



Newsletter No. 51 May 2019

G'Day, Outback Vic

here. Hi everyone, the one comment I get the most from my clients when I see them at the various 4wd shows or via email is, please send more newsletters. I wish I had the time but I'll do my best. It's been a busy couple of months since the last newsletter with our Flood flights taking off and a trip to New Zealand for Julie and I. See the reports below. Also in this newsletter is announcement of several new trips, finally I've developed my Flinders Ranges accommodated trip, the great news is we will still have the camping option. The second trip is one many of you have been asking about, the return of our outback photographic tour. It's going to be picture perfect! Then the last time I had the opportunity to present a Greening of the Outback Tour was 9 years ago, well after all the floods and a little rain in the outback, the interior of our dry country is turning green and I want to show it to you. Finally I have some exciting news about a deal I have done with the magnificent Coral Expeditions team in relation to a 7 day cruise around Tasmania, see below for all the details.



Birdsville to see the flood waters coming down the Diamantina channel country. In the end I managed to fill 2 plane loads and unfortunately we did have a couple of clients miss out as we needed 11 bookings for each plane to go at the price we quoted. Both trips proved to be outstanding, flying into Adelaide late on Friday evening and then at 7am boarding the mining plane to Olympic Dam and then before we knew it we were flying over Marree Man in our 12 seater Cessna Caravan from Wrightsair.



Marree Man is over 7 kilometres high, lucky he is laying down!

Everyone had superb views although it was warm in the plane but the ever changing scenery below kept our minds off the summer temps outside. It was a real buzz to see Marree Man from the air, and then we flew over a very dry Lake Eyre (to get this into perspective, Lake Eyre is now 80% full from the flood waters we saw up in Goyders Lagoon).

Our timing could not have been more perfect as we witnessed the fast flowing flood waters entering the top of Lake Eyre

A flight to see the floods

So last newsletter I mentioned that I could put together a 3 day flying trip out to

in the Warburton Groove. In fact, the video footage of this spectacle that I filmed on my iphone and posted to my Facebook site when we reached Birdsville at lunch time on 17 March was picked up by the ABC and shown on national television in their evening 7pm news slot.



The water had moved 10 kilometres in 7 days when we flew over it a week later as it entered Lake Eyre

We did a couple of fly pasts of the head waters of the flood and then followed the flooded Warburton River through the drought stricken landscape of the Great Stony Desert to Clifton Hills station. We saw firsthand the Inside Birdsville track under water for many many kilometres which means it won't be open this year.



Inside Birdsville Track flooded for the rest of this year

After lunch at the Birdsville Bakery we were back in the air to see the vast change in the landscape north of Birdsville where

the previously flooded Channel country was now a vivid green. It is amazing how quickly the vegetation returns after such a prolonged drought. We flew over the Diamantina Gates where the flood channel narrows to just a few hundred metres and all the flood waters from up north had squeezed between the two rocky cliff faces. I was even able to spot a camp I had used on the edge of Hunter gorge in the national park.



Diamantina Gates where the Channel Country narrows before spreading out for over 80 kilometres wide, all green now.

On our second trip out to Birdsville the road to Big Red was finally flood free and we were able to see sunset from atop Big Red thanks to Birdsville Adventure Tours, but the flies were in their masses and made any outdoor activity a real battle.



You can't beat this at sunset

After dinner and breakfast in Birdsville, which was very quiet due to the closed roads all around us, we had a fabulous second day flying over Big Red and then across the Simpson Desert to land at Dalhousie Springs for a very hot swim in the hot spring, needless to say we were the only people there with the Simpson Desert still closed.



Big Red where we normally drive over it and where 9,000 people will gather in July at the Big Red Bash.

Lunch on day 2 was a giant Oodna Burger at the Pink Roadhouse, again we were rather lonely with very few people travelling as yet. That night dinner was at the William Creek Hotel then on Monday morning we flew out early to land at the Painted Hills for a 3 hour 8 kilometre return walk around this sensational landscape.



