



G'Day, Outback Vic here

Long time readers of my Newsletters will know they are not very frequent, sometimes just 2 per year. I'm not about to state that this will change but I am making a concerted effort to try to get some more correspondence happening between us.



The purpose of my newsletters is to keep you up to date with what's going on with Great Divide Tours, share our love of Australia through our adventures and provide some tips that might help you with your travels, 4wd driving and vehicle preparations.

In a recent discussion with a representative from a large magazine distribution group I noted that they indicated that hard copy magazines now account for 60% of readership and the remaining 40% came from their on-line products, they also expected these figures to be reversed within the next couple of years.

Past trips

Since December 2015 we have had our busiest Christmas period yet. The Victorian High Country continues to be the flavour of the month over the holiday period with 3 fabulous 7 day high country trips being offered. This included our now popular camper trailer friendly trip. We had a mix of weather, the disastrous bushfires of Christmas Day along the Great Ocean Road made us wary of travelling into remote bush settings, (see below my tips on surviving a bush fire). But as it turned out, wet weather

was more of an issue with us leaving the high country on one day to allow the tracks to dry out. But in the end all of the trips went off really well and we received some excellent feedback from our clients.

At the same time we conducted our 4 day Man From Snowy River tour over the New Year, with Kiwi Tony leading this one. We had a fully booked tour and once again they had an incredible trip. Whilst camped on the second night the group were visited by a couple of cowboys/cowgirls who were actually out looking for wild brumbies. One of our clients suggested that if they could find one they would be interested in acquiring it. Well, about half an hour later they turned up with a young Brumby and I understand a deal was brokered in the bush. Amazing what can happen on our trips.

Holidays & stuff

I managed to score new Nikon Coolpix P610 for Christmas with loads of features and scene settings, this is a fun camera to have in my kit. It needs a tripod though if you are going to utilise its incredible 24-1440 mm zoom.



My new Coolpix Nikon camera with its ultra high zoom gets a work out.

During the Christmas/New Year period I personally had a little time off with the family and spent a couple of days down at the Training Centre near Braidwood, it is just like a very quiet country retreat when we are not conducting training. I was joined by my daughter and her two children. I think they were rather impressed with Pa's big farm and loved riding their bikes around the long veranda. The usual family of kangaroos hopped in for a drink from the dam in the later afternoon too and this provided a lot of entertainment for the little ones.



The Nikon at 1440 zoom capability, this was photographed through the glass window in the 4wd training centre, the roo was about 200 metres away, hand held too (the lens not the roo).

Whilst down there we had a family day trip down to Mogo Zoo just south of Batemans Bay. This is one of the best small zoos I have ever seen and if you are travelling in the area make sure you allow at least a few hours to meander around the grounds and be entertained by the various Monkeys, Meerkats and Lions!



Bogged? Not us!

Well actually we were. You see it all started with a fully booked trip to Stockton Beach in early January. Alex and I were taking care of the group. In the lead up to the day trip Newcastle had received lots of rain with flooding of the Hunter River and surrounding area being a bit of an issue. When we arrived at Lavis Lane at Stockton we found the access road under about 4 inches of water. After checking with the local cops we were given the ok to drive through the water to the beach. We had a great day with everyone on the beach and by the time 4.30pm rolled around and we had said farewell to everyone, Alex and I headed into town for some dinner.



Flooded access road to Stockton Beach

On the way home at 7pm we decided to have a look at a new entrance to Stockton beach that has recently opened. With the sun slowly setting after a lovely long summer's day, we reached the beach, now I must explain we had already re-inflated our tyres thinking at the time we wouldn't be doing any more beach driving. So with road pressures aboard I did a loop out onto the beach in the FJ Cruiser, of course it handled it easily (actually with road pressures it really struggled so I turned back and headed for the safety of the bitumen car park). To my horror Alex had tried to follow me and his heavier 76 series was about 3 car lengths onto the beach bogged to the floor boards.

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Of course I had to stop next to Alex to rub it in that he was bogged. That was my undoing and the FJ went down to the axles also.

Now, we thought this would be an easy recovery for a couple of so called experts, in hindsight we should have just dropped our tyre pressures, driven off the beach and re-inflated them. But no, we had 3 pairs of maxtrax didn't we and it was time to practise our sand de-bogging etiquette. Well with two strategically placed maxtrax the FJ launched out of the deep sand onto hard bitumen. But Alex's 76 proved a little more difficult. After 45 minutes of digging and shoving 3 pairs of maxtrax under the wheels we eventually got the 76 back on firm ground as the sun set.

