



Newsletter February 2010

What have we been up to?

Well, where do I start, its been 6 months since the last Newsletter, which pretty much explains how busy we have been. I still haven't worked out where 2009 went and now its March 2010!

The list is too long but the standout is what my youngest daughter, Lisa has been up to! Yep, she's having a baby in July and we just found out that Julie & I will be Ma and Pa to a beautiful granddaughter. Lots of excitement at our place!



Lisa is going to be a MUM!

Project Pajero

I hope you've kept up to date with Project Pajero on my website and even followed my friends Tony & Carol via the SPOT tracking device as they toured around OZ. The SPOT device is fantastic, Wayne D now has one in his Troopy so we can keep following him, and the other is being swapped between the other drivers. Anyway, Project Pajero is also featuring in Overlander magazine and we are currently up to Part 7 with great feedback from the readers on the yarn. Take a look at the photo galley on my website too, there are over 2000 photos taken by T & C

on their around OZ trip. We proved you can buy a 4WD for \$10,000 and drive it around OZ!



Tony and PP

Outback Vic

Well, Outback Vic is alive and well, you will see he has his own Blog on my website and he's also on Twitter, he was going to get his own Facebook Page but the real Vic beat him to it. Drop into the OV blog pages occasionally and see what the slim and dusty one has to say, you can even comment back to OV!

Recent trips

Burke Wills research trip

Between Christmas and New Year Julie & I took time out to head down to Melbourne to suss out the start point for our fantastic Burke & Wills trip. We visited the cemetery where there are head stones to Burke & Wills and tucked away in another corner one for King also. Take a look at my column in the March issue of Overlander magazine where you will find that when King passed away just a few years later they spelt Burke's name incorrectly on his headstone!!!

We also went to Royal Park where the famous expedition started, it looks pretty drab these days, sad considering its historic

significance and we dropped in on Edna Everidge at Moonie Ponds. Edna wasn't home but we found a monument to the first camp used by B&W!

I'm so lucky to have such good friends in this 4WD business. Pauline and Rich, who now live in Melbourne, have been doing an enormous amount of research and tracking down B&W's exact route for me. They showed us around Melbourne and even took us out as far as the Burke & Wills track north west of Melbourne.



Julie & I then trekked out past Bendigo finding their camp 4 beside a lovely tree lined river before we hit the Terrick Terrick Plains, climbed Pyramid Hill and eventually ended up in Swan Hill. It was 40 degrees just before New Year's Eve but we managed to find lots of history related to Burke & Wills and it's all been added to our growing arsenal of information we will be providing to the lucky ones joining us.

Speaking of which, the trip is full but we may split it into two trips as I have people on the waiting list, Watch the website for movement on this front.

The High Country.

In the New Year Wayne D took two groups into the High Country, the first trip went from 3 -9 January and went off like clock work, judging by the incredible feed back I received everyone had a great time. The trip that started the next day on 10 January was our camper trailer friendly trip and all started well until on Monday a Catastrophic

fire declaration was made for the Alpine Park. These days (following last year's Black Saturday disaster) when a Catastrophic fire danger day is declared all National Parks are closed and we must leave for safety reasons. I have no problem with this as safety always comes first.



I managed to get WD40 on the satellite phone and advised him of the situation (no fires were in the park) and he left the Park on Monday afternoon to make camp in Mansfield in the local caravan park. It was very hot and windy on Tuesday but fortunately no fires started. On Wednesday the all clear was given so the Park reopened and the tour recommenced. What was interesting was the large number of campers in the Park who had no idea it was to be closed and who took no notice of the catastrophic fire warning, if a fire had started they probably would have died. It demonstrated to me the importance of having good communications with our HQ and the ability for me to get info and pass it onto my guides. But it does make me wonder why others, when informed of the situation, ignored the advice.

The Red Centre is flooded!

Even as I write this newsletter there is a huge amount of rain falling across the Northern Territory and Queensland. We all thought last year was rather special with flood waters coming down the Georgina, Diamantina, and Eyre Creek river systems and eventually partially filling Lake Eyre. But having seen some photos of the outback taken over the past week I have to say that I've never seen anything like it.



