of our hotel rooms as Mr and Mrs Widman, what the ?



**I'm blessed to have two beautiful daughters, love you both!**

### *New Zealand in 2017 and its on again in 2018*

Just prior to Africa and the Wedding, Julie and I took another group of great Aussies over to the land of the long white cloud to join our NZ tour guide, Steve Beston, on another of our now famous 10 day New Zealand 4wd tours. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> year now that we have led tours over the ditch, and I never tire of them. The scenery is so fabulous, the people of the Sth Island so obliging, the accommodation and meals superb and the four wheel driving just mind blowing. Our trip took place just a few days after Murray Ball passed away ..... got you guessing on who he is?

Murray was the creator of Footrot Flats, the famous cartoon piece about the NZ farmer and his dog named Dog. To remember the passing of this great cartoonist our group had our own Dog to look after during the trip, he accompanied us everywhere and his trip was recorded by all on their cameras. On returning to Oz and with the assistance of Steve Gore, one of my clients from Victoria, we put together a photo book of our 10 days in NZ with Dog. A great keep sake which I provided to all who attended.

The trip was memorable for many reasons, not the least of which was how wonderful everyone got on together, along with the Arab style tents we camped in one night and the 100kph winds on top of the Pisa Range which prevented us from opening the 4wd drive doors.



**Incredible landscapes in New Zealand**

I had a number of people keen to do our trip in 2017 but as we can only take 7 vehicles at a time they missed out. Well, I've just released the dates for 2018, we will arrive in Christchurch on 7 April. I have deliberately delayed the trip this year so we can see the already beautiful country side bathed in the majestic autumn colours, to be honest, I think it is going to be an outstanding trip.



**Driving on the edge, NZ style.**

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We have changed the itinerary around a little, Steve Beston has even found a new track that I haven't done previously and included some of our old favourites. But, I think I have found something that is really out of this world for us to do. I recently saw a travel show on TV which depicted a helicopter flight into the mountains south of Queenstown where it landed in valley surrounded by glacier clad mountains with several waterfalls cascading into the river where the helicopter landed. So I have now included time for us to participate in this amazing tour. It is an optional tour whilst we are in Queenstown as I'm aware that not everyone has a passion for helicopters like I do, but there is heaps of other great stuff to see and do whilst we are Queenstown. I've attached the itinerary to the email with this Newsletter so have a look, but remember we only take 7 couples/vehicles.



**You can join us here too!**

### *Lots of trips*

As I write this, would you believe I'm sitting in the front of the fireplace at my 4wd training centre pounding on the keyboard, I have Tony on the Canning Stock Route leading our 26 day trip up the centre of WA, I also have Tom leading the 26 day Kimberley trip, they are in Mornington Wilderness camp and

Dave is on his way to Cairns to start our Cape York trip. We've also had our Simpson Desert trip in May led by Dave, and the Maralinga trip lead by Ian Bragg, both of which went off really well.



**See, told you I was here**

During June Ian Sheppard had recovered from his 3 weeks with me to lead our Madigan Line tour through the Simpson Desert and then in early July the likeable Greg and his family took our clients out to the Big Red Bash. Heaps of great adventures enjoyed by our clients. Of course we have had our usual array of day and weekend trips continuing too over the past few months, with a couple of Stockton Beach trips, the tours that we take into the Blue Mountains such as the Cox River and Turon River trips and then our weekend trips into Barrington Tops, the Caves to Caves tour between Jenolan and Wombeyan Caves and our Hill End/Abercrombie trip.

During April whilst I was in Africa fighting off lions, we had our usual 7 day high country tour planned but severe weather just prior to commencing the trip led to high snow falls, wet tracks and lots of tree damage, so sadly we had to cancel that trip in the interests of safety. But we did get to run our 4 day

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Snowy Mtns trip over the Easter period with Ian Bragg leading and helping fix a few vehicle issues along the way.

During May, Tom also lead a couple of our 7 day high country accommodated trips, the fist trip was fully booked so we had a second trip running which had three vehicles booked on it. Alas one of the participants had to drop out a few days before and then a second vehicle had issues the day prior to the trip commencing and couldn't make it. This left Tom with one customer, but as he was already in Bright, we decided to go ahead with the trip anyway. Imagine having your own personal guide for 7 days through the high country.

### *Driver Training*

You might think with all these trips we don't have much time for our 4wd driver training, not true, we have been flat chat with the training also. As mentioned I'm writing this newsletter from the training centre where I've just delivered 5 days of 4wd training to the good folk from the Australian Federal Police and also the staff at Canberra Toyota.



