

"Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do, than by the ones you did. So throw off the bow lines, sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, Dream, Discover."

Mark Twain

Most people would take ages to plan a trip like this but not Barb and I, in four days we have planned and booked the trip, renewed Barb's passport, applied for visas, and here we are off on a trip which has me excited and quite frankly a tad nervous. Welcome dear readers to the Aus and a bit more tour (it's a bit further than France)

Day 1

Well here we go, as we get into the car to head off for the airport for the beginning of our adventure we are both a tad nervous of what is ahead of us, and also the thought of the friends and family we leave behind and will not see for a good few months. As it says in the song "It's not the leaving of Liverpool that greaves me but my darlings when we think of you" (well its close) we will miss you all while we are away and we look forward to seeing you all on our return.

This morning started at the ridiculous time of 4.45am as we needed to leave home at 5.30 so that we would get to the airport 3 hours before our flight departure. Up until about 9pm last night I thought that we needed to be at the airport 2 hours before our departure time, It was only when I spoke to Jennie that I found out that we actually needed to be there 3 hours before. So I need to apologise to one Mr Eric Ormerod for dragging him out of bed an hour earlier than he expected when he signed up for the airport run, sorry eggs.

There is not a great deal to report today as it has all been spent sitting in an airport well two actually as we had to get off and back on at Munich where it was -6 so a tad fresh, and then the rest of the time we have been on the plane. We take off at 8.50am and arrive in Singapore at 8.05am (how does that work) after spending 16 hours traveling including the half an hour stop over at Munich, to say I have got a numb bum is an understatement.

As the estimated flight mileage for the total journey is just under 28 thousand miles and as yet god knows how many miles we will cover on land, I suspect that we will have very very numb bums by the time we arrive back in Liverpool.

There is not a great deal more to report today, as we arrive in Singapore tomorrow I am sure there will be a lot more to report, that is if we can find an Internet

connection? So that's it for day one of god knows how many, until tomorrow good night all sleep well.

Day 2

We land at Singapore airport and while we wait to disembark I set my watch to the local time which is 8.05 am and I realise that we have just lost 8 hours of our lives which we will not get back for a good few months, in fact over the commingle months we will lose another 5 hours before we get them back.

As the airport is about 40 minutes from the hotel we have organised a transfer to the hotel, we are met by our chauffeur, well taxi driver in a new BMW 5 series so the journey to the hotel was comfy apart from the fact that he could not drive it. We arrive at the hotel just after 10am and expect to be told that we can not have our room until 2pm but no we can have it straight away, yippee.

After a shower we have a nap to try and catch up on the lost 8 hours, then it's time for a look around the hotel to familiarise ourselves with the locations of the different restaurants oh and bars and then off for a walk into town. The main shopping area of Orchard Road is only a short walk from the hotel and this is a good job as 30 degrees and 95% humidity do not make for walking to far without finding an air conditioned haven. The list of shops here reads like a who's who from a Forbes list, they are all here, Cartier, YSL, Louis V, Paul Smith, Harry Winston's, Fendi, the list goes on and does not miss any of the top names out, you could spend a serious amount of money in a couple of hundred yards.

It is obvious that there is a serious amount of money here and this is born out by the amount of seriously expensive cars knocking about, again the list covers everything you can think of and does not miss any out Bentley's are common place and there is no shortage of Ferrari's and Lamborghini's. What you do have to remember is that not only do you have to pay for the car, you have to pay 100% purchase tax and you also have to bid for the right to own a registration number which costs up to 60,000 US Dollars. All this makes Singapore the most expensive country in the world to own a car and there are still plenty of them around, it is the 2nd biggest exporter of used cars in the world behind Japan.

The shops go on and on and they are like an iceberg, there are more of them three levels below ground all linked by cavernous air conditioned malls, it's amazing that they can all survive. Right that's enough of this window shopping lark, tonight we are going on night tour of the city so we need to get back to the hotel have another shower and get ready to go out at 6.30pm.

After navigating are way back to the hotel with only one navigation error we find our way back, shower, change and we are ready to go. Bang on 6.30 the coach arrives, yes I know another coach trip and yes by the look of the rest of the passengers we

could have made some money by bringing our incontinent pack and bin liner supplies from our Italian coach trip. First stop is China town and as there are a number of different tours we are split from this group and introduced to another group doing the same tour. First stop is to a shop to have a "master craftsman Mr Someone" write our name in Chinese on a paper fan, now as I do not understand Chinese writing he could have written sod off on it, but it will treasure it forever, oh yea like heck.

Then we are given half an hour free time to walk around the market stalls selling the same crap as every other Chinese market stall I have ever visited, so instead of looking at a load of crap. We find a street bar selling large bottles of tiger beer for S\$6.75, right result. Next stop is a Chinese restaurant for dinner and considering that the meal was included in the fairly inexpensive tour it was pretty darn good, not to sure what it was but it was good.

After dinner we go on a trishaw ride from the restaurant to Clarkes quay, there are two people to each trishaw and about ten trishaws, looks like we have drawn the short straw as most of the trishaw riders are young and athletic ours however is about 90 and four foot nowt. The ride was interesting to to say the least with the journey taking us along and across busy four lane carriage ways on what is not much more than a tricycle.

We arrive in one piece at Clark quay and give our rider a tip as he gets his breath back, (find a different job) then after a short walk we board a boat for a river cruise, cruise may be something of an exaggeration it was a boat trip.

That said the views of the buildings was fantastic there is some truly amazing architecture here and the buildings look great illuminated at nighttime. A fantastic photo opportunity especially if you have remembered to put a memory card in your SLR, luckily I have brought along a compact camera as well so that gives up its card to the superior SLR, now if the boat keeps still we may be in with a chance.

The end of the boat trip sorry cruise completes the tour and board a minibus for the trip to the hotel, there is just time for a glass of red in the hotel bar before we retire to bed to try and find some more of those elusive eight hours. So goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 3

As yesterday's blog went on a bit I will try to abbreviate today's into a more compact form, note I did say try. After a shower and stuff we go down to the restaurant for breakfast, blimey this could take some time as the buffet style breakfast is set up over 6 large areas plus the cooks station, the selection is endless and caters for all tastes this could take a while, along with the usual cooked meats and cheeses, bacon, sausage and stuff you have the choice of various dim sum, curries, noodles, rice, soups, eggs cooked every way you can think of and more, cakes, ice creams, oh and bread and butter pudding. The list was endless.

We have booked tickets on the ubiquitous open top hop on hop off bus, but we need to go to a Suntec city to collect them and this is a good few miles from the hotel, to far to walk in this climate. So we walk to the MTR station (underground) this is based on the same principal as the London Underground but this one is new, spacious, clean, smooth and air conditioned.

We get to the ticket office and in exchange for our voucher we are given a two day pass for the three tour bus routes and are told that the pass also includes the river boat cruises and the duck tour, now let me think what happened to the duck tour in Liverpool? The plan is to do the full tour on each of the buses and then after having a look around decide where we want to get off and spend more time. The initial todo list was China town, Raffles hotel, Botanic gardens. After doing one full tour we get on the heritage tour bus after a couple of stops we are joined by a Chinese tour group and as usual there are lots of them.

Now sitting on the top deck of an open top bus under a bit of sun protection canvass when it starts to rain is ok but when this rain turns into a deluge it not the best place to be, we negotiate our way through our fellow passengers to the lower deck by the time we get there we are a tad wet. Boy it can rain here a bit like Bangkok, this deluge has put paid to us getting off for the time being, eventually the rain stops and we get off at China town after having a look at the tat for sale we return to last nights street bar for some food, oh and a tiger beer well possibly two.

The sun is back out and it's back to 30 degrees, as the tour buses finish at 6.30 it's time to get the last bus that goes close to our hotel, as soon as we get off the bus the deluge, thunder and lightening starts again and we take cover in the bus stop along with lots of other travellers. When the deluge finally turns to normal rain we set off for the hotel the driest route takes us through yet another shopping mall, which gives us the opportunity to purchase a bottle of vin rouge.

We get back to our room a tad tired still missing those 8 hours so it's an early night without opening the vin rouge, we will be able to have an early start in the morning goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 4

We'll welcome to another day, I do not usually suffer with jet lag but I awoke at 5.30 this morning and unable to get back to sleep I edited some photographs and uploaded them onto the web site. The plan today is to have breakfast and then catch the 10 o'clock bus to the museum, yippee can't wait. However the lag that is jet has other ideas after breakfast we return to our room to collect cameras and stuff and the large bed calls to me lie on me, lie on me, a bit like Alice in wonderland. Lie on it I do and loose another couple of hours. We finally leave the hotel at 11.30am and walk out into the bright sunshine and 30 degrees, we get the hop it bus to the museum a 15 minute ride away. Now you will know that as far as museums go I am a bit of a philistine and after an hour and a half guided tour this one has me completely board stiff. However it has me captured and I will not be leaving in the near

future as the brilliant sunshine we had when we came in has been replaced by a thunder storm and another deluge of water falling from the sky so there we stay until it goes off.

When the rain finally stops we make a dash for our next stop Raffles hotel, It's a great whitewashed symbol of British colonialism, nowadays the hotel is dwarfed by the surrounding buildings, but you have to imagine what it must have been like when it opened in 1899. It is still an impressive building which as well as being a luxurious and expensive hotel it also incorporates, more shops. After a stroll around the hotel we find the Long bar where apparently the legendary Singapore sling was invented by Ngiam Tong Boon around 1915. We do not partake in a sling for a couple of reasons, we have lost some sight seeing time due to the weather, there is a queue to get into the Long bar, I don't particularly like them and oh yes they are \$27 each.

We get the hop on bus to our next destination Clarke quay, as we get off the bus the rain starts and just as we get undercover the heavens open again, when it finally stops we board a boat for another river trip which turned out to be the same trip we went on the first night only in daylight. The next part of the plan was to go to the stunning Marina Bay Sands hotel and blag our way to the top floor oasis pool, you have got to have a look at this hotel on the Internet, it is a truly magnificent building (there is a night time photo in the gallery).

However the weather has different ideas, as the boat approaches the hotel the rain starts again and the cloud drops covering the top of this magnificent structure, this thwarts our plans so we stay on board and return to Clarke quay we get off and make a dash for cover. With no sign of the rain stopping we find a watering hole and partake in a couple of beers.

We catch the last hop on bus back to the hotel, don't get carried away it's not late the last hop on bus is 7pm, we get back to our room hot, a tad wet, tired, foot sore and without any good photographs to show for our days travels.

Time to open a bottle of vin rouge me thinks, at about 9pm we are getting a bit peckish but

Barb does not fancy going out, so hunter gatherer departs the hotel to a local eatery and purchases a take away, and as instructed gets a selection of cakes from the posh cake shop next to the hotel and the cakes were more expensive than the take away, mind you it was as cheap as chips.

Well that's it for today, transfer day tomorrow I must say that I always find transfer days a bit of a pain in the arse but we will see what happens, goodnight one and all more tomorrow, well depending on a wifi connection.

Day 5

Well it's departure day today so we only have our room until 2pm and we will need to pack but blow it that can wait until later it's time for breakfast. Today we are going to walk to the Botanic Gardens yippee I can not wait.

After breakfast we grab our stuff and leave the hotel, as we walk through the doors we are hit by what I initially thought was the heat but it's not that hot but the humidity is ridiculous it must off the scale today, the day that we choose to go to a botanic garden, good choice.

