



Newsletter February 2009

What have we been up to?

Well since last Newsletter we've had Christmas, and 4WDOTY and a big rush on bookings in January and then last weekend the terrible bushfires, I hope all my Newsletter readers are safe and your families too. What a shocking disaster, unimaginable conditions on 7 February led to an unimaginable outcome. We have postponed our current High Country Camper Trailer trip which was due to depart on Sunday 15 February, not because the High Country was affected by the fires but because it just didn't seem right for us to be enjoying ourselves so close to so many that have lost everything.



The Suzuki on our test climb at Castle view

4WDOTY

Just after sending out the November 2008 Newsletter I departed on the Overlander Magazine 4WDOTY test program. For those that don't know, I not only write a regular column and travel articles for Overlander but I am one of their esteemed judges on this annual event, yep, they couldn't get anyone else to do the job.

My job is to put together the test route for the week and provide my training centre at Braidwood for a day of head to head testing as well as judge each vehicle against the set criteria. Planning the route is a load of fun

and this year we had a cracker of a drive. Starting in Stockton Beach and heading all the way down to the Victorian High Country not only did I get to visit some great old stamping ground in the mountains but I included a couple of new tracks that I had always wanted to drive.



We had to negotiate all sorts of obstacles when crossing the Murray River

The results are out now and the Pajero won 4WDOTY this year but I have to say by the slimmest of margins. The real surprise to all of us was the Suzuki Vitara Diesel. What a fantastic fun machine! I really wish it had won because it was the vehicle that really surprised. Smallest on the test, cheapest on the test and the only manual on the test. At \$34,000 almost anyone could afford it which you can't say about the Pajero or for that matter the Lexus which tipped the scales at \$157,000!

Camera crew on 4WDOTY



We took all the test cars into some of the steepest tracks I know in the High Country, even one we won't take our customers on because it is so steep, and the Suzuki went everywhere!

The point scores were actually tied between the Pajero and the Suzi until the last judges' scores came in and he had the Pajero in front by 3 points.



The winning Pajero in the river at Talbotville
Bookings Galore

It is no secret that leading up to Christmas 2008, the credit pinch was really starting to be felt. Bookings had dropped off and I admit we were all a little worried. It stayed quiet until 28 December and then the phone started to ring and the email started to receive mail. January went off the scale. We had a fully booked Driver Training, that's two groups in one weekend, the High Country in January was fully booked, and astonishingly even our Australia Day long weekend trip down south was fully booked. I can only thank you for keeping us going.

Vic's Mystery Trip

We ran the first of our Mystery Trips in early February (well in fact on 1 February, you can't get much earlier than that). It was funny, I had people ringing me up and asking "Where does your Mystery Trip go" well it wouldn't be a Mystery if I told you that, now would it.

Anyway, we had a fully booked trip and 8 4WDrives turned up in Nowra on Sunday morning. We had three different trip notes in three different envelopes, and had Cathie Comb, chose the envelope from a hat. See it

really was a Mystery. Alex and I had spent three days in the area putting this trip together and the feedback was tremendous, although, when we got down to flipping coins at intersections, Heads we went right and Tails we went left, I think everyone was starting to lose their faith in us.



On the Mystery Trip Vic wanted to know did he really have to drive up there? Nice legs!

But this was unreservedly restored when I translated some incredible aboriginal art we had stumbled across. Even though Alex pointed out later it was actually the glue from a stolen sign I was interpreting and not a drawing of the Dreamtime Serpent!???



Vic explaining the Dreamtime serpent sign

New Website

I know I keep going on about the new website, but it really is exciting. The thing I like the most is I now have the ability to upload photos immediately into it, so no sooner do you arrive home and you can go to www.4wd.net.au and see the photos from your trip, take a look at the photos from our Mystery Trip and check out the Dreamtime Serpent.

Floods in the Outback

Last year we all waited with anticipation as flood waters flowed down the Cooper. There was talk it would cross the Birdsville Track, something that had not occurred for twenty years, but somewhere out there in the dry Strzelecki Desert the water seeped into the Desert sands and disappeared.

BUT, not this year! There is a **HUGE** flood coming down the Eyre Creek and Diamantina River system. There have been several peaks over the past month and rain keeps topping it up. Birdsville has seen a 6 metre flood surround it on three occasions since Christmas and the Goyder Lagoon is now filling. Take a look at the map and you'll see that both Eyre Creek and the Diamantina flow into Goyder Lagoon and once it fills up it has nowhere to go but straight into Lake Eyre!



If you saw this now it would be wall to wall water.

I'm predicting that Lake Eyre will be full of water by the end of April if not earlier and my mate Trevor Wright from Wright's Air at William Creek says the water is just 75 kilometres away from Lake Eyre and flowing fast, he expects the first trickle to wash across the bare white salt in three weeks.

We will be arranging flights over Lake Eyre and the flooded channels from the Simpson Desert and Birdsville, so if you want 3-4 days of seeing something you may never see again, drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au and I'll put you on the notification list. What we did last time was get you to fly into Olympic Dam

(direct flights everyday from Adelaide) and then we took you from there by light plane over the Lake and the flooded river channels with stopovers in Birdsville and Bedourie.

