

Lightning Ridge

Easter Saturday – by Ben Sweetnam

Left Lorne Station at 8am to get into town for the festival. Goat races started at 9am down the main street and the wheelie bin races started soon after that. We all wandered around town for the morning enjoying the different races and the street markets with the town a hive of activity. During the tour of Lightning Ridge, we discovered that Elvis is in fact alive and well and did not look out of place with the other residents of the Ridge.

After a while we moved on to visit the Chambers of the Black Hand – an opal mine where the owner had converted the top level into an art gallery with stone carvings on all the walls of the different chambers – simply amazing. The owner of the mine then took us down to the lower level where he still works the mine (he claims not very well but we assured him none of us were from the ATO).

From here we moved on to the Bottle House (a house completely made of glass bottles) and then onto the Outdoor Baths with ground water coming up from the Artisan Bores underground. We had a great swim with the kids in the little pool and the others opting for the hotter main pool. We spent a long time relaxing in the steam baths and recharging the batteries before tackling the festivities in town again.

Kerri-Anne and Neville headed off to the race course to check out the different races and then went on to the circus rides next door while Alan and us took a time out at the Bowling Club for coffee and cake, but we had to balk at the \$6.50 for a piece of 3 day old cake – Not That Desperate!

We met up again and decided it was time for happy hour back at the camp so off we went, got back and proceeded to get a nice cosy fire going and happy hour commenced. We spent a few hours that night by the fire, eating and drinking while the kids roasted marshmallows – a great end to a nice day.

Monday – by Ben Sweetnam

Up early for the long drive back – still raining from the night before we had opted to stay in a cabin because of the kids and the mud so we had already packed. We met the others at 7am and helped them to finish off before setting out.

After packing up all the wet camping gear, Alan and the Jacobs headed down to the Baths for a shower and we were off. We all headed into Walgett before we said goodbye to the Jacobs who were heading off to Bourke and a week long trek following the Darling down to Menindee. Alan and ourselves continued on back to Sydney followed by the heavy rain that had been with us since Sunday morning.

Our first stop was Coonamble for fuel and coffee – still raining quite heavily. We continued on to Gilgandra where just before town discovered an elderly lady bogged on the other side of the road (apparently she had pulled over to do a u-turn and had been stuck there for some time with no-one stopping). We pulled off and quickly sank in the mud but Alan managed to turn around a line up to help her, while I reluctantly got out in ankle deep mud to engage my manual hubs – dam you Nissan. Alan offered to rescue me next but I assured him I would abandon the car and walk before being snatched out by a Mitsubishi. We helped the lady back onto the road and headed off again towards home.

We continued and stopped for lunch somewhere around Gulgong and then a final fuel stop in Lithgow to reset before tackling the Bells Line of Rd. The weather was still terrible and after 7hrs of driving we were pretty much over everything. Once we crossed the mountains, we came to a huge bank of traffic heading into North Richmond which saw us sit for an hour moving about 300 meters. Despite the crappy finish it was a fantastic trip. Thanks to Alan for leading another great adventure and to the Jacobs for making it fun all the way. We had a great time.