**We couldn't stop this FJ in our bog hole**

Training the sales and service personnel from Canberra Toyota was a real buzz,

as despite them selling these vehicles day in and day out, they rarely get the chance to see their actual capability. Suffice to say I'm sure they were blown away with just how capable these modern 4wdrives really are.

Demonstrating the advantages of traction control and crawl function etc always brings a smile to the dial, but allowing the sales people to experience the hill climbing capability and learning our unique mud driving skills will really arm these people with a better appreciation of the vehicles they are selling.



**Most of you speak with Jenny in my office, but she is also one of my professional trainers**

But that is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to our 4wd delivery over the past few months. We've had tremendous response from the general public attending our weekend courses, lots of individual based training and a great variety of courses with camper trailer training and an advanced course all knocked off in May. I was even asked to design a course for drivers of 12 ton trucks delivering gas supplies to rural properties, which I did and we had the good people from Elgas running around

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our training centre grounds identifying where they can and should not drive.

On the training front my staff and I have all been going through recertification to have the latest and greatest Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment and I now have 9 senior trainers all qualified at this industry leading standard.

At our training centre we have continued to work on the tracks and facilities so we can provide the best possible learning environment, the one thing that all our attendees comment on is the high standard of the training centre. But, I have more to come and hope to start work soon on a dedicated water crossing for the training centre that will provide a realistic water crossing similar to what you would find in the Victorian High Country, watch this space for more details and photos of the construction process.



**Vic and a chainsaw, what could possibly go wrong?**

### *More Certification*

Whilst it is important that my staff are correctly certified to deliver the nationally recognised driver training that we offer, it is equally important that the 4wd tour aspect of Great Divide Tours

also operates at the accepted industry standard. You can't just put a couple of stickers on your 4wd and call yourself a tour guide. In fact, there is a lot more to it than that and from a legal perspective all tour operators need to be licensed and operating at an established level of business competency in the field they choose.

In Australia not only am I required to be licensed by the various state authorities in the national parks that we conduct tours, but to achieve that licensing arrangement my business must also hold certification by Ecotourism Australia. This has established industry standards so that anyone joining a licensed tour operator can do so with peace of mind that they are dealing with a business that has a reputable and legally binding business profile.

Great Divide Tours was recently awarded "Green Travel Leader" status by Ecotourism for its services to the tourism industry over the past ten years, something I am very proud of and demonstrates our commitment to the tourism industry and the environment, showing that 4wd driving and the environment can work in harmony with each other.



**Not only talk the talk but walk it also with GDT**

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In addition to this, Ecotourism conducts audits of its members to ensure they are meeting their obligations as a eco tour operator. GDT's turn to be audited occurred recently and I was more than pleased to receive a letter from the Operations Manager of Ecotourism Australia congratulating me on achieving an outstanding level of compliance.

### *What's coming up?*

The next few months continue to be very busy for us, here is a sample of what's on our calendar and what few vacancies still exist in case you find the need to escape the rat race.



**Checking out a turtle nest on Cape Arnhem**

Our Arnhem Land trip is on again from 9 August and whilst we don't have any spots available on it, it is shaping up to be another amazing trip, we are constantly working with the local aboriginal communities to bring our people to them and to assist them with their business opportunities, I'm in the process right now of discussing more possibilities for this trip in the future. In the meantime we have added a couple of extra days to the trip this year because we have found even better locations to visit. Tony Davys will be leading this

trip this year yet again, but this time he will be accompanied by the newest recruit to GDT, an amazing person by the name of Neil Bell whose experience and demeanour is amongst the best I have seen.

Dave "Coighty" Fullerton is on his way to Cape York right now for this year's first trip departing Cairns on and then followed with our second Cape trip commencing 17 August. His second trip has a couple of spots available, so if you have some time to spare and would like to visit the top of Oz, give me a call 02 99131395.

Tom Savage is currently leading the first of our Kimberley trips but immediately following that he kicks off out of Alice Springs on our second trip on 11 August. We have one spot still available on this trip.

After Arnhem Land Tony drives from the top of Australia almost to the bottom at Port Augusta to start our incredibly beautiful Spring time Flinders Ranges tour, a 12 day spectacular through the best of the Flinders resplendent in all its wildflowers and beautiful mountain scenery, this trip commences on 4 September and still has 3 spots available and is camper trailer friendly.

