



Newsletter No. 42 December 2016

G'Day, Outback Vic here

I'm sure everyone is saying this at the moment, but where did 2016 go? It's been an incredible year for Great Divide Tours, we have achieved a record year with a 30 % increase over our previous best year (last year) and everything points to this trend continuing with very solid bookings for 2017 already. Sadly, many of you may miss out on your favoured trip for 2017 as we are already fully booked on many of them. See the full list of what's available later in this newsletter. So with Christmas just two weeks away let me bring you up to date with what we have been up to over here at GDT over the past 3 months.



Africa here we come



Last newsletter I announced the really big news that we were heading off to Africa with a special 4wd tag-along tour in combination with Self Drive Safaris to Namibia. Well, I'm pleased to say that we have acquired sufficient bookings for this trip to proceed and those that have booked are now in the process of booking their

flights etc. I still have 4 spots remaining so if you are considering joining us on this adventure of a lifetime its not too late. Drop me an email and I'll forward the entire itinerary.

Accommodated Outback Icons trip

Well, why didn't you tell me earlier you wanted one of these trips! You see I announced this trip, a fully accommodated tour with dinner and breakfast, in my last newsletter, and within two weeks we had not one but two trips fully booked! But it didn't stop there, the bookings kept rolling in, so we put on a third trip in September 2017 and now I have just 3 spots remaining on it.



This trip will take you from Cobar to White Cliffs, to Tibooburra, Cameron Corner, Innamincka, Birdsville, into the Simpson Desert for a day, then down the Birdsville Track to Marree and finally to Port Augusta. It is fully accommodated in hotels, motels and shearing sheds with dinner and breakfast provided. Ask me for the itinerary via email and I'll send it to you, remember we have just 3 spots remaining on the third and final trip for 2017.

You asked for it, here it is

This experience made me realise that not everyone wishes to or can camp on our fabulous 4wd trips. It made me think about offering more of this type of trip and naturally turned to the **Victorian High Country** which has proven to be our most popular 4wd tour by far. This summer we have no less than 7 of these great camping trips taking place. But could we also offer an accommodated 4wd trip which also included dinner and breakfast in the package?



Fortunately I know the high country like the back of my hand, I've been travelling down there since 1984! So I worked out, on paper, a rough itinerary based around the towns of Bright, Mansfield, Heyfield and Dargo. Then just last week (if you have been following Great Divide Tours on Facebook you will have seen my photos and videos from this reccie trip) I headed down to the high country for the week to drive the route and experience the accommodation first hand. It's a tough gig this 4wd tour guiding!!

The end result is that in this newsletter I am announcing that we are now offering a magnificent 7 day and 8 night fully accommodated 4wd trip into the magnificent high country. I have attached the full itinerary to the email with this newsletter for your perusal.

I have scheduled three of these trips for 2017, March, May and early December 2017. They will start in Bright then we move to Mansfield via great 4wd tracks past Lake William Hovell. We will make Mansfield our base for three nights, the Mansfield Hotel serves great meals, and during the days we will explore iconic locations such as Craig's Hut, King Hut, Bluff Hut, Bindaree Falls and Bindaree Hut, the Howqua River and of course Mountain No 3!



Then we cross right over the very top of the Great Dividing range via Mt Skene where the views are simply stunning. Passing through Licola our overnight stop is in the delightfully named Happy Days Motor Inn and we will dine in the award winning Tinamba Hotel voted best Regional Hotel in 2016, the menu looks amazing!

The next three days see us move onto Dargo via two of the best 4wd tracks in the high country, the track up to Mt Wellington at over 1650 metres high and the incredible fire tower lookout on The Pinnacles at the top of Billy Goat Bluff which we will descend. Dinner will be in the Dargo Hotel each night with another day of exploring the gold fields around Talbotville and Grant with 30 river

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crossings thrown in for good measure on this day.

The final day we just have to take you to the best of the best, the Mt Blue Rag Range Trail where we reach over 1700 metres in height for a birds eye like view down on the mountains. We have included the last night's accommodation and meal back in delightful Bright too.



Take a look at the detailed itinerary attached to this email and if this trip suits you, please book early as I do expect a lot of interest.

