



Newsletter No. 31 April 2013

What have we been up to?

I think it would be easier to list what we haven't done thus far this year, so sit back and enjoy the recap and reading about some great new trips and projects I have on the boil.

A new Grandson

I would be lynched if I didn't mention the biggest news of all first up, my darling daughter, Lisa, presented us with our second grandchild, a little boy called Jaxon on 20 January. All doing well. Although only last week Jax gave us a real scare when he was diagnosed with meningitis fortunately it was the viral kind and not the bacterial kind, but all concerned were very worried for a while. Apparently there is an epidemic of it on the north side of Sydney at present.



Vic & Julie's new Grandson, Jaxon

A helping hand

In the first week of January GDT hosted the Police Legacy people and 21 kids from Police families who had lost a parent. We spent 5 days at our driver training centre near Braidwood showing the kids how to 4WD, swimming at Batemans Bay, attending the Mogo Zoo, swimming in the Shoalhaven River and generally having a fantastic time.

A huge effort was put in by the following from GDT, Irene and Dave, Tony and Carol and Katherine and Greg, I can't thank them enough.

The week didn't quite go as planned however, with the cops and kids arriving on Monday afternoon just as a Catastrophic fire danger was declared for our area. Tuesday was forecast to be 45 degrees with 100kph winds, if a fire started in those conditions there would be no stopping it. Before the kids arrived Tony, Greg and I spent the Monday clearing and mowing the grass around the conference centre, we created a 100 metre buffer, Tony worked a treat on my new ride on mower whilst the rest of us cleared gutters and collected fallen branches and bark. The place looked immaculate by the time the kids turned up.



Tony enjoyed using my new ride on mower

Despite our efforts I wasn't certain we could stop a fire if it approached in the forecast conditions, so the decision was made not to set up all the tents on the now bowling green like camp ground but rather let the 21 kids aged 7-18 bunk down inside (yes a bit like asking to have a MacDonalld's birthday party all night in your lounge room).

Actually the children and adults were very well behaved.

On Monday evening the phone rang and it was one of those pre-recorded emergency alert calls advising us to evacuate on Tuesday, pretty scary: things were getting serious.

We took no chances and arranged with the Police people with the kids to take them into Canberra to escape the heat by attending the movies all day. In the meantime, the rest of us packed up, took what may have been our last photos of the training centre and headed into Braidwood for the day.



A new look for the training room

What I found really interesting was that despite the whole area being in a catastrophic fire zone and everyone being told to evacuate, we were the only ones to do so. In Braidwood nothing was in place anywhere for evacuees, so we just sat in the Park all day in 42 degrees with howling winds monitoring the local ABC and an excellent iphone app called "Fires near me" prepared by the RFS.

Dave is the local RFS Fire Captain so he was on call, and no-one wants to have a family member on call in those conditions. After sitting in Braidwood all day we returned to Castle View at 6pm, the kids were just coming out of the movies in Canberra and we were preparing dinner for them. Then a fire started between Braidwood and Canberra and Dave was called out at 6pm, he eventually came back

home at 4am next morning, those RFS volunteers really work hard!

Problem was the Kings Hwy was closed and the cops and kids couldn't get back to us, various phone calls between us and the organisers kept everyone informed, and the cops spoke to the local cops about road blocks and a local farmer showed them a 100 k detour around the fire. By the time they arrived home it was 9.30pm, the kids had a big day and a real adventure, but no dinner! We had kept it for them so they eagerly chomped into it by 10pm, a big long day full of high drama for all, but we survived.

Wednesday was cooler and the fire threat had passed, we had a big day planned for the kids and all drove down to Batemans Bay for a surf and then a visit to the beautiful Mogo Zoo. As it turned out, one of the volunteer guides at the zoo assigned to our group was also the mother of one my good customers (Robyn Croker). After the zoo visit the Police Commissioner, Andrew Scipione, who was holidaying on the south coast, dropped in for photos with the children. The whole Police family is very supportive and it was great to see such involvement at all levels.



Its not what you know but who, Vic and Greg Widman with the Police Commissioner.

On Thursday we were due to take the kids to Tuross cascades for a swim, but a fire in Wadbilliga NP meant the area was closed so we improvised yet again and took them down to the Shoalhaven for a swim. When we returned another highway patrol man

from Batemans Bay had dropped into Castle View to say hello to the kids. It seemed a little odd having a Police vehicle and uniformed policeman at the training centre, then he hand cuffed me and told the kids to get me, thanks a lot!



Hmm maybe its not the people you know but what you say!

Needless to say we all had a lot of fun, I even suggested he breathalyse Irene who arrived at that moment in her Bubble car (Mazda 121), all in good fun (she passed the breath test thank goodness).