Also in September its my turn to hit the track as I lead the first of our new Outback Icons accommodated tour, from Cobar to Birdsville via Innamincka and then down to Marree and Port Augusta. A fully accommodated trip with dinner and breakfast included in each stop over, these trips have proved to be very popular.

My first trip commencing 6 September is fully booked and on the return trip from Port Augusta back to Cobar via Birdsville commencing 16 Sept I have two spots available.



**Ever wanted to go to Birdsville but don't like camping? This trip is for you!**

Whilst I'm doing that, and because these trips have proved so popular we have scheduled a third Outback Icons trip commencing from Cobar on 14 Sept being lead by Dave fresh from his Cape York adventures. This trip is also fully booked, but fear not as we are running these trips again next year in September.

Of course we haven't forgotten about those of us who can't get any extended time off work and have a great selection of day and weekend trips coming up as we get closer to Spring.

Over 12-13 August we are taking a tour out to Hill End and then on day 2 into the beautiful Abercrombie National Park, this trip is accommodated also with dinner and breakfast provided, I have just 3 spots remaining if you would like to join us.

On 20 August we have a day trip into the Blue Mountains to the area bounded by

the Cox and Kowmung rivers which includes Kanangra Walls. Just a couple of hours west of Sydney is some spectacular scenery and 4wd trails, so its a nice easy day trip away with the family.

Then on 10 September we have another of our very popular Stockton Beach trips. I just took a corporate group up there last Sunday and despite doing this trip probably more than 50 times now its still a fantastic day out. On this recent trip we saw a huge pod of dolphins, a school of whales and of course found pippies on the beach and showed all the usual historic points of interest including the wreck of the Sygna, Tin City and the WWII fortresses. A great day of sand driving for sure.



**Stockton Beach is one of the best single day trips that we lead, next one is 10 September**

If you are looking for a camping weekend away we have our usual 3 day long weekend trip to Deua NP on the south coast from 30/9-2/10/17 too.

For all pricing and to book any of these trips just visit my website at [www.4wd.net.au](http://www.4wd.net.au) or drop me an email at [info@4wd.net.au](mailto:info@4wd.net.au)

### *Its snow time!*

I've spent a lot of time down at my 4wd training centre at Braidwood over the past month and we have experienced some of the coldest days ever. Three mornings in a row the temperature dipped to minus 7 degrees and then on one of these days my dam on the property was completely frozen over, not just in the early morning but all day! Even as I write this newsletter at the training centre it is predicted to drop again to minus 6 tomorrow morning, Bbbrrrrrr! No wonder I've spent a lot of time cutting firewood of late.

Sadly, we have also gone through one of the driest June and July periods on record, in fact, I don't think it has rained at all over the past two months down here. So with that in mind, I'm now about to tell you about our planned snow tours during August. The three day trips will see us venture over some 4wd tracks in the Brindabella Ranges behind Canberra on our way to Tumut and then up via Batlow to our accommodation in Tumbarumba.



**Honestly Santa I've been a good boy**

Day two will have us venturing into the high altitude forests around Elliott Way east of Tumbarumba. Now this area is around 1000-1200 metres above sea

level, and whilst it isn't guaranteed to snow there, it did last week, blanketing the area in beautiful crystal whiteness (a bit like the frosts we have had at the training centre). So we have our fingers crossed for the weekends in August when we are in the area that we will be lucky enough to experience some snow.

But, even if it just remains cold and crispy, the tracks we drive are superb, we have a beautiful lake to visit and I'm sure we will see some wild brumbies galloping through the snow gums, nothing looks more free and wild in my opinion. As this is a three day trip, on the Monday we will lead you back to busy Canberra via Cabramurra and Three Mile Dam where we know we will see some snow.

But wait: there is more to this trip. Alex and I did our reccie run for the trip during the June long weekend and sampled our accommodation at the same time. We will be staying in the modern Tumbarumba Motel which has fabulous rooms, nicely heated of course and a tremendous onsite restaurant where we will be having dinner and breakfast. For our second night (Sunday) we have themed the night's meal with a Christmas in August flavour, so there will be a beautiful roast dinner and some Christmas pudding and of course a visit from Santa.