The ground walk at the Painted Hills is sensational

Finally after lunch at William Creek it was time to fly back to Olympic Dam and Adelaide and for me back to Sydney that evening.

In the end it was an absolutely amazing flight, we definitely pioneered the flights out to see the floods, Lake Eyre and the greening of the outback, with many other charter flights now doing a similar trip (but not the Simpson Desert and Painted Hills component, which was definitely a Vic special!). The profits from these trips went to Buy a Cow appeal, to help the graziers in far north Queensland who lost so many stock in the devastating floods.

As we left Birdsville on the second trip Cyclone Trevor was dumping more rain across the Channel country and as of today Birdsville is isolated again with a second flood coming down both the Diamantina and Eyre Creek. In fact, Eyre Creek is impassable with 3 metres of water at the QAA crossing in the Desert. Given I have a Simpson Desert tour commencing in 10 days time, whether our tour group will be able to get across the desert remains a mystery. We will make a decision on this when they reach Poeppel Corner on 25 May, if the track to the east is not open, we will head up the Hay River Track to the Plenty Highway, not a bad option after all.

So with the two floods and rain which has now fallen across the outback there has been a dramatic transformation of the drought stricken areas. The dry dusty rock strewn ground is now a verdant green and in a few weeks it will be a riot of colour with all that green blossoming with millions of wild flowers. It will be an absolute treat to see. Yep! You guessed it, I now have a Greening of the Outback tour organised for the second half of June, see the attached itinerary with this newsletter. We will drive through all the areas that were flooded and received rain such as

Eulo, Quilpie, Windorah, Birdsville, down the Birdsville Track, Marree with a flight over Lake Eyre and back via the Strzelecki Track, Cameron Corner, Wanaaring, Trilby station and Louth. Let me know if you would like to see the outback in full bloom.



Believe it or not this is desert country north of Birdsville

New Zealand 4wd trip

Literally a week after flying out to Birdsville Julie and I were on another plane, this time across the ditch to NZ. Landing in Christchurch on a cold but sunny Monday afternoon we were soon acquainting ourselves with the 7 other couples that had joined us for our 10 day 4wd tour. I am sure you get sick of me raving about the beautiful scenery in NZ, but it never fails to impress. This is the 10th year that we have organised 4wd tours in New Zealand, and I have to say every time we go it is fabulous.



Autumn colours near Clyde

The first few days of the trip were a little showery and quite cool but it didn't prevent us from exploring the valleys and mountains south of Christchurch. But then the weather really cleared up, a big high pressure system sat over the Sth Island for the next 7 days and we had glorious clear blue skies, barely a breath of wind which all led to some amazing scenery in the mountains and along the edge of the various blue lakes.



This photo was taken on our first tagalong to NZ in 2010, Jenny was doing her best to drop Wayne down the well and Julie was looking for a goat!

Julie and I had a couple more days in Christchurch at the end of the tour so we booked ourselves on the Tranzalpine Railway which travels daily from Christchurch to Greymouth through Arthurs Pass to the west coast and return. It was a full day leaving at 8am and returning at 6pm, but it was a top train trip. I now have my eyes of the west coast train trip from Christchurch to Picton. That is the beauty of my trips to NZ, not only are the 10 days of four wheel driving, dining and great accommodation worth doing but there is so

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much more you can do when you are over the ditch.



Mountain trails



Chasing rainbows



Crossing rivers

Cat away mice do play

So whilst I was out of the country having a great time I left my very capable staff in charge of things back here in Oz, GDT would not function without the enormous effort that Jenny in the office puts in, she kept busy taking bookings and arranging the upcoming trips. Wylie, who now resides

permanently at my driver training centre took a group away over Easter on our 4 day Man From Snowy River tour and judging by the feedback received, everyone loved the trip and were very complimentary of Wylie's leadership and care for them.