After a short walk we arrive at the gardens, they are very impressive especially considering that it is in the heart of the city, we continue through the gardens the humidity here is mad but on we go, after a while we find the orchid gardens. After parting with the S\$5 entrance fee we enter, the colours and the shapes of the orchids are amazing, the signs tell us that there between 25,000 and 30,000 different varieties of orchids, might need another memory card if they are all on display here.

My mum would have loved this place as Singapore orchids were her favourite flowers she was so taken by the colours, the different shapes and the delicacy of them, I remember as a child we used to get them delivered to her flower shop and how amazed she was that they could arrive so fresh from so far away, also there was a couple who lived in Childwall who grew them and we used to buy them from them as well as the market. Happy times and so long ago, and now here we are admiring these beautiful orchids in their natural environment.

That's enough of that soppy stuff, it's time to return to the hotel to pack, shower and evacuate our room, the humidity outside the gardens is no better and to say that I am perspiring a little may be an understatement. We get to the room and start packing, how is it that we have not made any purchases but now what we came with does not want to fit back in the cases, strange. We complete our packing have a shower and leave our room, after checking twice that we have not forgotten anything, just after our 2pm check out time.

Reception desk next stop to pay for any extras we may have encountered during our stay, now what on earth could that be, oh you know stuff like a bar bill possibly, which considering we have been here for four days is quit light. We are now homeless with our bags stored in a secure area we have to wait for four hours before our lift arrives to take us to the airport.

We sit reading for a while and then go for a stroll around the local mall, downstairs in the mall is a food hall so we go to grab a spot of lunch with the locals S\$4.50 just over two quid gets you a substantial meal, not sure of what but substantial non the less. After that it's back to the hotel bar for a quick libation before leaving for the airport. Our driver introduces himself to us and our bags are loaded into another BMW 5 series this one is slightly different to the one that took us to the hotel as this one did not have a on off switch for a brake or accelerator, or it's possible that this driver could drive.

You all know the expression Sunday drivers well in Singapore they do actually have Sunday drivers there are cars which have a red and yellow number plates and these cars are only taxed and insured to be driven on a Sunday, they also have another plate which allows you to drive your car from 3pm on Saturday through to Sunday evening. Sunday drivers hey now you know where they really are.

The rest of the evening is fairly un eventful apart from Barb getting stopped at the bag scanning because she had a sowing kit with a miniature pair of scissors in it, I think it came out of a Christmas cracker. We told the the guy to throw it away but he said as they had found it they had to be reported and Barb had to sign some form to say that they had found them, strange that they managed to get from Manchester to Singapore in the same bag.

The flight was delayed by 45 minutes for some reason so we did not take off until 10pm, after a bite to eat and a G & T it's time to try and get some sleep so goodnight one and all sleep well the next time you hear from us we will be in Australia, a slightly larger country than Singapore.

Day 6

The pilot has had his foot down and we have made up the time we lost at departure and we arrive in Brisbane 7.15am after another sleepless night thanks to a schoolboy error when we picked our seats by not checking that we were sitting by any small children. Now that was an error as the little girl sitting just in front of us must have done the voice over for the screams in King Kong, she could have woken the dead.

You may remember from day 4 that while at Raffles hotel we missed out on a Singapore sling, well they do them on the plane and there free up there, so Barb has her finger on the stewardess button and partakes in a couple, just to see if they will drown out the charming child's screams. Which they do for a short while.

They let us through the immigration and baggage checking, without all the drama you see on the TV programme if you watch that junk that is, and then it's off to the domestic departure gate to catch the flight to Cairns. This flight is also delayed and we sit on the Tarmac for 45 minutes before we take off never mind there's no rush, none of that immigration nonsense at Cairns just collect our bags and then find our way to the hotel. Ok so the bus is \$28 and a taxi is \$25 so taxi it is, it's only a short trip to the hotel and not much longer until we are in our room.

We are both hot and tired so time for a shower and a quick nap, now as you know the showers in most hotels are good, well this one is fantastic it could strip paint it's like a jet wash the Polish guys at the car wash would love it, it does not just clean you it removes a layer of skin, I love it. After a nap it's off into town to explore and find somewhere to eat.

It's just before 7pm and it's still in the mid 20 degrees, very pleasant, we find a bar and partake in cold one, now food time, after eating eastern cuisine for the last couple of days I do don't fancy any more rice or noodles so it's time for a steak, burger or similar. After the

usual lets look at every alternative we pick an eatery that fits the bill, burgers it is and I choose the Wagyu beef burger and very good it was, it was also very big.

Tired, full and footsore again we return to the hotel for nightcap on the balcony and early night to catch up with the much needed sleep that we have missed out on recently, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 7

After breakfast which we had overlooking the marina which was not a bad place to eat, and then standing under the skin removing shower for a while we venture Into town for a walk around. We need to find a phone shop to organise SIM cards, a launderette, a money exchange and a general look around to get an idea of what's going on.

Now I was shopped out in Singapore but it looks like Barb's up for a bit more, we find a phone shop and get some information on the various networks which we will need to peruse later, we find the launderette however even though Cairns is not a very large town I am not sure I will find it tomorrow. As we continued to walk around for ages, then we find a watering hole to partake in a cold one.

We head back to the hotel for a little siesta in the comfort of the air conditioned room, the siesta lasts a little longer than expected, how long can I put this down to jet lag for. After our siesta we sit out on the balcony, take in the views and watch the helicopters take off and land from the jetty nearby and the fishing and tour boats return to the harbour.

It's time to go back into town for some food, we stroll along the esplanade and then into town to the night market where there are some Chinese food stalls, these are similar to all you can eat in the UK but here you choose your size of plate and then make your selection of the things you fancy. I like the idea as you can try a verity of dishes, we make our selection, choose a table and dig in, it was ok but we will not be going back.

After a small libation at one of the many hostelries we return to the hotel, Barb watches the TV for a while while I type up the blog, then it Bo Bo time, goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 8

We have had the great news that Mike and Emma have had a baby daughter, congratulations to them both and welcome baby Edmond to our world, congratulations to the grandparents as well (grandparents hehe)

We are aware that for one reason or another we have not done anything exciting as yet and that the blog may be a bit same old stuff, well this could be for a couple of reasons one being that because we are here for a fairly long time we have not had the usual rush to do stuff and also we have had a problem with jet lag.

Well let me tell you that's about to change you will soon be getting some much more exciting blog news, and today is preparation day. There are a couple of things we need to organise, here is the list, find another hotel for two more nights, organise collecting the hire car tomorrow from the local office rather than going to the airport, book a boat trip to the Barrier reef, get the phone SIM cards, change some money, oh and a tad boring but necessary got to the launderette.

Right breakfast first stop, while waiting for my poached eggs I get talking to the chef and we discuss the view from his office, he and his wife moved from Sydney 18 months ago for a different way of life. He said that it did not matter how bad a day you were having, one look outside and it got better, much better, I turn around and see exactly what he means.

Ok best get on with the todo list, first stop money exchange, we find an exchange counter and discuss rates and while chatting find out that the lady dishing out the money was originally from Manchester and emigrated here in the 70's mad old world. Ok money sorted next stop Avis hire car office, another tick off the list, we can collect from there rather than the airport. The next stop is the launderette which is only a couple of doors down from the car hire office, no faffing about separating colours here bung it in and see what happens, while the washing machine is doing its stuff we walk up to a tour agents to get an idea of what's available at what cost. It's more a matter of what's not available the choice is endless

we narrow down our selection to a couple of choices which we will look at while the washing is in the dryer.

Washing done it's time to get a deal on the trip we have chosen and after a bit of bartering a deal is done and a day trip on a sailing boat to the reef including food and snorkelling is booked for Friday. Next stop phone shop we had done the research the other day so this should be simple two pay as you go SIM cards, only problem is they need ID and that's in the hotel safe, oh well we were doing well up to now we will have finalise this one tomorrow.

Now I have not mentioned how hot it is, well it's bloody hot so it's time to blow the head off a cold one as good old crock Dundee would say, while partaking in the cooling refreshment we make use of their wifi and have a look at various hotels and choose one which we book if our current gaff is not up for a deal.

We get back to the hotel and Barb goes up to the room while I go to reception to see if they are up for a deal, turns out that even though they have room availability they are not up for a deal. Never makes a great deal of sense to me empty room = no income, occupied room = income with a chance of more! possibly they are too precious about their room rates and do not want to undermine the product, me I'd take the money and have full occupancy.

I get back to the room and Barb is not happy when she got to the room she found the door open it would appear that whoever cleaned the room had left it open for some reason. Barb is on the phone to the manager to tell him that she is not happy, a bottle of champagne some fruit, cheese and biscuits are on their way to appease the situation. Time to book the other hotel and do what customers do vote with their feet, hotel booked best get packing while drinking their champagne.

Now there's another day gone time for a bite to eat, and when we return finish packing with cheese and biscuits for desert, then it's watch a Golden Eye, you can not beat a good old James Bond film, write up the blog and then bedtime, goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 9

Well the day has arrived when we collect our intergalactic time machine, but before that we need to have breakfast, finish packing and check out of our room. Breakfast is again eaten while taken in the views of the marina harbour tomorrow at this time we will have boarded one of these yacht's on our way to the reef. Breakfast done time for a quick walk under the skin removing shower, then pack now all we have purchased while we have been here is some cups and some bowls for the trip so why is it that we arrive with 4 bags and now when we check them in with bag holding area we have got seven of the rascals. While I have been getting the rest of the bags Barb has been chatting to her new best friend the general manager who is still full of apologies and has removed any extras from our bill, well that's big of him as it was two bottles of water.

Time for a short walk collect the time machine, we arrive at the office and again the receptionist is an ex pat, she gives us the keys to our intergalactic time machine, well it's Holden Cruise actually aka Tom. We give Tom the once over, sign the paperwork and we are off, freedom unleashed first stop the phone shop to get the SIM cards, we park in the shopping mall car park and take note Liverpool One, the first three hours are free. Sims purchased we head to our new residence, the Queens hotel check in and dump some bags then we head North for the Daintree rain forest now Tom may not travel at light speed but he can reach the maximum speed limits with ease and with beam me up Scotty option selected, well the cruise control, it makes for a fairly leisurely drive. We stop on route at Port Douglas for a coffee, and then a couple of other places on route. Now it turns out that there is a longer cul-de-sac in the world than Barrow in Furness and it turns out that this is Daintree which made for a 250k round trip to a place that shuts at 4pm.

The return journey to Cairns goes without any drama then it's grab a bite to eat, go to the hotel and get an early night, ready for and early start tomorrow for the boat trip, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 10

6am start this morning so that we can have breakfast, shower and stuff and get to the marina to be on board a yacht named Ocean Free by 7.15 am. It's only a quick drive to the marina and only \$9 to park for the whole day, we get our boarding passes and are on board by 7.15.

We choose seats at the back as there is cover from the sun and by all accounts it's going to be a scorcher today.

It's a 2 hour trip to the reef of Ocean Free, there are much quicker boats but these are massive ugly things that carry a couple of hundred people at a time, the boat we have chosen only has maximum 35 passengers so it is a bit more personal and leisurely and takes the whole day.

