

FLINDERS RANGES TRIP March 2016.

Aim of the trip: To visit the Flinders Ranges in South Australia and Silverton, near Broken Hill in far Western New South Wales for artistic purposes. Coordinated by Mike Maddox.

On 11th. March ten people set off northward to reconvene at Hattah Lakes National Park for the first night's camp. Judi and Allen wisely decided to "camp" in a comfortable hotel in Mildura.

Picture... an attractive campsite by a lake all to ourselves. Tents erected (bit of help for Charlie and Min and Jenny and Amy who were "first-timers").



Oppressive heat, a paddle in the lake providing a little relief (and some interesting photographic opportunities).



As light faded we had a hasty meal and retired to our tents for the night (I thought you had to be asleep to have a nightmare!). The whole ground was alive with ants outside my tent. Despite nightfall the temperature stubbornly refused to budge from 35 degrees. Lying still on my bed, bathed in perspiration the ants found their way indoors and began crawling all over me. Desperate attempts to evict them and thwart their re-entry proved only partially successful. An attempt at finding escape in the toilet gave little solace. After briefly perching on the pedestal something gave me an alarming bite on a most significant part of my anatomy. Springing off the pedestal I directed torchlight down the interior expecting to see a redback or two. The whole interior wall was alive with the same ants (or their brothers and sisters). Unsatisfied I returned to my sauna and crawling ants for the night.

Next morning we were only too happy to escape our tents, eat, pack up and head off for Burra in South Australia for our second night (in our air conditioned cars....ahhhh!). After retrieving one of our number who decided to take an unplanned excursion into the depths of the national park by taking a "righty" instead of a "lefty" we happily bade farewell to the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park.



Burra caravan park was, by comparison, delightful. Green grass, excellent facilities and..... no ants! A good night, a most enjoyable walk around the restored copper mining town, and off for Hawker; our last stop before Wilpena Pound.

On Sunday under grey and threatening skies we arrived at Wilpena Pound. The weather was to stay pretty much like this for the next 2 days.



The visitor's centre was quite attractive and well appointed. Paying our dues we set off to find an elevated, well-drained campsite among the trees. Charlie and Mike's keen eyes guided us to good sites. There was quite a bit of evidence of significant rainfall.

Over the Monday and Tuesday we did not go far afield as the grey days did not do much to highlight the spectacular color of the ranges. Sacred Canyon was a highlight. A very evocative and intimate little canyon with some interesting aboriginal wall carvings. We also walked into the old homestead in the Pound and visited the Casneaux tree (an iconic red gum made famous many years ago by a photographer and contemporary of Hans Heysen).



Over the Monday and Tuesday we did a fair bit of exploring and photography but very little drawing and no painting. Charlie, Min and I figured that we would get a good sunrise the next morning so we rose early and set up our cameras at the Casneaux tree ...and waited. We were well rewarded



Later on Wednesday we also went on a long drive through Brachina Gorge; particularly attractive. Later that afternoon we drove up the Aroona Valley for a fascinating journey back through the pastoral history of the place.



We covered a lot of ground on Wednesday and didn't get back to Judi and Allen's nice cabin for drinks and nibbles until 5.30pm (a half an hour late).

Needing to get home I decided to leave early and not to go on to Silverton. Charlie and Min kindly offered to squeeze me into their car for a homeward dash on Thursday. Thursday proved quite eventful.... We first headed north to Blinman then through the Parachilna Gorge to Parachilna (a non-descript town on the road heading north to Oodnadatta). The Prairie Hotel had quite a reputation and we wanted to check it out.



Between the 3 of us we shared a goat burger, a kangaroo burger and an emu burger. Not particularly PC but tasty. Very interesting décor. Mark it down for a visit if passing.

Heading south toward Hawker and home with the Flinders Ranges on our left the puffy clouds were building into something more substantial.



After leaving Hawker en route for Mildura blustery storm cells started sweeping in. At one stage the grey curtains of rain turned orange and we found ourselves driving through a dust storm.



The storms developed and followed us into Victoria. They overtook us during our overnight stay in Mildura but we caught up with them again on the Friday. Essentially we drove home in storms and rain the whole way to find that they had wrought significant damage around Melbourne.

The rest of the group stayed on in the Flinders Ranges for a couple more days then headed for Silverton.

Art?... I hear you say. For me virtually none in terms of painting or drawing but a lot of photography to try and capture the feel. There just didn't seem time. However upon reflection a lot of observing and soaking up impressions. Hopefully, these will be given expression with a brush before they fade. Very much enjoyed the relaxed chats, camaraderie and camping (Hattah notwithstanding).

Many thanks to Mike for the lift, the good company and pulling it all together.

Paul Gallant.

