

Sydney to Hebel

Caught the train from the International airport down to Berry. Had two changes but as it would be a bit of a wait for the last train from Kiama to Berry Bob drove to Kiama to pick us up. Sue and Bob had grandchildren there as it was school holidays and I put the tent up in their driveway for the night.

Gina packed her wheeled suit case with non-camping gear and we left it with her cousin in Sydney. Her cousin calls a GPS a ghost because it is a voice without a body. I used the ghost to find the address and it took us on a toll road going in and getting back out to the Pacific Highway. It was \$4.71 each time and I intended to go online that night and pay it – as I had done in Melbourne 4 weeks ago. However it slipped my mind and 3 days later when I checked my bank account I found that the Transport Authority had taken two lots of \$25 out – for late payment. A valuable lesson there.

Gina was pretty tired after 4 mornings of getting up at 5am in Russia, and then the long flight to Australia and wanted to just relax for a couple of days. We booked into a cabin at Lake Macquarie for the first night. Light rain when we got there.

The next night was in a cabin at Telegraph Point near Port Macquarie. This park had a beautiful Aqua park for kids on a small lake. Would be great in summertime.

After Grafton we took a minor road to Casino, and went through Lawrence. Before camping in Casino we drove over to Lismore to catch up with Keith Ellis and his wife Rob who were watching Vic and Q play for 3rd and 4th in the over 75.





Saturday morning I caught up with a few more of the team before they started their warm up and then watched them beat WA for gold, 2-1. Just shows how much better off they were without me letting all those goals in last year in Hobart. I heard it will be in Bunbury next year..