Now, here is the catch, these trips have proved to be extremely popular, so if you are thinking of joining us please be aware that we have been fully booked for the first two weekends in August. However, due to the popularity of this trip I now have a new date on the calendar being 18-20 August, so if you would like some fun in the snow, a great

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long weekend away, some lovely accommodation, the chance to celebrate Christmas early and the opportunity to sit on Santa's knee, then drop me an email or make a booking direct via my website [www.4wd.net.au](http://www.4wd.net.au)

PS. Hot off the press, our first Snow tour just finished and they had an amazing amount of snow, even driving through half a metre of snow at times!

### *High Country tours are going off*

It is no secret that one of our most popular 4wd tours are those to the Victorian High Country. Whilst the tracks we use are now closed during Winter, this has not stopped our planned trips over next Summer already receiving solid bookings. For example have a look at the following trips and their booking status

High Country camping trip 19-25/11/17 Fully booked

High Country camping Trip 26/11 - 2/12/17 6 spots available

High Country accommodated trip 25/11-2/12/17 3 spots available

High Country Accommodated trip 2 - 9/12/17 Just 1 spot available

High Country camper trailer trip 29/12/17 - 4/1/18 4 spots available

High Country camping trip 3 -9/1/18 4 spots available

As you see you will need to book early to get on board, so please don't leave it to the last minute if you are thinking of joining us on one of these great trips.

### *Kimberley Cruising x2*

Last newsletter I mentioned that I planned to explore the beautiful Kimberley coast in August 2018, and had negotiated a great discounted price on the Odyssey Kimberley, a 20 berth boat that would take you all along the amazing coastal strip from Broome to the Mitchell plateau, then we would fly you back to Broome from the Mitchell Falls. Well, you guys must have liked that idea because I booked out the whole boat in just two weeks. So we have negotiated a similar price for a second Kimberley cruise commencing from Broome on 20 August 2018, just \$7,600 per person for the 9 day cruise, all meals, fishing and exploring the amazing Kimberley coast on the Odyssey Kimberley and the helicopter and light plane flight back to Broome. This trip will be fully escorted by Jenny from my office and her partner Wayne. But to get this discounted price we do need to fill the boat, we have a couple of bookings already from the overflow from the first trip but we need a few more, so if you are keen to see what I rate as the most spectacular place I have visited in Australia, take a look at the itinerary that accompanies this Newsletter and book it asap.



**We have filled one cruise and now we are offering a second trip commencing 20 August 2018**

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### *Also new for 2018*

I've had this trip brewing in my mind for a few months now and recently sat down and worked out its logistics and came up with the following.

**A complete circumnavigation of the Simpson Desert**, I've attached the itinerary to this email for you have a look but in short this is my plan. We will meet in Cobar and travel to Trilby Station, then through to Tibooburra and Warri Gate and onto Innamincka via Santos and the Bore Track. Then we will take the Walkers Crossing Track to the Birdsville Track and head south until we pick up the Warburton Crossing Track, from here our circumnavigation of the Desert commences. The Warburton Crossing Track emerges on the Rig Rd which we follow to the west until it intersects with the Colson Track. We then follow the Colson Track north all the way to Camp 5 on the Madigan Line.



**This could be the longest Simpson Desert trip ever**

Now we turn east and follow the Madigan Line until it intersects with the Hay River Track where we head north once more. We will spend a day at Batton Hill camp on the Hay River Track before ducking out to Jervois station on the Plenty Hwy to replenish

our fuel stocks. Now we retrace all the way down the Hay River Track to Poeppel Corner and exit out of the Desert via the QAA Line, over Big Red and into Birdsville. After a fabulous night in the Birdsville Hotel we will continue east and take the Arrabury road visiting Haddon Corner on the way.

After the Dig Tree on the Cooper Creek we drive east along the Adventure Way to the famous hotel at Noccundra and then head south all the way back down to Warri Gate, completing the full circle, but to finish the trip we will continue past Tibooburra to the Underground Motel at White Cliffs.

This is an epic 21 day desert adventure and if you think you are up to it and have fuel capacity to cover 1500 kilometres of desert travel (Approx 330 litres of diesel based on 22 litres per 100 kilometres (this is my 200 series' average in desert driving) then please reserve your spot early as I expect this trip will fill quickly. It is planned for 6-26 May 2018

### *A Photo course weekend*

A few years back we conducted several of these weekends down at my 4wd training centre, so I'm pleased to announce that we have brought them back. I will be teaming up with well known pro photographer Phil Cooper over the long weekend in September/October 30/9 - 1/10/17 for a two day photographic course. Designed to help you understand how to get the best out of your SLR camera, this course will cover all the basics of camera operation and subject framing, along with more detailed use of the various attributes of your SLR including shutter speed and aperture control.