The biggest issue was we had lost 4 of the 6 maxtrax in the process, they were buried somewhere deep in the sand. Lesson here, always attach the bright orange straps to your maxtrax so you can easily locate them after use. Fortunately Alex carries a 40 centimetre long tent peg (that is a very big tent peg!) and by pushing it down into the deep sand we were able to locate the lost maxtrax after about 20 mins of frantic searching.

Needless to say, we could see the funny side of it and laughed all the way home – NOT!



Luckily this yarn with the customers was before we got bogged

Driver Training

I have to say that our 4wd training courses are going off (in a good way) we had two groups in January and then another double group last weekend at the February course. Most of you have probably attended our 4wd training and you know how passionate I am about it and my training centre at Braidwood. So it is great to see all the hard work I have put into the training centre now paying off.

Cox's River tour

We had this trip scheduled for 31 January and it quickly became fully booked, so we also ran a second trip a week later on 7 February. With our trips, like our driver training, we like to limit the number of vehicles to 8, in fact, our licence with NPWS also sets a limit of 8 vehicles, this allows the group to be of a manageable size. From an economic view point most trips have a breakeven point after 3 bookings just to cover the actual cost of running the trip, after that the extra bookings then offset all the other costs such as insurance, licensing, advertising and Vic's fetish for 4wdrives!



Exploring new tracks

Chris Johnson lead both of these trips for me and did a great job as usual. While Chris was doing this I went exploring for a new day trip with Wayne and Jenny, we found some great tracks which would fill in about half a day, so we will be doing some more of this exploring to make up the remainder of a new day trip out of Sydney. Once this is

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done I'll announce it through my newsletters, Facebook and on the website.

Travel Film Festival & High Country fun

Last week I was invited to present my DVD on our First Across the Desert trip at the Adventure Travel Film Festival in Bright Victoria. This is an annual event held over 3 days in Bright. It sees about 10 different films being shown and several guest speakers on adventure travel holding seminars. It is a delightful experience, with a window to some amazing adventures around the world in all forms of transport from postie bikes to 4wdrives and even motorised hang gliders.



GDT makes a statement in Bright

My presentation was well attended with over 100 people cramming into a small hall. I took the opportunity to invite all the Great Divide Tours team to the festival so we could enjoy the activities and then head bush into the high country for a few days to do what we love the most, some camping and 4wdriving.

Bright was a little overrun with GDT vehicles with 12 of them parked around town over the 3 days of the festival and in excess of 20 of our staff wandering from film to film.

We then had 5 days in the high country, initially using Talbotville as a base camp and exploring some new and old tracks out

from there. After that we headed over towards Buchan where I found some great new tracks and an even better camp site high in the snow gums. Last Friday we crossed the Snowy River at Jackson's Crossing and found even more fabulous 4wd tracks. It looks like I may now have another completely new 7 days high country trip to offer you, so keep an eye out for this one appearing later this year.



Talbotville campsite

Lake Eyre in Flood trip

During Christmas and early January a lot of rain fell across Central Australia, in fact so much rain fell over the Simpson Desert and Lake Eyre that the Lake has filled with water. There have been some great photos of the interior under water appearing on Facebook sites such as Wrights Air, The Pink Roadhouse and Old Andado.



Lake Eyre in flood makes for an amazing sight

After talking with Trevor Wright from Wrights Air at William Creek I decided to

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put together a 7 day tagalong out to Lake Eyre to see it with all the water. Amazingly this trip was fully booked within 3 weeks of listing it on my website. As a result we have scheduled a second Lake Eyre in Flood tag-along commencing from Lithgow on 23 April, I have two bookings thus far on this second trip so there are a few spots still remaining if you wish to see the incredible sight of Lake Eyre covered in water.

This trip will commence in Lithgow with our first night in Willandra National Park followed by a journey through outback NSW via Ivanhoe with a camp on Menindee Lakes. We then go via Broken Hill to Port Augusta and then up to Coober Pedy with an overnight stop in an underground motel. We then drive through the moonscape like landscape to William Creek where we have a 2 hour flight over Lake Eyre booked for you. The next day we make our way down the Oodnadatta Track with a visit out to the Lake's edge at Halligan Bay, tonight we will camp at Muloorina Station, on the final day of our trip we drive back to Marree and then down to Port Augusta via Leigh Creek and Hawker.