A wildflower season like none other

With half of Queensland under water at present and most of that between Mt Isa and Birdsville, the prospect for an incredible wildflower display in outback Queensland is very good. I'm currently planning a trip that will return via Diamantina Lakes (under 6 metres of flood water at present) in July which will allow us to see firsthand how nature turns adversity into a riot of green and gold.

Vic's Red Centre Adventure

It's no secret that my Ocean to the Outback trip last year was one of our best 4WD trips ever. Or so my customers keep telling me. In fact, the lucky few who joined me, Eric & Anne have been doing a lot of arm twisting to get us back out there in 2009.



Vic will see this spot on his next trip, where is it?

So what I have done is taken the opportunity to explore some old ground around the Ghan railway and Chambers Pillar, revisit the Finke Gorge and then explore some new ground up the Binns Track and through the Davenport Ranges near Tenant Creek, then on our way home we will divert via the now flooded Diamantina Lakes to see the wildflowers and visit Lark Quarry on the way.

This is not an advertised trip, if you are interested in being party to this outback adventure during July 2009, drop me an email.

4WD Show

We will be at the Illawarra Caravan, Camping and 4WD show from 27 February to 1 March it is held in the grounds of Kembla Grange Racecourse, so make sure you drop in and say Hello to Alex, Wayne D and Richard.

Exciting trips coming up and Hot Specials

We've got plenty happening over the next couple of months and whilst things were really good in January, the recent hot weather and the terrible fires in Victoria have diverted everyone's attention away from booking trips. Now, it's not for me to tell you how to spend the incentive package that our Federal Government has just announced, but if you want to stimulate the economy then do it with Great Divide Tours because we have so many flow ons when we run a trip that it's just not Vic and his family benefitting.

Next weekend 21-22 February we have the South Coast Explorer tour which is one of our best weekend trips. Two days of some of the best 4WD action you can find with a great overnight stop in a cabin on the water at Batemans Bay. I've only got two bookings thus far, and honestly we need more to make this trip happen, so come on join us for this fantastic weekend away. The cost is \$470 per vehicle for two people including your accommodation, and for the first two bookings as a result of this newsletter I'll give you a \$50 discount.



You could be here next Sunday just pick up the phone and dial 9913 1395.

As mentioned, we have postponed our High Country Camper Trailer trip due to the awful disaster that occurred near Melbourne (not in the High Country), this trip is now being run from 8-14 March, so if you would like to join us there is still time, just email me at info@greatdividetours.com.au

On 14-15 March we have another of our popular Advanced 4WD Training courses, if you want to learn more about your ability and how to handle your recovery gear, then come along to this great weekend away at Braidwood.

Don't forget our perennial favorite Stockton Beach trip on 22 March, there is a \$20 discount to the first three bookings!



Stop reflecting on your last great trip come and join us on Stockton beach on 22 March.

On 28-29 March we have our Barrington Tops tour, another fantastic 4WD trip with a great campsite with amenities, we have just 4 spots left so get in early.

I know its bit like seeing Easter Eggs in the shops straight after Christmas, but Easter is just around corner, which means we have our fabulous 4 day trip down to the Snowy Mtns commencing on Good Friday 10 April.

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The GDT Team

Just before Christmas we had our Christmas party at Castle View, our training Centre, and somehow we managed to get everyone dressed up in the Company gear and to stand still long enough for this group shot, a cast of thousands as one person said, but we love our work, and they love their boss, don't you guys?



Like a bunch of school kids it took us nearly 10 mins to get everyone to stand still for this shot!

Vic Writes more for Overlander

Well it has started, my regular Travel articles sponsored by Cooper Tires kicked off in the February issue of Overlander Magazine with a yarn on outback NSW, this will be followed by the Gawler Ranges in March issue and then heaps more over the next 12 months. I hope you enjoy reading about the Australia we all love and seeing my photos of our great country.

Our 2009 Brochure

A few of you have asked when will you receive my 2009 brochure, well I'm not actually producing one this year, the first time in 18 years that we won't have a brochure detailing our trips for the year. The reason? Blame it on the internet, we now find that 99% of our business is done via the internet, so we have put the time and effort into the website where people can look at what we offer, see the pricing and look at the photos from our past trips, there is a one page flyer for 2009 on the site, just go to www.4wd.net.au and click on the menu item titled "2009 Brochure". The times are a changing!

You be the Judge

OK, over Christmas one of our team tried to disguise himself with some facial hair. Young Alex, thinks he looks pretty cool. So what do you think? Should Alex look like the mafia or do you prefer him clean shaven, drop me an email with your comments, the best comment will win a fantastic prize!



Is this ugly or what?

Finally

There is one little corner of Australia that I have not visited as yet, the Sth West corner of WA. But the office job is taking me to Perth shortly for a conference, so I'm taking a few days off and hiring a car to have a look around Pemberton and Margaret River, next time I hope it will be a 4WD adventure.

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

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

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