We are told that usually they head to the reef using engine power and then return under sail this maximises the time available at the reef and Green Island, but unless the weather changes we will not be sailing as there is not a breath of wind. After a bit of a safety talk we sit back, chat to our companions, relax and watch the bigger more powerful boats rush to the reef for there morning trip, they will do two trips during the day.

We arrive at the reef and now it's snorkelling time we don our flippers, sorry fins, mask, snorkel and off we go, after sitting in the heat for 2 hours the water is lovely and by no means cold. Pascal one of the crew acts as a guide and takes us to spots that he knows to see various sea life, he swims down to the reef reaches into a crack in rocks and very gently brings out a small sea turtle about two foot long it's like they are old friends and he tells us that he has been doing this every day for the last three years, and that the turtle has always been in the same spot, after a couple of minutes the turtle swims off happily back to his den.

We swim over the reef looking at the coral, pascal points out a giant clam which is about 3 foot in length, he then swims down to the reef and returns with a giant sea slug it's bright red and nearly 2 foot long, he offers to let us hold the creature but I decline the offer. We swim around looking at the marine life, now there are not as many small fish as you see while snorkelling in Egypt but there are some big buggers which dart around us like crazy when Pascal throws some prawns to them from the boat, we had seen a small shark earlier I am glad that he was not around during feeding time, no matter how small he was.

We return to the boat for lunch and then we go over to Green Island on the small tender we have been towing behind us, we have a couple of hours on the island so we decide to walk around it and during the walk along the beach we see a Ray basking in the sun, now not knowing what type of Ray it was we leave well alone, as we all know what can happen even if you do know what you are doing.

As we suspected there is no chance of making any headway under sail so we make the return trip under engine power, we get back to harbour just before 5pm and after saying our goodbyes we return to our hotel. We get to our room tired and a little sun burnt, we decide that we do not need any food but we do need an early night. So there is just time to write up the blog and then retire for the night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, the journey south starts tomorrow.

Day 11

After breakfast we load Tom with our bags and we are ready to leave Cairns in the fastest car you have ever driven, that has the capabilities of the best off road vehicle going, yes that's the one a hire car, now Tom may be a Holden but he does not have a superb sounding V8 (that you hear driving around) under the bonnet.

Now Cairns is not a large place but it does have a complete lack of round signs telling you which way is out, we eventually find the Bruce highway our road south to our next destination which as yet is unknown and which we will only discover when it gets closer to night time and we need to stop for the night.

We head off down the alright Bruce highway and we soon have Tom up to the maximum 100k speed limit, now for a hire car Tom has a pretty good spec, leather (sort of) seats, a/c, parking sensors, intergalactic light speed button well cruise control and god knows why but it's got heated seats as if your bums not hot enough.

Barb has picked a route which takes us inland for a while and the first stop is to Gordondale to see a 500 year old fig tree, in the book it describes the last part of the journey as on uncovered road, now that should test Toms off road capabilities. I am a tad sceptical about seeing a tree but when we get there it is a fairly amazing and unique sight.

Next it's off to see a waterfall, when we arrive we realise that the author of the book should have been done under the trade description act, as I have seen more water coming out of our bath tap. We move on to the next town Innesfield and arrive there just before 4pm and well what can I say well it's shut, so we beat a hasty retreat, on to our next stop. During the drive we have the opportunity to observe a number of house's and we have realised that they must build to be utilitarian rather than architecturally pleasing, as most of them look nothing more than a very large tin shed with a corrugated tin roof.

We arrive at what's to be our final destination for the day Mission Beech, that is providing we can find some accommodation. Now we are on the cheap and cheerful part of the trip and after checking one place out and deciding that it is too expensive we find what was the YHA that Barb stayed in last time she was here.

We book in and put some stuff in our room, the view from this place is fantastic you could pay a fortune for a room with a view like this but not here its twenty five quid a night. Then it's off into town to get some food, the return drive back here was interesting as there is no street lighting and it's pitch black. Even though it is extremely dark and the sky is black and clear with very little light pollution I still can not find the North Star I wonder why that is.

We have had two FaceTime conversations today one with Jennie and one with Ian and Colette it was great to catch up even it was a tad dark when we spoke to Ian & Colette as we were outside watching a film. After the film there was just enough time to write up the blog and then time for bed, goodnight one and all sleep well more tomorrow.

Day 12

We awake early this morning and have breakfast overlooking the forest and in the distance the sea, it is a pretty damn good view for a hostel. Last night we watched a movie on a big screen with the rest of the guys in the roof top sit off room.

Today we are making the journey to Townsville about a 250k drive, not yesterday I may have been slightly unkind about the aesthetics of the houses, well today we have driven past a few very nice properties, so there must actually be a couple of architects that do specialise in designing residential properties.

The weather is mad today raining heavily and then the sun comes out and it's 33 degrees it's no wonder that everything grows so prolifically. We stop at a rest area for ice cream and fresh mangos and when we return to Tom we find that he is not so indestructible as I thought. As his n/s/f tyre is looking a tad flat, luckily there is a petrol station over the road so with 45psi stuffed into it we continue along the Bruce highway. We stop at a big M to use the Internet as we still need to activate our Australian mobile phones and mobile broadband, well we would if the internet connection was any good, but it's not its as slow as a slow thing can be. After a number of unsuccessful attempts at activating the sims we give up and continue onto Townsville.

We find a suitable resting place for the night and when I check Toms rubber it's obvious that stuffing a load of air into the tyre has not fixed the problem, so it's a phone call to the Avis assist the guy on the other end of the line is great, he is full on "no worries mate" and unlike France the repair truck is with us in 15 minutes and the spare is fitted in a couple of minutes, however the tyre is rubber ducked and we will need to deal with that tomorrow.

Unlike the UK, Aus is shut on a Sunday it is a bit like taking a step back in time over here, it's a bit like the good old days booze only available from off licences, things actually close at 5.30pm, very few places open on Sunday even in the resorts, it takes a while to get your head around it.

After god knows how long faffing about I have managed to get both our mobiles fired up and working and will send you all the numbers by email, but as yet have been unable to get the mobile broadband working as yet, but after a phone call to the support center it appears to be a problem at their end which they hope to have rectified in an hour, that was four hours ago!

So for the time being its a gin and tonic and watch some TV, write up the blog and then it's time for bed so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 13

Right first job phone the mobile broadband supplier and get the wifi modem sorted out, after half an hour on the phone the very helpful guy at the support centre solves the problem after changing a couple of settings on the Mifi modem yippee we now have 2 mobile phones and mobile broadband.

Next stop find the Bridgestone tyre centre, our first attempt fails dismally, so now that we can use the mobile phones capabilities we use it as a sat nav that gets us closer but not to our destination so it's back to the good old way, phone them and ask for directions. Eventually we get there and after some stupid questions Toms rubber is replaced and we are on our way.

Back on the Bruce highway we head south once more, now describing the Bruce as a highway may give you the impression that this is on a par with an American highway, well it's not, it's two lanes, one each way with a 100k speed limit. For the most of it, it is fairly straight and raised higher than the land surrounding it. It's a tad strange seeing all the flood warning signs and the water height marker boards, considering that it's 33 degrees outside the land looks as dry as a bone and the river beds are just sand. So I guess that when it rains it proper rain, the fields either side of the Bruce are either full of sugar cane, bananas, mango trees and lime trees.

The land is flat for as far as you can see in all directions and between towns that can be 200k apart there is nothing and do I mean nothing, no fuel stops, no shops just the occasional farm in the distance from the road, and this is the populated area god knows what it's like on the way to Alice Springs. I did have an idea to go to Alice and Uluru from Cairns but we have decided to put the trip off until after we get to Melbourne when we have more time and possibly hire a 4 wheel drive for the journey. It's difficult to get ones head around distance as they are huge compared to what we are used to the trip from Melbourne to Uluru and Alice is over 3500 miles, that's Lands end to John o Groats and back, and back and back again now that's mad, and the trip from Cairns to Melbourne is going to be over 2400 miles, that's just nuts.

We have arrived at a place called Ayr now I love Scotland however this Ayr is a proper one horse town so we decide to give it a miss and continue on the Bruce to the next town this ones only 150k away so we best get moving. We arrive at Bowden this is a two horse town but we are staying here what ever happens as it's getting late and it's a further 150k to the next town. We find a motel and do a deal for a room including breakfast the lady at reception is very friendly and was in England last year and we have a good old chat before we go to our room.

We watch a film on the tv accompanied by a couple of gin and tonics while I write up the blog and now it's time for bed, goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 14

While watching the film last night we checked out the available hotels in Airlie Beach on the Internet and found a one offering a studio apartment with living room, kitchen and a separate bedroom for \$10 more than the YHA, now that's mad as well. We booked it on line last night, so that is the destination for today, it is just under a 2 hour drive to the hotel so we have time to stop on the way. Barb has found a place on the coast that she would like to go and see, and as we drive down The Bruce we come to the turn off hey it's only 40k off the the main road and 40k back so let's go.

This ends as one of Barbs "short cuts" the last 10k is a dirt track and tests Toms off road capabilities once again, we get there and what's there well nothing other than a beach, it's a very nice beach and we have a walk along it hand in hand. The water looks so inviting but unfortunately you ain't going in the water here, well not without getting bitten by something so we give it a miss.

Back on the Bruce we continue to Airlie Beach, first stop is to Woolworths "that's the order of good old woollies" it's alive and kicking here and even has one Mr Jamie Oliver advertising on TV for them. We get some stuff for breakfasts and to have on the barby, then it's on to the apartment, we book in and get the keys to pool view 19, it's great living room, balcony overlooking the pool, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom.

Hey we could live here, this place is great value for money, we dump our stuff and drive into town for a look around, there are lots of small shops, lots of places offering tours of various descriptions oh and some bars, shall we have a drink oh why not. Now it's back to the hotel and use the communal BBQ to cook our dinner, while at the BBQ we meet a couple and start chatting, they are a bit older than us and they got married in Scotland last year, they end up inviting us to join them camping at Fraser island next week, they didn't mention anything about keys in a bowl, so we may give it a try.

After dinner it's time for a bit of TV, have a look at where we are going next and write up the blog, then it's time for bed so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 15

As we are self sufficient in our studio apartment we have a leisurely breakfast in the dining area of the apartment, we have decided that today is going to be a rest and do nothing day,

well nothing to strenuous anyway. After breakfast Barb goes to sunbath and read her book, while I edit some photographs and upload them onto the web site, I refrain from sending the email as it is silly o'clock in the UK so I will send it later.

The morning is soon gone but it is nice just to do nothing and relax, and then it's time for lunch, I make some sandwiches, cheese or rare roast beef are on the menu today, after lunch it's time to go shopping at BCF the Aussie equivalent of Go outdoors. They appear to sell everything that any aspiring Crocodile Dundee may need for his or her time in the bush, I kid you not they sell everything from boats and engines to knives and forks, I could stay here all day I am in a proper happy place. They have got more fishing rods than you can shake a stick at, they are lined up in hundreds, all different sizes from small pink ones to things that could reel in Jaws, as long as you had a big enough boat.

We make our tent purchase, Barb will not let me buy a Bear Grylls machete or any of the other items they have, no mater how useful I say they will be. Then it's onto the supermarket for a bit of food shopping and then there is just time for a quick look around the harbour before we need to get back to the hotel before the stuff in the boot melts. There is a bar just by the hotel so we decide that there is just enough time to blow the head off a cold one before the boot is a mess, our timing is just right and the stuff is in the fridge before it reaches the point of no return.