High Country camping trips

Of course, our grass roots 4wd tours are our camping trips and these are still available, but if you wanted to join us over Christmas I am afraid I only have two spots remaining on the 7 day trip commencing 3 January. All other trips at this time are now fully booked. As is the camping trip scheduled for February 2017, but I have listed a second trip in February commencing 19 February so this has some spots still remaining. The good news is we still have plenty of spots available on the 7 day camping trip into the high country in April 2017.

Always be prepared

Speaking of the high country, we have just finished two x 7 day camping trips

down there, Tony Davys was our leader and the first trip presented a couple of challenges with wet weather. We know full well that the steep tracks in the high country are no place to be in wet weather, not only is there a greater risk of vehicle damage but track damage is also likely, neither of these situations make for a good trip in our view. So when it rained all night on the crew at King Hut they made a hasty retreat to the caravan park in Mansfield to dry out. The next day was still wet with low cloud so the decision was made to go around the mountains rather than over them which proved a very sensible idea indeed. Just take a look at the email I have received from one of the customers on Tony's trip, makes me a proud business owner for sure.

Hi Jenny and Vic,

We have just completed our Victorian high country trip and we wanted you to know we had a fabulous time. Tony and Tom were very knowledgeable and experienced leaders who taught us a lot. We saw some amazing scenery along the track but more importantly we were able to put into practice what we learned at your 4wd training weekend. This was our third trip with your company and are now seriously considering your Arnhem Land trip after listening to Tony's adventures around the campfire every night. Not only did we have so much fun but we met some amazing people who we look forward to meeting again in future travels.

Kind regards,
Lyn and Phil

Fortunately the next week, Tony had perfect weather for the whole week and

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he kicked another goal as detailed in this email I received last week.

Dear Great Divide Team,

My wife, brother and sister in-law and I have just returned from the Victorian High country and I needed to email you to express our thoughts of our amazing week.

Our host, guide, comedian, wildlife educator, teacher, mentor and now I hope friend Tony was, and is nothing short of just amazing. Tony from the first time we all met him at the briefing put everyone at ease and guided us through what the next 7 days would have in store.

Throughout our adventure Tony led with professionalism and confidence and his mastery of his craft is a credit to him, at every turn he knew where we were heading and provided the information pertinent to the specific location.

The sights and locations we visited will stay with us forever as will the challenges we all worked through as a team. I thought I was a very experience 4wd driver, however I certainly learnt a lot.

The organisation from GDT down to the fine details was fantastic and left nothing to chance. I have and will recommend GDT to everyone who will listen and WE WILL BE BACK.

Please pass our heartfelt thanks to Tony and the Great Divide support team.

Warm regards,

Andrew

But wait, there is more

At the end of October I received this email from one of our 4wd training customers, it tells a great story not just

about the advice we passed on during the training but also about a 4wd workshop.

31/10/2016

Vic Widman

Great Divide Tours.

Good afternoon Vic,

I had the pleasure of doing a training weekend with you way back in January of 2014 just after I purchased my Black FJ Cruiser.

Well several years have passed and my FJ is nothing like the one you saw at Braidwood, I wont go into the list of modifications or accessories fitted but I will mention 2.

I had a 2inch lift kit fitted by "The Ultimate Suspension"(I know you have dealt with them in your 200 series) and all was good. The guys there looked after me and my FJ and I would recommend them to others looking for suspension work, However less than 2 weeks after this work I was on a drive down the Root hog trail going from Bathurst to Hill End and almost at the river I started getting a loud knocking sound from the left front, when I checked the area I found that the metal spacer/washer on top of the shockie had split allowing the top of the shock absorber to hit the inner guard, my only choice was to limp very carefully into Hill End, We did get there. At 3.30pm on Saturday I rang Ken from The ultimate suspension not expecting an answer, but to my surprise Ken answered and after a few calls he assured me 2 mechanics would drive to Hill End that night and fix my FJ, well at 7pm the mechanics turned up and went to work, at 9pm they handed me my keys and said enjoy your weekend and they then drove back to Sydney.

That is what I call going above and beyond what was expected, Vic can I through your news letter give them a huge THANK YOU. The second thing I wanted to do was thank you for telling me about Ozi Cozi, I had this fitted to my FJ and love it, I was on my way

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home from Taree back in July when a tailgate of a truck opened slightly and dropped about a ton of 25mm blue metal at 100kph, long storey short \$17000 (fully insured) later my FJ is like new, the point is while ozicozi is not meant for that type of punishment it reduced the amount of preparation in areas it was fixed and on the left side of the FJ little to no paint work required, yes ozicozi was refitted under insurance.

