

14 Aug 2009

Diary excerpts *I almost crossed the Simpson*

Star of movie – 1989 GL diesel Landcruiser, literally last of the 60's Series

DAY 1 – FRIDAY 14 AUGUST

Reputation intact, we were late to the meeting point. We were on the road for 15 minutes using a shortcut when the new windscreen got 5 chips compliments of roadworks tip truck and using the shortcut took 20 min longer so we had to catch up with convoy at the border.

10 a.m. Pulled in for leg stretch and the 2-way call was finally answered. No wonder the convoy was one block away.

Note – don't fill up your jerry cans at Bacchus Marsh. Wait until you get to Oodnadatta.

p.m. Pulled into Port Wakefield after sunset. I'm not going to bunk on the side of road so we booked into the caravan park. When the group got back from the pub they liked the idea and stayed there too.

DAY 2 – SATURDAY 15 AUGUST

I was excited because I was shown how to take photos with new camera.

Note – promise never to leave instructions on couch ever again.

Camping professionals assisting new member in packing his truck. Nice expression on ## face with discovery there was so much space in back and no need to strip car to get at the fold up table. Chatting loudly with ET who insists he always had everything packed perfectly when overheard concern ## put 10 litres super in reserve 60 litre diesel tank. 10 opinions from 6 blokes decided to continue slowly, flipping switch between both tanks. Our 2-way reception was so weak we made a quick stop at an autoshop while others discussed whether 10 litres petrol would blow up a diesel motor. We forgot about the country mentality – shop assistant looked like a stunned mullet when we walked in and bought their best antenna on spot within 2 seconds. But their mechanic who was attaching correct male and female connections was not concerned with keeping us waiting and kept yakking to his mate for 30 min about the purchase price of 500 Remington bullets. I believe the yakking actually slowed down when the convoy rolled in and our 5 trucks used every space in his carpark. After all that, the reception with the new antenna was still crappy.

p.m. Maree – First night to watch the stars. Lucky we put the fly cover on the tent at the last minute, it protected us from Force 10 hurricane with lightning fireworks. Must have been bad at 2am as the boys turned their swags around against the wind.

DAY 3 – SUNDAY 16 AUGUST

Oodnadatta Track. Outback here we come. Took photo of 350,000 kms on the speedo. At 350,035 kms ET said something was not right and pulled over. Motor was purring smoothly, but when we tried to move it sounded like shopping cart with a

jammed wheel down the aisle of an empty shop. That's it, we were not going anywhere. 2 trucks stay with us while other 3 went on to set up camp at Dalhousie.

Note – if ## trying new super-duper antenna for the sat phone remind him to bring the old antenna as well; at least it works.

5p.m. Rang RACV 1800 number. Reception bit dodgy so stayed online listening to them sort out who was to come from where to pick us up. Freecall (1800 number) Telstra called this a “service call surcharge” 22 min = \$62.04 + \$20.49 for ET's 7 min to Oodnadatta Pink House.

Reckon tow driver stripped our gearbox when he tried drive it onto the trailer, but watching how he later jack knifed over 2 tonne cruiser onto his tray in seconds really opened our eyes. I want another 2-way. Antique hand held that tow bloke had – he was listening to Coober Pedy 200 km away. At dusk we pulled into Oodnadatta and now know why they call themselves the Pink Road House, must have had a good sale on that colour paint. Next truck I'm going to get is a Ford..... he was sitting on 80 kms easy and didn't even know it was pulling trailer with fully loaded Cruiser. No probs catching up to the 2 in front.

That Pink Road House owner was busier than excited bees in a hive and cor blimey did he talk fast. Got tired just watching him – looking for new gearbox, working out best options for towing, left the Cruiser on the tray to leave it as the 1st tow, made a booking on the next weekly road train, just lost his 6 week German backpacker staff in the shop so he started telling the cleaning lady (?) how to stack shelves, preparing to go to a funeral in two days, almost blew fuse because someone didn't take the proper phone message, calling mates in Alice and Coober to ask who can do gearbox job, working out best towing options, looking for the correct part to put in a motor by garage assistant, checked if a tyre is required for other car to be fixed, items incorrectly dumped in shop's fridge and not looking enticing to clientele – phew – and that was in 10 minutes.

