



Newsletter April 2008

What have we been up to?

Its been a big couple of months for us (Julie and I). The 18 March saw us celebrate 30 years of marriage (to each other too). In this day and age that is some milestone and despite Julie asking what she did to deserve this, we made the most of our anniversary. Now I won't brag or anything, but I thought a quiet cruise on one of the most remote waterways in the world would be a good way to celebrate such a momentous occasion. Julie kept mumbling something about pearls on a Pearl anniversary, I never did understand that symbolism thing.



The life jacket saved me from being drowned by Julie.

Anyway, back to my remote cruise. Julie turned up her nose at the idea of us kayaking up the Cooper Creek, so we flew to the land of the long white cloud, hired a Corolla, yes I was banned from anything to do with 4WD drives and spent 10 days cruising around the South Island of NZ. The remote cruise was actually true. I had seen on one of those travel shows on TV about 12 months ago a story on Doubtful Sound, which is said to be 3 times as big as Milford Sound. So this is where we spent our anniversary.

We boarded a rather large ship called the Fiordland Navigator near Manapouri and spent the afternoon cruising amongst the mountains and the sea. We reached the Tasman Sea at one stage, saw some smelly seals, experienced glorious weather and

even potted around in a small runabout to get up close and personal with some real wilderness areas. Moored overnight in a quiet back water and feasted on the magnificent food provided on the ship. The next morning we cruised some more before heading back to civilisation. A truly memorable anniversary.



The Fiordland Navigator – very beautiful ship

The rest of our short stay in NZ was also fabulous, amazingly we had only one wet day out of 10 and even experienced a day of 29 degrees and were delayed by a bushfire near Queenstown. Anyway, that should keep me in the good books for at least another 30 years, what pearls?

Is the outback flooded?

Well that is a good question. In my last Newsletter I was all excited about the prospect of flood waters coming down the Cooper and crossing the Birdsville Track for the first time in 20 years. To date this has not occurred. My mate, Trevor Wright, from Wright's air at William Creek told me about 3 weeks ago that he was flying up the Channel Country to see how much water was out there, but he has not come back to me as yet, so I assume that the initial bulk of water has not continued to push south. But if any news does come up I'll let you know.

One thing we can be assured of is that the desert country in Queensland and Northern Territory will look pretty good this year, with lots of growth following the good rains

they have had. It is a different story in Sth Australia which has been blistering under extremely dry and hot conditions.

Recent trips

We have had quite a few trips on over the past 2 months. Most notable was our Australia Day long weekend trip to Deua National Park. Alex volunteered to lead this one and was having a great time until mid morning on the last day when a customers Prado broke its rear differential in some steep low range country. This required some special recovery techniques, lots of support from myself back in the office in regard to various phone calls to locate a tow truck and then a long drive home without their car for the customers. It was an interesting exercise, I believe Wayne Desmond would call it character building. It showed to us that even though we were only an hour's drive from a major town, no-one had the ability to recover a 4WD from a 4WD location. It was left up to us to get the car out to a 2WD road where help could then reach them. This prompted me to write in my Overlander Column for April about the lack of support from those motoring organizations and vehicle assist companies that we all belong to. Don't expect too much H*E*L*P when you are in the bush with a busted diff, except from GDT.



We tested the hill climbing ability of Cooper tyres on our new torture track hill climb.

Meanwhile Wayne D was having a pleasant time down in his beloved high country on our Camper Trailer tour. Unfortunately we only had two clients and running a trip with this small number doesn't really cover costs but we decided to go ahead anyway as it is better to deliver than not. The route we have

plotted for our camper trailer friendly High Country trip is a ripper and it certainly shows off the best of this beautiful corner of Australia. We run this trip every February, so watch for it next year.

Wayne & Jenny led our Brindabella Trip with several vehicles participating. This is a trip that we redesigned from our Autumn Leaf Wonderland trip from last year by adding more 4WD component on day 2. Day 1 is an easy drive on quiet gravel roads to some great scenic locations on Long Plain and Coolamon Waterhole. Whilst day 2 takes in the rugged 4WD tracks of the Brindabella Ranges.



This is the WRONG way to cross a river!