We chill out on the balcony with a glass of vin blanc and then it's time to use the BBQ to cook our dinner, tonight we decide to sit outside to eat our meal which seemed like a good idea until we start getting bitten by some vicious flies, these buggers can bite I tell you. We retreat back to our balcony where it is a bit safer than the open ground by the BBQ, then it's time to watch a bit of TV including a good old 007 movie, you can not beat a bit of James Bond no matter where you are.

There is just time to write up the blog before it's time for bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well more tomorrow.

Day 16

Another leisurely morning, a swim and jacuzzi before breakfast sitting on the balcony overlooking the pool in the warm morning sun, he he. As the apartment is not serviced we have a quick, very quick tidy up, and also take the opportunity to use the washing machine and tumble dryer. As the tent we have purchased does not have washing facilities.

We have a face time conversation with Jennie & Antony it was great to catch up with them and we give them a tour of the apartment and the pool area and then we catch up with Sharon and Mick. It's amazing to think that we are on the other side of the world in a different hemisphere and we can have a video conversation for free, slightly mind blowing when you think about it, don't you just love technology, where will it end.

We drive down to one of the many beaches and go for a walk along the beach admiring the yachts that are moored in the bay and in the harbour, there are some beautiful and expensive boats parked up here waiting for the wealthy owners to remember that they are here and waiting to be used.

We spend a couple of hours checking out the various bays and then it's time to return to our apt for a cooling dip in the pool and a relax in the jacuzzi, after a shower it's time to use the communal BBQ to cook our dinner. After dinner it's time to watch some tv and write up the blog.

Then it's time for bed so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 17

Well originally today was to be departure day, but as the apartment is such good value we have decided to stay another day, this means we don't have to be up early this morning and are in for another relaxing day.

Watching the news here is a bit like being at home, the government is a coalition and is busy blaming the prior labour government for mispending the countries hard earned coffers. The

coalition is not in a good place in the poles at the present time and it is not being helped by Holden motor co which is threatening to pull out of the country leaving thousands unemployed, and not surprisingly holding the government to ransom. This will leave the country with little manufacturing industry, which as we are well aware is the largest employer outside the usual wasteful public sector, now where have I heard this story before.

This is definitely the land of the the four wheel drive vehicle, they are everywhere in all various guises from the things we are used to big 7 seater Toyotas to UTE's four wheel drive pick up trucks with pick up beds in various configurations. The majority of them fitted with big and I do mean big Bull well Kangaroo nudge bars fitted to the front of them, not very pedestrian friendly or Zippy friendly for that matter. They are also fitted with big tyres and very large two way radio aerials fastened to the Roo bars, this would suggest that unlike the UK these vehicles are actually going to go off road, not just on the pavement on the school run.

We have gone for a drive today and have explored a couple of beaches outside the main resorts, now this is a bit bizarre but anyway here we go, at one of the beaches I need to use the bathroom, now this is the odd bit, the otherwise ordinary loo roll holders have a padlock on them, strange. On the return journey down the Bruce there is a bit of a delay which we initially put down to road works which are fairly prolific, but as we get closer we see that it's an accident, two of these gladiator 4 by 4s have had an altercation and their Zoo bars have not been of any assistance to either of them. They are not indestructible after all.

Now you may be pleased to know that it is raining this afternoon, well so it is but it's still 26 degrees, so everyone is still wearing shorts and T shirts. We arrive back at the apartment and rather than using the BBQ we are having chicken and chorizo risotto this evening accompanied by a glass of chilled vin blanc.

Just time to pack ready for tomorrow's departure, watch some TV and write up the blog prior to bedtime, so goodnight one and all sleep well, we will be back on the road tomorrow with about 1,100k to get us to Brisbane in the next ten days.

Day 18

Today we are awoken by the rain it is absolutely throwing it down so I think that a swim before breakfast will not be on the agenda, which is not bad as it gives us more time to pack and tidy up. While a Barb is in the shower I put the dishes in the dish washer, now I do make a school boy error by not putting on my glasses to read the contents of the bottle before adding what I think is the dish washer agent.

O

I take my turn in the shower only to be disturbed by a Barbs screams for me to get a towel, I exit the shower and run to the kitchen to find the floor covered in soap suds it's a bit like one

of those carry on e films, when I open the dish washer it is full of soap bubbles, and they do not want to go away they just keep producing more and more. I have the thought that very soon the whole apartment will be full of soap bubbles. Two bath towels have managed to stop the flow of bubbles across the kitchen floor, but what to do now, if only we had some salt to put on them, but we don't have any so that's out, I end up with a pan scooping the bubbles out of the dish washer into the sink. I wish I had video'd the scene as we would defiantly got £200 for it from that daft sod Harry Hill.

Mess cleared up we leave the apartment and go to reception to settle our bill, now I don't think in have mentioned the guy on reception, he is not the usual hotel receptionist, you know the type all polite and kiss your arse, well this guy ain't, yesterday when I booked the extra night and ask him if he wanted me to pay his response was no your ok pommie bugger off.

This morning was not a great deal different while settling the bill he asked where we were heading so I told him Rockhampton, his response was you will enjoy that drive, I asked if he was serious and he said no there is absolutely bugger all to see. After completing the 500k journey I have to agree with him there is nothing apart from bush land as far as the eye can see in any direction, they even have rest stops every couple of hundred kilometres offering free coffee to keep you awake.

Before the real journey we stop off in Airlie beach as there is a Saturday market going on, they rain has nearly stopped and is stinking hot, guess what they sell, correct the usual load of tat, that is apart from one stall selling wood carvings which are very good and I am tempted to make a purchase, but as we are only in week two I think better of it. Next stop find a post office as we have discovered that Barb has brought Philips Christmas card with her and not mine as they both had Mr P Hawkins on them, so we need to send Phil's home.

While Barb goes into the post office I sit in Tom in the car park after a couple of minutes there is crunch sound of bending metal and Tom lunges forward, correct some complete twit, I think I said twit, in a massive 4X4 has driven into the side of the car. I get out and look at his front bumper and there is a bit of a scuff, Toms n/s quarter panel has not survived the the meeting of the two vehicles quit so well, in fact it's proper stuffed, great this should be fun with Avis. The guy apologises profusely and gives me his details, no point in getting worked up so we shake hands and after a phone call to Avis off we go.

I will not bore you with the journey down The Bruce as my mate "bugger off" at the hotel was 100% correct there is absolutely bugger all to see apart from scrub land and some trees. We are camping tonight so we need to find a camp site it's approaching 6pm and as it goes dark at about 7pm we need to find one sharpish. We have driven past the ones we had seen on the map so as to get some more miles sorry kilometres under our belt. We see a sign for a

camp site so this is it we turn off the Bruce down some dirt track drive through some one horse town and eventually find the site.

To say that is quite is an understatement there are two motorhomes and no other tents, and I am not surprised at €30 a night. That site is ok there is a BBQ and a TV in the eating area and all the usual amenities, and by the sound of it a fair amount of wildlife, so I may find more than a Badger in the tent later.

Right we are going to bed before it gets to late in an effort to try and get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well in your lovely comfy beds, god and nature willing there will be more tomorrow, hopefully without anything unexpected joining us for the evening, I wonder who will be the first to sleep in the car.

Day 19

Well we survived the night without being eaten by one of the creatures we could hear walking around, as for sleep that is a totally different matter. When we purchased Ted the tent we had planned to be camping on beaches with nice soft sand, so we did not purchase any mattresses, and here there is no soft sand just extremely hard ground add this to the fact that the woods are alive and nighttime with the sounds of the crickets, big crickets, wild turkeys and god knows what else was out there talking to each other all night. Most of the night was spent trying to get back to sleep after being woken up, tomorrow is going to see us visit BCF "Boating Camping and Fishing" to purchase a mattress, some ear plugs and if allowed a Bear Grylls machete.

We are up early and retreat into Tom for a quick nap before the sun rises and it gets to hot inside the car, then we pack up Ted and amazingly manage to get him back into the bag he

came in, for 20 quid he is a great little tent. After breakfast and a shower and stuff we are on the road, today's drive is about 550k Barb drives first to get her stint behind the wheel over and done with. We are back on The Bruce and this section of the drive is no more interesting than the trip from Airlie Beach, there is nothing to see for miles apart from scrub land and the occasional one horse township.

It is becoming apparent that if you live in one of these townships that it is obligatory to have an item of automotive, aquatic or farming equipment junk rusting away outside your property with a ridiculous for sale price on them, there is no wonder they have not sold for two reasons, one they are heaps of crap and secondly the asking price.

As we drive down the Bruce a van comes in the other direction with flashing lights and a wide load sign, but no wide load wagon behind it. A minute or two. Later another van followed by three police cars traveling on the wrong side of the road pushing the oncoming traffic onto the grass verge, we come to a stop on the grass and then we see why following the police cars, is a wagon a very big wagon with a very very wide load, it looked like the back of one of lorries you see in the open cast mines that carry a zillion tons of rocks, it was massive with a capital M.

In the UK there would have been signs up for weeks advising traffic of the planned journey, not here the just drive head on towards you and push you off the road, effective and interesting. We find a BCF store and purchase a mattress but alas I am still not allowed a BG machete.

Tonight we have opted for a bit of road side camping and that is where you find us now along with a number of back packers in various forms of transport, so this should be another interesting night. I can not get a phone signal so I will have to upload this tomorrow until then dear readers goodnight to you all sleep well, as we are going to try and get some sleep tonight.

Day 20

Well we get through the night without any events and also without a great deal of sleep, in fact I retreated into Tom at about 4am as it was more comfortable, cooler and quieter. As not only was there lots of crickets, parrots and various other bloody noisy critters in the park behind us, we also had the added joy of exceedingly large wagons going past at a considerable pace. Deep joy I think that we will be stopping for a nap fairly soon, also the foam mat we had purchased was only marginally better than the unprotected ground.

We pack Ted back into his bag and head off along the Bruce today's drive is only about 200k so just a short one today which is good as we are both fairly tired, we stop after about an hour for some breakfast and a caffeine injection. We are heading for Hervey Bay to a motel I found on [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) that is as cheap as chips and we have booked in for two nights, not sure what it's going to be like, but it's a step up from roadside camping.

This section of the Bruce is not a great deal more interesting than the previous bit so there is not a great deal to report along the way, we arrive at Hervey Bay and have a drive around to have a quick look around and get our bearings then we head off to the motel in a district called Torquay. Now the room does not have a pool view but it has the usual stuff, TV, A/C, bathroom, fridge oh and a BED, it's time for a siesta before we go and explore.

After a nap and a shower it's time to go for a stroll along the near deserted beach, the water looks so inviting but without a stinger suit it's a no go area as the jellies will get you. After a walk around we choose a venue for dinner, and blow the head off a cold one, before ordering some food. After dinner we return to the motel and watch some TV, write up the blog and then bed for hopefully a good night's sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 21

It's day 21 and at this time most would be thinking of their return flight home, not us we are here for a tad longer. We were planning on a trip over to Fraser Island but the weather tomorrow is not going to be good, so we have decided not to go.

