

Yamba to Sydney

The two days at Yamba it rained and it rained and it rained. It might let up for half an hour and then another downpour would start. We needed my big golf umbrella to walk around town. We managed a walk out on the long break-water between showers, and later drove to Angourie and Wooloweyah, down a dead end road. They are holiday places, one on the ocean and the other on a big lake. There were dolphins in the channel into Yamba. It was a wild day, not your ideal camping weather.

At Angourie there are huge rock pools on the beach where the rock has been mined for the training wall at Yamba. These pools look ideal for kids swimming – although it was raining heavily when we were there there were kids in bathing costumes. It wasn't too cold even though raining.



From our balcony.









On the way down to Grafton I took a ferry across to the other side of the Clarence River just so Gina could experience one.



Then it was over the Great Dividing Range towards Armidale and we were immediately in a different climate – dry. I’ve already mentioned Keith Ellis and the over 75 hockey team, he is the person that rang me last year to play with them in Hobart. He may be over 75 but plays like a 35 year old. He and his wife Rob live at Armidale so we called in for morning tea and then went to a pub at Uralla for lunch.

Lots of birdlife on his feeders, plus his pet sheep.





After lunch we continued south to Tamworth to catch up with another old hockey buddy. Barry played in Hobart for some years before moving to Tamworth where he runs a travel agency. It starts to get a bit difficult to just pull off the road and camp in more civilized places so we booked into an unpowered site at the City Lights caravan park after rejecting Big 4 caravan park – not a friendly place and expensive.

We were told to camp in a powered site if we wanted to so selected one very close to the recreation room and kitchen – great facilities. Very comfortable arm chairs and big TV, and gas heater, and a fully equipped kitchen area with a gas range and microwave and 2 BBQs. Rang Barry and arranged to meet him for lunch at 12 the next day.



We had our own little rotunda.





City Lights Caravan Park was a little out of town so we drove in early the next morning and found a Big W complex to wander around. One of the kiosk type places was a key cutting place – advertising electronic key replacement. I only had one for my car and had been quoted over \$500 for a replacement so was pleased to get a quote of \$165 here. Half an hour later I had it. The bloke did have to go out to the car to download stuff from it and I told him the car would be easy to find.

Then we moved into the centre of town and found another big arcade where there was a “Radio Shack”. These are all over America and the equivalent of Jaycar here in Australia.

On this trip I’ve been using my small tablet and my 4G device as a GPS when I needed one but it is limited to where I have phone coverage. I’ve been meaning to get a proper GPS for a couple of years now. I asked in Radio Shack but they didn’t stock them and suggested JB Hi Fi a few shops away. In there I found a GPS for \$93, a Navman. Seemed like a good price so I bought it – after asking what was wrong with it. It had been a demo.

Then we met Barry for lunch and then we were off south again to Denman where Grunt had recommended a caravan park with individual ensuites. We were told to camp anywhere and given a key for our ensuites. Camped on the grass in front of a small lake/large pond.





BBQ shelter

I do have to mention that the ensuites were about as big (or small) as the ones on the Spirit of Tasmania. Not easy to move in.

There was a power point in the shelter so I set up my computer, and also got the GPS out to play with it – only to find it didn't work. That was a bummer. It was permanently in Demo mode and I spent at least an hour trying to get it out of that, to no avail. I went online and found that dozens of other Navman owners have exactly the same problem and none of the "helpful" answers solved their problem. I tried them all as well. Apparently there should have been an option in the settings to turn the demo on or off but that was not in mine.

I was due to drop Gina off in Sydney tomorrow so thought about my options. I would still have 10 days of camping on my own. I could drop Gina off and then return to Tamworth and then continue my camping from there, or continue down to Berry and do loads of laundry and catch up with Sue and Bob again – and then continue camping again from Tamworth. But seeing we were only less than 2 hours from Tamworth I decided on an early start back to Tamworth, and then back down to Sydney.

