

2016 03 8- The Grand Tour Story

8 to 23 March 2016

Tue 8 Mar 16: We have set ourselves up in Chris's very nice brand new unit in Longreach which is just behind the main street and an easy walk to the hospital. In fact his digs came as a bit of a surprise as when we heard he was moving to Longreach we Googled the address and it showed a very old group of houses which all looked somewhat depressing – obviously it was a very old street capture. The van is even parked across from his unit in the middle of the road in a designated caravan parking strip – ya gotta love thinking councils!



This is the brand new block of units where Chris lives



The vans spot, in its very own caravan designated parking spot

We spent the day shopping for the forthcoming 14 days in the Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) Edgbaston Reserve and getting in contact with the Reserve Manager for any last minute advice. It would appear that we may have a tick problem out there! We dined uninterrupted with Chris even though he was on call though this can be a pain (no pun intended) and in fact he didn't get a call all night. While he bemoans the lack of frantic medicine he is benefitting from the more regular work hours. Chris gave us a neat book on Australia Bush Pubs which contains 45 of our must visit iconic waterholes – so we have taken this task to heart and intend visiting as many as we can! We have already crossed off the Lions Den, the Middleton Hotel, the Bedourie Royal Hotel, the Birdsville Hotel and the Daly Waters Pub so we have another 40 to go – jobs on!

Wed 9 Mar 16: Just another day of relaxing, doing a bit of make and mending and spending time with Chris.



This is one of Chris's neighbours and yes the fence is full of bras!

Thu 10 Mar 16: Today is our last rest day in Longreach which included having to take Gunther to the local vet as we now accept that our "tuff" cattle dog has delicate skin which we have to treat with a form of antihistamine and fish oil tablets. Our visit also finally put to bed a long held desire for Chris to have his own "World of Warcraft" surgical cap. In all fairness Chris did arrange for Katharine to knock one up for him and even gave me a standard surgical cap to give to her as a template but me being me I totally forgot where I put the dam thing which may have caused some friction – it may have also occurred many months ago which only added to the sibling confusion. Anyways, Vicki discovered the original cap a couple of days ago, then blew the whistle on me and knocked it up by hand within 24hrs.



Surgical caps are pale blue and do not contain the World of Warcraft "Hordes" symbol



Dr Darlington looks like a ninja

The weather has been a bit patchy with scattered rain all over the place and some of it quite heavy. Vicki checked the road reports and found that the road to Winton was cut in

a number of places but the roads south were still open. That night Chris took us out to dinner where the antics of the brand new waiter and the lass that was supposed to keep an eye on him kept us entertained. Thankfully the main meals were pretty good and we got most of our drinks for free.

Fri 11 Mar 16: We did a quick pack up and found the new Longreach dump point with its flash van parking area to top up the water tanks. This new facility is at the top of the main street and thus within easy walking distance of the shops – I’m telling you these folk have got their customer focus just about right. We then headed out of town, past all the stranded road trains trying to get to Winton, got to Ilfracombe and (crossing our fingers) turned NE to Aramac over 92km’s of reasonably good dry, dirt road. At least all the major flood ways were sealed and it saved us 53km’s! The only shock we got was when we filled up at the only servo in Aramac and paid \$1.34 a litre.



The famous White Bull that was Henry Redford’s (aka Captain Starlight’s) undoing. Back in 1870 he and four mates nicked some 600 head of cattle and drove them to SA to be sold. Unfortunately the very distinctive white bull was spotted and he himself was nicked in 1873 but the jury found him not guilty because of his exceptional droving skills and he got off!

With everything squared away for the last leg we rang the Reserve Manager, David Coulton aka “Cujo” who invited us around to his place for a cuppa and a chance for him to see what he was getting himself in for. Thankfully all was good and we headed 28km SW up a sealed road. On the way we passed two outstanding wire and metal sculptures constructed by a local artist.



This was made in support of a local charity bike ride. We just love the cheeky goanna in the middle



This one was at the entrance to a property and apparently the locals swear she got the owners profile dead right!

