

WARRUMBUNGLE NATIONAL PARK

Trip Report

Warrumbungle's & Pilliga Trek

Trip Leader - Rex Farr
Real Trip Leader - Susan Farr
Trip participants - Harrison & Amber-Rose Farr
Transport - Tug the ever faithful FJ Cruiser

The long weekend was fast approaching however most of NSW was still in flood and the weather forecast was a little uncertain with a front expected to move across western NSW over the weekend.

Not to be daunted and keen to enjoy my first days of annual leave since February I pulled a long planned road trip out of mothballs, rang National Parks to confirm access and put the trip up on the Sydney 4x4 web page.

The trip was ideal, especially considering the weather as most of the travel was on sealed roads and toured through the only part of NSW that had escaped the recent major flooding. I also hadn't been to the Warrumbungle's since learning to drive in my dad's almost new FJ55 Toyota Landcruiser, a long wheel base wagon that came in two tone cream and baby poo brown. Yes you guessed it, that was quite a while back.

Day 1

We set out bright and early on the Saturday to avoid the traffic but there was none! Seems the recent weather combined with two weekend football grand final's was conspiring to keep most travellers at home. Saturday's travels were uneventful with us passing through Lithgow, Gulgong, and then on to Coonabarabran where we stopped in at the tourist information centre and driver reviver for some local maps and to check on road conditions. Local advice was that the rain had come and gone in the last week and that the sandy roads north of the Warrumbungle's dried out quite quickly and were open. We rolled into the Warrumbungle's National Park camp site just



on 4pm and picked up a camper trailer site with a great view of the mountains. It took around an hour to set up and settle down to a refreshing cider as our first day came to an end.

Day 2

This day was a relaxed no travel day which we spent reacquainting ourselves with this beautiful National Park. We visited Siding Springs telescope, a couple of look outs and Harry and I did the demanding but thoroughly rewarding Beloungery Split Rock walking trail. A 4.6km loop with stunning mountain top views back to our camp, towards the Breadknife in the main range and across into our later destination, the Pilliga.

Day 3

There was a "little" rain overnight so we decided to let the camper dry off and packed up slowly pulling out of camp around mid-morning and heading back into Coonabarabran. We checked the National Parks web site and confirmed there were no road closures or local area warnings. We then turned



north out of Coonabarabran and travelled out along the Newell Hwy following local directions to an un-signposted turn off 33km out of town to visit the Pilliga Sandstone Caves.

To our delight the gate onto the short 1 km well graded sand track to the carpark and this marvellous site was open, with the road reasonably dry and in very good order. This site is simply awe inspiring and it's impossible not to appreciate the areas significance to the local Aboriginal community. We can only express our thanks to the Aboriginal community for allowing access to the Sandstone Caves site with stunning views into the Pilliga and for sharing this beautiful place with all Australians. The short and easy loop walk from the carpark to the caves and back was worth every step with a well-defined and cared for path and new drop toilet discreetly and well placed part the way along.

We turned back out onto the Newell Hwy for a short distance and then headed further into the Pilliga travelling on graded sandy, dirt roads which were surprisingly reminiscent of central Australia. The Pilliga Forest Salt Cave Picnic and Camp Site was marvellous with new facilities including gas BBQ, fire lookout tower and new drop toilets. It's obvious that some funds have recently been spent upgrading the local Pilliga facilities to encourage bird watching and tourism. Salt Caves Camp Site is camper trailer and car based camping friendly however there are only a limited number of sites so a fall-back camping option for larger groups or during busy times would be recommended.

We set up camp and ended our day watching the sun set over the Pilliga and distant Warrumbungle's from the top of the new and public accessible lookout tower which stood 20 metres over the caves rocky outcrop, providing 360 degree views as far as the eye could see.

Day 4

We awoke to a quite an peaceful dawn, broke camp and headed out onto the main tar road turning towards Gwabegar township. Gwabegar is a little old town with some very old and still occupied homes. The tar ends at Gwabegar and the last 30 km to Pilliga township (and pub) were on dirt with some standing water still lying in the table drains. The Gwabegar to Pilliga road was open however we did pass the local grader driver

about half way along where he was still tiding up from the previous weeks rain.

We stopped in Pilliga township for a fantastic hot chip lunch from the local café which featured a host of signs about how the world would be a better place without men. The café owner a very friendly lady had evidently experienced some hardships over time and was exercising her right to free speech and good luck to her too. If you pass through Pilliga town, make sure you drop into the café (directly opposite the pub), have a chuckle reading the sign's (like I did) and support this marvellous mum and young son with your business.

Without doubt however the main reason to visit Pilliga township is to relax and soak in the free thermal baths just out of town and on the way to Wee Waa. We all dutifully soaked in the hot spring waters for a half hour or so and then reluctantly dressed and headed on to Wee Waa via bitumen to visit the Australian Radio Telescope array. The CSIRO array of six movable radio telescopes on rails was amazing with the public being actively encouraged to visit, photograph and film the array and facilities to their hearts content. Just remember to turn off your UHF radio's on the way in otherwise the CSIRO may mistakenly discover a new 9th planet.



After leaving the radio telescope and having spent a little more time sightseeing than expected for the day we modified our plans and decided to make our way back towards Sydney via the Kamilaroi Highway, electing to set up camp at a little roadside free camp and rest area 10 km outside Gunnedah on the Tamworth road. The amenities at this simple little roadside stop enjoyed great



reviews in our Camps 7 book and the WikiCamps Australia web app. The reviews weren't wrong with the camp spots amenities being whistle clean.

For a quieter night however or for larger groups the showground in Boggabri (north of Gunnedah) or better still the 1st & 2nd Fleet Memorial Park further south in the little town of Wallabadah near Quirindi would be a better choice. Wallabadah town council has provided nothing short of 1st class \$10 per vehicle camping facilities next to the Quirindi Creek. This camp site features grassy open sites nestled adjacent to landscaped gardens featuring spotlessly clean hot showers and amenities even providing little soaps at each hand basin for the weary traveller. The café just down the road on the New England Hwy boasts the best burgers in Australia and the best coffee outside of Italy. The coffee was great and the burgers looked old school and very good.

Day 5

Sadly day five marked the end of our little 1500km mini holiday as we headed back to Sydney on tar via Muswellbrook and Singleton. We will however return to the area to explore the Burning Mountain Nature Reserve and nearby Barrington Tops.

Any takers..... we promise there'll be more dirt?