Mogo zoo is an absolute delight

That night we turned the training centre into a disco with strobe lights and loud doof doof music, the kids had a great time and us oldies looked on remembering how we used to boogie!!

Before we knew it Friday had arrived and they packed up and headed off back home, we cleaned up which didn't take long and headed off home too. I have to say doing something like this to support others less fortunate certainly made me feel pretty

good. I have since received a beautiful book prepared by retired Asst Commissioner Bob Thwaites depicting the Police Legacy camp at Braidwood, I'll have it on display at Braidwood for everyone to share in the great times we all had. Also, a big thank you to Tim Catterall who made a lovely donation towards the Police Legacy after reading about it in my last Newsletter.

A few days off in Tassie

A week prior to the Police Legacy camp Julie and I took a flying holiday to Tassie for 4 days over the New Year. This was to be a non 4wd trip, we even hired a Hyundai i20, so there was no real way for me to get off road. Of course this did not stop me and as I had never been up Jacobs Ladder on Mt Ben Lomond I decided to remedy that much to Julie's displeasure. Yep, you are right, we were not insured to take the i20 off road. Anyway we climbed Jacobs Ladder, got some great photos and everyone survived. We also ducked down from Launceston to Hobart for the day to see the Sydney to Hobart Yachts as they crossed the line, quite a buzz!



The skipper of Wild Oats with the Sydney to Hobart Cup!

In our few days in Tassie, based at Launceston, we drove out to Sheffield where we met the Catterall family also having a 4wd free holiday, drove around the Great Lake, visited Hobart and then the Lavender Farms east of Lonnie and climbed Jacobs Ladder, we covered over 1400k's in 4 days and the hire car man almost passed out when I returned the car, he couldn't believe we had done so much!



The i20 off roader on Jacobs Ladder.

High Country trips

Over New Year we had 4 different high country trips occurring. One was our usual 4 day Man From Snowy River trip which Wayne D led for us. But the demand for our 7 day High Country tour was so great that we actually offered 3 different trips, with new GDT man Dave Fullerton leading a combined 4wd and 4wd + camper trailer trip for us. The feedback from his trip was fantastic and Dave really enjoyed getting back into the 4wd touring business and showcasing our beautiful high country. Wayne D led the first of his 7 day trips but this coincided with some extremely hot weather and the going was pretty tough, incredible to think that the heat would be too great in the High Country. We then followed this up with a 7 day camper trailer trip, but some found the tracks too arduous for the trailers, so in future we will revise our route for the trailer friendly High Country trip.

We had another High Country trip scheduled for February but shortly after the January trips bush fires broke out in the surrounding area and much of the Alpine NP was closed for several weeks. It opened just days before our Feb trip so although it looked like we would have to cancel it, the trip was put back on. As Murphy's Law would have it, no sooner had I advised everyone that the trip was OK to go and a series of lightning strikes started new fires throughout the High Country and the Park was again closed. So with just 24 hrs to go before kickoff I had to cancel this trip.

As fate would have it we have another 7 day trip in the High Country occurring this week (mid April) and as I write this newsletter all is going well, although it is cold and a little wet with some snow even predicted, you can follow this trip via our Spot tracker at <https://spotwalla.com/tripViewer.php?id=64ef51675164ca99b>

First Across the Desert for 2013

We pioneered this trip in 2012 but as it turned out it was very wet and muddy and the trip was far from what we expected, spectacular but different given all the water and those darn mozzies. I was keen to try the desert trip again, and be the first to cross it in more realistic conditions (i.e. sand not water) so we put our First Across the Desert trip on once again in March.



Once again Wayne and Jenny provided invaluable support to our first Across the Desert trip

After a record heat wave across Australia during Summer, we knew the Simpson was going to be at its blistering best. In fact, with several consecutive days above 50 degrees during February I expected the sand to be very soft, we weren't disappointed either!



Vic's 100 series led the way

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This year we reached Mt Dare without the incidents of flooded roads and thoroughly enjoyed the hospitality of Jeff and Karen, we were their first group through for the year. Leaving Mt Dare on 15 March we made our way to Dalhousie Springs, the road was atrocious this year with large rocks strewn all over it. It took us 3 hrs to drive the 70k's.



It is scenery like this that keeps drawing us back to the Simpson

Normally Dalhousie Springs with its 38 degree water is a delight but with the mercury already at 39 degrees, it was like getting out of the saucepan into the fire. We camped that night at Purnie Bore and had an inquisitive dingo visit us.

On the morning of 16 March a lone 4wd passed us, and he would be the first across the desert for 2013, so we took the prize of the first group to cross the desert.