The road to Cameron Corner from Mertj Mertj

Around Cameron Corner there is water lining everywhere, Moomba gas field is sitting in a lake, there is 7 metres of water over the causeway at Innamincka - that's right 7 METRES! The Todd River in Alice Springs is in flood for the second time in as many months and some say the Cooper Creek may actually cross the Birdsville Track and flow into Lake Eyre, that has not occurred in over 25 years.

At present virtually the whole of Central Australia is flooded and all unsealed roads are closed. It's likely to stay this way for a couple of months at least. Just imagine the wild flowers and re-growth that is about to take place. I heard a chap on the radio last week say he had just driven from Brisbane to Broken Hills and the grass was knee high all the way!



Moomba gas fields

And this is the rainfall for Sth West Queensland up to 6am Monday morning on

the 1st March! Rainfall totals recorded in the 21 hours to 6am include: Bedourie 185mm, Birdsville 121mm and Roxborough Downs 111mm.

Crikey! Imagine what the roads must be like!

This means we are going to have an amazing Winter outback touring season, honestly, if you haven't booked on one of our Simpson Desert trips in July as yet, you should seriously consider it. I expect there is even water flowing down the always dry Hay River in the centre of the Simpson Desert, and we will be there in July!



Flooding at Alice Springs on Sunday 28 February

I'm also working on another of my incredible 4 day flights over the flooded outback with Trevor Wright from Wright's Air in William Creek. As soon as we know we can land and take off in some of these flooded locations I'll put together the whole itinerary. I'm hoping to start in Alice Springs, fly across the Simpson Desert, hopefully to see water in the Hay River, spend a night at Bedourie, then follow the Cooper Creek down to Innamincka and all the way over Coongie Lakes (which are overflowing apparently) and across the Birdsville Track to Lake Eyre before reaching William Creek and returning you to Olympic Dam which has daily flights out to Adelaide. I'll drop everyone an email on this when its fully sorted, but if you are keen, drop me an email now. info@greatdividetours.com.au

Alex also spoke to his friends at Pine View Station up the dog fence from Silverton. They were isolated by the flood waters until they bulldozed a new road across high land so they could get out to Broken Hill to restock. The dog fence is 2 metres under water in places! So Alex's Corner country trip in July school holidays also looks like being a drive through an outback botanic garden.

4WD Shows

Our next 4WD show will be next weekend at Kembla Grange near Wollongong so if you are down that way look for Alex and Richard inside the pavilion where hopefully they will be warm and dry. I mention this because all that outback rain came to Canberra two weekends ago during the Queanbeyan 4WD show and literally washed it away. By Saturday afternoon most exhibitors were standing in ankle deep water and at lunch time Sunday they closed the show to concentrate on getting people out of the flooded sites! Thanks to Irene, Dave and Richard for looking after my show stand and putting up with such atrocious conditions.



Our driver training hill climbs looked more like rivers

Don't forget the Rosehill Caravan, Camping and 4WD Show is on again in April from 17-25 April. We are back on the ground floor this year and as I'll be fresh back from my New Zealand adventure make sure you drop in to say Hi to me on Saturday 17th. I've got two free passes to the show to the first person to drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au

To coincide with the Rosehill Supershow I am also donating a Simpson Desert tour (in July) as a prize to be given away to one lucky visitor to the Show. I'm not certain just yet how the show organisers will run this competition, but stay tuned for advice in this respect. But this is a fantastic prize and as mentioned, the Simpson Desert after all this rain is going to be very special in 2010.

New Zealand 4WD Tour

I head off on this amazing trip over Easter for 7 days. With 7 other couples all from Oz. We are joining Steve Beston from NZ 4X4 Treks (a tag-along operation similar to GDT but operating in the mountains of the South Island).



Milford Sound in NZ awaits us

The itinerary looks amazing and the scenery absolutely stunning. So let's hope it lives up to our high expectations. A lot of you expressed interest in this trip for next year, so provided I'm happy with what I experience in early April, I'll plan another of these trips probably for February 2011. Let me know if you wish to be added to my list of interested parties. The current \$exchange rate with the NZ \$ is making this a very affordable trip.