Today is going to be a relaxing day, after breakfast we sit by the pool until it gets just too hot, sorry. We are camping again tomorrow night, but without some more padding under us it will be another sleepless night. So it's off into town to have a look at the camping shops yet again.

We find three shops reasonably close together, after visiting all three we return to our now good old faithful BCF, and purchase two self inflating bed rolls which they have on special offer. Hopefully we should be able to sleep better on these.

We return from the camping shop mission and have another relax by the pool it is slightly cooler now so more comfortable to sit and doze, then it's into town for some food after dinner we return to the motel to watch some TV before bed, US Marshall's you can not beat

a bit of Tommy Lee Jones, and then just enough time to write up the blog before bed,
goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 22

We are packed up and ready to leave well before check out time, this will give us an early start on today's journey to Noosa which is only about two hours drive away, so kids stuff by the mileage you can do here. We stop on route for a coffee, tea a couple of bacon rolls and arrive in Noosa about 12 o'clock.

First stop is the tourist information center to find a camp site, Barb goes in and after the usual where are you from how long are you here for questions she is given a list of camp sites, we opt for the cheapest one first, which is run by the Sea Scouts, after an unsuccessful phone call we drive to the site, there is a notice on the gate that says if open check in between 4.30 and 6.30pm, if open that sounds helpful. We then go to the next one closest on the list and although considerably more expensive than the 10 bucks the sea scouts wanted this one is open has a pitch and along with the usual amenities it also has a pool.

We check in set up Ted in about 2 minutes open our new self inflating mattresses and drive into town to explore, now Noosa is a very nice place with a river running through the town to the ocean, there are some very expensive looking properties and

some very expensive boats, sorry yachts moored in the harbour. Next its a trip to good old Woolies to purchase some items to be placed on the BBQ later, lamb chops look good value for money so in the basket they go along with some sausages, mini burgers and salad stuff.

Then it's back to the site and to the communal BBQ area, where we bump into the three guys from Cornwall that we met on the boat trip we went on in Cairns , big planet small world. We take our turn at the BBQ and have our dinner accompanied by a bottle of Merlot and another James Bond film which is on the TV.

It's then time to retire to Ted, write up the blog and try and get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 23

Today is another relax day and after a shower and breakfast it's time for a sit by the pool, while Barb has a sunbath, to hot for me I am afraid I go and put some cloths in the washing machine this time I take my specs and manage to add the correct ingredients. Thirty minutes later hey presto washing done and ready to go on the line to dry. It is starting to look like that we have seriously over packed as so far we have managed to wear a weeks worth of clothes, wash them and wear the same ones again. So we still have a lot of clothes in our main suitcases which have not yet been out to play.

Our sleep last night did not fair much better on our new mattresses, and Barb escaped to sleep in Tom at about 11pm mainly because the mattress she was sleeping on had ridge across the top part of it that kept her awake. So yes we are going to find the local BCF and exchange it for a new one. As it is to hot even for Barb to sunbath we decide to make the trip to BCF, we use our phones mapping to guide us to the store, good old Google.

We wait patiently in the queue clutching the defective mattress, now we can not find the receipt but we are hopeful that they will exchange it without to much of a problem. We get to the front of the queue and explain the problem to the girl on the check out desk, and then we unroll the mattress to show her the problem, ok she says we would exchange the item, that is if we sold it but that is not a range we sell. Oops

wrong shop we must have purchased it from Rays camping shop which was next door to BCF in Hervey Bay, we leave BCF with our tails between our legs, feeling a tad daft. Now there is no Rays camping shop in Noosa and the closest one is about an hours drive down the coast so that will have to wait until tomorrow.

We have booked on to a sunset cruise on the river tonight so after a quick snack in town we head off to the marina to catch the boat, we arrive at the marina in plenty of time and have a walk around the various shops and photographic galleries which have some fantastic photographs on display. Sometimes I look at other peoples photographs and I am extremely jealous of their abilities, but on the other hand I am very critical of my own photographs, and should possibly have more faith in them.

We board the boat, yes this is a boat for the evening cruise, however while we have been waiting Barb has been eyeing up the other passengers and has decided that she is underdressed for the evening and has changed into a different top and white three quarter jeans. The boat does not sell drinks but you can BYO which everyone has done, to extremes judging by the size of the (eskys) fridge boxes they have. I will be driving home later so I have a bottle of coke Barb however has a bottle of Merlot, I wonder to myself if Barb, red wine and a moving boat is a good idea?

The cruise is very pleasant and apart from the scenery and the wild birds shows us some more very very impressive real estate with some very very impressive yachts, boats and jet skis moored outside the back door or it may be the front door of the properties. The sunset was not bad but I have seen much better in Scotland but we will have to see what Photoshop can do to improve the pictures.

After the cruise we return to the camp site, with no damage to the white jeans, and then to the communal BBQ, after dinner we return to Ted to see if we can get any sleep, just time to write up the blog and then to bed, goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 24

Today sees us heading off to see what is the heritage of one of today's great guys, Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo. This guy was taken from this planet 6 years ago, far too early in his life, I am sure he had much more to offer the well being and our understanding of the wildlife of our planet, he was a great conservationist and brought an understanding of wildlife to us all the like of which we had not seen before. I doubt the like of which we will not see again, his involvement and enthusiasm was infectious, he will be sadly missed especially I am sure by those who met him.

In writing this it reminds me that I have not mentioned that we have recently lost a great man a true legend, and a legend in his own lifetime of course I am talking about Nelson Mandela and man who suffered so much and still managed to do so much for his country a country and people he loved and who loved him. It is nearly unbelievable what one man achieved and how so many followed him, god will look after him now, RIP Nelson Mandela you changed your country and the world, my thoughts now are with the future of South Africa.

Before we get to the Zoo it's time to go to Rays outdoor world and try again with the defective mattress, this time the queue is a bit shorter and we explain the situation to the lady at the counter, who needs to get her supervisor. Her supervisor explains that as we don't have a receipt they don't have to do anything but as it looks faulty they will exchange it, and then gives us a lecture on how to use a self inflating mattress. She is however very helpful and enrolls us on their members club as that way if we make another purchase we do not need to keep a receipt as the purchase will be logged in membership history. Time for a quick coffee and sandwich before we head off to Irwin's gaff.

We drive down the Steve Irwin highway and arrive at the zoo the car park is pretty full but we manage to find a space to park Tom with some shade, thinking more of ourselves when we return rather than Tom's paintwork. We make our way in and pay what I initially thought was a fairly hefty entrance fee. There is a show due to start shortly at the main arena so we make our way there stopping on the way to see the koala bears most of which were having a kip but looked lovely all the same. We get to the arena and choose to sit in the shade as it is, well bloody hot, the show involves some birds of prey to get the show going, then the handlers bring in crocodywoc the crocodile.

This guy is a big bugger and we find out later when we are reading some of Irwin's history, that Graham (the croc) had got hold of Irwin's best mate one night during a flood and had left him needing 186 surgical staples to put him back together, he would have needed more only Irwin had jumped in and pulled Graham's mouth open to release his mate. The handlers put on a good show but I am sure that the man himself would have been much more impressive.

We then go to see the kangaroo's now these guys are pretty laid back and you just walk around their enclosure with them, you can feed them by hand, sit with them, stroke them it's a pretty good experience. There is the usual zoo stuff to see, and then it's off to see the tiger cubs, again these are very docile and seem tame, people have paid extra and are sitting with them, stroking them and having their picture taken with them. It is hard to imagine that we need not to forget that these will grow up to be dangerous animals, a fact that will soon become apparent.

As we wander through tiger world lots of people are starting to take seats by the tiger enclosure, as there is nothing happening we make enquiries and find that the handlers will be giving a tiger training display shortly, so we take a seat. It turns out that we will have to wait for 40 minutes for the display but as it is under cover from the sun and we can sit down we decide to wait. I make a comment to Barb that we better not sit her for 40 minutes only to see a 5 minute display, oops.

The audience grows to a full house, we are sitting on the front row and late arrivals end up sitting on the floor, the handlers three in total, one commentating and two to look after the tigers come into the arena with a female tiger which we are told weighs 80kg and a big male weighing in at 140kg. They start off by feeding the animals with a carton of milk, and while the female does as she should and sits up on her hind legs to drink the milk, the male wanders off looking uninterested. The next minute the male launches itself at exceptional speed at his handler knocking him to the ground, I don't think that this is part of the show. The other handlers run to his assistance, fend off the obviously unhappy male and carry their colleague to safety, the incident had happened at the very edge of our vision so at this time we are not to sure how serious things are.

After a couple of minutes the two guys come back into the arena, with one tiger still wandering around, the guy doing the commentary is obviously and understandably shaken, but this is the show must go on type of thing. While one guy gets the other tiger out of the enclosure the guy with the mike explains that the handler is ok was just knocked over and that the tiger was "just playing", playing my arse, it wanted to eat him. There were a few people in the audience who had seen more of the incident than we had and were visibly shaken by the experience. We have to remember that these are wild animals and no matter how much training they have, they can and will return to their natural instincts. It looks

like they were lucky today and nothing serious has happened however the show is unsurprisingly over for today.

After the excitement has died down we wander through to Africa in looked at the Giraffes and stuff, we then jumped on the Steve Irwin bus to grab a lift back to the other side of the zoo, so that we could see the Tasmanian devils, giant tortoises big buggers they were as well, dingoes, freshwater crocodiles, and yes Jennifer we saw some otters, three actual otters and we have photographic evidence to prove it, unlike your sighting in Ambleside.

After going to see the koalas again it's time to leave the great guys legacy, my only reservation about the place is the Disney experience, but hopefully the money earned is used to continue Steve's conservation plans and not just for profit. Now it's time to find a campsite for the night, I have seen one on Google and it is only twenty minutes away from Steve's gaff, when we arrive at the site the reviews I had read are correct. They stated that the owner of the site is a bit shall we say over the top in making sure that the guests keep to a 10 kph speed limit, and as such has installed sleeping policemen, no make that sleeping POLICE STATIONS, a big 4x4 would have trouble, as for poor little Tom he bottoms out every 20 yards.

Great the site is all grass so it may be a bit more comfortable than the previous sites, it's a big place and there are only three other residents this is unlike the other sites we have stayed at recently as these have been smaller and fuller with more than 150 other campers, well mostly caravaners or motorhomers. This Place is in the mountains and it's vast it's like putting up a two man tent in 4 football pitches, Ted feels dwarfed by his surroundings.

We have eaten while we were on route so we settle in for the night there are no such luxuries as swimming pools here not even a TV, so retire to our sleeping mattress's Barb reads her book and I write up the blog then it's time for sleep, goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 25

After a marginally better nights sleep, apart from it being much colder up In the mountains we wake at about 7am pack Ted back into his bag and fight our way over the police stations with Tom receiving a few more scratches underneath we depart the site. We are heading back up north today no not to Yorkshire but to Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast which is only about an hour and half drive.

After the usual drive around to get our bearings we hunt for a car parking space with some shade as according to Tom's external temperature gauge it is already 31 degrees. We find a suitable and spot park up, it's coffee time so we find a cafe and order coffee, stupid tea, (earl grey) and poached eggs on toast, we sit outside looking out at the amazingly blue Pacific Ocean.

After breakfast we walk along the beach front, there are lots of people swimming without wearing stinger suits so we decide to join them, the ocean is wonderfully cooling in the mid day heat, although a tad chilly around the nether regions when first getting in. After a good old splash about its time to get out of the ocean, without any stings or bites of any kind, Barb had suggested shouting Shark but I said that it might not be a good idea.