At times there was plenty of hard work in the heat and flies

It took us 5 days of long hot driving, this time I led the group in the trusty old 100 series which performed faultlessly. Many of the dunes were a challenge with their sheer walls of sand up to a metre or so high. Wheel lifts to get over the dunes were common and some required several attempts. Others in our group had the occasional bogging but nothing that a friendly snatch strap, spade or maxtrax couldn't fix.



There is still a little water on the east side of Big Red

The highest temperature on my in-car thermometer was 42 degrees and that was at 6pm! We swallowed a few flies, others tried to clean their teeth through their fly nets but above all we had a great time. I've done two of these First Across the Desert challenges, and that will probably be it for a while, doing this trip is a real mental and physical challenge and to have accomplished two without mishap might have been good management or good luck but I don't wish to push my luck too far. But wait! I have another big challenge for 2014, see what's coming up later in this Newsletter.



We made it to Birdsville

New Zealand 4wd tour

I have just returned from our 4th New Zealand 4wd tour, another magical 7 days exploring the beautiful Sth Island. This time we went north of Christchurch initially up the coast to Kaikoura with some deviations onto private stations where the rolling hills and 4wd tracks were excellent. Then we headed west from the coast into the Clarence Valley to one of New Zealand's oldest sheep stations, Muzzle station. It took us all day with some fantastic 4wd country to reach this isolated station. Our accommodation was in an 1860 built mud hut, all quite civilised given the age of the building. Colin and Teena Nimmo have owned Muzzle Stn since 1980 and they were our hosts cooking a delicious BBQ of local lamb, beef and venison.



On the way to muzzle Stn

Colin told us that once the snow falls at the end of May they are isolated in the valley until the snow thaws in November. They do have a plane and helicopter but you can't always fly over the 5000 feet range above their valley due to low cloud, snow falls and very high winds. He said the worst part was that the ground would freeze over for a few weeks in the dead of winter making walking rather tricky. We can't even imagine living like that!

We had a full day on Muzzle Stn and crossed the Clarence River several times and drove to the top of the 5000 feet range. The scenery was spectacular everywhere.

It took us another full day of 4wd action to get out of the valley, leaving by a different

route and some even more spectacular scenery.



Crossing the Clarence River in NZ

After this we headed over to the west coast where finally we found mountains that actually had tree cover on them. Here we did a track that had not had anyone through for a few weeks and had to rebuild the road through a couple of river crossings.



We drove up to the clouds

As usual the guide, Tony on this occasion, he also owns the 4wd hire company that we use, was excellent in guiding us, the accommodation each night was great and the meals each evening were incredible. Honestly, more people need to join us on these trips, for \$6200 NZ for two people including the 9 day tour, 4wd hire, accommodation and meals, for two people it is a real bargain.



We will be doing another 9 day trip next March 2014 this time around Queenstown and we all know how spectacular the scenery is down there, hopefully you can join us and participate in what I rate as one of the best 4wd trips you can do anywhere.

Other trips thus far this year

We have had several day and weekend trips in the first quarter of the year also. The year kicked off with me leading one of our popular Stockton Beach trips. Stockton Beach was ravaged by big storms in July 2012 and most of the beach was washed away and water entered the dunal area. This allowed National Parks to close all of the dunal area north of the Lavis Lane entry and with little beach to drive on we have really struggled to deliver a meaningful trip for most of 2012. I was quite surprised to find in January '13 that the beach was still only accessible at low tide, the sand just has not returned this time. Unfortunately National Parks have seized the opportunity to keep the dune area closed, and now that all of the water has subsided in the dunes it is hard to understand why they persist in keeping this area off limits.

To be honest there has been a marked drop off in the number of people visiting Stockton and local businesses must be really feeling the pinch. Regretfully I can't see NPWS changing the situation in the near future at all.



We can still access the tank traps on Stockton

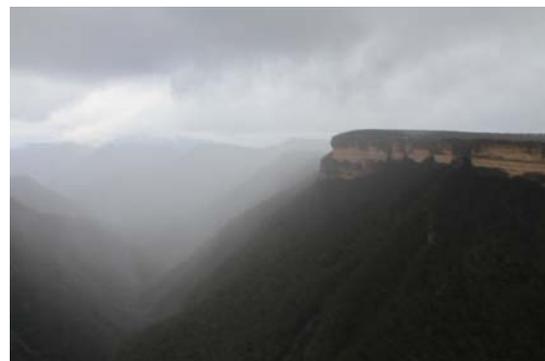
That said we have modified our tours to Stockton to spend more time exploring the

Recreational Vehicle Area (RVA) south of Lavis Lane and timing our drives up the beach to coincide with a low tide. We can still take you to the Tin City and the Tank traps, only issue is we have to walk a few hundred metres rather than drive, but it is certainly worth seeing these two locations.