Anyone living on the east coast of Australia over the past 2 months will know we have had our fair share of rain, this spelt disaster for our planned Werrikimbe Wilderness Tour which we had to cancel due to the wet tracks. Any trip into a rainforest area on unsealed roads must be completed in dry conditions and when we learnt that the area we were going to travel through had received more than 2 metres of rain in just a few weeks, we knew we wouldn't be seeing it this time.

National Park madness

I don't wish to bore you with some of the issues I have as a tour operator but my recent discussions with National Parks on a trail we wish to use in the Cells River area on the North Coast almost borders on the ridiculous. I may have mentioned this before but the first piece of madness came with my license for the area. I could conduct 4wd tag-alongs provided we had a maximum of 8 cars, and the convoy was split into three

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groups of not more than 3 vehicles in each group with 20 minutes between them. Now you tell me how that will work in a tag-along tour, throw in the various turns and tracks we take and the Nationally Recognised standard for convoy procedure and all of a sudden you have either a totally unworkable system or lost clients. I went to some length to explain in writing what issues this would cause us and their response? “Is Vic some kind of Lawyer” Do you believe these guys?



This may be the last time we get to see some tracks in the Cells River area

Now they have told me that a track I wish to use is off bounds to me. It is a track that is open to the public, but I can't use it. Go figure that one out. My plea as always with NPWS is “why don't we work together instead of against each other” It seems NPWS on the mid north coast simply don't want people in their parks.

Are you toilet trained?

If you intend to visit Stockton beach, I hope so. Now that the land has been handed back to the Worimi people who then handed it over to NPWS to manage, new rules regarding effluent disposal have been introduced. Of course the first people asked to abide by these new rules are the Tour operators and apparently this will flow onto the general public using Stockton Beach so be warned. As of now you are not allowed to pee or poo (pardon my language) whilst on the beach. If you must, then you must take it off the beach with you.

Now whilst this may sound rather gross, my research has shown that there are various effluent disposal systems that might be used.

First up you have the traditional chemical toilet commonly used in Caravans, but these are bulky and can be rather messy. But I also found a company that has a product that ,well basically, you do your bit into a plastic bag that has an amount of powder in it which solidifies the contents and you zip it shut and supposedly you can simply drop the bag in any waste bin.



Things are changing on Stockton. So next time you go to Stockton don't forget your special plastic bag, we won't.

When asked why don't NPWS supply proper toilets at either end of the beach and at Silver City, the response was predictable, we don't have funds for that.

Changes at Castle View

I mentioned in the last Newsletter some of the new tracks and improvements we have made at our training centre, Castle View. We were able to put these into practise during a recent Cooper tyres training weekend. Cooper climb proved insurmountable until some tyre pressure was dropped and then up went some of the vehicles. We have also used this impossible hill during our Advanced courses and it is proving a real hit for those with front and rear diff locks.

The new water crossing at our Driver Training facility is proving to be a real splash



We continue to have rain in Braidwood and the grass is still growing, which is rare for this time of year, normally we are getting frosts that just burn off everything.

For those that have met and /or been trained by my brother-in-law, Dave, you will know that he has not had the best of hips. Well we hope all of that will change shortly as Dave undergoes a hip replacement on 4 April. He will be in hospital for a few days and then allowed home but I doubt he will be running around Castle view for a few weeks. I wishes go to Dave for a successful operation and a speedy recovery.

Whilst Dave is resting, I will have Robert down at the property performing the training and some of Dave's caretaker activities

4WD Shows and Talks

The Rosehill Caravan Camping and 4WD show is currently on at Rosehill, it runs right up to Sunday 6 April, so if you haven't done so already make sure you pop out to this mammoth show. We are out there of course and you will find us on level 2 of the JR Fleming stand opposite TJM. Drop in and say hi. Here is a little tip, if you can visit the show during the week rather than the weekend you might save your self a lot of hassle. Huge crowds were there last weekend and the parking was a bit crazy. Also, to wander through all the stands and have a good look around you will need several hours, so get out there early and wear comfortable shoes.



Alex and Eric last Saturday at our stand at the Rosehill Supershow, you still have time to drop in and say Hi.

I have never seen so many caravans and Motor homes, this is obviously the boom market.