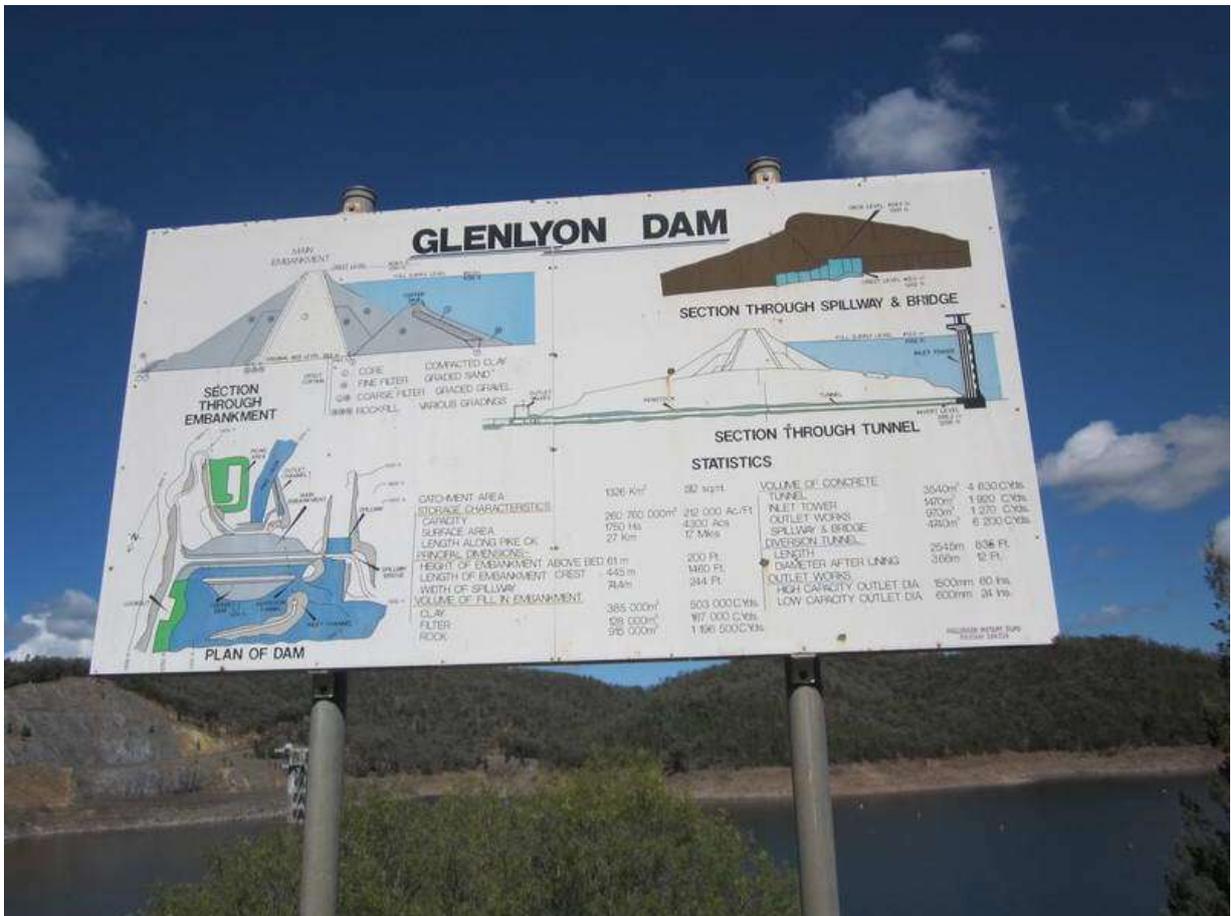


Casino Caravan park



The afternoon it started to rain heavily and thunder so we opted for a motel room. We were both awake early and were on the road by 5am heading towards Tenterfield, and then the final destination of Kwiambale NP.

On the way we toured out to look at Glenlyon Dam where a very enthusiastic caravan park owner pointed out where the big Murray Cod were under big rocks. He said that the makers of the TV series River Monsters are coming here shortly to film the big cod.



Kwiamble NP is a bit of a drive off the main road from Ashmore but a top place to camp – they even provide free firewood. I have stayed here before with Elli. I probably would have stayed 2 or 3 nights here if I'd been on my own but Gina had to be back in Sydney by the 17th and I wanted to show her a bit of Oz. She and 7 of her relatives and friends are going to Coober Pedy. On the way out of Kwiamble NP we looked into the Limestone cave.



Kwiamble NP





That is a Platypus in the centre of the ripples.



Welcome to The Limestone caves

You are in Kwiambal (pronounced Kwi-am-bal) National Park, named after the original Aboriginal people of this area.

This part of the park is important for its limestone caves, their unique wildlife and the history associated with early settlement in the district.

Entering the caves
Please limit your exploration to the first 50 metres of the caves.

Bats sleeping!
PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB

Access beyond 50 metres is restricted

As the bats are easily disturbed, the cave narrows and the floor becomes uneven, and it is easy to get lost. Beyond 50 metres, there are many more bat droppings and disturbing them can expose you to *histoplasmosis*, a lung infection caused by airborne fungus spores.

Caving Guidelines

- help the bats by only exploring the caves between September-October or March-April.
- explore as a team for a lower risk of injury and better first aid.
- explore slowly because you will see more, and damage less.
- explore quietly so that loud noises will not disturb the bats.
- do not shine torches on bats.
- do not rely on mobile phones for light.
- do not smoke in the caves.
- do not mark the caves with directional arrows or graffiti; and
- take nothing from the cave, including rocks and animals.

Microbial processes

Bats & Bugs

A number of small insect-eating bats (microbats) live in these caves and depend on them for survival. These small mammals only weigh between 10 to 20 grams, and the caves provide bats with a stable temperature and moisture.

Bats use caves for four important activities:

1. for daytime darkness and protection from predators.
2. to roost in during the day.
3. to hibernation through the colder months, and
4. to raise their young in underground nurseries.

Eastern bentwing bats are a threatened species and found in this cave. This bat has reddish-brown fur on its back and slightly lighter patches on its belly. They, like many of female bats gather here every year from October to February to give birth and rear their young. These females will fly from 2000m above sea level to roost in the cave, naturally roost each year in their home of choice but fly away to other caves. These bats then usually go on their home range and hibernation by staying in the caves during the night, though they don't hibernate from May to September.

The Eastern cave bat is another threatened bat species in this cave. This species is found in the surrounding forest and woodland, and is believed to be a staging post when females return enroute to maternity sites elsewhere. This bat is known to use rocky overhangs, old brick, abandoned mines and buildings for roosting and raising their young.

Eastern horseshoe bats are another protected species that use these caves to breed, with females gathering in a maternity colony from October to February each year. The young are named on their mothers stomach and named for eight weeks. They are named for their distinctive pink horseshoe-shaped noseleaf, which helps the bat send out sounds. When these sound echoes return to the bats ears, it can "see" objects in the dark, which means they can hunt for flying insects at night. These bats also use the caves to roost and hibernate in suitable temperature and humidity year round.