I also had a 7 day high country tour on at the same time. But we were having real issues with bush fires that had ravaged the high country during February and March. Despite the fires now being out, the landscape in areas looked like a nuclear bomb had gone off, it is such a shame that our management of our Parks cannot prevent their total devastation when bush fires strike. This meant that of the 7 days of our trip only 3 of them were still open to the public. We needed to either cancel the trip or come up with an alternate plan. Not being one to return money, errr..... I mean deter people from experiencing the wonders of camping, I quickly devised an alternate 4 days and everyone agreed to the revised trip. Neill Bell took this tour and of course under his excellent leadership everyone had a great time camping in the high country in safety.

Rosehill Show

This just completed, I have spent the past 6 days on my display with the help of Wayne D, Coighty Fullerton, Brad Bell and Wayne and Jenny. There were over 50,000 people that visited the show, for us this equated to handing out 400 brochures to interested persons and emailing about 40 people specific tour itineraries.

This year there was a lot of interest in our Cape York and Arnhem Land tours and not so much in the driver training. Bookings are already coming in for both so it all worked anyway.

Anyone familiar with our displays at the various 4wd shows will know that we have used a stunning photo I took of Big Red at the very first Big Red Bash about 6 years ago as our back drop. I decided it was time to update this and with the incredible help of

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Brad Bell whose real job is to run a sign company known as Outback Signs, we put together two fantastic photos that I felt portrayed spectacularly what we do as far as tag-along tours are concerned. So we had a great shot of my Cruiser leading a convoy through the rich red sands of the Madigan Line on one half of the 6 metre wide back drop. On the other 3 metre section was a photo taken by Brad's son in January in the high country on Mt Blue Rag, it portrayed Neill's Ford Ranger climbing Mt Blue Rag with half the range in bright sunshine and the other half enveloped in swirling mist, so typical of the high country. It was a stunning photo. See below and let me know what you think of this amazing back drop, as you can tell I love it.

the public for a small fee. This includes Horseshoe Top End, Arkapena, Merna Morna, Willow Springs and Sky Trek, Mt Newman and of course Arkaroola with its Echo Back Camp track and Ridgetop trail.



The Flinders Ranges are stunning



This banner is 6 metres wide!

OK, its now time if you have read this newsletter this far to announce the new trips that I have developed in the past week.

A new accommodated trip to the Flinders Ranges

We have taken camping trips to the beautiful Flinders Ranges for a number of years now but there has been a lot of interest in doing this magnificent area along the lines of our other accommodated tours (read Outback Icons, High Country, Tasmania, Down the Darling etc). So I have been working on this and finally come up with a fabulous 12 day trip from Broken Hill to Port Augusta via the Flinders Ranges. It is very similar to our usual Flinders trip and we will still visit a number of private stations and explore their 4wd tracks that they have opened to

I have attached the full itinerary to this email for you have a look at. However, this itinerary is slightly different to the others that I offer in that there are three different ways you can do this trip with us. First up there is the fully accommodated tour which includes dinner and breakfast each day. Then you have the option of camping on the trip and doing your own meals, and finally you can do the same trip and elect to camp but join us for dinner each night at our various accommodation locations. See the itinerary attached for all the various price ranges depending on what level of self help you choose.

You asked for it, an Outback photographic tour

A few years ago I provided a few weekend photo trips and a week long run out to Broken Hill where we had a photography expert accompany us to show us how to get the best out of our camera gear. I had a few people asking about the return of this style of 4wd trip so here it is. In October this year Neill Bell and his wife Gail will be leading an 8 day trip which starts from Sydney and heads out to Menindee and returns via the Warrumbungle Ranges.

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Gail has studied photography under Ken Duncan and knows how to take a pretty good photo. She also conducts learning programs in other forms of recreational activity and is quite versed in an easy going and sharing of knowledge approach. So with the great skills of Neill as a tour guide, if you've been away with him you will know exactly what I mean, and the easy going and approachable poise of Gail I believe this will be a fantastic trip.



