

Keith's VSS: AUSTRALIAN FLINDERS RANGE

We flew into Adelaide, and settled in for a few days. By this time in our trip, Chuck and Winston were anxious to talk to their wives. They brought ipads with them but there was no internet connection where we had been. First morning in Adelaide we wandered from our hotel to the cafe round the corner. The main attraction was that it offered internet. Unfortunately, every seat was taken by breakfast customers, but being desperate, my brother bribed the cafe owner to put a table outside in the cold within range of the internet signal. I thoroughly enjoyed my cooked breakfast; theirs must have been cold by the time they stopped talking to the U.S. Our system was in sight of a telephone mast; they used my smart phone (theirs are useless outside the U.S.) ; in site of the internet they used their ipads.

After inspecting Adelaide, our plan was to drive up north to the Flinders Range for a touch of mountain scenery (and of course geology). My brother had chosen a sheep station, called Morna Mora, for our lodgings.

We set off on the A1 road which would take us most of the way but we were all suffering from lack of sleep and did not have a proper map. By the time we had found the A1 we were quite late starting off, so when we got to Port Augusta we decided to find a motel for the night. Three beds, clean sparse and freezing, but by six we were all asleep.

If we had continued on the A1 we would have visited Woomera, where the British tested rockets, and on even further we could visit Coober Pedy where they all live underground it is so hot and dig "Opals". However, from Port Augusta we took the road to the east, towards Flinders. So very early next morning, after an hour and a half drive, by 8.30 we were in Hawker, a town of 231 inhabitants, the largest settlement within 50 miles. Looking at the map I have attached with this email, you will be able to judge the size of the other settlement, comparing the size of the script used for Hawker with its population of 231.

Our sheep station Merna Mora, was 30 kilometres further north, so after filling up with petrol, and gathering other supplies, we carried on to the station. No supplies on the sheep station.

This sheep station was 140,000 acres, 2,500 sheep and 800 cattle. One gem of information we picked up immediately was that every six months they shear around the eyes and the bum to stop infection, and of course a complete shear once a year.

First morning we were up at 5.00 a.m. and we were on the road by 7.30. By 8.30 we had hit a kangaroo, wrecked the car and wrecked the kangaroo. The rainfall in this area, as in a large part of OZ, is minimal. That means that generally the vegetation is sparse, but with the camber on the road, what rain there is runs to the side of the road, causing the vegetation at the side of the road to grow just that little bit higher, hiding some sneaky kangaroos. One jump from their hiding place and they are in front of the car. Another gem! A kangaroo has no reverse gear.

The radiator was completely wrecked, The road we were on went miles further north and faded into the desert, so we turned around and headed back, leaving what was left of the water in the radiator, back to Hawker, the source of all local assistance!

John, the owner of the garage where 12 hours previously we had filled up with petrol, said "Stick it over there, 'til the insurance company picks it up". He let us use his phone to contact the car hire company and insurance in Adelaide, as there was no telephone mast in Hawker that I could use for my smart phone.

John also told us that Doreen who lives across the road, had a dental appointment in Port Augusta tomorrow, (an hour and one half closer to civilisation), but her vehicle only had space for one passenger. From Port Augusta there is a bus service three times a week to Adelaide. WE needed all three of us to get back to Adelaide of course so we thanked her and thought a little bit more.

We were told that sometimes Chris around the corner, hires out his 4 x 4 (with a bull bar). Perhaps we could have a word with him? O.K. A plan all sorted ??, but he would only take a clean British license, not a license of an American, especially not the one who kills the local kangaroos (my brother).

As it turns out this 4 x 4 was just the vehicle we needed to travel the trails through the wonderfully rugged Flinders Mountains. We visited the warden's station called Wilpena to the southern end of the range, where a number of aborigine fellows manned the desks answering the visitors' questions. One rather shook us when we asked him what Merna Mora, the name of our lodgings, meant. I don't want you to blush so I will not tell what the answer was. Wilpena is sort of a resort area, sitting in the Flinders range, with many camp sites and warden controlled. The Flinders range basically lies north/south and as you go further north the rocks get progressively older. The range is well endowed with fossils and obviously the further north you go the older the fossils.

A couple of years before this Australian trip, we visited Western Canada, and close to Banff we visited a little town called Field. Field is where in the early 1900's they discovered what was thought to be the oldest fossil beds, 508 million years old. However over the last couple of decades the Ozzies have discovered, to the far north of the Flinders range, even older fossils, closer to 620 million years old. The area is now protected, so we were not able to go too far north. I was quite happy with the mountain scenery we could easily travel to in the "new" 4 x 4 pick-up. Samples of the Flinders fossils, called the Ediacaran, can be seen in the museum in Adelaide.

On that trip we saw much unfamiliar flora and fauna. A few wallabies and a dozen or so emus and koalas, but no echidnas nor platypuses (should that be platypi?). Loads of birds, especially parrots and parakeets. We also saw a few hundred Kangaroos, both alive and dead beside the road. It seems that we were not the first visitors to have the sort of accident, that we had had. Of course we were still driving around in Chris's 4 x 4 and he lived in Hawker. We had to get back to civilisation and Adelaide.

John at the garage phoned the bus company and found out that tomorrow a bus passed through Port Augusta at 10.00 a.m. on its way to Adelaide. Then back talking to Chris, he told us that his brother, Steve, lived in Port Augusta. Steve owed Chris a visit. Perhaps we could leave the 4 x 4 with Steve? Steve could later drive it back to Hawker to see his brother. Nothing upsets these 231 souls in Hawker; they will find a way to solve anyone's and everybody's problem. I guess living in an isolated town like that develops a deep "can do" attitude to life.

And so it was!!

We woke at 4.00a.m., drove very gently to Port Augusta, taking about two hours and avoiding the kangaroos, that we finally realised always come out with the sun. By 9.30 we were sitting at the bus station. Two minutes before 10.00 the bus arrived , and with the bus so did Steve.

We quickly shook hands with Steve and handed him the keys of the 4 x 4 and jumped on the bus.

Six hours later we arrived back in Adelaide!
Keith (photos below)