DAY 4 – MONDAY 17 AUGUST

Waved bye bye as others took off to go catch up with rest of convoy.

a.m. Worked out how to use unusual plug for kitchen sink.

p.m. Reset TV – must have channels in logical order.

Cabins were actually very nice but don't be pregnant if want to get into the bathroom. Found out cheaper tow using Friday's weekly road train booked out. Up to Alice? Might do the job if they have a gearbox but there are problems about hoisting 2,500 kg truck. Down to Coober Pedy? Nice week of free accommodation and hire car but 10 days before get truck into garage – If we can get a gearbox. RACV will take us home to Melbourne and leave the Cruiser in our driveway. Definitely will not take it to a garage. Nice but then all the pissing around with time off work, hiring a tow truck, looking for reco gearbox, finding a mechanic that will put it in under \$10g, keeping car at garage – maybe not so nice. Adelaide has main SA distributors with 'One Stop Shop', new to used, all models, 4WD specialists and will start work immediately. ☺ Get it fixed then north to Alice have a look or meet up at Flinders with others.

Sounds good so we decide we were off to Barossa Valley and City Dismantlers – they were forwarding the gearbox to Alice or Coober anyway.

Note – everything heavy (e.g. gearbox) get it delivered via the weekly road train.

DAY 5 – TUESDAY 18 AUGUST

a.m. Panic – started working out our \$. Accommodation \$110/night x 2 weeks = \$1540, we're sitting 1200 km out of Adelaide towing fee = \$3600, lucky got plenty of food though.

Note – like the way towing co-charge \$3/km starting from leaving the depot, or \$6/km from actual pickup. \$6 is cheaper really.

Fell in love Pink Road House phone booth. Spent hours deciding if it was the original Tardis or old Aussie phone booth – then living in it calling RACV. Mobile phone costs an arm and leg but with landline 1800 really is free. Confirmed they cover all costs until car in surgery at City Dismantlers hospital, towing, accommodation, taxi fares to/from garage, hire car, airfare from Coober to Adelaide and they do all the booking/arranging, weeeeeee! Actually I didn't want to fly hoping the Crusier arrives safe and sound so the RACV booked nice twin cab tow truck with airconditioning and we stayed with the Cruiser.

10.00 a.m. Go clockwise walkabout around city of Oodnadatta and look for a pub. Found couple of trees.

10.30 See if missed anything so walkabout again.

10.50 Nope did not miss anything.

Note - worth \$10 for key deposit to get into town museum – do not miss it.

ET went to return key, too close to pub though, never saw money again.

p.m. Lovely eagle soaring in sky, it was up there for hours and hours and hours. Just got news from some passing German tourists – Essendon **BEAT** St Kilda. Don't have Vic stuff on TV over here.

DAY 6 – WEDNESDAY 19 AUGUST

Went walkabout anti-clockwise around town to make sure buildings are in the same spots. Had trouble taking photo of sign "driest town, driest state, driest country". It was raining.

Tow truck showed. Unusual twin cab back doors missing and in the old days that type of airconditioning was known as an open window, explains why everything's covered in moon dust. Don't know what's older, it or the driver. ET's got a big bum so he's going to sit in the middle.

20 min out and weird car goes belting past the other way. What is an old Cadillac covered in streamers and big plastic nose stuck onto bumper bar doing on the Oodnadatta Track in the middle of Australia? Joe the tow truck driver was not happy, bullet gravel shot at him between the eyes; windscreen chipped so bad it started cracking straight away. Counted 82 2WD cars, everything from the Blues Mobile to a

Melbourne Fire Brigade truck to a big banana and now 5 windscreen chips. Found out it was the Aussie Charity Bash – definitely one hell of a party at the old Oodnadatta pub tonight, what else is new we just left so were missing it all.

Lunch at Coober Pedy. Hello. Goodbye. Meal was good in new restaurant, but outside this place is not for me. Good choice not take Coober Pedy freebie offer. 2 days visit nice, 1 week no way. ET desperately needs a cushion sitting in the middle of the only seat in tow so pinched my new windcheater, definitely won't get creases out of it now.