Then it was a short 8km run over old floodplains to the Edgbaston homestead. “Cujo” gave us a quick tour around the buildings which all have water and electricity and left it up to us to pick where we wanted to set up the van. We chose the old shearing shed only because it offered the biggest amount of shade. “Cujo” had warned us about the tick infestation and true to his word the buggers were soon climbing up our legs. At least they were reasonably large, were not the nasty paralysis type and you could break them in half with your thumb nail! We had come armed with a can of Malawash which we hoped would do the trick in keeping them off Gunther and us. Once we had set up the van “Cujo” took us all (including Gunther) on a short drive to show us part of the property and the all important fish holding springs. The first thing we saw though where hundreds of very healthy Grey Kangaroos just everywhere! Cujo, who is also a roo shooter or for those more enlightened, a macropod harvester, told us that the area holds good numbers of Greys, Wallaroos and the occasional Reds. The roos in this region are prime eating roos as they do not have the problematic parasite infestations that other regions have. Bush Heritage purchased the property back in 2008 when it was discovered in 1990 that within some of its 50 natural artesian springs there lived the only population of a tiny fish called the Red-finned blue-eye (*Scaturiginichthys vermeilipinnis*).



A male Red-finned blue-eye, a big one is only 3cm long. The fish is listed as endangered under both Federal and QLD legislation.

The problem being that the wild guppy (aka Mosquito Fish, *Gambusia*) eats the “red-fin” and so the mission is to separate the “red-fin” from the threat by keeping the *Gambusia* out of the remaining three springs. The Bush Heritage folk are trying all manner of methods to save this little fish which include constructing barriers and building new springs and transferring “red-fin” family groups into these. I’m hoping to do my bit by reducing the feral pig problem as they destroy the wetland and barriers.



This is a beautiful little spring bubbling up out of the ground but the crystal clear waters are full of gambesia.



Cujo showing us one of the protected springs. Brace yourselves, this is where the red-finned blue-eyes live and flourish!



This is one of the very successful springs. Cujo is watching a male red-fin trying to keep herd on 4-6 females – all in 2-3cm of water and in the space of a dinner plate!



The tour finished with a quick look at a fossil bed – just look at the size of these shells – and they have to stay here!



The parent of the nautilus! The EGRU card scale is in cm. This one came from a spot some 30km away

After the tour we had another briefing and then he left us on our own. The silence and solitude is just amazing! We did have a visit by a local tree frog but none of the promised howling dingos gave voice. That night I did take a walk down to the homestead bore overflow (dam) and spotted several native frogs and far too many big cane toads – I must do something about them at least!



We did get a visit from this Common green Tree Frog

Sat 12 Mar 16: No dingo's but by heck didn't the wind blow! At 0100h we had to scamper out of bed and resecure the awning when the clips came loose! All I can say is thank god we were on our own as the sight would have sent people into fits of laughter! Today we took the Polaris and went out to investigate the SE quarter of the reserve where a mud map indicted the presence of pigs but first we sprayed Gunther and our selves with the Malawash in the hope it would keep the ticks at bay.



We decided that Vicki would be the designated Polaris driver so I could take photos and shoot things

Vicki took us eastward in search of Lake Mueller which has dried up significantly and is now just a series of shallow pools under thick Tea trees and other shrubs. Vicki did spot five little ducklings in one pool but they raced away before I could get a clear picture of them but we did hear a parent calling to them from within the dense timber. I later surprised a Pacific Black Duck so I would assume they were one and the same. We came across another pool which Gunther immediately stood in and sank into the mud. This one held some unidentified fish and right beside the bank, a struggling frog. When I bent down to see what the problem was I felt a freshwater crab hanging onto it but I was too slow to grab either one of them – maybe it was in fear of falling in the goeey muck! Despite a good look there was no sign of pig activity around the water which is a good thing for BHA but a little depressing for me. Cujo also said that there were little to no reptiles in the reserve so we plan on looking hard to confirm or deny this disturbing point.



This recently deceased crab was about 8cm across the shell

The northern boundary of the reserve comprises a very steep early cretaceous range so in need of a vantage point Vicki then took us as close as possible then we all hiked up to the top. The view was great and we could see the eastern swamp areas, the central flat and dry areas and the western treed and pasture areas.



On the edge of the escarpment looking ESE



Vicki heading back down and looking S with the homestead on the horizon in the middle

By now the time had got away from us and it was 1500h so we headed back to the shearing shed for lunch. After which I took the camera for a wander around the station bore overflow which has developed into a bit of a swamp/dam. The long term plan is to repair the bore so it doesn't loose water. I was hard pressed to find critters with only an occasional crow passing by. There were large blue and red dragonflies and of course the constant flow of Grey Kangaroos.



While the Greys are carrying good weight the sight of huge ticks on some was unpleasant but it doesn't seem to worry them too much.