On a side note, I went for a walk along my own beach last weekend (Nth Narrabeen) and was overwhelmed by the damage caused to the beach by recent heavy storms, millions of tons of sand have disappeared from Sydney's beaches also and at high tide there is no beach along the Collaroy to Nth Narrabeen strip to even sun bake on. It has been like this for 7 months now and we can only hope that nature eventually does its thing and returns the sand.

A fully booked trip and a wash out

Whenever I put on a new trip it quickly fills up and my new Cox's and Kowmung Rivers trip was no different. I had a tour scheduled for 27 January and it quickly became fully booked. Only problem was the god's brought a full day of heavy rain to the region on the very day we were due to explore it. Some frantic phone calls at 6am on a Sunday morning had everyone warned of the need to cancel the trip, but we were able to reschedule it two weeks later and the trip has proved to be a real winner.



Believe it or not, this was the fine day.

We ran it again on 7 April and had new recruit Chris Johnston lead it, he ran tail end Charlie on my first trip with me and proved his knowledge of the area. It turns out Chris has actually walked the Six Foot track

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several times and as our trip follows it for part of the day, he was a font of knowledge. I had some good feedback on Chris' performance, its always nice to know that I can hand out trips to my drivers and know they will deliver a quality product.



The Kowmung River trip is making a real splash

What's coming up?

We have some fantastic trips coming up over the winter months so lets take a quick look at them.

Simpson Desert Safari

I have run this trip every year (and often more than once) each year since 1992, so it is now in its 21st year! Our July school holiday trip is fully booked so I have scheduled a second Simpson Desert trip for this winter. It departs on 26 June and we have just 3 spots available, so don't miss out if you wish to do the Simpson. Of course this trip is a whole lot more than the Simpson Desert with us travelling through the Flinders Ranges, then up the Oodnadatta Track and after the desert via Innamincka, the Dig Tree, Corner Country and finishing in the opal town of White Cliffs.

Canning Stock Route

This is the most difficult 4wd trip anyone can undertake, it follows the historic stock route through the centre of Western Australia, we are in remote country for 22 days where you need to be virtually self sufficient. This will be our 12th trip up the CSR and Wayne D is our master of ceremonies on this trip, he loves helping

people achieve the goal of doing the Canning.

This trip departs Uluru on 4 July and we now have just 3 vacancies on it also.

Corner Country Birdsville Trip

Another school holiday special designed for those that have less time, don't wish to sink a lot of money into the preparation of their vehicle or who have an off road trailer and want to see some iconic locations.



Cameron Corner

We have 4 spots remaining on this tour which will visit Cameron Corner, Sturt NP, Innamincka, the Dig Tree, Birdsville and Big Red in the Simpson Desert, Haddon Corner, Noccundra, Warri gate and White Cliffs. It departs Broken Hill on 1 July and returns to White Cliffs on 10 July.

Kimberley Tour

This trip is in its 15th year with my first exploration of the area being in 1998. I still remember that trip like it was yesterday, the Kimberley is such a spectacular location. Obviously my customers know this as my trip commencing 2 August is already fully booked. We have put a second Kimberley tour on at the end of this one, starting in Broome on 30 August and finishing in Alice Springs on 24 September. Wayne D is doing the flip flop, leading the first over and the second back.

Cape York

Yep! This one is fully booked too, but we also have a second Cape York trip now on

the books which still has 4 spots remaining, it commences out of Cairns on 6 August with Dave F leading it, he is a bit of an expert on the Cape, having led several trips up there previously when running Aussie Off road Tours.

Arnhem Land

I'm so pleased to say that I am going back again this year with 6 customers thus far, that means we have just 2 spots left on this amazing tour. Did you know that no other tour company spends as much time as us in Arnhem Land? Of our 19 day trip, 17 days are in Arnhem Land and we get to places most have never heard of. I'm still working with the local Aboriginal Tourism people and we may even have some more very special spots to visit. I'm really looking forward to spending another cold August in the 30 degree heat of Arnhem Land.



Places like this are truly special in Arnhem Land

Vic's new Flinders Trip

After the First Across the Simpson Desert tour in late March I spent a couple of days exploring some more private station tracks in the southern Flinders Ranges which I have added to my Flinders Ranges trip commencing 5 September. Wow! Aren't they incredible, you will really enjoy the spectacular scenery and great 4wd tracks that these new properties have to offer. The Flinders Ranges is similar to the spectacle that the High Country provides, if you like dramatic scenery mixed with great 4wd driving, you really should join me in September in the Flinders.



Some of the spectacular scenery you will see on my new Flinders Ranges trip.