Meant to go for 500km then stop but all the motels were booked for the Charity Bash. Pulling into Port Augusta Joe proudly told us he was born 1935 then he swerve and left quite a bit of tyre rubber on edge of bridge railings. We agree with the 74 year old we were all a bit tired so were happy to go to motel that was a bit off main freeway.

DAY 7 – THURSDAY 20 AUGUST

p.m. Made it. Dismantlers offered \$15/day rent car pretty crappy car but better than standing on footpath. Blessed be the GPS system, no idea where we were in Adelaide. Took one hour to get through infamous intersection and get to motel for night. I'll never complain again about trying to get off the Westgate and go to World Trade Centre during roadworks.

DAY 8 – FRIDAY 21 AUGUST

Good news the garage rang – they have a gearbox. Bad news garage rings again – truck too heavy to lift on hoist allocated. Good news garage again – cars rearranged with other hoists so examination in progress. Bad news – wrong gearbox. Good and bad news – can get one in 24 hours but closed weekends so 24 hours means Monday morning.

Note – make sure plenty of good DVD's as most of Adelaide is closed on weekends.

Found digs @ \$60/night, don't have to pay \$110 motel after RACV 2 night freebie runs out. BIG, BIG problem, battery going flat on GPS – cigarette lighter bugged up in crappy car. Somehow got back to the garage they would not fix the lighter, just gave us a new car with sound system, cost more than both cars combined. Nice, but best of all the lighter works for recharging – no more GPS warning lights.

Note – buy enough wall rechargers for both phone and GPS to keep in every bag, 1st aid box, repair kit ...

DAY 9 – SATURDAY 22 AUGUST

Getting pelted by rain and watched Melbourne destroyed in wind storms. What we enjoyed in Maree finally got to Melbourne. Sleeping in a tent in that? Watched Galah trying to land against wind. Lucky Salvo shop across the road closed as I would have got drenched trying to get to car to drive there. Reset TV in motel.

DAY 10 – SUNDAY 23 AUGUST

Watch same Galah (?) trying to fly against wind. ET almost smashed up chicken joint, he didn't want extra chips but swapped with cheaper side salad, young bird

behind counter asked manager who refused as it's not part of family feast. Lucky staff in pizza shop next door were really nice and friendly.

DAY 11 – MONDAY 24 AUGUST

a.m. Garage now working on Cruiser. Recommend pub called "Dubliner" just south of Port Wakefield across the road from the Op shop.

p.m. Garage now almost working on car, bit of a delay they say. Found 3 Op shops.

DAY 12 – TUESDAY 25 AUGUST

Booked out of motel and showed up at garage to be told Cruiser not ready.

Definitely pissed off, if we had know we would be living in the waiting room we would've turned north put pedal to floor and hit Alice for long weekend. Reset TV in new motel. Found 2 Op shops.

DAY 13 – WEDNESDAY 26 AUGUST

Sitting by garage front counter and told the mechanic we were not happy on test drive, had a gut feeling something's not right, back up on hoist. We were not surprised when the price was just a touch higher than \$5g quoted, like up to \$7,500 and that's with a reco gearbox. Found 1 Op shop. No, not going north but we pulled up stakes and headed home, if something goes wrong we would have good reception to call Adelaide and scream "warranty, come pick us up". Stopped in first motel at Bordertown, worst place on entire trip, whoever gave this place 3 star must have been counting stars back in Maree. Handset not work so couldn't reset TV.

DAY 14 – THURSDAY 27 AUGUST

Pulled up in Hamilton. 2 Op shops, 1 pub. Allergic to Melbourne, when I stepped outside and not stop sneezing. Stayed in caravan park, more like luxury resort, obviously bloke who gave 3 star in Bordertown never saw this place. Best spot of all the nights. Only problem TV was in the kitchen so could not watch it in bed like everywhere else.

Note – keep away from op shops, pre-loved included, definitely got more stuff than when started trip.

DAY 15 – FRIDAY 28 AUGUST

Fuel usage really good coming back from SA as tornado blowing up arse all the way. Now total \$..

To be cont...