After dinner we decided to put the vans air conditioner on so we closed up the van and put Gunther inside to enjoy the cool as we headed off to the bore overflow to start our battle with the cane toads. No sooner had we arrived when Vicki 's torch picked up the first big toad (around 12cm) just sitting on the edge. By the time we had walk a mere 30m I had picked eight of the big buggers up with hardly a struggle. We collected them all (including a little 6cm one) in a plastic bag (makes the tally 8.5 toads) which we put in the BHA freezer for a little sleep before going into the tip in the morning. On the plus side we did see a very common Green-striped Frog.

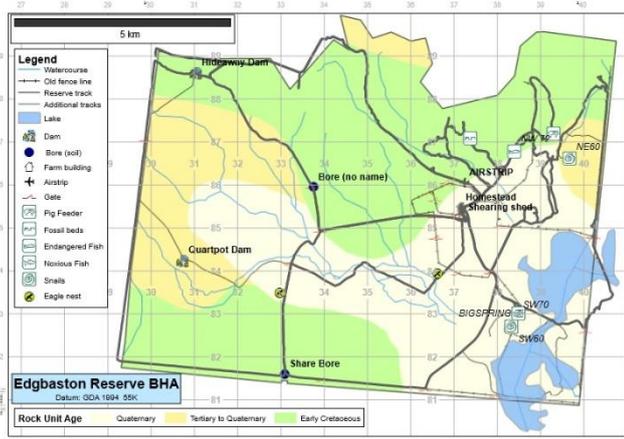


A Green-striped or Burrowing Frog (*Litoria alboguttata*)



All the cane toads were around the same 12cm size and "calling" which may have been why they were so easy to pick up – sucks to be them!

Sun 13 Jul 16: We started the day having had a much better sleep and just to prove that the Malawash treatment worked when I climbed down from the van I was mobbed by ticks as they came out of the ground. A quick spray and they disappeared – it works! Today Vicki is taking us into the NW quarter to have a look around so we loaded up the Polaris, sprayed everything with our tick repellent and headed off – all around 0900h. We really should get going earlier.



Edgbaston Reserve is approx 11km W to E and 8km N to S with all the water draining into Lake Mueller

We mounted up and Vicki took us directly west to the middle of the reserve (and the pasture patch) then north past the No Name bore to the jewel being Hideaway Dam.



The northern half of the dam. It was clean, reasonably clear and held some good sized Spangled Perch – next time we will go for a swim too!

The bird life around the dam contained White-necked Heron, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Little Woodswallows (a new first), the usual Galah's and a nest of Magpie-larks chicks.



The Magpie-lark chicks were a tad hot

I was also able to take a series of pictures of a juvenile Rainbow Bee-eater demonstrating its natural regurgitation behaviour. I had seen this behaviour before but thought the bird had just dropped something it was eating but I was able to capture the whole cycle as the bird regurgitated what appeared to be encased insect bits – much like an owl getting rid of the bones and fur.



Chocks away! This is the third of a five shot series. You can tell the bird is a juvenile as it lacks the adults' two long tail feathers.

We continued north up onto the top of the escarpment and then headed east stopping occasionally to grab a look from the natural lookouts. While we were at one such point I thought I saw a Wedge-tailed Eagle high in a thermal so I snapped off some quick shots. By now it was well into midday so we knocked things on the head and headed for the shearing shed, past the old vehicle dump and to lunch.



The old cruiser bought back fond memories. The Bedford truck still had its major engine parts

Back at the shearing shed I downloaded the pictures and got the shock of my life, what I thought was a Wedge-tail turned out to be a Little Eagle.



Not a bad shot considering the slant range

We had a short visit by Cujo who just wanted to know that we were OK and once he saw our layout and heard about our adventures he was more than happy to leave us for longer periods. He later told us that we were the first ever visitors to the Reserve since it was opened. Gunther got to meet one of his big roo dogs which all went well for both dogs. We do have the luxury of a land line phone in the house for any emergency. Cujo even gave us some advice on where to look for feral cats. After dinner we headed back over to the homestead bore overflow and captured nine large cane toads for the freezer. Hopefully with the demise in cane toad numbers more native frogs will come out. We then climbed into the Polaris (less Gunther) and headed west across the middle track towards the shared bore and got very excited when our lights picked up a set of white eyes at ground level at the intersection. I couldn't make out if it was a cat so couldn't make the shot and watched it slink off and despite a close search it was a lost cause. We then headed south to the shared bore which must have been full of hidden frogs as the noise was deafening. We turned east and followed the brand new eight foot boundary fence which had been put in to keep the roos and wild dogs out of the sheep paddocks. We did manage to come across a small mouse of some description but it shot down a large crack before we could get a good look at it. We then arrived at the main gate and so turned north back to the shearing shed and bed.