This was a long day. We were on the road before 6am and I was sitting outside JB Hi Fi when they opened at 9. Seeing so many other people had had this trouble I was inclined to go for a refund but the girl asked if I wanted that or did I want to keep the GPS. I said I'd keep it if she could make it work. She went off for about ten minutes and came

back saying she had given it a factory reset and it would be OK now. Outside in the car it did work properly so we hit the road for Sydney Town. Coming through Wallabadah there is a First Fleet Park with free camping – and the local pub advertises \$10 meals. Just checked it out for future reference.

Turned off at Muswellbrook to go for “Broke”, a small town on a back road that will take you to Wisemans Ferry and then to Sydney. Broke has a huge area for free camping (with toilets) for up to 3 days. I’d been here before but wanted to see if that was still there. Further down we stopped at a brilliant rest area in St Albans – this rest area has won an award back in 2009. The toilet block and other BBQ shelters and things looked like they were only built a month ago. Very clean nice spot and a good cafe/store nearby where I got a couple of National Pies. What more could a man ask for?

We crossed the Hawkesbury River on the ferry after a few km of dirt road and then hit peak evening traffic through Sydney to Hurstville. The new GPS kept me amused – it told when we were coming to speed cameras, or red-light cameras, or school zones (only when they were active). It told me when I exceeded the speed limit. It told me I had been driving for over 2 hours and did I want it to find a rest area so I could stop. But it got me there about 6pm, and avoided toll roads. Then I set off to Berry and got there about 8pm. The house was empty and Sue and Bob were not due back till late Friday (today is Wednesday) but they had told where the key was. I had intended to camp in their driveway and just use their toilet and washing machine but the biggest electrical storm opened up just as I arrived and the lightning and thunder were instantaneous – no delay between the two. It was actually slightly frightening to be outside in it. And the heavens opened up so I opted for a bed inside. I found that I was quite tired after the 14 hour day.

Thursday I did two loads of washing and also nipped down to Nowra to shop. The GPS was fairly useless here as it doesn’t seem to have the new Berry bypass and was totally confused. I didn’t really need it anyway, and I JB Hi Fi had told me that it came with free updates if I plug it into my computer.

Rested all day and read. I’d brought about a dozen books from home expecting to camp in the one spot for a few days before moving to another one for a few days. At that stage Gina was undecided about coming camping.

I’ll probably leave here Sunday but it is too late to go outback before getting to Melbourne and the Spirit. I’ll be looking for a quiet place next to a river with free camping and unlimited firewood where I can watch the birds and animals, and the fish jumping. And only a 5 minute walk into town. And friendly locals.

Not many places like that – just one that I know of.



This is the Pulsar on the banks of the Lachlan River in 2014.



And the Hilux in the same spot in 2015.