Alex reckons he is networking at our February Driver Training Course

Exciting trips coming up

We are getting closer to our winter outback trips and already we have solid bookings for some. We have just 2 spots left on the Canning Stock Route trip in June, the Simpson Desert Safari tour in July is now fully booked, but if you want to get into the Desert over the school holidays we still have plenty spots on our Red Centre Trip.

Alex is looking forward to his Corner Country Trip also in the July School holidays and we only have 2 spots free on this one.

Wayne D will be exploring the Kimberley again in July/August with nearly a full group, so if you want to see the best that Australia has to offer, give me a call real quick 02 9913 1395.



I can't wait to get onto Goog's Track and re-acquaint with some old friends

My Ocean to the Outback trip in September now has 5 bookings so we can fit in only a few more.

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Tassie Tour Now Available

The big news is that Peter & Ngaire have returned from their 3 month trip around Tassie during which time they plotted the route for our 15 day tour of Tassie at the end of this year. This will be a fabulous trip and if you have ever dreamt of seeing the highlights and the 4WD tracks of Tassie you should consider joining this amazing tour. I now have a detailed itinerary for the trip, you can get a copy by emailing me at info@greatdividetours.com.au or dropping into our stand at the Rosehill show and asking for a copy.



You will see these Falls if you join us on our new Tassie Tour

Your Feedback

As mentioned in the last Newsletter we have begun seeking out your feedback on each of our trips. Thanks to those that have participated thus far. This has shown us that we are strong in some areas but need more work in others which I am addressing as we go. One of the common comments is that the information we supply prior to a day or weekend trip is only Satisfactory rather than being very good or excellent. I am keen to improve this but need your help with some ideas on what it is that expect to receive before the trip commences. If you have any suggestions just drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au

4WD Tip

Anyone who attends our Advanced Course is expected to have a certain level of 4WD knowledge in order to be able to complete the Advanced Course. One of these requirements is the ability to perform a reverse stall recovery on a steep hill in a

manual 4WD. It is amazing to me how many people can correctly describe the reverse stall start procedure but when it comes to performing it, they stuff it.

My advice as always is to stop before you commence a steep ascent and think about the “what If”, what if you have to stop and reverse back down, how will you do this. This usually helps you to refresh in your mind the reverse stall start procedures.

So here they are:-

The 4WD runs out of traction or stalls on a steep ascent.

Hit the brake, do not touch the clutch.

If the vehicle holds, apply the hand brake and take a few deep breaths and think clearly what your next action is (refer below)

If the vehicle does not hold on the foot brake, don't apply the hand brake but push the clutch in as fast as you can and select reverse gear, release the clutch asap.

Now turn the ignition to on to start the 4WD and at the same time release the pressure on the foot brake.

The 4WD should start and begin to descend the hill in reverse under engine braking. You can slow the progress, if needed, by feathering the brake.

Use your side mirrors to see back down the track, never look over your shoulder.

New Website

Well, we promised it would be up and running by now, but it isn't. We have the new website all ready to go and all we need is a little cooperation from our existing website manager which, to date, has not been forthcoming, very frustrating. All he needs to do is answer a couple of emails and away we can go. Don't worry we will keep trying.

Employee Profile

This newsletter employee profile is all about John Ferella. John joined us as a customer several years ago and completed many of our trips in his trusty Prado with his wife Santina. Then one day John asked me if I had any jobs going. Much to his surprise the

timing was right and we took John under our wing and began to train him in the GDT way. John now leads our day and weekend trips and is a regular driver training officer. He also upgraded to a Turbo Diesel 100 Series Landcruiser so he could really look the part. Welcome to John and his happy smiling face.

John's always got a friendly smile



A World Class Standard of Training

I could not let this one pass, I recently received a letter from one of our largest multinational corporate clients who described our Driver Training Courses as operating at a **world class standard**, high praise of which all of us here at GDT are justly proud.



Do you think I am doing the right thing, letting Robert fill Dave's shoes?

That's all for now from the crew at Great Divide Tours:-

Vic, Julie, Wayne D, Wayne V, Wayne B & Jenny, Peter & Ngaire, Alex, John, Eric & Anne, Brian, Dave & Irene, Richard, Greg, Ian B & Skippy.

Some photos from New Zealand.



Milford Sound



Lake Te Anu



The road to Queenstown



It's New Zealand, I had to include a photo of some sheep!