Mon 14 Mar 16: Today we start to earn our pay. Cujo is very keen to have a usable map and when Vicki showed him what she had been pulling together just to help our own

navigation he was rapt so we will be driving and recording all the main tracks and features as a priority. During our travels we came across the odd tree that had fallen across the track so we added track clearance to the day's task list. Before we headed off Vicki spotted one of the homestead water pipes spraying precious water from a split so we did a quick and wet repair job – it's going to be a day for jobs! We headed SW following the homesteads power line during which we came across mobs of Red Kangaroos and four emus and then the much talked about Wedge-tailed Eagles double nest. Cujo told us that one year the nest fell out of the tree when a branch gave way, along with an eaglet which stayed around for some time and possibly survived. The following year the eagles rebuilt the nest and so it's called the "double nest". It makes you wonder why the eagles didn't move trees, the actual tree isn't that big, maybe 4 to 5 meters to the nest, the tree is completely dead and there are taller healthier trees nearby.



The "double eagles nest" – maybe it was a case of "Happy wife, happy life"

We eventually left the power line track and headed west where we came across a flock (10 to 15) of Brolgas but try as I might I couldn't get close enough for a decent picture. Thankfully a mob of Cockatiels landed in the tree above me so I was able to get some good pictures.



Obviously the good looking bloke on the right is the male. Mind you the female looks pretty good too!

We came to an intersection and headed south and soon found a second Wedge-tailed Eagle nest, this time in a much better tree. Given we have seen four Wedge-tailed Eagles flying together, the second nest makes sense even though this one is only 3km away from the other one.



The other eagle's nest. Note the countryside which shows the signs of clearing for sheep farming

We continued south to the "Shared Bore" which is right on the southern boundary fence line. Vicki was chuffed that she has finally seen a working station windmill. Cujo had warned us that the dam and run-off was extremely treacherous due to the black soil mud that has killed stock and critters alike – he wasn't kidding! Bloody Gunther was so hot he made straight for the water but thankfully got himself stuck right on the edge so was able to get a drink and then extract himself – thank heavens the Polaris is a ute!



The "Shared Bore" windmill



This is the main bore dam with its sticky edges. Note the dead tree on the far side and the right hand trunk



A pair of Magpie-larks (aka Pee Wee) had built their nest on that right hand trunk which was well over the water – and safe as houses for the two fledglings!

By now the heat was really building up so we drove north up the western boundary to the Hideaway Dam for a swim. When we got there, there was no mucking about as Vicki and Gunther just walked straight into the water, boots and all! The bank and bottom was a bit stony so you didn't sink into the mud and we couldn't touch bottom about 3m from shore – and the water was cold and clean!



I threw three sticks for Gunther – and they all sank! – bloody hardwood. Then I went in and it was fantastic! That's Vicki's head bobbing out there.

Having all had a good swim Vicki then drove us up the escarpment and along the northern boundary where we had to clear dead trees of the track. Thankfully BHA had a fully kitted up chainsaw here with all the OHS stuff to attack the hardwood. We had noted three trees across the road

on an earlier trip and Cujo wanted them gone so we did just that!



The first tree. Thankfully the lack of reptiles made it dead easy.



Job done

When we came off the escarpment we found ourselves in amongst a goodly number of Red Kangaroo mobs which was pretty neat. When those big buggers want to get going they can certainly outrun the Grey Kangaroos!



Even the Red Kangaroos were feeling the heat. Note how they lick their arms to cool down through evaporation.

Tue 15 Mar 16: I started drawing up a map of the homestead so I could at least give each room a number to make renovation notes against – there are 12 bloody rooms under that roof not including the toilet, shower or kitchen! Vicki then drove us westward to map the track to Quartpot Dam.



The clouds made it more interesting than it was

We then continued west to the western boundary then followed the southern boundary fence to the SW corner. On the way we spotted a pair of brilliant but fast moving Mulga Parrots. We turned east to Shared Bore where I wasted a huge amount of time unsuccessfully stalking a small blue tailed wren which wouldn't come out of the thick scrub! Vicki on the other hand had enough mobile reception to check her Facebook and made some comment about the grandkids egging the house when she had a call from Alex! We then found the track that follows the power lines back to the homestead.