A week long photo tour to some amazing locations in October 2019

We won't be spending every minute of the day looking through a camera lens, but we will be touring some great country and making sure we are camped at fabulous locations in time to then explore the local area with Gail beside you giving tips on all array of photographic capability from picture framing to night time star trails and depth of field . If you have an SLR camera and want to know what all those other dials off Auto really do in a fun atmosphere this is the trip for you. I have attached the itinerary to this email also so you can see exactly where we are going. The trip commences on 26 October and concludes on 2 November.

Greening of the Outback Tour *22 June - 2 July 2019*

I spoke earlier about how the outback is now greening up after the floods and some rain and this will lead to an amazing

wildflower display. So here is a trip hot off the press, (I just designed it today!) that will take you to the green outback to see it like it has not been seen for years. It is a camping trip but you can bring your off road trailer.



Flooded Eyre Creek

It will start in Dubbo and head north to Hungerford and Quilpie (passing the areas flooded by the Paroo River), then across the Cooper Creek at Windorah where the bridge was under water just weeks ago. Then into Birdsville which has been cut off twice now by the flooded Diamantina River. Whilst here we will visit Big Red and drive out to Eyre Creek which was in flood during May, by now the flooded sand dunes will be in full bloom and the bird life amazing along the water filled channels of the Creek.



Imagine seeing this!

Then we head down the Birdsville Track to Marree where we will include a flight over Lake Eyre which is currently 80% full, the experts say it has not had this much water since 1974! We then follow the Strzelecki Track to Merty Merty and Cameron Corner before making our way to Wanaaring and follow some great station tracks to our beautiful camp on the Darling River at Trilby station. We will bring you back to the hard top at Cobar and all the way back to Dubbo. This will be a great one off trip so don't miss the Greening of the Outback, the full itinerary is attached to this email.

See the Channel 10 news clip below via this link -

<https://tenplay.com.au/news/brisbane/2019/5/6/tourists-flocking-to-birdsville-to-see-nature-s-rejuvenation%C2%A0after-floods?fbclid=IwAR1BLDXyAS9smexYtF3YypOO2zlyTdkBkGJ7-EeeiWMv1c-caz8fgB7lNtA>

Tasmania Cruise March 2020

Well, here is another bucket list item. We all know (don't we?) that Tasmania is not only a great road trip, don't forget I have my 20 day 4wd road trip in November 2019 and I still have spots on the second trip commencing 22 November 2019. But being an island, Tasmania has some of the most pristine, wild and beautiful coastline in the whole country. So I thought why not have a look at it too?



The coast at the Bay of Fires

Coral Expeditions have a luxurious cruise ship which spends the summer cruising around Tassie and I've got 10 cabins reserved for us. Would you like to join Julie and I on this magnificent 7 day cruise out of Hobart to Bruny Island, then down around the bottom of the island, and then back up to Maria Island and the Bay of Fires before bringing you back to Hobart?

I have reserved the cruise starting **2nd March 2020** for Great Divide Tours clients.

The cost is \$6720 per person for a luxurious Promenade Deck Category A room. The price includes the following:-

- 7 nights accommodation on board
- All meals, morning & afternoon teas
- House wine & beer included with lunch & dinner
- Captains welcome and farewell drinks
- 24 hour barrista coffee and soft drinks YAY!
- Excursions aboard the Zodiacs
- Guest Lecturers (not me)
- Transfer to the airport or hotel at the end of the cruise
- My great jokes - ok this is not part of their package.

Have a look at their website for more details on what we will be doing and seeing, it looks fabulous.

<https://www.coralexpeditions.com/au/cruises/tasmania/7-night-hobart-hobart/>

The really good news is if you book this special Great Divide Tours cruise with me, you will be eligible for a special discount on my future trips, contact me for more details.

The bad news is, I have 60 days from now to fill the 10 cabins I have reserved, so get cracking and email me at info@4wd.net.au and let me know if you wish to join Julie and I in March 2020.