What about some day and weekend trips over the next quarter?

Glad you asked, coming up 27-28 April we have our beautiful autumn trip to the Brindabella ranges, this one is led by the likeable Wayne and Jenny and is located just west of Canberra so its not too far away either. I have 2 bookings thus far, but we need 2 more to make it a goer, so please think about joining us on this beautiful 4wd trip.

On 18-19 May I am unleashing Alex on the unsuspecting public on one of his favourite trips, our Barrington Tops to Myall Lakes tour. This one is accommodated so you don't even need camping gear.

We also have a Stockton Beach trip taking place on 26 May and a Turon river trip on 23 June.

And on the June long weekend from 8-10 June we have our fabulous 3 day camping trip into the Deua National Park our Ridges and Rivers tour – this is the best 4wd camping escape in NSW.

So as you see we have quite a lot of opportunities to get out over the next few months and enjoy our great country.

Photo courses and tours

Let me start by saying if you don't think one of my photo courses or trips can help you take better photos, check the following out.

I am a subscriber to Australian Traveller Magazine, what I term a high end travel magazine, which features the type of places most of us dream of visiting rather than ever actually getting there. Anyway, each month they run a photo competition for their readers and after a few months I decided to submit a photo to see how I went in the competition, the photo accompanies this article below.



Vic's winning photo

I have just been advised that I have won the current competition with my photo of Big Red in the Simpson Desert. The prize is a beautiful F2.4 70-200 Macro lens. So for me all the photo tips provided by Phil Cooper at our photo courses has really paid off!



Join us on the Vivid Sydney photo tour

We have a couple of opportunities coming up for you to learn how to get the best results from your digital camera. Starting on 29 May we will be accompanied by Photo Phil at the Vivid Sydney light show. We have run this photo course in conjunction with Vivid Sydney over the past couple of years and the light spectacular around

Circular Quay just keeps getting better and more exciting. Photo Phil will spend at least 3 hrs with you as we walk around the Quay and the Rocks photographing the spectacular light show. Phil will show you how to get fantastic results from your digital camera with the after dark photos. A tripod is essential of course and you will be blown away by the photos you will be taking by the end of the night.

Hot on the heels of Vivid Sydney is another of our very popular dedicated photo course weekends, conducted at my driver training facility at Braidwood. On the weekend of 15-16 June we are joined by Photo Phil from 10 am at Braidwood, Phil will conduct a series of class room and outdoor exercises all day on Saturday helping you to fully understand how your digital camera works and how to use all the special functions it provides. You then get to use these functions and new skills in our bushland back yard so you will see your results straight away and Phil will be looking over your shoulder offering his words of wisdom.



Yep, even mono chrome can look cool

The course runs over two days, so after dinner on Saturday night we have the chance to do some time lapse photography and Phil will analyse your photos for you. On Sunday we hit the track to do some action photos and some work in tricky light in the local rainforest again with Phil at your side to assist. These courses have been very well received previously and Phil even provides extensive notes to each participant. I hope you can join us on 15-16 June.

And now for something completely different

You can join Vic as he takes a drive out to Birdsville this July to see John Williamson perform live on top of Big Red.

On 8 July Big Red will be closed to all traffic and from 5.30pm just on sunset the melodic tones of one of Australia's most loved singers, John Williamson will ring out over the Desert sands. Just imagine for a moment what a spectacle that will be.

Well it is too much for me, an avid John Williamson fan and a bloke who has crossed Big Red 19 times. So I have decided to go and watch this unforgettable concert. And you can join me in a GDT conducted trip to Birdsville just to see John perform. I have devised a tour departing Sydney 4 July and heading out via Cobar, Louth, Wanaaring, Tibooburra and Innamincka to Birdsville. Then returning to Sydney on 12 July via Windorah, Hungerford and Dubbo. If you would like to join me for this once in a lifetime event just drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au or look at my website www.4wd.ent.au for all the details.



What's happening in 2014?

I have just issued the dates for our extended 4WD safaris for 2014, these are now all listed on my website at www.4wd.net.au so if you need to plan well ahead this gives you the opportunity. We are offering our usual Cape York, Kimberley Simpson and CSR trips along with Arnhem Land and the Flinders Ranges and my very special 7 day

NZ tour. New for 2014 will be my personally led trip along the Madigan Line in the northern Simpson Desert. This is the last of the tracks through the Simpson Desert for me to explore and is the most obscure and difficult. Just a handful of people venture into the Madigan Line each year. I have not set exact dates or costs as yet, but it will be conducted in May 2014, if you would like to receive more information on this great trip let me know via email and I'll add you to the list. info@greatdividetours.com.au

Rosehill show time

Yes, its that time of year again when the Rosehill race course gives way to thousands of caravans, motor homes, camper trailers and tourist destinations for the annual Caravan, Camping and 4WD Supershow. It commences from this Saturday 20 April and concludes on Sunday 28 April. We will be at the show on stand number 248 which is on level 2 of the JR Fleming stand, down in our usual spot. Drop in and say hello, I will have a few copies of my books at the show for sale so this may give you the opportunity to pick one up. We will also have a few show specials on trips so keep an eye out for them too.