Gunther was not handling the heat in the exposed back tray all that well and would take any chance to get under the shade

When we got back we ran into Cuja who told us he had just seen a yellow dingo bitch pull down a Wallaroo just south of the shearing shed. He observed that the dog was pretty lean and probably from last years litters. We also heard that we could expect a visit by Rob Wagner, the Edgbaston Freshwater Ecologist who specialises in the Red-finned Blue-eye Fish (RFBE). That afternoon we investigated one of the springs called SW60 and checked out one of Cujo's pig traps.



The head of the spring is to the left and the tail heads towards the lake

That night we returned to the homestead bore overflow and spotted four native Green-striped Frogs and consigned 11 more cane toads to the freezer. Still no bloody cats!

Wed 16 Mar 16: First task this morning was the further modification of the Polaris by the construction of a shade cover over the back from pieces of plastic water pipe cut offs and a bit of shade cloth – what did we ever do before zippy ties!.



The extended back shade cloth really keeps the Polaris crew cooler

We headed towards the front gate to start the mapping of a track through the centre of the Reserve when we ran into Cujo and Rob Wagner who were searching for a new spring with a population of RFBE that Cujo stumbled upon while fencing. We did all the introduction stuff and they told us about the four Wedge-tails that were on the nearby Wallaroo carcass. We headed off eventually ending up at Hideaway Dam where Vicki found some sticks that actually floated so Gunther had a ball.



This is the Wallaroo that Gunther flushed out of a gully while we were searching for a way down the escarpment.

We then drove up the escarpment and mapped the N and NE boundaries which had not been driven on for many years. Vicki really had a job on her hands finding a safe route through all manner of nasty obstacles. One highlight was spotting a yellow dingo as it raced away at a distance.



The dingo making a hasty retreat. Cujo classes big wild dogs as “being big enough to pull you out of your swag”

We followed the fence line boundary mapping it as Cujo was going to get a dozer in to clear a fire break. We noted the location of three big dead trees which we will have to go back and chainsaw apart and clear.



Finally, a Nankeen Kestrel that just sat still for me

We finally came to the end of the fence line when it dropped off a cliff. By now we had enough of the bush bashing and looked for a route down the escarpment to avoid retracing our path but after four failed attempts we gave up and turned around. Just as we started the long, hot dusty haul a wooden spike went into the front left tyre of the Polaris! Vicki jumped out and held the spike in place to reduce the loss of air while I pulled out the tyre repair kit and then slammed two plugs into the hole. A little bit further on we heard a strange noise from the back of the Polaris and found that the left hand transmission gear had come out of the gear housing when a tree branch had lifted out of the ground at just the wrong moment and connected with the drive shaft – bugga! I couldn't get it back into place so after a bit of experimenting we continued slowly on our way in 4WD. We had been trying to call Cujo on the UHF but all we got in response was static so we sent regular SITREP's as we pushed on. We made it back to the western escarpment track and ran into Cujo and Rob who had been

listening to us the whole time so they knew where we were. A quick repair saw us back on the track with Cujo and Rob whipping off to check on another spring location while we headed back at the Shearing sheds.



Gunther refused to leave his shade even while the work was going on

When Cujo and Rob arrived they told us about three black dingo's that were currently chewing on the Wallaroo carcass and weren't unduly fazed by the 4WD going past. Cujo also dropped off some finer meshed wire netting so that we can make our cane toad proof fence around Bubble Spring before heading back to Aramac. After dinner all three of us returned to the homestead bore overflow and spotted 5 Green-striped Frogs and consigned a whopping 45 cane toads to the freezer!



Sunsets out here are pretty good too.

Thu 17 Mar 16: Today was more of a mapping/writing day with Vicki developing the Edgbaston Track Map and doing more revision on her thesis. I have undertaken an Edgbaston Reserve Bird List and an Edgbaston Reserve Volunteer Information paper (a task set by Leanne Hales, the Regional Community Engagement Officer for QLD and Regional NSW) so the morning was spent with both of us at our laptops.



The local Grey Kangaroos don't do that much damage to the springs of the barrier fencing but checking on the barriers is a good volunteer job

After lunch Rob took me out to place more markers in a different set of springs. It was a real pleasure to be out with him as he is quite happy to impart his knowledge and his experiences on.



We came out of a small creek bed and this old Wallaroo just stayed in place and let us go by.

