

Lightning ridge



Easter Rodeo

A number of members on the Darling River Run are left Burke on Good Friday and headed up to Lightning Ridge for the Lightning Ridge Easter Rodeo. This involves a huge carnival over the four days of Easter including the rodeo, horse and wheelie bin races and markets.

Friday 22 April – Good Friday

The predawn activity by the Gilbert's who were heading to Port Macquarie and Sweetnam's who were heading to Newnes at around 4.45am was very quiet indeed and as they left the rest of us said goodbye from the warmth of our sleeping bags!

Brian headed home at a more civilised hour and after a relaxed pack up the Kynock's, Coddington's, Fitzsimmons and Groth's left the Artesian Bores at Piliga for Lightning Ridge.

This was John's first go at leading a trip and he was stoked to be leaving the free camp at 8.58am for a scheduled 9am departure. So far so good!

After a scenic drive from Piliga via Walgett where we stopped for some fuel and a pit stop we continued on to Lightning Ridge. The Groth's and Coddington's were stopped for random breath test as part of Operation Tortoise over the Easter Long Weekend which started a raft of jokes by Noelene about the Hare and the Rabbit (or was it the Tortoise and the Hare!). After travelling through some really flat landscapes which seemed to stretch forever, we headed into Lightning Ridge.

Arriving late morning we stopped at the Visitors Centre which provided us with some information on the activities at the Ridge over the weekend and we headed onto Lorne Station, a couple of kms out of town on a rugged corrugated road. We had been told by other travellers to expect around 500 people at Lorne Station over Easter so we were concerned as to crowding but were greeted by Christine (somewhat more friendly caravan park operator than Kidman's Camp). We choose to set up camp in a compact style set up in anticipation of the hoards of people who didn't arrive.

Anyway, it was nice and close so the Coddington's could hear John's snoring each evening.

That afternoon we decided to experience some of the infamous car door tours of Lightning Ridge. After one false start trying to follow the Red car door tour and ending up lost, we headed back to the Visitors Centre and paid the \$1 for the Car Door Map Directions! We headed out on the Green Car Door Tour which started at 'Pig Hill'. Despite the brochure telling

us we would find a wild orange tree with an 80ft root system, to Stan's disappointment we could not find it. We were rewarded with great views from Nettleton's First Shaft over the Coocoran Opal Fields which was a multi billion dollar opal field from 1988-1996. We were also rewarded by Stan's fantastic Irish accents and commentary on the way. We were also excited to find a fantastic sign designed just for Stan!

That evening after dinner, the Fitzy's and Coddington's headed into town and visited the Lightning Ridge Bowling Club for Carnivale. After a few quiet drinks and enjoying the local scenery (interesting people) including fire throwers and dancers, they headed for the Sideshow Alley with a whole gammet of thrill rides. The Hurricane was a winner with Peter and Shelley taking Monica on the ride. Monica was rewarded with Fitzy farting on her and singing 'When the Saints Come Marching In' as he thought he was preparing for the pearly gates being on the fast and spinning ride. Shelley once again was laughing uncontrollably much to everyone's amusement!

Stan and Noelene stayed back at camp and listened around the camp fire while Allen the caravan park operator sang covers of 1960/70's music. The Groth's hit the hay early, Liam and Ashley exhausted with Karina the last of the dirty stop outs going to bed at 8pm! The shackle was given to Shelley for being Shelley!

Saturday 23 April

We started in town for the goat races and wheelie bin races. Due to RSPCA and ACA the goat races were done with a twist but still very good. Fitzy won his own goat race by going head over heels over one of the goat carts and doing a massive tumble in the main street in front of hundreds of people. True to Fitzys fear of Shelley though he managed to save the camera (minus some skin off his hand and elbow) One of his more graceful moves when you take the night before into consideration!



We then all went off checking out opal stalls, opal stalls, plant stalls and a couple of opal stores, trying to waste some time before the centenary horse races.

Come 12pm we all went down to the Lightning Ridge Race Club. Glen won the first race. We decided for the second race we would put in \$2 per family (yes we are all big spenders) and do a Quinella. We watched the horses parade around, picked 2 horses based on them having 4 legs, a head, tail and jockey as we really didn't know what else to look for and sat and waited for the race. The beers were nice and cold and the race started. We lost.

Next adventure was the carnival for a couple of rides to see who could hold down their beers and steak sandwich. Monica and Kim were in the front and Fitzy and Shelley were in the back. Fitzy complained the whole ride that he was eating Monicas hair and the girls just laughed the whole ride. John and Liam were in the carriage behind with John coming off not looking his best!

Next stop...IGA. Kim and Glen found Fitzy and Shelley having a stand up argument over easter eggs! Because Fitzy wanted a bunny shaped chocolate he was only allowed one as opposed to Shelley being allowed to have 2 egg shaped chocolates (Shelleys rules of course). Then we found out that Shelley can only eat dark chocolate and white chocolate as the milk chocolate does funny things to her (however OP's milk choc is OK!!). Kim and Glen agreed that 2 for 2 is only fair so Shelley stomped off while Fitzy walked happily to the checkout with a chocolate in each hand.

We headed back to camp as the natives were starting to get a bit restless in town. Cods was back first followed by Fitzys. Groths were still getting gas and Stan and Noelene were still at the races spending Noelenes camper trailer money.

The rest of the afternoon was relatively quiet as tonight was the night the Easter Bunny was to come and leave chocolate for all the good kids and Ashleigh was to leave her dummy for the Easter Bunny to take (god help

us!). The daily shackle went to Fitzy for being a goat!!

Sunday 24 April

We set out at about 8.30am to go on the "Chambers of the Black Hand" tour and we were lucky to be able to go on the Guided Mine tour straight away through the 100 year old mine. After the mine tour we were able to look at all the carvings in sandstone on the walls of the mine. The 500+ carvings were fabulous and included carvings from Elephants to Egyptian mummies. After the "Chambers of the Black Hand" tour we then went for a drive up to Lunatic Hill to the lookout where a \$2.5million black opal was found in 1986, they named it "Haley's Comet". We then visited the Church purposely built for the movie "Goddess of 1967" a weird art house film. Stan and Noelene stayed on in town and went to the markets while the rest of us went back to camp for lunch.

After lunch the Fitzy's went for a bit of a drive around the Red & Blue car door tours and went up to Bald Hill opal field which is famous for good black opals that were found on many different levels, we drove past the cactus nursery and then up to Sim's Hill Opal field, site of the first 1906 settlement. The first opal rush boomed here in 1905. It is also the highest point in the district at 170 metres above sea level.

A drive by Amigo's Castle, which is a private home single-handedly built of ironstone in 1981 and inspired by Roman ruins in northern Italy and then up to Kangaroo Hill. We then met up with the Groth's and Coddington's in town where they had been to the pool for a swim in the afternoon.

A bit of a firewood collection was done on the way home for our last night for a good campfire. No shackle award was given today as we were all SO WELL behaved

By Peter & Shelley Fitzsimmons