Driver Training update

We have been extremely busy with our driver training with the weekend courses well subscribed and a lot of corporate work from major companies now coming our way. The month of May in particular will be very busy as we provide training over several days to various companies. It looks like the hard work to maintain our training facility at Braidwood as a world leader is paying off.



Wayne's wife Belinda wants to know how I can persuade Wayne to mow my lawn

To this end we have been doing a lot of work down at Braidwood on the training centre, thanks to Wayne D who is now caretaking when not on 4wd trips. The grounds are looking great and in June we will be constructing a new 4wd/6wd test track for heavy vehicles as we are getting a lot of interest in this field from various power companies, mining companies and the like. Its always fun designing and constructing new obstacles and the weekend of 7-10 June is going to see a lot of work done down there. If you are looking for something to do you are welcome to come and spend a few days working like a slave.



Alex prepares one of the logs for his bridge construction.

One of our tasks is to rebuild our earth bridge that was washed away in a recent storm, we are sourcing some large storm water pipes and heavy machinery for this one but we will also build our own Cape York log bridge, that should make Alex happy as he has gone to a lot of trouble to collect logs for the bridge over the past few months.

A Camper trailer course too

On 25-26 May I'm running another of our very popular camper trailer 4wd courses, so if you own one of these and would like to learn how to tow it off road drop me an email.

What's happening at Overlander?

I have written a series on a trip down the Darling River, based around a few of our trips and our fabulous photo tour that we took down there last year, so watch out for

these travel yarns. Later on this year there will be a story on my recent Simpson Desert First Across trip too.

Follow us on SPOT

Spot has been getting a real work out of late, tracing our Simpson Trip and then my tour through New Zealand, the track is still on the website so take a look here

<https://spotwalla.com/tripViewer.php?id=5fa2511c27c094e2d>



You can follow our trips via our Spot tracker.

Did you know you can hire a spot tracker from me for just \$10 per day and I'll link your trip to my website where all your family and friends can follow you, drop me an email if you wish to use this service. info@greatdividetours.com.au

You can also hire a **sat phone** from me for just \$20 per day plus any call costs, great peace of mind.

Facebook

I keep updating the GDT Facebook on a regular almost daily basis, make sure you follow us there for all the latest on what we are up to etc. This provides an ideal opportunity for me to give almost a virtual day by day account of our adventures, provided I have some phone service you will be updated on what I'm up to, the idea is to make you very jealous of course! Click on

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the Facebook link on my website www.4wd.net.au I've just uploaded a lot of photos from our New Zealand tour so take a look.

Things I'm testing

In the lead up to the Simpson crossing I purchased a couple of new items so here is my unbiased evaluation of them.

Oztent Outdoor screen tent

Knowing how hot it was going to be in the Simpson in March I wanted to get a screen tent that I could sleep in but stay cool as well. There are various brands on the market but either they did not provide standing room or they were too flimsy to withstand any strong winds in the Desert. I went to Amazon Camping at Wetherill Park who are the distributors for the Oztent brand. Oztent has been around for many years now and specializes in quick to erect tents, their Oztents are legendary and are a quality product.



Vic's mosque err.... I mean Screen tent

They have a screen tent which is designed to attach to an Oztent, now I don't have an Oztent and basically wanted a free standing screen tent. Their screen tent can be used in this way although it is an odd shape on its own, being wide and not very deep, just long enough to fit my air bed in length ways to be precise. It was wide enough to provide space for a second bed which Stan Sheldon used (Stan accompanied me on the Desert crossing).

I have to say I was a little disappointed with the screen tent as it possessed none of the qualities of the quick to erect Oztent in

terms of its ease to pop up. It has 4 poles, one in each corner each requiring two guide ropes and pegs to maintain its rigidity in a breeze, so the end result is it is slow and awkward for one person to erect. Also, the roof section is held up by flexible spring loaded poles which, straight out of the bag had lost their spring tension and were near impossible to use. I'll be returning these poles and asking for replacements as surely that can't be right.



Just enough room for Stan's stretcher.

Once up and after the onlookers stopped calling it the Mosque, it served the purpose of providing a fly and insect free area to sleep and eat with plenty of flow through ventilation, so in MKR talk I give it a 7/10.