Best time to visit

To help bats, only enter the caves during September-October or March-April.

In summer, if bat mothers are disturbed in the November-February breeding season, they abandon their babies, which then die - sometimes hundreds at a time.

In winter, each time about bats are woken from winter hibernation, they use up 80% of their energy and will die if disturbed too often. These sleeping little bats are like buildings. They can turn down their thermostat to reduce their energy needs by 90%. If their body gets close to freezing (around two degrees Celsius) - or if you wake them up - this will restart their body furnace, and from previous body fat to warm up. If this happens too often, they use all their body fat and die before winter ends.

Bugs

Small insects are a vital part of the cave ecosystem. They help break down bat droppings and other organic matter, which provides nutrients for the bats. Some insects, like beetles and crickets, are also eaten by the bats.

Microbial Processes & Cycling

cave zones

How cave biology works

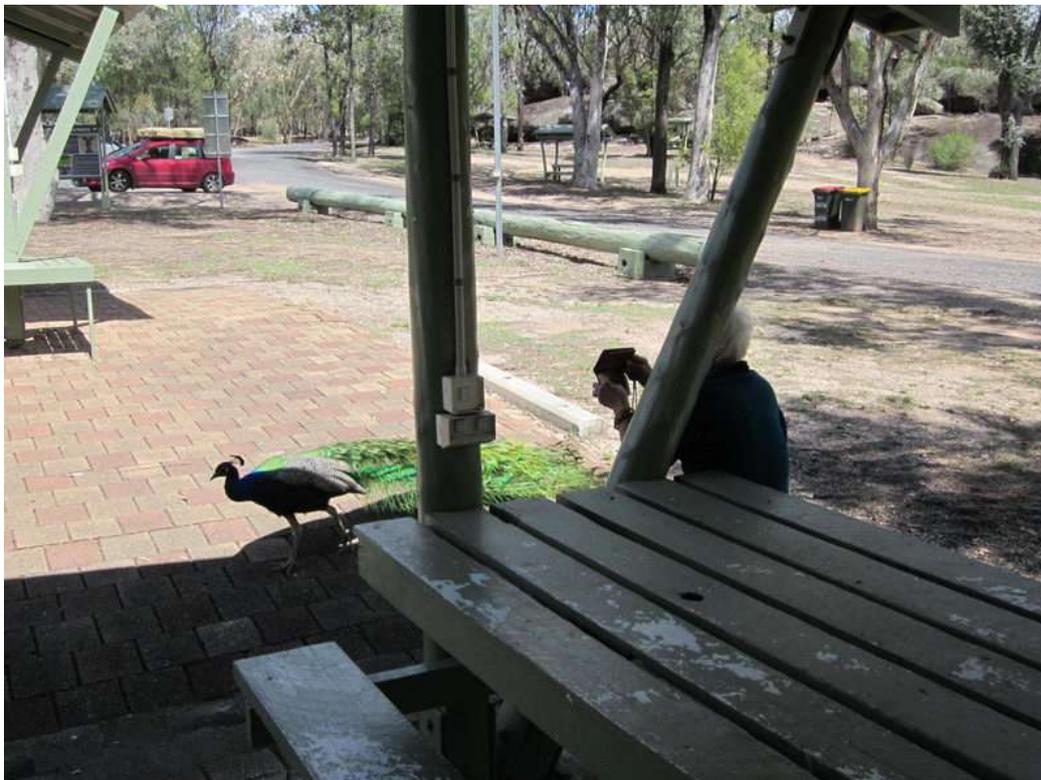


You could wander round on your own.

On the strength of Gina going to Coober Pedy I thought she should visit Lightning Ridge as well, it is the only place in the world where they find black

opal. So after Kwiamble it was a dirt road back to the highway towards Walgett and then north towards Lightning Ridge. Had a quick stop at Cranky Rock.





Stopped 20km short of Lightning Ridge late in the day and pulled off the road and camped.

This was a cunning idea. It is next to a toilet at a rest stop on the highway.



The headlights reflect up to a mirror and then into the clear roof of the toilet.

Spent a good bit of the next day in Lightning Ridge and bought a souvenir or two. Did a bus tour. It was a good introduction to opals for Gina.



Late in the day we continued to Hebel just over the border in Queensland. Camped down next to the river and had a meal in the café/store. Hebel has a hotel and a store, and about 10 houses.



Hebel Hotel



Men's toilet



Ladies toilet