See next page but watch for flying clocks!

Or, see how time flies when Julie gets riled up!

Or, what to do to fill in a large white space in your newsletter. Please turn the page, now.



Julie doesn't throw plates at me, she throws a clock tower last time we were in NZ!

Exciting trips coming up

It's been a strange year thus far with some weekend trips with solid bookings and others barely scraping two customers together. Also our winter outback trips are the same with my Kimberley Tour fully booked and just one spot left on the Best of the West trip, whilst we have only a few on the Simpson Desert and Cape York trips. So, maybe it's time for me to encourage you to start planning your next holiday.

Unbelievably my 4 day Man From Snowy River Tour over Easter and my 7 day High Country tour at the same time are both lacking any solid bookings. These two trips have been very popular for over 18 years now, surely their attraction has not worn off? So if you have nothing on over Easter please consider joining us on one or the other of these great 4WD trips.

4 days in the Snowy Mtns over Easter is a great way to see this part of our great land. We start in Jindabyne at 11 am on Good Friday so you can drive down from Sydney early that day if you can't get Thursday off work. From here we follow the Snowy river into Victoria before engaging low range and climbing to the snow gums to make camp opposite Mt Kosciuszko. Easter Saturday we follow a great 4WD rack that climbs up and down the hill sides crossing small creeks along the way and then pause near the Murray river before heading back up into the mountains once more to make a base camp for the next two nights deep in one of the beautiful valleys. Easter Sunday we usually have a Easter egg hunt around the

camp before doing a loop around the Davies High Plains down to Tom Groggin Station and the Murray river again, returning to camp via more interesting 4WD tracks. Finally on Easter Monday we pack up and take a breathtaking ridge top track over numerous tall mountains with fantastic views to the top of Mt Pinnibar before descending in to Tom Groggin and across the mighty Murray to the Alpine Way and back to Jindabyne which we reach approx 3pm. You can then either stay in Jindabyne or even head straight back home if you must be back at work on Tuesday.

Of course if you have another 3 days then join us on the 7 day High Country tour, possibly the best short 4WD trip we have on our books. If you've been following my series of stories on the High Country in Overlander Magazine you will know how good this trip is.

GPS and Camp Oven cooking

Following the success last year of our camp oven cook off between Alex and those who knew what they were doing, I've now developed another great weekend at our training centre at Braidwood which might be of interest to you.



On 27 March we will be running an actual **Learn how to cook with a camp oven** course. We will first cook up a delicious damper for us all to enjoy and then cook a fantastic roast dinner in the camp oven for dinner. You will receive all the expert tips from our great team of cooks and guides so you too can learn the rights and wrongs of how to make the perfect meal – a bit like My Camp Oven Rules, but no television

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cameras! We even encourage you to bring your own camp oven and damper mix to have a go in the afternoon.

But wait, there's more! On Saturday afternoon we will be joined by the GPS guru, Brian Somerville from GPSOZ, Brian is going to give a presentation on how to use your GPS to its full advantage. Brian will have all latest GPS gadgetry and software to demonstrate plus bring your own GPS to learn how to really use it. We are limiting the numbers to 24 people or 12 couples and the cost is a very attractive and affordable \$120 per vehicle per couple (Extras in the vehicle are \$50 each) This includes the roast dinner on Saturday night, the camp oven training and the GPS presentation plus camping at our training centre (Bunk house accommodation is available for \$20 per bed) to book this great day just email me at info@greatdividetours.com.au first in best dressed.



Brian Sommerville from GPSOZ will be on hand to answer all our GPS questions.