Time to find a campsite, I follow Barbs map reading directions and we arrive at the first site on the list, not quite Barbs cup of tea as it looks a bit like Butlins with loads of rug rats running around, luckily it's full and has no vacancies. On to the next site, this one looks ok and they tell us that they can fit us in for one night. We book in and erect Ted in a couple of minutes, now there is a fair bit of wind today and Ted's poles are bending a bit to much, this may be a bit to much to ask of our 20 quid tent. We are going out for the rest of the afternoon so I decide to drop Ted to the floor, just in case the wind gets any stronger while we are out.

Couple of things that I have not mentioned about our fellow campers, who's equipment has dwarfed poor little Ted, there is some seriously big stuff here the caravans look like something the British army would use, they are huge all with a least four wheels running massive off road tyres, they must weigh a ton. They have massive awnings no make that marquees and then as if they have not got enough space they add a couple of pop up gazebos for good measure.

Now when we go camping in the UK we are accused of taking everything but the kitchen sink, on this trip we have two bowls, two plastic cups purchased from Mad Max discount store, one fork, one spoon and two knives which we have acquired from various hotels on route. Our fellow campers on the other hand arrive with everything INCLUDING the kitchen sink, most of them have more fridge boxes than you can shake a stick at, a couple of them have brought upright fridge freezers and one guy has brought the fridge freezer and I kid you not a washing machine, completely nuts.

While we are out we blow the heads off a couple of cold ones and have good old fish and chips for tea, the fish was the best we have had for ages, we're turn to the site, the wind has dropped and Ted is no worse for wear so we put the poles back together and Ted is ready and erect moments later. Now we need an early night so it's time to write up the blog and then try and get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 26

This morning we have gate crash Dave and Judith's party, via FaceTime, that they were having last night it sounds confusing but it's not really it's just the time difference, so they were drinking booze and we, as it was 7.30am here were drinking tea and coffee. It was great to catch up with everyone and as you can imagine it was fun. We are in two minds whether to stay another night at this site but as the office does not open until 9am it's time to pop out for a spot of breakfast.

When we return Barb enquires about pitch availability for tonight, and is told that they have a space but not the one that we are currently on, we have a look at the other available pitch but it is hard standing which is not really suitable for Ted, or our backs for that matter, so we decide to pack up and move on to another destination.

We are only about 80k from Brisbane so ideally we need to choose somewhere not too far away, after looking at the map we decide on Which is only about an hour's drive away. We arrive and have our usual trip around to gain our bearings and also to check out whether we wish to stay here. The place looks ok much like the other sea side towns we have visited. Next job find a place to stay, Google to the rescue, I phone the first site, sorry we do not have tents here, oops sorry I asked, must be some stuck up sod from the Caravan club. No answer from the second one but as it's only half a mile away we drive down there, we arrive just before the office closes and secure a pitch for \$30, looks good the amenities are fine and there is a grass pitch under shade, result.

Ted is erect in moments and as it's a bit blowy the guy ropes are pegged down as well just in case. Then it's off into Scarborough for a look around, not much to report as it is fairly similar to the others we have been to, you know beautiful blue ocean miles of

silver sand, fantastic yachts in the harbour, it's a hard life. The shops are selling the same seaside tat as the others as well so luckily shopping is down to the minimum.

Time for a refreshing cold one and to get something to eat, then it's time to return to the site so that Barb can have a glass of vin rouge, as it was her turn to drive this evening. When we get to the site we retire to the seating area and have a glass of red out of a blue plastic beaker, who said we have got no class. While we are there we get chatting to a couple from Tasmania, we discuss the various places they have visited and they have traveled fairly widely across Europe we exchange details and they have invited us to go and see them if we get to Tasmania, than it's time for blog write up and bed so goodnight one and all sleep well.

We meander our way back to the hotel, our room is ready so we check in and take our bags which have grown from two to five, up to our room. The hotel is how shall we describe it "functional" but it is clean, close to the city centre and oh yes cheap.

As we have been deprived of sleep while we have been camping its time for a little siesta before we do anything else. Now this little siesta turns into a full blown sleep and does not see either of us waking up until 8.30pm at which time neither of us fancy going out so we watch some pretty poor tv and then return to the land of nod, this should see us ready for a full day tomorrow.

Christmas Eve, sees us awake early and into town for some breakfast, after breakfast we mingle with the shoppers scurrying around buying their last minute Christmas items, us well we buy nowt. Next stop is down to the river to catch the ferry for a spot of sight seeing from the water, there are two different ferry services one which is free and one that you pay for, the free one uses smaller boats and does not go as far. We choose the one that you pay for as it will give us more sight seeing opportunities, now it only costs \$9.60 for a round trip for both of us and it's not like the Mersey ferry, two stops and your off lark. This is a modern cat type boat which does about 20 stops at which you can hop on and off, and the round trip takes about two hours.

While I am outside taking some photographs Barb goes inside to get some shade from the seriously hot sun, while inside Barb gets talking to some locals, gets some information regarding the floods of 2011 and they also tell her about a great place to eat which does special deals at lunchtime. After cruising around for a while longer we decide to go to the suggested restaurant for some lunch, first impressions are good the views are wonderful and we get a table by the window overlooking the river.

The people that a Barb met on the ferry are also in the restaurant and Catherine comes over to say hello and that she hopes we like the food. After we have eaten I pop off to the loo and on my return stop of at Catherine's table to compliment her on

her recommendation. After a brief chat and introductions Catherine asks what plans we have for this evening, my response is no plans, just a walk into town a little drink and possibly a little bite to eat as we were fairly well stuffed after lunch. Catherine then asks if we would like to join them for dinner, I say just give me a minute and I will check with the Boss, Barb has agreed so I return to their table with an affirmative and then ask where we should meet them, but the invitation was not to a restaurant, the invitation is to their house, what amazing hospitality. I little taken aback I get the address and we agree on a 7pm rendezvous and say our goodbyes until later. I return to our table and give Barb the news and she as taken aback as I was, this is hospitality at its best.

Now while we have been sitting at our table I have noticed a familiar accent at the next table and when the opportunity arises I ask them if I am correct, sure is they are from just up the road from us off Queens Drive. Mum and dad are visiting son, daughter in law and grand children and we are told by Scott that they are here for another 3 months, 17 days, 14 hours and approximately 37 minutes, not that he is counting. They finish their meal and we say our goodbyes, a couple of minutes later Scott returns with their address and says that if we are free on Boxing Day they are having a bit of a party and would we like to join them. This is amazing you just don't get this type of hospitality in the UK.

We catch the ferry back towards the hotel, when we get to our room we decide that a little siesta would be appropriate before we make the journey to Catherine and Brian's house which is about a 30 minute drive away, I phone a taxi firm negotiate a price and arrange a collection time. When the taxi arrives he wants to charge us another €30 but after a bit more negotiation and the agreement of a return fare we are on our way. We arrive a little late thanks to the renegotiation time with the taxi and are welcomed with wonderful hospitality, there is to be the six of us for dinner, Catherine, her husband Brian, her sister Irene and her husband Peter, oh and us. Irene had mentioned that there may be a fair amount of vin rouge consumed and we are offered a glass as soon as we arrive.

We have a very pleasant evening and we all try to get enough of our family details, history and our planned trip into the short time we have available, Irene has invited us to see them in Adelaide and that may happen sooner than she expected as we are now due there on the 20th of Jan. We have wonderful meal with an amazing custard dessert, for which Catherine must send me the recipe, the conversation is brisk following a number of different trends, the hours pass and the evening is over all too soon as our taxi arrives, we exchange addresses express our thanks say our goodbyes and get into our taxi for the journey back to the hotel. I would like to take this

opportunity to thank this lovely family for their hospitality, warmth and hopefully future friendship, their invitation to join them on Christmas Eve was very much appreciated, if you are reading this, what can I say more than thank you.

We return to the hotel watch a little TV then it is time for bed, goodnight one and all sleep well, we miss you all especially at this time of year.

Ok it's Christmas Day we are on the other side of the world and the first time we have ever been away from our family at Christmas, it's going to be 30 degrees c which is also a bit mad, what shall we do, I know we will go for a free ferry ride across to the other side on not Birkenhead the dark side, we are going to the sunnier side the side where there are park, swimming pools at the side of the river, there are loads of families and friends having BBQ Christmas dinner in the park and it's a bit mad watching people swimming with Father Christmas hats on, on Christmas Day when it's 30c, my mind is now officially blown.

Australia is a bit like the UK twenty or possibly thirty years ago it is officially shut on Christmas Day, no bars open and very few restaurants however given the heat we are not that hungry we find a cafe and have a late breakfast then we catch the free ferry taking the long route back towards town, compared to the other side of the river the town centre is very quite so we take the opportunity to wander through the streets taking in the sights as we go. Its now time for a drink and by the looks of it, the only place that that's going to happen is our hotel room. Before we left the UK we had wondered about Christmas Day but had thought well if all else fails the bar and the restaurant in the hotel will be open. Well it just goes to show that one should never assume anything as the bar/restaurant in our hotel is shut until the 6th of January, have we moved hemispheres or planets, just as well we have our own supplies.

We have FaceTime chats with mum and dad, and, Jennie and Antony and as we should have been having lunch at Jane and Barry's we geg in with a Skype conversation just as they are serving crimbo dinner, it did look very good, thank goodness Apple have not yet invented smelly vision.

After a couple of little drinkets it's time for bed so goodnight one and all merry Christmas sleep well.

Boxing Day, now we have not been very constructive in our planning since we arrived in Brisbane, as we are due to leave our hotel and Brisbane on the 27th, we need to get ourselves organised we start making phone calls and it is apparent that Ozz is still shut, I send £££ a text sending our apologise that we will not be able to join them today, but we just need to get ourselves sorted out. In the end we should have gone to the party as no matter how many phone calls we make, we are not going anywhere on the 27th. , so we book an extra night in the hotel and end up going to the

Irish bar for a couple of Boxing Day libations, it gets a bit of a blur from here so
goodnight one and all sleep well.

27th December, oops got a bit of a headache, first stop shower, then breakfast, now
we need to stop messing about and get our fingers out. Within a couple of hours we
have arranged two free motorhome transfers, one from Sydney to Melbourne and one
from Melbourne to Adelaide, we have also organised a hire car for tomorrow
morning, to take us to Sydney.

Ok that's things sorted for tomorrow apart from packing we are done, just a bit of
time left for some sight seeing so we jump on the bus over the road from the hotel to
the XXXX brewery, hey don't knock it sight seeing, history and booze in one trip,
sounds good to me. Now it's only a short trip on the bus and yes we could have
walked, however if we had walked in this heat we would have been a pair of sweaty
little piggies by the time we got there.

We arrive in plenty of time for the tour and there is a huge bar area however we can
not have a drink before going on the tour, if you have been on a brewery tour they are
pretty similar as the process is pretty much the same as it has been for hundreds and
hundreds of years. It's a shame that the bottling part of brewery was closed as that
would have been interesting, oh hang on a minute it was all closed mind you what do
you expect on the 27th December. After the tour we sample a couple of the brews and
end up having our dinner there, then it's back on the bus to the hotel to pack.