That afternoon I went on the dry as Cujo took me out spotlighting. The plan was to try for some feral cats or rabbits so I packed my .17HMR, and as the night bird and critter life promised to be interesting I took along my camera with the 75-300mm lens. No sooner had we started towards the main gate when we came across two wild dogs (being they had far too much German Sheppard like characteristics) so Cujo dropped one and in the blink of an eye had taken the scalp off for the piddling \$30 bounty. We drove around the main tracks and visited the dams and bores and had a ball taking pictures of all manner of birds. On the downside we must have chased a dozen Nightjars but never got within a chance of a picture. We didn't see any cats but we did spot two fat but fast moving rabbits.



I considered this the find of the night, an Australian Owlet-nightjar. Cujo was just brilliant in spotting critters



We spotted two Frogmouths. This one is a Tawny Frogmouth and the other was the much larger Papuan Frogmouth

Fri 18 Mar 16: Rob needed to place tall plastic pipe markers on all the known springs as the previous wooden markers were being trampled by the odd clumsy kangaroo but first we had to do a bit of water level adjusting at Bubbles. We discussed the number of cane toads that we had pulled out and offered to build the cane toad barrier but Rod believes that the cane toads will be able to jump over the proposed 30cm wire flyscreen barrier.



This is the very unglamorous Bubbles Project (before we added to it). BHA built a spring to try and save some RFBE from the encroaching gambesia, Bore water keeps the water level correct, a bund around it stops flood water creeping in and the steel fence keeps out kangaroos while the chicken wire is suppose to keep something else out.

We then headed off to place markers on the eastern springs and to check on their health. Some had grown a tad while some had shrunk and one had even disappeared. It does drive home to you how fragile the Red-finned Blue-eye environment is. While I was checking out a nearby dry creek bed I flushed out a huge goanna in the hip high grass by standing on it. The big fella was a good 1.5m long and lightening quick so I didn't get a chance to take a picture. I did snap some Budgerigars though.



It's really hard to get a picture of a fast moving 4cm fish. This was a bigger battle as three male RFBE's tried to herd out a bunch of uncooperative females



You may be able to make out the red-finned male (LHS) trying to keep herd on his blue headed yellow bodied females



This is an Edgbaston Goby, they only grow to about 5-7cm

Later in the afternoon Rob took Vicki and I out to mark out the springs we missed that morning and to find one of the highest springs in the Reserve. On the way out I spotted four Emu's and wanted another shot at them so Rob stopped the Polaris and told me to wait a bit. Rob then waved at the Emu's, got down on the ground and rolled around waving his arms and legs in the air – sure enough the Emu's became curious and one in particular came within 30m before we ran out of time! Rob tells me that he has had them within 3m which even he said was a tad close for comfort.



What is that Freshwater Ecologist doing on the ground?

We then headed out to the springs and stuck markers in them. One spring was deep enough for Rob to put his camera into to film Red-finned Blue-eye mating behaviour which had us coming up with all manner of smutty titles.



While Rob and Vicki were watching fish porn I got some great pictures of a Nankeen Kestrel, this time the brown morph colouration

We then headed off in search of this higher spring. Cujo and Rob had spotted it years ago but the prickly acacia had surrounded it with an impenetrable barrier of spines. Last year Cujo had arrange aerial spraying of the noxious plant and so here we were bashing our way through very dead, dry, spiny thicket and thankfully we did find it. We GPS'ed it so some poor student can come back and see what is living in there. Having fought our way in and out Rob decided to call it "Prickle Spring" – bloody good choice that!



There are not too many places you can stand without being scratched. The recommendation was to put a match to it!



This is the "tail" of Prickle Spring. The all important "head" is off to the left



I found this little spring in the thicket

As Rob was heading home tomorrow we all got together for a happy snap after which Cujo headed back to Aramac and we set about knocking up a camp oven roast chicken dinner to celebrate. Apparently I did a good job on the camp oven before drinking far too much scotch – apparently!



The mob – Gunther, Vicki, Darlo, Cujo and Rob



While Rob and Cujo finalised their matters we watched the sun go down

Sat 19 Mar 16: The day kicked off sending Rob on his two day drive back to Esk. We then headed over to where Cujo had shot the wild dog to set up a game camera over it. Cujo believes that most birds, pigs and other dogs don't feed off a dead dog so we hope to see what happens. Our own dog was misbehaving terribly and would not come out from under the van. I had to crawl under it and grab him! We think the heat and the ruff ride in the back of the Polaris may be getting to him. We then headed NW to a spring called NW110 where we pulled up about 80m of barrier fencing and god knows how many plastic pegs. Sadly gambesia (guppies) had got into the spring and eaten all the Red-finned Blue-eyes and their eggs.