As a foot note I work in the pest control industry and have no connection with either of these companies apart from being a customer.

Kind regards
Ross

Speaking of Ozicozi

Last month one of our good customers advised me that he was updating his 200 series Landcruiser, his current vehicle was superbly set up and the kilometres and price were right so I purchased it. This vehicle will be used by Tony during the 2017 touring season. I picked it up today from my sign writer, Brad Bell from Outback Signs out at Freemans Reach, he and his team do the best job with sign writing which is why I literally drive right across Sydney to have him do the work. The Cruiser is going into Ozicozi to be wrapped in the clear protective coating that I swear by and use on all my vehicles, so a big shout out to Andrew Jackson at Ozicozi in Artarmon too.



European Vacation

Well, its finally happened, I've been on a trip to Europe. We had a close relative getting married to a lovely French lass and of course the wedding was to be in the south of France. Julie, my wife, saw this as the perfect opportunity to get me out of the outback for a while. Being a tour guide I'm always arranging other people's holidays, so this time I took a break from what I call my work and let my daughter, Emma, do all the organising. Emma and her partner Mike were also accompanying us.



So here are my impressions of my trip. I thought I wouldn't like Paris, too many French speaking people who I was led to believe can be rude to tourists. Not true, still lots of people but far from rude and I didn't realise how much I would enjoy the history of the place, it makes our European history in Oz look rather shabby. I definitely want to go back to Paris.

We then hired a car and I drove the family to the town where the wedding was to take place. French weddings are weird, they start at 3 pm and it wasn't until 2.30am that the cake cutting took place and the band started playing at 3

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am! No-one told me the party was going to go for over 12 hours!

After the wedding we continued to drive and made for Switzerland, holy cow! What a place, they were making tunnels for roads and trains at the turn of the century, 1900's that is, and we dare to boast how good our West Connex is or the Harbour Tunnel. Loved the scenery in Switzerland. Hated the driving though! I might have crossed the Simpson Desert 21 times but I could not come to grips with driving on the wrong side of the road and sitting on the wrong side of the car, especially on the narrow mountain roads in Switzerland. Very stressful!



When we reached Zurich, Julie and I headed to London, a first for us, whilst Emma and Mike went to Spain. We had a great time in London, catching big red buses and not driving! Saw all the usual things like the changing of the guard, Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and Stonehenge which was a lifelong goal of mine. Then Julie and I headed to Dubai for 3 nights at the Atlantis on Palm, OMG! What a place, cost us a small fortune, but it was worth every cent. It was a tad hot too with 41 degrees feeling officially like 51degrees C !

I have to admit I did enjoy my first visit to Europe and look forward to seeing more of the world. If they only drove on the correct side of the road I'm sure I could work out a 4wd trip over there.



At last

Whilst in Zurich airport Mike asked me if it was OK if he married Emma, so now, much to Julie's delight, we are planning for our first daughter's wedding in April 2017. Luckily I'll just be back from our African 4wd safari too.

More weddings

Ty, my nephew who has been assisting us with the driver training and local 4wd trips is also getting married in 2017 in March, just before I head to New Zealand for our NZ 4wd trip. Gee I'm glad they are working around my hectic travel schedule, please remember I am working on these trips.

And another Widman

Ty's brother Greg, and his lovely wife, Katherine were blessed to receive a baby boy a month ago, Zachary Widman, so it looks like we are making sure GDT will continue to thrive into the next couple of generations, I wonder if Zachary knows he will grow up to be an awesome four wheel driver?

Luke King Racing

You might recall that in my last Newsletter I introduced you to Luke King, my nieces son or Great Nephew, who I have supported since he was 12 years old in his motor racing career. Well despite some great results with the

Brian Hilton Motor Sport team in the Toyota 86 series, they dropped him mid season from their line up. As it turned out that was their bad as the younger generation would say.