We arrived in Ozz with two bags each and we are now struggling to get our
belongings into five bags, we have purchased some of those reinforced carrier bags to
carry or extra belongings, you know Ted the tent and stuff, that's it we are
officially bag persons. Bags packed it's time for some more crap TV then to bed so
goodnight one and all sleep well.

28th hey it's Barb's Birthday, after a shower and the usual other stuff we make our
way to the reception area like a pair of sherpa's lugging bags of god knows what into
the lift and down one floor to reception, we leave the majority of the bags there while
we go for some breakfast and to collect our next chariot. We have breakfast in a
pancake parlour, now I can never get my head around bacon, eggs, pancakes,
creamed butter and some form of maple syrup, and I am not wrong, all great ideas but
they do need to be served separately.

Next stop that well known Dutchman hertz van rental, when we get there it looks like
this is the only place hiring cars today the queue is out of the door, eventually after
the usual, you get this but need this cover, oh and this, oh and this.

We are shown to our latest form of transportation a Red Hyundai Elantra Eleanor to
her friends, unlike Nicholas Cages nemesis, this Eleanor is a tad more shy and
retiring and lacking the considerable grunt of a V8 GT500 Mustang, however she is

considerably more comfortable than Tom the Cruze Holden/Vauxhall/GM Something or other bag of bones.

We make our way back to the hotel to collect the bag people and then we are off into the sunset, no we're not it's not even 11.30am ok so were off down route three to the Goldcoast we get to the coast in about an hour and a half and our first stop is Southport yes it's a seaside town but it's not like gods waiting room it is fairly lively and although there are no kiss me quick hats the place is a tad tacky, so we move on further down the coast.

Now I know that it is Christmas but being a daft pommy we had not realised that campsites would be in such demand at this time of year as we expected the Aussies to be at home with their friends and families. Well their not they are all and I do mean each and every one of them are either camping or occupying a hotel room. We need to find somewhere to stay and at the present time we know how Joseph felt when told there is no room at the inn.

We have tried numerous places all with the same result sorry we are full and have no vacancies, we are starting to get a bit tired and for the first time since our arrival a bit narked with each other. We stop at yet another site and I get Barb to go and work her magic, result the owner has taken pity on us and can squeeze us in. Now when I say result she is actually having a laugh, 40 bucks for the night for a site that is not much more than a field next to the main road, and the amenities must be the same as when she arrived here 27 years ago from Stockport, limited is an understatement, the caravan club would not approve. It turns out that she is selling up to a property developer and is moving back to the UK, I hope she got a fortune for the land as she must be making 4,000 bucks a night with zero and I do mean zero costs.

That said the beach is a two minute walk away so Phil and Kirsty must be right, location, location, location. We walk down the beach at sunset hand in hand each carrying our thongs in our spare hand, we are at the waters edge leaving our footprints in the virgin sand only for the gentle waves to lap over them and make them disappear moments later, it's as if we where never there. We celebrate Barbs birthday with a bottle of fizz served in plastic cups, proper classy. Oh by the way smutty, thongs are flip flops.

Then we stroll into town, well village for Barb's birthday dinner, Barb has grilled prawns and I have seafood pasta, both of which were fantastic and washed down with a jug of the local brew, tonight we have a desert, brandy and coffee. Then we return to chez Ted and attempt to get some sleep before the parrots wake up and wake everyone else up, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

29th Now Phil and Kirsty are right as Barb wants to stay another night, so we get mugged again by our mate from Stockport and hand over a kings ransom for another night. We go down to the beach for a swim, the ocean is a tad fresh this morning and there are a few eek's and aah's as the cold water touches certain parts of our anatomy

then we are in and then we are wiped out by one of the larger waves. We splash around getting knocked off our feet by the waves on numerous occasions having, well, a right good laugh. We return to the site and after a shower we walk into town for a coffee and a look around, the coffee was good and the walk around did not take long.

The weather has changed and we can see that there is a storm coming in, back at the site we are told that there actually two storms heading in our direction one from the south and one from the west, our fellow campers are battening down the hatches, so we do the same and peg out Teds four guy ropes, for what use they may be. The storm gathers momentum and the lightening strikes followed by the very loud claps of thunder get closer and closer. It is an amazing display of the earths powers with fork lightening hitting the ground at regular intervals. There are a couple of people trying to erect their tent just as the storm starts to hit, they get the tent up and are starting to put up the tarpaulin and poles when there is an amazingly loud clap of thunder, that's it they just drop the poles and run for cover.

We had decided that the safest driest place was inside Eleanor so we watch the display from there, the storm lasts for about an hour and as the storm moves on the rain stops and the sky brightens up, Ted is still standing and is bone dry inside so we climb inside and read for a while before it is time to try and get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

30th we are woken by the parrots at dawn or possibly before dawn so we get up at about 7am and after a shower we pack Ted away in now time at all into his original bag yet again. We leave the car at the site packed up and ready to go while we go for a cup of coffee and a tea, then we go back to the site. Barb gets a hug off the owner as we are leaving I suggested that she checked her pockets, and we head off towards Byron Bay.

Now Byron Bay although only a small town is very popular and very busy there is a good two mile queue to get into the place, we eventually get into the town center and we wonder if this might be a good place to spend new year, so we check out a camp site they are full but suggest another one so we drive over to it. They have a pitch and they only want 90 bucks for the privilege, 90 bucks are they having a complete laugh, so we decide that Byron bay may not be the place to stay, but we park up for an hour and have a look around.

We head off down the coast and it's not long before the road is closed and we are sent on a detour, we eventually arrive at Lennox Head another small seaside town

however this one is not as busy as previous places we have been and does not appear to have the same volume of tat shops. We drive down the Main Street and at the end of the road there is a campsite, it says no vacancies but we are learning that this could be untrue. Barb goes off to work her magic and returns saying that they have a pitch available, we book in and drive round to our allotted pitch, this place is huge, if not massive, and so is our pitch.

Ted is about 2 meters square and he is lost on this pitch which could easily fit 20 Teds on, as we decide where on the pitch to put him we are laughing that much I nearly wet myself. We are surrounded by bigger encampments than the British light infantry have when they are on tour, this is serious camping little Ted is again dwarfed by his bigger relatives. I suggest that we could sublet the rest of the pitch and be in profit on the deal.

On a serious note last nights lightening strike has started a Bush fire which is clearly visible from the camp site, and there are helicopters dropping water on it collected from the lake next to the camp site, apparently the fire we can see has been started deliberately to stop the spread of the original fire, and this one is under control, if that's under control then I can knit fog.

The authorities must know better as the helicopters, along with the fire brigade and dumper trucks have gone home, however there is still a lot of smoke and the sky is still an orange glow from the fires burning below. So we will have trust to the local knowledge for now but rest assured we will be out of here in a shot and Ted will have to fend for himself.

We have heard today of Michael Schumacher's accident, and as we retire to bed the news so far is not good. Yesterday he had everything people may wish for in life and now in the blink of an eye he is left fighting for his life. This life we live can change in an instance and we have no control over our destiny, live your life, your time here is short do not leave it regretting the things you should have done or wanted to do and did not. Goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 34

Well we are still here, the campsite was not evacuated although on a serious note a couple of houses have been lost to the fire, and I feel for those who have lost their homes and possessions especially at this time of year. Right we are back up to speed it's New Year's Eve and we have now been away for over a month, doesn't time fly. It does not look like it is going to be a very lively New Year's Eve as the options are attend a free BBQ on the camp site with the happy clappers at the Christian fellowship or walk into the village to the one and only pub, well the pub is going win.

We decide to go out for the day and drive down the coast to Ballina and to a couple of other small towns along the coast, not a great deal to report here they are all very similar small seaside towns with shops selling the same tat. So we park up by a beach and go for a stroll watching and listening to the waves of the Pacific Ocean roll up roll up the beach.

We make the return trip which takes a couple of hours, well getting everywhere takes forever because of the vast distances between places. When we get back to Lennox head we decide to get some food while it is still quiet and we may as well blow the head off a cold one while we are at it. Then we return to the site to get ready for the evening, now you do not need to make much of an effort as most of the blokes look like they have just got of a surf board and put on the first thing they found.

We have been told by our neighbour that the band is due on stage at 9pm and that it gets really busy down there later, mind you it is only 6.30pm and she is half cut, as she was at the same time yesterday. We walk down to the Lennox head hotel at about 8.45 and when we get there it is near enough empty, so we take a seat and wait for the band to come on stage. The band was setting up when we were there before and that was 5.30pm, so just after 9.15pm they arrive on stage piss about tuning up and testing the previously test amps and sound outputs then bugger off again without playing one song.

It turns out that they were doing us a favour as when they did finally come on stage they were to say the least bad if not crap, that said the locals are up and dancing, but there is no wonder there either as most of them are off their heads by 10.30pm this should be interesting with another two and half hours to go before closing. We have a couple more drinks and depart just after 11pm and head off back to Ted in case he is lonely or has gone up in smoke, as the fires are under control but they are still burning.

We have a little gin and tonic to toast in the new year and phone home to say happy new year and then retire to get some sleep so goodnight one and all sleep well, welcome to 2014.

Day 35

After breakfast we pack Ted up and while we are putting the stuff in the car we notice that our next door neighbour is asleep in a camping chair out side their tent in the same clothes that she had gone out in, must have been a good night. We shower and depart the site pdq, today the adventure starts to get a bit more interesting as we are heading inland for a bit of bush camping.

It's a 250k drive so we need to get going, heading inland the landscape gets a bit more interesting and the towns get further apart as do the McDonalds, we stop to get some shopping before we run out of shops, and it's good job we did as very soon there are no more shops. We enter the Gibraltar National park, after a good few more miles we turn off the main road onto a forest track we drive 3.5k into the forest to the camp site, well a clearing in the woods. Barb wants to be close to a river or stream and there isn't one here so off we go to the next one.

The next one is a 9k drive into the bush and this road is a tad rougher than the last in fact we could have done with John and Barbara's new toy, but that would have got it dirty, you want to see the state of Eleanor, she is filthy and will need a wash at the next car wash. As we have driven 9k down a track it's a good job there is a stream, as we are checking out a suitable site a wild Skippy hops into the field, that's it we are staying here.

We set up site, as usual this does not take long with Ted's quick erection ability, then we go for a walk along the river. When we return to Ted I light a fire while Barb gets food ready, as we have not got any cooking facilities we purchased a roast chicken, if this type of camping is to continue we may have to visit BCF again for a gas stove, oh and a trailer.

As the light starts to fail the bush starts to come to life, the noise is deafening, god knows how much sleep we are going to get, and I wonder if skippy or one of his mates will come to visit our tent. One thing for sure there is not going to be any bush tucker trails, and I will be going to the loo before I go to bed and not venturing out of Ted until daylight tomorrow.

It's going to be an early night tonight to try and get some sleep just in case the wildlife gets any noisier or skippy comes a visiting, so goodnight one and sleep well, not sure if we will and I have not got Ant or Dicks phone number if we want to get out of here.

Day 36

We are awoken early by the parrots and every other living thing in the bush with their wonderful dawn chorus, we have survived the night without any mishaps and did not have any visits from young skippy or his mates. We have breakfast, wash , no shower this morning as it is only cold water and I am a bit of a whimp, we pack Ted back into his bag and we are off down the 9k rally route a bit quicker this time as we know that there are no main traumas waiting to catch us out. By the time we get to the main road Eleanor is as dusty as a dusty thing can be and defiantly needs a wash, but she is in one piece.