This is part of the now defunct NW110 project. We now have to slosh through the muddy water and pull everything out.

Once we had everything out of the spring and into the Polaris we headed back to the homestead to unload then headed straight to Hideaway Dam for a swim – in our clothes to wash everything off. We were visited by a mob of budgerigars that dropped in for a drink which was a highlight.



Late afternoon the wind picked up even more and we spotted some isolated rain falling in the distance and hoped it would come our way. Finally some drops did hit the tin roof but not enough to make the van fan rain sensor consider closing the flap – bugga! Gunther on the other hand decided to protect Vicki from the strange noise.



Gunther protecting Vicki from the noisy rain



Sadly all the rain went around us but the temperature did improve a bit and the sunset caught the rain showers – all very pretty

Sun 20 Mar 16: We had given ourselves a number of tasks today and the weather was already bloody hot and still before we left the homestead. We headed north on our way up the escarpment to the NE boundary to cut up some big dead trees that were on the fence line which would save BHA some money as the impending dozer driver would merely push the cut up bits to the side rather than charging to have the trees cut up. Vicki is getting much better at steering the Polaris through the scrub and washouts so we got onto the job reasonably quickly. I wheeled the chainsaw while Vicki dragged the smaller bits away from the fence. We left the larger bits for the dozer to roll away. We worked NE until we had cleared four trees and then packed it in as even Gunther was feeling the heat. Next on our plan was to find a special rock pool on top of the escarpment which Cujo happened across but wasn't able to mark its location. We had a ruff map spot from Friday nights huddle around Google Earth so we parked up and started the search. Did I mention it was bloody hot and still no breeze! Vicki carries a 3 litre water back pack and I carry 10 litres of water as I need to keep Gunther hydrated as well and I'm glad we were as we were going through it rapidly. It was so hot that Gunther had given up walking with us and was moving from shade to shade.



A big Wallaroo keeps on eye on Gunther – who was too hot to show much interest

We eventually closed in on the map spot over open country and next minute Gunther just trots off at a good pace in a straight line and was getting close to be 300 odd meters ahead of us. I turned to Vicki and made some comment about maybe Gunther smells water when I saw him dip out of sight. Next minute Gunther comes back over the top of the ridge racing back towards me at high speed with a dingo hot on his heels! Gunther may be a shit when it comes to getting into the Polaris but by crikey when he's in deep trouble he heads straight for the boss! As soon as I

saw the dingo I gave a mighty shout which focused the dingo and it did a smart turn and headed away.



This would have to be the nicest looking dingo we have seen to date

We then headed to where Gunther and the dingo had come from and found the first of two reasonably large rock pools. We had been told that Cujo's love heart rock pool always held water even in the most severe droughts. All this one had were a number of soaks but it would make a great spa during the wet! Just 30m further north up the dry creek bed we found the actual love heart rock pool and it does have the shape of a valentines heart and the water looked deep.



This is the first rock pool we came too. The dingo must have been at one of the soaks. The channel from the love heart pool as at the head.



Vicki standing triumphantly beside Cujo's Love Heart Rock Pool. Its about a meter down to the water and you could jam nine folk in there during the wet! Cujo said it always stayed about 2m deep.

Having found and GPS'ed the spot we then turned and made our way back to the Polaris. Poor Gunther pull up half way back and wouldn't come out from under a shady tree and panted like there was no tomorrow so I ducked under

the branches and poured water on his head and over his body as well as giving him another drink. After awhile he eventually came good and we got everyone back to the Polaris. All in all we trekked around 4km in the heat. Next on the agenda was a much needed swim in Hideaway Dam so we nipped along the northern boundary and down the escarpment and I think the cool breeze picked everyone up. We pulled up at the dam to see a bunch of Grey Kangaroos race of to the left and a dingo bolt up the escarpment in front of us!



The dingo is looking at his dinner disappear over the hill! The dogs back legs are covered in mud but it looks like it has white socks all round.