New sand pegs

Whilst at Amazon I found these pegs, they are actually called Bluescrew pegs, I have no idea why as they are definitely bright orange. The idea is they screw into the ground to provide a solid anchor in sand, you don't hammer them in at all just screw them in. The ground we camped on was never really soft sand so I didn't get the chance to test them with a real tent etc, but when on Big Red I pulled them out and gave them the screw and pull test, now keep a clear mind on this please. They screwed into the sand relatively easy, then pulling on the guy rope I found they took a moderate amount of effort to pull out. I tested both the large and small pegs with a similar result but the larger pegs definitely hung on longer. Would they withstand a stiff breeze in soft sand whilst hanging onto a guy rope on a tent? Probably not, but in a moderate breeze

they should be fine. I give them a 6 out of 10.



Vic testing the Orange Bluescrew on Big Red.

The Oztent Jet Bunker swag

Whilst at the Amazon store Alex spotted their new Jet Bunker swag, this is a combination of a swag and a stretcher. As Alex is going soft and growing old, he has decided he would prefer to sleep on a stretcher rather than the ground like I do, but he still wants to look macho so the idea of a combined swag and stretcher appealed to him. Anyway, he shelled out his money and purchased the new Oztent Jet Bunker and used it last weekend on a Cooper Tyres drive day, here is his report.



The Oztent Jet Bunker

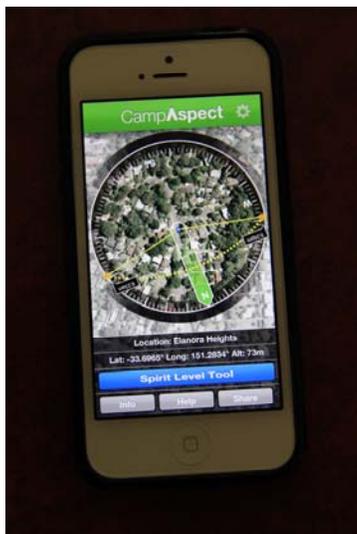
"I recently tested a new product from Oz tent called the Jet Bunker supplied by Amazon. In the first instance I have to say the range of quality camping gear Amazon

have in stock at their shop at Wetherill Park is something you have see to believe. In any event I am heading up to Cape York in August for our GDT's Cape York trip and wanted to get up off the ground for obvious reasons. Snakes and crocs and any other nasties being the main reason. I was initially looking for a stretcher to throw my swag on until the jet bunker caught my eye. The jet bunker is essentially a one man oz tent in the guise of a swag built on a stretcher. Perfect for getting up off the ground and staying nice and dry. Now its one thing to test a tent out in the show room and another in the bush so on a recent Cooper tire corporate trip event, I decided to test it out. My initial thoughts were that the jet bunkers would be perfect for our type of work which in the main part is moving camp each day. The jet bunker packs into a good size bag and is about the same length as a regular swag. It weighs about 15 kilos and fits perfectly on the floor in the back of my truck. On getting to camp setting up the jet bunker was amazingly easy in fact I reckon I had it set up in about 20 seconds. The jet bunker has a built in mattress however I opted to add my roman self inflating mattress for extra comfort. Add a pillow to the sleeping quarters and it was like home away from home. I am a bit of a tosser and turner when I sleep and I noticed very little flex and or roll in the jet bunker throughout the evening. The jet bunker has a top quality canvass fly that comes supplied and sits about 5cm above the quality insect mesh of the actual jet bunker. In the morning there was the usual condensation on the inside wall of the fly however I was totally dry which was great news. I would recommend erecting the jet bunker under an awning to reduce the condensation. Awaking to another day in the office was made so much more pleasant due to the jet bunker and I would recommend it to anyone looking for a one man stretcher bunker swag configuration. In a few words. "I love my jet bunker and would not leave home without it" And he wasn't paid for that report either, I'm guessing on the MKR score guide it would be a 10/10 .

A new App for 4wdrivers and carvaners

It was only a matter of time before the world of online apps filtered down to our world of camping and 4wd driving. Most people seem to have an iPhone or iPad or Android phone these days. So using an app that can help you when travelling is a pretty smart idea. So I was pretty happy when one of my customers, Neil Harper, contacted me to advise he has written an App that would be useful to campers, trailer owners and caravan owners. It is called **CampAspect**, and what it does is locate your exact position when you arrive at your camp site and shows you, via a Google Map photo of the area, where and what time the sun rises and sets and its trajectory across the sky. This allows you to set up your tent, trailer or van to catch the sun (or avoid it) or brace against a stiff southerly etc.