If you are keen to see Lake Eyre with water we still have a few spots available on the trip commencing 23 April, see all the details on our website or email me for a detailed itinerary info@4wd.net.au

Big Red Concert tour

This event is held in the first week of July, it has grown into quite an event and we have

been to all the concerts with our amazing 11 day outback tour thus far. I am already fully booked for the first trip, but I am contemplating running a second trip so if you are thinking of seeing Jimmy Barnes, Russell Morris and heaps more great Aussie singers perform at the base of Big Red along with our amazing 4wd tour through the outback, then let me know.

Lots of bookings

2016 is shaping up to be a very busy year and we already have full trips on the following tours:-

Maralinga in May
Simpson in May
Simpson in July
Cape York in August
Arnhem Land in August

This means I have the following vacancies only, so if you are thinking of doing an outback trip with us this year may I suggest you book asap

Canning Stock Route 15/6 -10/7 3 spots
Kimberley 9/7 – 3/8 one spot only
Cape York 15/8-2/9 6 spots
Arnhem Land 17/8 – 4/9 5 spots
Flinders Ranges 5-16/9 6 spots
Burke and Wills tour 4-22/9 6 spots

The Naked Ute

Check this out!

<http://content.volkswagen-commercial.com.au/amarok>

Did you see the Facebook and TV campaign entitled the Naked Ute? It shows a stripped down 4wd doing some high speed off road work and some 4wd terrain, with off the street characters driving and wondering what model it actually is. It turns out to be a VW Amarok and the idea of the add was to show that it is much tougher under its pretty exterior than most give it credit for.

Well, back in October 2015 I was approached to help film the advertisement for the Naked Ute, I had to sign waivers of

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secrecy so I wouldn't say anything about it until the add was released, so now I can tell the world. They used my training centre for all the off road 4wd work (not the high speed stuff thank goodness) The filming took all day from 5 am until 6pm, there were over 100 people at the training centre and about 30 odd vehicles including the usual movie set catering trucks etc, quite a major undertaking for just one short 30 second add.



I stole this photo, don't tell anyone

The Naked Amarak performed really well and the "off the street" characters were indeed off the Braidwood streets and their reactions and comments were all genuine. Quite an experience, I just wish I was allowed to take some photos to show you, but alas I wasn't

Be fire ready

So what would you do if you were out camping or four wheel driving and a bush fire approached?

This is what I recommend.

Firstly, before going bush be aware of weather conditions and what is forecast, there are plenty of Apps for smart phones that do this for example Weatherzone and Rain Radar

If a Catastrophic (NSW) or Code Red (Victoria) fire day is forecast you must, by law, leave or not enter a forested area. Even in a settled area they suggest you evacuate. If you know the day before that this situation is forecast for the next day you should leave the day before it arrives. We go to the

nearest large town and book into a caravan park for the day when this occurs on tour.

Download the **Fire Ready** App for Victoria and **Fires Near Me** for NSW, they work really well at keeping you informed whilst you have service, probably a good idea to have someone at home do the same and a means of contacting you if they become aware of a developing situation. Of course the local ABC radio station is also a good source for receiving fire updates whilst out and about.

If you see a fire in the bush ring 000 and report it, always carry a satellite phone when in remote locations

Advise the authorities where you are and take any advice they give you.



If driving on a bush track, you cannot outrun (drive) a wild fire, look for a cleared area and park in the middle of it. Lie down on the floor of the car and cover yourself with a woollen blanket, do not use a sleeping bag as they tend to melt under heat. If you can wet the blanket do so. Wait in the car until the fire front passes before leaving the vehicle.

If possible you could even burn a clearing around your car but be careful in doing so. This creates your own fire break.

Do not attempt to run or drive through a fire front, temperatures exceed 2000 degrees and not only burns all skin but burns your lungs.

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Don't use water tanks, they can collapse or the water can boil, only get into a dam or creek/river as a last resort, you still need to breathe and whilst you may avoid burning your skin, your airways can burn and this kills you just as easily. Put a wet woollen blanket over your head if in water.

If you find a brick house or building, shelter in it well away from windows and direct heat, stay as long as possible before leaving the building if it is on fire, the outside temperature during a fire front is huge and can last up to 15 minutes.



Here is an extract from the WA fire authority website for people in a building
When the fire front passes the heat will be extreme and you must shelter at this time whether you planned to or not.

This information will increase your chances of survival:

- Stay in the house when the fire front is passing, this usually takes five to fifteen minutes. You need to actively defend while sheltering
- Take shelter inside furthest from the fire front. Make sure you can easily

escape from the building. It is best to shelter in a room with two exits and a water supply (eg. a laundry with a door that goes outside or a kitchen with two exits). People have died sheltering in bathrooms and other rooms without a door going outside

- If your house catches on fire and the conditions inside become unbearable, you need to get out and go to an area that has already been burnt. Close all internal doors and leave through the door as far from the approaching fire as possible. Many people have died from toxic smoke and fumes when their house has caught fire
- You should protect yourself from radiant heat with long sleeves, long trousers and strong leather boots. The majority of people die in a bushfire from radiant heat.