But wait, there's even more! On **Sunday 28 March** after breakfast, we are giving you the chance to join us on a fun GPS navigation rally. This will put your new skills to the test in a GPS search around our property. We will give you numerous waypoints which you have to find around my property at Braidwood. Each waypoint will have an item to be collected and there will be a fantastic prize (I'm still working on it but it'll be fantastic!) for the first to collect all the items and return to the training room. We'll have a BBQ lunch and announce the winner before heading home. This is going to be soooooo much fun and at the same time

you have the opportunity to use and learn skills that will enhance your travels. The cost is \$120 per day per vehicle. To enroll in this GPS Fun Day just email me at info@greatdividetours.com.au You don't have to attend the day before either, you can come down just for the GPS Fun Day on Sunday, it starts at 9am.

Vic's writing more and more

I've been pretty busy over the past few months totally rewriting my book **"Travelling the Outback"** this second edition will have a completely new look and will be available from around May 2010 and is being distributed by Woodslane Publishing. This will be a detailed guide on how to plan your outback trip and how to set up your 4WD for the trip. There will be an extensive info section providing the entire permit and access contact details for all areas across Australia plus trip suggestions.

Avid readers of Overlander Magazine will have noticed I've been busy writing the Cooper Tires sponsored Outback Treks series for the Magazine and this is continuing throughout 2010. I've also been flat out bringing the Project Pajero series to everyone and of course my monthly column which has been keeping plenty of people entertained. It now looks like Woodslane will be asking me to write a book based on the Outback Trek series and this should be available early next year. I guess I'll do that one in my spare time.

4WD of the Year

Overlander's 4WD of the Year was conducted in the first week of December and announced at the end of January and once again I was asked to be a judge and chief designer of a test route over the 5 days. To everyone's surprise the Disco 4 and Range Rover failed miserably, the Prado's found to be too gimmicky and the sole Triton ute stood out easily to be the best choice by far. Other 4WD Magazines did not agree with this and all I can say is we tested the vehicles over the same tracks I take you guys and the Triton was the one that handled

all too easy. A very worthy winner which will make Terry Atkinson very happy!



The Terrific Triton proved to be 4WDOTY for 2009

20 years and still going strong!

2010 marks 20 years since I came up with the idea of Great Divide Tours! My how time flies! My first 4WD trip was a day trip up the Old Great North Road, which is now closed to vehicular traffic. My first customer was none other than Robert Lachman who now works for me. And would you believe for the first three or so 4WD trips that GDT ran, I didn't even own a 4WD and ran the trips from the back seat of a friend's 2 door 4Runner, Ralph and Shirley Bull, and that's no bull! Now there's some trivia!

Bargain corner

Well it's sort of a Bargain Corner but to celebrate our 20 years of operation and in recognition of the fantastic support you people have given GDT I've now introduced a good customer discount scheme.

First - if you have already done a particular trip and want to do it again I'll give you a 30% discount on that trip (for one or two day trips). Number on each trip limited to 2 discounted positions. When booking your trip make reference to the date you did it previously.

Secondly - if you bring a friend along on a trip that has not been away with GDT previously, I'll give your friend a 10% discount and I'll give you a 10% discount too! This applies to all trips (the tour

component - not accommodation meals etc). As you know, I charge \$160 per day for the tour component so that's a \$16 discount per day. Again, when booking the tour make sure you let me know you are introducing a new friend to the GDT.

Thankyou

Finally a big thanks to the many people who replied to my last newsletter offering advice on how to transfer my old Video tapes onto DVD's. There were lots of great suggestions. What I have done is worked out how to copy from the tape to a DVD using my DVD recorder. Whilst this is just straight copying without the ability to edit etc, at least it conserves the great old material I have on VCR tape. One day I'll be retired and have the opportunity to edit and add music and voice over etc etc, but for now, spending hours on end copying to DVD is working. In fact, my daughter Lisa who is now expecting her own daughter is now safely stored on DVD when she was just 6 months old. Memories! This has taught me one thing; you can't have too many photos or movies of your kids growing up.

That's all for now from the crew at Great Divide Tours:-

Vic, Julie, Wayne D, Wayne V, Wayne B & Jenny, Alex, John, Eric & Anne, Brian, Dave & Irene, Richard, Greg, Ian B & Skippy/Yarn/Ian.

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Floods in the outback happening now!

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