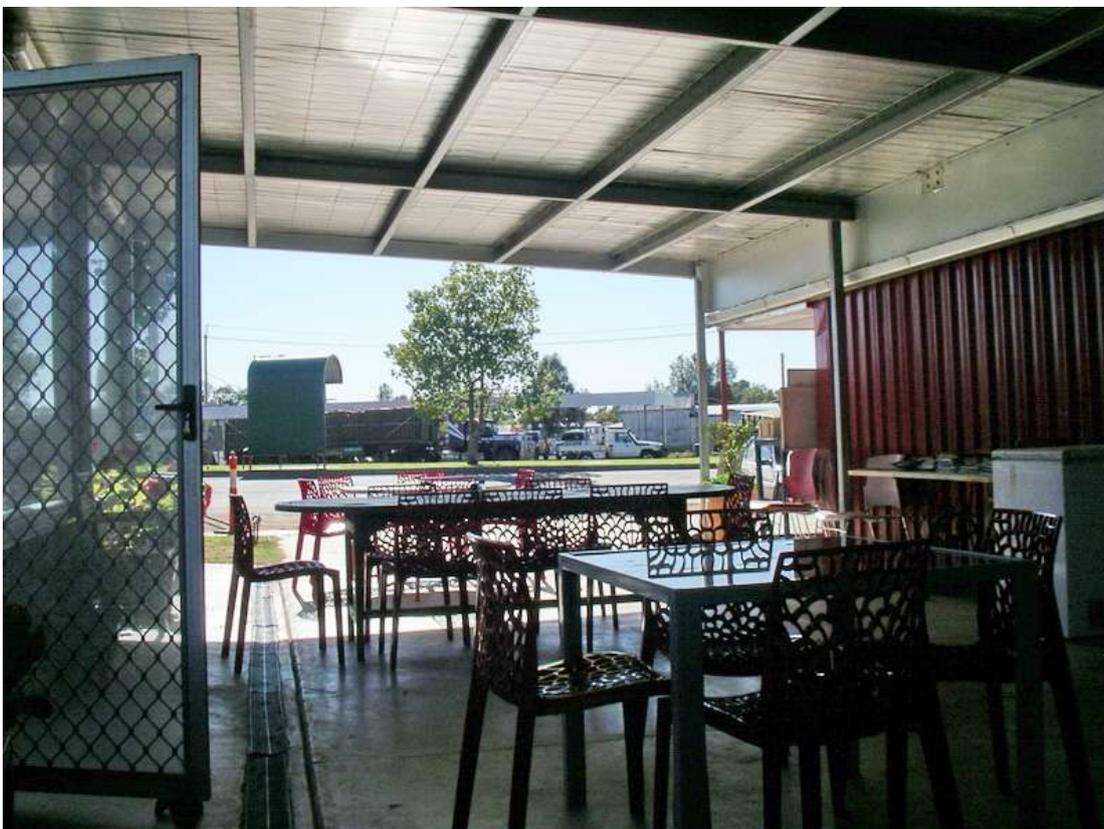
I've got to tell you about this place. It is along a track about 200 metres long and ends in a turning circle – it doesn't go anywhere and doesn't look very used. Heaps of dead wood lying around. It is less than a 10 minute walk into the centre of the town. And you walk past this place on the way.

The Shed on the Lachlan.





It has a washing machine and drier at the front. Just about every workman leaving town stops here for coffee in the morning. Good meals. I had one here while waiting for the laundry. Probably less than 300 metres from where I am camped.



Friendly people?????????

There I was camped in 2015 with enough firewood for the night and probably going to leave the next morning when a vehicle started along the track but turned off into the trees, towing a big trailer. Couldn't see the occupants but a hand waved from the driver's window. I heard a chain-saw going later, and then the vehicle coming out again. I expected it to turn right and drive out but it came my way and pulled up right next to me. Without saying a word the only occupant got out and walked back to the trailer and started throwing long bits of firewood onto my heap. I just sat there and watched.



From this

To this.



When I'd left Hobart a friend had given me this card.



Well, I started to believe in angels – it's enough to drive a man to religion.



Mandy and her partner had an identical Hilux and used to go all over the place as I do. Now they have 2 daughters they have a big caravan. We chatted for a while. The next day she came back in again with her daughters and a friend, for more firewood. Her saw wasn't cutting very well so I got mine out and cut it for her. Then we sat on the back of the trailer while she showed me some photos on an iPad. The eldest daughter (13) piped up and said it was hers – she'd bought it with money from busking.





Mandy and Harriet and Greta came back the evening before I was leaving and they sat around my fire for a while before going off for tea.



Before they left they presented me with this – the young girls had cooked the muffins for me that afternoon.



Loved the box they came in. Harriet is Harriet Kelly. Any Country and Western fans may have heard of her. If not you may in the future. This was her on stage in Tamworth a few years ago at the age of 13.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGONo7SC-SM>

She was a finalist in 2014:

<http://www.ccma.net.au/2014talentquestfinalists.html>

I'm just waiting for her to become a mega-star and then I can boast that I know her, and that she cooked muffins for me.

It's an easy drive from Hillston down to Mildura and Melbourne to get home.