And here is an extract from advice issued by La Trobe University if caught by a fire whilst driving.

If caught on the road Remember, if your plan is to leave early when a fire is burning in your area, do so before the fire threatens and road travel becomes hazardous. Leaving late is a deadly option. Declaration of a Total Fire Ban, or other high fire risk days, should be your trigger to put your Bushfire Survival Plan into action. If you are driving and see smoke ahead, always u-turn to safety if you have the option. Avoid being caught out on the road during a fire as it is highly dangerous - a car will not offer safe protection from the radiant heat. However, if you are caught in a fire do not get out and run. Being in a car is still better than being in the open. Pull over to the side of the road into a clear area – a dirt track may be the best option Try not to park the car in a

place where it is surrounded by vegetation that will burn - avoid long grass and scrub Park behind a solid object, if possible, such as a bus shelter of brick toilet block clear of vegetation. Ensure all windows and doors are tightly closed and shut all air vents Put the hazard lights and headlights on so other vehicles can see you Cover exposed skin as much as possible with clothes made of natural fibres Get down as low as possible below window level and cover up with a woollen blanket until the fire front passes. Remember to drink lots of water to stop yourself from dehydrating. Move to safety only when you will feel a reduction in the heat Always carry a woollen blanket in your car if travelling in the country during the fire season

Sad times

Just after Christmas we lost two great people in our industry, both I knew very well. The first was very close to us and was the website face of GDT. Jeff Bultitude has provided website support to me for the past 15 years, he has designed my website and kept it looking really great all this time. Sadly Jeff died suddenly and unexpectedly. My thoughts are with his family and especially his wife Leonie who is also a crucial part of the GDT team in that she designs our logos, brochures and advertisements.

Then a couple of weeks after Jeff's passing the 4wd industry lost one of its legends, Fred Black. Fred Black was the founder of Out of Town 4wd in Newcastle, he is best known as the man behind Long Ranger fuel tanks sold through ARB stores. I have known Fred since the mid 1980's and he has supplied all my 4wdrives with long range fuel tanks, a fuel tank I could never fault.

For Sale Got something 4wd related you want to sell, well let me know and I can list it here and on my Facebook site.

A good client of mine, Phil Owen, has upgraded from his 100 series Land cruiser to a 200 series and has his fully set up 100 turbo diesel up for sale, here is the link to it.

<http://e.carsal.es/g6ftk>



Wayne Desmond retires from the outback

My longest serving tour guide, Wayne Desmond is finally hanging up his outback guiding shoes, after more than 21 years of faithful service, With over a dozen trips up the Canning Stock Route, 30+ Simpson Desert trips, over a dozen Kimberley trips, a few Cape York tours and well, something like 50 or 60 Victorian High Country trips Wayne is saying goodbye to his outback touring days.



But, he isn't leaving for good, in fact I'll keep flogging him at the driver training centre. Wayne has been a stalwart to Great Divide Tours, a man of high principles, who

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always put safety ahead of everything else, I've never heard him swear, even when I tell him the same old Dad jokes over and over.

He could fix almost anything in the middle of nowhere, was the most experienced man around when it came to vehicle recoveries and was as dependable as the day is long. Take care of yourself mate, a true friend indeed.



Wayne could fix anything on the track, if you think you've got what it takes to be a tour guide, ask yourself, how would I weld a shock tower back onto a 4wd on the CSR, and make a non standard shocky fit

Off to the shaky isle

As you read this I'll be hopping on a plane to head to Christchurch for this year's amazing 10 day 4wd tag-along tour. This year we are exploring some new country in the far south of the South Island, it is going to be simply stunning. Keep an eye on the Great Divide Tours Facebook site for photos and updates

<https://www.facebook.com/Great-Divide-Tours-153808191334980/>



And you can watch my progress via our Spot tracker here.

<https://spotwalla.com/tripViewer.php?id=d26b555684163ad33>

Congratulations

My nephew, Ty Widman, who has been part of the team now for a couple of years recently became engaged to the lovely Olga, with a marriage date set for March 2017 looks like they might be lining themselves up for a honeymoon in New Zealand on my 2017 NZ trip. Congrats guys.



That's all for now, stay safe and book early

Regards

Vic Widman



Phil and Lyn visited us at our stand at the Illawarra caravan and camping show last weekend.

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