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Kimberley Cruise April 2020 , 3 cabins only

That's right we have just 3 cabins remaining on our amazing 14 day Kimberley cruise from Wyndham to Broome on the Odyssey Explorer in April 2020.

How do I describe this trip? I've done a lot of travel in and around Australia over the past 45 years and the cruise along the Kimberley coast is the stand out best trip I have ever done. Words don't do the scenery justice, the boat is beautiful, the food amazing and I can't think of a single thing not to like about this trip. I have 7 of the 10 cabins filled so we have just 3 twin cabins remaining, see here for the details <http://www.greatdividetours.com.au/4wd-tours/extended-safaris/cruise-the-kimberley-coast> Don't miss out on this trip, it is a real bucket list item and worth every red cent of the tour fee.



Great Divide Tours, more than a 4wd tour company, we are your ticket to the best the world has to offer.

Route 66 in 2020

I've had a good response to the possibility of doing route 66 so here is the info on it again, let me know if you are keen to join me next year.

I've found an Australian tour company in USA that facilitates us Aussies driving Route 66. I'm working with them to

organise a Route 66 trip in October 2020, so let me know if you would like to receive more info on this trip. My plan is to add a few days of 4wd fun too and whilst I'm still sorting this out I hope to have firm details in the next couple of months. So if you are keen on a 20 day Route 66 trip plus a 5 day 4wd trip in an off road vehicle please drop me an email and I'll put you on the further info list.

Prostate Cancer Fund Raising Rally

I helped organise the first of these rallies last year. Our target was to raise \$30,000 for research into prostate cancer, it is the number one killer of men in Australia. In the end the trip attracted 37 vehicles and we raised over a whopping \$200,000!!!! Many of the participants were clients of mine and no doubt read about this venture in my infrequent newsletters, so a big thank you to those that participated and those that were able to donate but not actually enter the event.



The Prostate rally is a fun event, you should join us in September

Now I don't expect that we will achieve that kind of figure again, but you never know. So this year I am leading the second of these outback adventure drives to continue raising money for cancer research for prostate cancer sufferers. This year we will start in Lightning Ridge and follow the Darling River to Broken Hill, spend some time exploring Eldee Station

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and then continue down the Darling to the Murray. We have included a paddle steamer dinner cruise, we will explore Mungo National Park and finish the drive in Tocumwal.

If you would like to join me on this fund raising event which includes all your accommodation and meals (dinner breakfast and lunch) and raise money for Prostate Cancer research and have fun doing it then please go here to register <https://charitycarevents.com.au/pcfarally/> or just donate to my goal to raise some money by going here <https://2019outback4wd.everydayhero.com.au/vic-widman-raising-money-for-prostate-cancer-research>

What is coming up back home for a day or two?

Ok, so you can only get a weekend off at the moment, here is my vacancy list for the next few weeks:-

25-26 May we have our version of a Mountains to Sea tour, its a 4wd trip to **Barrington Tops** on day 1 followed by day 2 driving the beaches of **Myall Lakes**. But I hear you say, Vic its almost Winter and who in their right mind would go camping on Barrington Tops, I agree totally which is why this trip includes dinner, bed and breakfast in a great motel in Gloucester. So if you are looking for a nice weekend away with the love of your life, shout her/him to a romantic weekend with Great Divide Tours, this would make a great Mother's Day present, wouldn't it???

BUT! If you like camping in the dead of Winter, lets face it, a roaring camp fire is hard to beat on a Winter's night, then check out our 3 day long weekend trip from **8-10 June**. We guide you deep into the beautiful **Bendethera Valley** where

we make camp for 2 nights. Where is this? Just south of Braidwood inland from Moruya, possibly the best camp site in NSW. Some great 4wd driving too.



Crossing the Deua River on our long weekend trip

Looking for a challenging day trip in your 4WD, then try our **Turon River** 4wd tag-along **on 2 June** – a great day trip out of Sydney in the Blue Mountains just north of Lithgow, some nice river crossings and some good low range tracks – I've got 4 spots on this one.