Luke went on to personally fund and lease the Eastern Creeks Go Kart Toyota 86 so he could continue in the series. Less than a week after being dropped by Brian Hilton he not only won the race at Sandown but set the fastest lap. He then achieved a lifelong dream and raced at Bathurst, unfortunately a failed gearbox saw him with a poor grid position. I'm pleased to say that GDT stepped in and purchased a new gearbox for him which was installed by Luke and his Dad and he went on to score more points for the championship.

Then the final round came at Homebush only last week and he managed another podium finish with a third place and third overall for the weekend, this gave him enough points to finish 6th outright in the 2016 series, an amazing result for a Father and Son team on a very limited budget, well done to Luke and his Dad Brad King. Let's hope a bigger team sees the potential this young lad has and gives him the break he deserves in 2017.

Maintenance week at the driver training centre

As you read this I will be heading down to the driver training centre for a week of hard work. Its time to paint the centre, have the carpets cleaned and the floors polished and the tracks groomed and a few new obstacles built, always fun!

But more importantly I am having some major work done to ensure that the centre and us, if we are conducting a course, survive if a bushfire should approach. One of the greatest benefits of my training centre is that it is set in a beautiful bush land setting with real 4wd tracks to learn on. The down side is we are very prone to wild fire and to my knowledge the bush in the immediate area has not burned in over 30 years, fuel loads this year, after all the rain, are at extreme levels and the possibility of a wildfire racing through the area has to be very real.

After some considerable investigation I am having installed on the centre what I believe is an exceptional fire fighting system. It is called BushfirePro and if a fire approached it will automatically envelope the whole centre in an umbrella of water. Using our water tanks, we should have at least 3 hours protection, which is ample time to allow the fire front to pass. It means we can stay in situ and be totally safe from any wild fire and also protect this major asset to my business. Because of the size of the building it is not a cheap system, costing in excess of \$30,000 but that is far less than the money we would lose if we lost everything in a bush fire.

As the system is installed I will record its progress and also show you the

system when we test it, so keep a watch on the Great Divide Tours Facebook site towards the end of next week.

What is coming up

Here is a short list of what we have on for next year

- 3-9 January** High Country 2 spots left
- 8 January** a day on Stockton Beach, always heaps of fun
- 14-15 January** Our two day 4wd training course
- 29 January** a day trip up to Cox and Kowmung Rivers and the Kanangra Walls
- 25-26 February** a 2 day camper trailer training course
- 25-26 February** our Barrington Tops and Myall Lakes trip
- 2-19 April** We are off to Namibia in Africa 4 spots left
- 9-27 May** our incredible trip to Maralinga and Surveyor Generals Corner - 5 spots available
- 23 May - 5 June** our 14 day Simpson Desert trip
- 14-30 June** our trip across the Madigan Line in the northern Simpson Desert
- 30/6-11/7/17** The Big Red Bash, just 4 spots remain
- 3-16 July** Another 14 day Simpson trip with just 3 spots remaining

Please note our Kimberley, Cape York and Canning Stock Route trips are fully booked, we do have two spots remaining on our second Kimberley tour commencing **11 August** and just one spot left on the second Cape York tour commencing **17 August**, hurry if you wish to do these trips.

Vic keeps writing and talking

I'm really pleased to announce that I am now writing for Unsealed 4x4 magazine, a free on-line magazine produced by Pat Callinan Media. I am writing about all of my recent trips as well as a great two part series on my 1981 Cape York trip in my Subaru. Plus they are giving me heaps of special assignments related to outback travel which I am really enjoying writing up. Check out this on-line magazine to keep up with my travels and views on 4wd driving in Australia.

Don't forget you can also catch my Track Talk radio segment on Radio 2UE 954AM every Friday afternoon around 3.40pm. I regularly post the podcasts on the GDT Facebook site also. Or download the 2UE App to your smart phone and you can tune in every Friday to learn about my favourite tracks.

Christmas gift ideas

Each year we issue a large number of gift vouchers for Christmas gifts, these include anything from day trips to weekend 4wd courses or you can even just buy a gift voucher to any dollar value that you elect. So if you are stuck for a gift idea for your hubby, wife, son or brother, gives us a call or send an email and we will be happy to help.

Merry Christmas

Finally allow me to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, it is only two weeks away, if you are travelling or having a few days off, please drive carefully and look after your fellow travellers.

Regards

Vic Widman