After taking the dingo's picture I noticed the Polaris was loosing air out of one of it numerous plugs in its front left tyre so I whacked in another patch and pulled out the air compressor to pump it back up. Meanwhile Gunther had raced off and was already having his swim with Vicki not that far behind him! I must remember to buy a range of plug sizes as you really need some boofy ones after you are spiked by hard wood. I certainly enjoyed my swim. Then it was back to the homestead to recover. That evening I took myself off to the homestead bore overflow on another cane toad mission. It was a nosy place with the moon about three quarters full and some real monster 12-15cm toads putting their all into finding a mate. I grabbed six before the huge sods ripped through my plastic bag. Feeling somewhat miffed I drop kicked one into the night then thought better of it and went looking for it only to find it against the outside bath. With a flash of inspiration I chucked all the toads into it and decided to use the opportunity to see if they could jump/climb out the 38cm sides as Rod was adamant that they could jump quite a distance vertically.

Mon 21 Mar 16: We awoke to a slightly cooler start to the day probably due to the low cloud cover. We rode our bikes over to the bore to checked on the toads in the bath and only the very, very big one had escaped which means if we build our anti-toad wall 45cm high then even the big bastards cant get through the chicken wire at the top and into Bubbles.



I'm not kidding when I say they have big cane toads here!

We then nipped back down Gate Road to check the game camera on the dead wild dog and were surprised to see that something had moved the carcass about 20m to a spot behind the camera. When we downloaded the camera to find that this all important seven hours was missing – not one picture between 1500h and 2200h! Not real impressed with the Acorn LTL 5210 camera. Reviewing what pictures we had, we could see that we had some ravens visit the carcass the day after we set it up and then a dog visited the spot where the carcass had been so we don't have any real proof as to what will chew on a dead dog.



Not the best shot but we could see that the carcass had gone

Vicki then drove us north up the Ridge Road (apparently putting names on a map changes mere tracks to roads) up the escarpment and eastward to the far NE corner where we had to cut up the last dead tree – and boy wasn't it a bugger to cut up, solid hardwood most of the way through.



It looked easy enough with nice uncluttered branches



Job done and that was the last tree on our job list

We finally got it cut up and some of the smaller bits pull off to the side and headed back to the NW Boundary Road. On the way we spiked the front left tyre again but this time it was a good sized bit of timber which required three plugs to stop the leak and we did have to pump the tyre back up to pressure. We now had a problem as we only had the one plug left so it was a cautious trip back. The plan was to make for the escarpment drop off where Vicki would try to get contact with family while I snuck around in the hot scrub trying to add to the bird list.



I was lucky enough to spot two pairs of Red-winged Parrots and this male was the best shot I could get

After that we rolled down the hill and pulled up at the Hideaway Dam around midday and spotted the same dark brown dingo scampering up the hill to the NW. Gunther had another swim and we came home with a clean-ish and happier dog.



Yesterday dingo looking miffed. This time his rump was a tad cleaner and I could see its back white socks

Once back at the homestead, the heat and now a hot wind was really making itself felt so we decided to just kick back

for the rest of the day. Once the heat had gone out of the day Vicki and I headed over to Bubbles with rolls of the 15cm wide fine mesh and started to build our barrier. Cujo showed up and decided to extend the fence by adding two more yard segments so we all pitched in and ended up with what we thought was a sturdy anti-cane toad barrier.



The new and improved Bubbles



A very important puddle

After that I headed across to the homestead to do some final measuring up for the report I had been asked to do. While mucking about I kept hearing a strange scraping noise but just put it down to the old building moving in the wind but the closer I got to the front of the house the louder and more frantic the sound became. I finally stopped what I was doing and went looking for the source and much to my surprise I found a Whistling Kite inside a room trying to get out! I bolted for Vicki and a camera and together we caught it then after a couple of pictures we set it free and it didn't appear to be any worse for the experience. What we couldn't work out was why it came inside the house and then ended up quite a distance from the open front door.



It's a shame I only grabbed my pocket camera as the feather pattern was quite striking.



It's hard to smile looking into a sunset with flies on your face and a handful of angry Kite

After dinner Vicki and I set off to clear the new Bubbles enclosure of all cane toads. I went inside and grabbed about 4 small ones but Vicki found a whole bunch on the outside trying to get it and we ended up with about 10 in the bag. The three overlapping layers of the fine wire mesh did the trick!



This big boofy guy is a Grassland Collard Frog

Wed 23 Mar 16: Today we packed up, gave Gunther a serious bath with him standing on a plastic table so he had no chance of getting back into the dirt or the ticks, then said our goodbyes to Cujo and Edgbaston and headed through Aramac onto the dirt road through to Ilfracombe where we stopped for an ice cream. Then it was a short leg into Longreach and Chris. We sent the remainder of the day, showering, washing cloths, catching up on emails and cooking him dinner.