Are you looking for some extra driver training? I have an **Advanced 4WD course** at Braidwood on **22-23 June**. If you want hands on experience at winching, tyre repairs and welding, and driving down and maybe up Cooper Climb, this fun filled learning weekend might be just what you are looking for. Just \$650 for two drivers fully catered and staying at my beautiful 4wd training centre.

Maybe you have just purchased an off road camper trailer? Then join me on **2-3 June** at the training centre on our camper trailer off road course, learn how easy it is to reverse park a trailer. Gosh, if I can do it so can you! Even better, buy my Ultimate camper trailer and I'll throw in a camper trailer course free of charge – what a bargain!

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An Ultimate for sale

If you are looking for a great off road trailer they don't come much better than this one. I purchased it off one my customers last year and now have it up for sale. For just \$47,500 this 2014 Xplor Ultimate could be yours. The other good news is that Ultimate Campers based in Moruya on the south coast of NSW which had gone into receivership has been purchased by another camper trailer business and they have re-opened the Moruya assembly plant and continue to market the Ultimate Campers, which is fantastic news for a great Australian made product. Give me a call on 02 99131395 if you would like to have a look at my Ultimate.



Its for sale and its like brand new



Call me if you are after an Ultimate

See Midnight Oil in the desert!

If you are a Midnight Oil fan (Diesel and Dust) then you must be salivating at the thought of them performing in front of Big Red at the Bash in mid July. Did you know that I have a fabulous 4wd tour going out to the Big Red Bash commencing on 12 July? I do have 3 spots remaining on this fantastic 4wd trip which not only includes your tickets to the Bash and Midnight Oil pumping the diesel and dust in the Desert, but it incorporates a fabulous tour of outback NSW, SA and Qld at the same time. It includes a night in the iconic Birdsville hotel, not to be missed, so hurry and drop me an email for the full itinerary.

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I wonder if these guys need Stop Drip Plumbing?

Need a good well set up and cheap 4wd for your son or daughter to start their 4wd driving?

If you do, this one would be a good starting point, just look at all the gear its got on it. Owned by customers of mine who have been around for quite a long time and really love their 4wd trips.

1996 Toyota Landcruiser Prado - \$8,900

Located in Sydney, its a petrol V6

277,000 km
Automatic transmission
Black Sunraysia steel wheels with 16x8
Bridgestone D697 265/75x16 tyres
Alloy factory Bull Bar (painted black with Raptor paint)
Safari Snorkel
ARB Rear Air Locker Rock Sliders (painted Raptor paint)
Factory Tow Bar
Narva Spot Lights
Tinted windows
Bonnet Protector
Dual fuel tanks (Main 90L, Sub 69L)

Interior

cargo barrier
GME CB UHF radio
After market front Touring Seats
ARB air compressor
Kenwood stereo with Bluetooth Reverse Camera
Cruise Control
Air Conditioning

Under The Bonnet

Dual Battery with Redarc isolator
K&N Air Filter
Automatic Transmission Cooler

Underneath

Extended Diff Breathers F & R

2 inch heavy duty raised King Springs and Bilstein Shocks
2.5 inch Sports Exhaust
Rear PolyAir Air Bags



For all inquiries please call George on 0401262481

Finally

Julie and I are off to Iceland in June for our 14 day Arctic Truck 4wd tagalong and then Jenny and Wayne are doing the same trip in July, wish us well and watch my facebook site for updates on this amazing trip. Stay safe everyone.

Vic

The following are a few photos from our epic New Zealand tour in April



We even did an amazing helicopter flight when in New Zealand

Photos from New Zealand



Not a bad spot for a picnic lunch



Time to reflect on a great trip in NZ



Tight track beside a blue lake



Our hire 4wdrives are modern and have heated seats!



Lake Haweka in NZ



The food is fabulous!

Next New Zealand trip is 28 March to 8 April 2020