How many times have you pulled into camp and wondered where the sun will rise so you can position your tent etc to catch the early morning sun to help warm it and dry it out as quickly as possible? Now you can just use the **CampAspect** App.



This new App will be helpful in the bush

The App also includes a spirit level which is fantastic for getting your trailer or van level or anything else in camp for that matter (I hate sleeping in my swag with my feet up and head down), now the **CampAspect** App

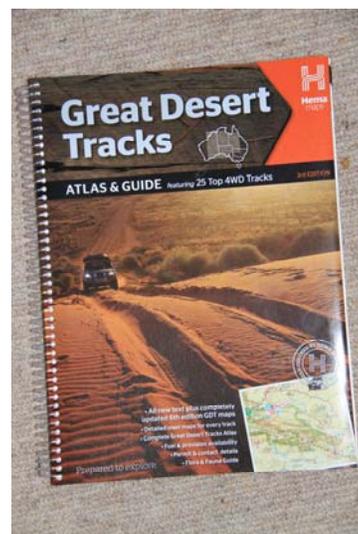
will take the guess factor out of my camp site location. It costs just \$2.99 and you find it by searching for **CampAspect** in your App store on your phone. Too easy as they say. My score 10/10.

Hey! If you have any other ideas for an App that will assist us when camping drop me an email and I'll see what is out there.

You know what I would like? When driving across the country I would love to know what radio stations are within the area, I find that the "Seek" function on the 4wdrive's radio usually skips past everything. Does anyone know of an App that tells you what radio stations are receivable in the area you are travelling through?

Hema Great Desert Tracks Atlas & Guide

This spiral bound book includes yarns of 25 outback tracks, similar to my own classic Outback tracks but not with the same detail, great for an overview of each destination though. It does contain excellent HEMA maps for each Track and a full outback map atlas which makes it very useful. Opening chapters also cover history of our early explorers plus vehicle preparation, driving skills and permits etc, overall an excellent book Vic's score 12/10! Costs around \$45 I believe but money well spent.



This book is worth having in your library

Gift ideas

If you are stumped for a Birthday or Anniversary gift idea why not consider one of my great books, Travelling the Outback or Classic Outback Tracks, or my Burke and Wills DVD? You can even give a gift voucher for a trip or driver training course, just email me at info@greatdividetours.com.au

More Widmans in 4wdrives!

OMG looks like I've started something, my two cousins, Greg and Ty Widman now own 4wdrives, I might even go 4wdriving with them next week. And my nephew Luke is looking for a 4wd ute to tow his Formula Ford, I say ditch the FF and buy some camping gear Luke.

For sale

Have you ever made a bad purchase? I just did, I had this idea that a the 100 series needed a new seat so forked out \$2000 on a beautiful Stratos suspension seat, after having it fitted I didn't like it! Just didn't suit my boney bum. So now I have a brand new Stratos suspension seat sitting in the garage collecting dust valued at \$2k and happy to receive \$1,500 from anyone who wants it.



But wait, there's more

Anyone after a near new Mitsubishi Lancer, another nephew of mine has a black manual Lancer, just 2 years old with less than 20k on the clock for sale, he hasn't had a single inquiry even at the ridiculously low price of \$15,000, if you have a family member that needs a dam good car at a cheap price call me on 02 99131395.

A big change for Vic

Most of you won't know this and most won't believe it, but I actually have a full time job. I've worked in the State Govt since I was 16 years old in office style positions, I can't tell you what I actually do because I would have to kill you, but you get the idea. Anyway, I have over 12 months long service leave owing which means with my 60th birthday due in May 2014, I am about to leave the day job on a permanent basis and concentrate on GDT and writing full time. A lot of people ask me how can you have full time job and achieve so much with GDT etc, the simple answer is, I am a workaholic, and 18 hour days virtually 7 days per week have been the norm for me for many years. 43 years in a job is a long time, but hey! I've been running GDT for 23 years now so only 20 to go there too!

The question is, when I leave the day job what will I do with all the extra time? Everyone tells me I will wonder how I ever managed to put a suit and tie on from Mon to Fri as I will soon become very busy. But, a big change for me is about to occur, the next chapter of my exciting life perhaps.

For example, I would love to write an online 4wd and camping magazine, and have even registered a few domain names along this line of thinking, but I need a little more technical knowhow to make that a reality.

Anyway, one thing is for sure, these newsletters should become more frequent, hope you have enjoyed this issue.

That's all for now and I hope this newsletter finds you fit and well, see you at the Rosehill show.

Vic, Julie, Wayne D, Wayne B & Jenny, Alex, Brian, Dave & Irene, Richard, Greg & Helen, Ian B & Skippy/Yarn/Ian, Chris, Greg W and Dave F.

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