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As it is a weekend course we will also include night photography and Phil will get you outdoors to show you how to photograph the stars, get beautiful long exposure images and how to paint subjects with a torch whilst photographing them.



**Two days of camera tuition at our 4wd training centre with Phil Cooper**

Phil is a main stream photographer for 4x4 Australia magazine and has a wealth of photographic knowledge to pass on. We will keep the number limited to allow Phil to literally look over your shoulder and give you personal assistance along with the usual class room tuition.



**Personal instruction from Phil is guaranteed**

On the second day we will hit some local tracks too to put your new skills to great practice. The course fee for two days is

just \$300 per person, with a camera, if two attend with one camera the fee is \$450 for the two. It will be a self catered weekend, but you have full use of my kitchen in my training centre and camp on site or stay in our bunk house beds. Check out my website for more details and to enrol in this great 2 day photo course.

### *Vic's 4wd tips*

Its interesting to note that every new 4wd now coming to us at our 4wd courses all have Vehicle Stability Control and Traction Control. Of course VSC is a high speed safety device that should be left alone when driving at normal speeds, but most vehicles disengage it when you select 4wd as it recognises that at times you need the wheels to spin to find traction. My recent trip to Stockton highlighted the need to switch it off though when using high range on the sand, otherwise the brakes are applied automatically and even the power can be cut to the motor. The big trick is to remember that it switches itself back on every time you stop and restart the engine. (Could be a real issue with those 4wd drives that do this every time you stop in order save fuel). But did you know that the Traction Control can also impede your progress on the sand (this will also apply to mud and snow) Traction Control works on the theory of applying the brakes to any spinning wheels and diverting drive to the opposite end of the axle in hope that wheel can gain traction. This works a treat on solid ground but in sand/mud./snow, applying the brakes generally stops forward progress pretty quickly. Which is why you can usually disengage the traction control too when you elect to. Just push that skiddy car button on your dash. One push and in

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high range the traction Control is disabled, but keep pushing the same button for a few more seconds and the VSC is also turned off. Try it next time you on the sand or snow.

### *Vic's gripe*

Sadly, I'm seeing more and more morons in the bush. What makes a moron? Any person that thinks they need to spin their wheels on a nice grassed camp site, leave their camp fire burning, leave their rubbish in a camp site or leave their toilet visit unburied and within sight of everyone. Seems to me that this is becoming an even greater problem as I read regularly of this type of behaviour from all over the country. The other point to note is that in times gone by you could pull up someone you saw doing the wrong thing and have a conversation with them about it, these days, you virtually take your life in your hands if you dare to speak up. The aggressiveness of some people supposedly out enjoying the great outdoors is mind boggling. Glad most of my trips get me well away from the city crowds.

### *Luke King Racing*

My nephew Luke King is competing again this year in the Toyota 86 racing series in conjunction with the V8 Supercar rounds (5 of them). GDT is one of his valued sponsors and I'm glad to say that in the current point score and after two rounds he is in 4<sup>th</sup> outright place and just 2 points off third place. The next round is at Eastern Creek in mid August followed by Bathurst in October. I'm hoping to have some big news on our sponsor arrangement for Bathurst and possibly the last race in

November at Newcastle, imagine an 86 in Great Divide Tours livery! Yeehaa!



### *Vale Ian Glover*

On a sad note we lost a real character and pioneer in many ways from the 4wd industry in the last couple of weeks. Ian Glover may be known to you as the former editor of Overlander Magazine back in the 1980's and also the brains behind 4Wheeler Magazine which debuted in the 1990's. Ian was a very respected motoring journalist and worked in the media area of Mitsubishi motors for some time also.

He undertook various outback expeditions over the years and wrote several books. Regretfully he was in the process of writing the history of 4wd driving in Australia when he passed away.

I first met Ian when he was the Editor of Overlander and he was invited to judge a photo competition held by my 4wd car club at the time, the Subaru Car Club, this would have been around 1982 I believe, a photo I submitted of a dead gum in the fog out near Newnes won the prize, and so started my great interest in photography. I met Ian again 20 years later when he and I were judges on 4WD of the Year, always a fascinating

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character with many tales to spill around the camp fire. Ian died of complications due to cancer, my condolences to his family.

So that's a wrap as they say, a lot has taken place over the past 5 months since my last newsletter and the rest of 2017 looks like it will be just as busy, I can't wait!

Regards

Vic Widman

Some more photos from Africa