We set off down the highway, further inland towards the next place we are planning to stay which is only about 50k away, when we get to the turn off this time the sign says that the camp site is a 16k into the bush down a dirt track, this should be fun. Before we head off into the bush we go to the nearest town, Glen Innes to get some provisions, it's only 40k away so let's hope we don't forget the milk. While in the town we have a look around its a bit like stepping back in time, being as tactful as I can, while I am talking about taking a step back in time I know Jules and Verne have had little or no input so far, not sure why they have been so quiet but I have told them it's about time they made themselves heard, so rest assured they will be playing their part as of tomorrow.

After a trip to Woolies we set off to the campsite, when we turn of the main road we are straight onto a gravel track which descends down the mountain with some serious hairpin bends, this would make a great rally stage at the end of the 16k we arrive at the campsite which is next to a river. The river which at the moment is not much more than a stream however I suspect is a raging torrent in the rainy season. There are no showers here not even cold ones and no proper loos just a compost dunny (nice) which Barb is not too happy about so I imagine this is going to be a one night stand.

Ted is erect in his usual mater of moments, which is good as it is pretty hot and one does want to be exerting to much effort in this heat, it's amazing how quickly the heat saps your energy, especially for us whining pomms. As usual Ted is dwarfed by every other tent and piece of camping equipment around us. We are camped by a Ute with a sleeping compartment on the back and are shortly joined by a Land Rover 110 which looks like a proper bit of kit complete with a roof tent and it's own shower tent all serious stuff this, and we haven't even a stove, kettle or a pan, we better get ourselves some kit if this bush tucker trial stuff is going to continue.

As evening comes and it starts getting a bit cooler we venture out of Eleanor's air conditioning bubble, and join the owner of the Ute, Warwick and Bruce and Sue the

owners of the lovely Land Rover. We start chatting and find out that Warwick owns a 900 acre (I think) farm, Bruce is a self employed builder and Sue works for a road building company. These people must think we are completely mad when we tell them what we are doing and then look at the equipment we have, or actually the lack of. It turns out that Warwick wanted to sell the farm last year and tour the country for a while, but his wife had different ideas so he is spending some time touring while his son and wife look after the farm, while we discuss the prices we have paid for campsites he invites us to his farm and tells us we can pitch Ted anywhere on the farm for free, if we get over that way we will take him up on his offer.

During the conversation regarding everyone's travels it looks like Bruce and Sue have the winning hand, they with the Landy known as the "milk wagon" and sometimes a caravan, have traveled extensively around this vast country working in various places and by the sound of it they have been to most parts of it, including driving through flooded areas and across proper deserts. Considering the distance covered and the terrains it has been to endure the milk wagon is in great condition and is a credit to its owner. I could have listened to everyone's travel stories all night but it's bed time so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 37

No shower to be had here this morning so we join Warwick, Bruce and Sue for breakfast, now we can manage the cereal and milk and Warwick donates some boiling water so that we can have a tea and a coffee. We chat a bit more over breakfast exchange email addresses, we are all packed up so we say our farewells and set off in various directions. These are seriously great guys and it was a pleasure to have met them, we depart wiser than when we arrived.

We head off for Copeton dam in the Dwydir National Park which is a couple of hours drive away, the drive is fairly mundane and there is not much to report apart from we had a self induced 200k detour. I will say no more than the journey took a bit longer than expected, but we did see a bit more of the country. It is a hot one today a very hot one Eleanor's display tells us that it tops out at 47 degrees c, now that's hot I don't care what anyone says.

It is difficult for me to fully explain the vastness of this country to our friends back home living on our little island, but I can say that it is bloody huge and we haven't even scratched the surface yet. As you venture inland the distances between towns

grows to hundreds of kilometres and there is not a great deal in between them, you do not want to breakdown out here. We arrive at the dam's campsite and we book in, 20 bucks for the night not bad there our toilets, showers and BBQ areas. We are given a map and an explanation of the site, now going back to the size of things over here get your heads around this, the campsite is 8 Kilometres long and you can camp near enough anywhere you fancy, this is bush camping with amenities. Talk about spoilt for choice it takes us for ever to choose a pitch.

We eventually pitch up lakeside on the north side of the peninsula, Tom is as usual erect in a couple of minutes which is a good job in this heat, now it's time to find a BBQ area to cook the sausages we purchased earlier. We sit at a picnic table and I prepare, cook, BBQ well burn the sausages but to be honest it's too hot to eat, it is now 7pm and it is still 44 degrees c, even the locals think that it is hot. As we sit at the picnic table the kangaroo's hop around with their little joeys popping their heads out of their pouch, and the vibrantly coloured parrots fly around overhead.

We return to Ted and we have a couple of cold beers at the waters edge, watching the optimistic but unsuccessful fishermen in their aluminium motor boats, they give up and return to their tents. Time passes as we chat and watch the sunset over the lake, the heat has us worn out and it is time to retire so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 38

I awake just before dawn after not getting a great deal of sleep due to the heat, it was like an oven inside Ted last night, but the sun has not yet risen and there is a cool breeze coming off the lake. I get my camera and look for a suitably subject to photograph in the magic of the dawn sunlight. The light is good but I am not too happy with the subject matter but we will see what we can do with photoshop when we get home. The sun rises quickly over the hills and all too soon the mystical light of the rising sun is gone.

I return to Barb who is now awake and getting things together ready to pack up, now that the sun is up so are the flies, they are causing serious pain in the arse, well there not really, they are a pain in arms, legs, ears, head in fact any part of the body that is not covered. So Ted is packed up double quick time and then it's off to the showers, I don't care how basic these are after not having one for three days we are both in desperate need of a long hot one, the showers are great stinking hot and I have difficulty removing myself from the raging torrent of hot water.

We are going to a place called Lightening Ridge apparently this is the only place where black opal is found so we are off to have a look, it's a 300k drive but what the heck. The drive takes us further inland and the land is dry and barren for miles and miles. We stop of for a coffee in a town called Bingara, the coffee shop is part of a 1930's picture house and it is the same now as it was then, well apart the new coffee machine and cash register. The place is amazing retaining all of its original art decor fixtures and fittings and the adjoining picture house is the same, it's like taking a step back in time Jules and Verne are amazed.

We continue the journey and eventually arrive at Lightening Ridge, well if you are ever planning on visiting Australia what can I say without offending my Australian readers. Well let's put it this way do not make Lightening Ridge top of your agenda, I will say it was shut, disappointing, a waste of time and oh blow it, crap. Needless to say we do not stay long and head off south east engaging light speed as soon as it is safe to do so.

Time is getting on and we need to find somewhere to stay, we have arrived at a town called Coonamble there is nowhere to camp so we find a motel, basic to say the least but it is a bed for the night. We have dinner at the crown green bowling club and then return to the motel and watch Ant and Dicks Saturday show, it was that or The Wizard of Oz. It's then time to catch up on last nights sleep so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 39

The plan today is to continue further south east towards Sydney, we do not need to be there until the 10th (another 5 days) but there is still a lot to see on route so we plan to get to the Blue Mountain region for a look around. After a tea, coffee and some breakfast we set off. This is drive of approximately a 320k journey which should take about 4 hours without a stop.

Barb does the first stint behind the wheel while I try and catch up with the blog, this is hampered by the undulating road surface which is a tad rough in places, so if there are any typographical errors then it's the fault of the road surface, in fact I think that I will use that excuse for the whole blog. As we travel at light speed, well 110kph through the middle of nowhere we pass a Dalek at the entrance to a homestead, I wonder Who lives there, strange thing to see at the side of the road.

Our night camping with Warwick, Bruce and Sue, made us realise how inadequately equipped we are when there is no camp kitchen available at a campsite, so we have made a couple of purchases, Barb purchased a Billy can, so that we can make a cup of tea. Although not a great deal of good without a heat source and as camp fires are not permitted at the moment due to the high risk of bush fires, I have purchased a gas stove, some gas and also a pan that's it we can now fend for ourselves. Still haven't got a Bear Grylls machete but there is a BCF down the road so you never know. God

knows how we are going to carry it all when we do not have transport, but we will cross that bridge when we come to it.

As there is not too much to say about today's journey, I will fill in a few details from previous days, I am not sure if I have mentioned it but we had arranged two camper van relocations one from Sydney to Melbourne and then one from Melbourne to Adelaide both for free. While we were having a coffee in the art decor coffee shop the other day, Barb was looking on the Internet and found a relocation in America taking a new RV from Winnebago's head office in Iowa to San Francisco. So I phoned the company, it's booked, 11 days for free and it's a full blown 33 foot Winnebago that should be a right laugh. Now we just need to get one from Adelaide to Alice Springs and I will be as happy as a pig in stuff.

Right back to today we have arrived at a town called Orange, compared to the other towns we have passed through on route this is a large one, and things are actually open, Barb has visited the information centre and got the details of the local campsites, I phoned the first one but it's full so we give up with the phone and just turn up at the next one, hey they have got space and it's 18 bucks at night. We find an empty pitch and park up, there is a pair of antlers hanging on the fence and the guy next to us comes over to remove them, Barb asks if they are to keep bad spirits away or is the pitch reserved for someone else, no the guy says that's what you get when you go hunting. Christ we are parked next to Crocodile Dundee, I hope the flys bugger off with the drying antlers, nice.

When Barb returned from the Tourist information centre, she said you will like where we are going tomorrow as there is a racing circuit there, now as if I did not know that there is a circuit at BATHURST, it's a legend and I can't wait to see it. Now Warwick had invited us to stay at his farm which by the distances we have covered recently is only a stone's throw away, but he did say that he would not be home until later in the week. If we are still around the area I will give him a ring to see if he has returned from his travels.

It's time for a gin and tonic, write up the blog and then climb into Ted and get some sleep so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 40

When we arrived in Australia we were in awe seeing beautifully coloured parrots flying around, now they are just a pain in the arse and although I do not agree with killing wildlife, after talking to Warwick who as you may remember is a farmer these things are bloody pests they drag up his seeds and then come back for the young shoots of his next crop. For me they just have you awake at 5.30am with their continual squawking so this morning I would do what he does and shoot the buggers.

You will remember that we are now self sufficient, cooking wise, so we put Billy on to boil, make tea, coffee and then have fried egg sandwiches for breakfast. I go for a shower while Barb tries to arrange our growing belongings in Eleanor, as we can not find a dam thing. Ted is packed up back in his bag, dishes are washed and we are ready to go, first stop travel agent to see what we can do about flights from LA to Des Moines Iowa so that we can collect our free Winnebago. We find an agent and he is very helpful he gives us all the details we require, now to search the web and see what deal we can get.

Now it's on to Bathurst, it's about an hours drive away so we will be at the Mount Panorama circuit in no time at all. After a drive which started to show us the beauty of the the country we arrive at Bathurst, now to find the race track, and finding it is not difficult it's 2k out of town built on a bloody big big hill with Mount Panorama written on the side of it, a blind man on a galloping horse could find it.

We spend some time looking around the museum taking in the history of the circuit and it's hero's, watching videos of the big V8 Fords and Holden's thundering their way around the mountain and tight twisting bends. Then it's time for a drive around this historic track, as when there is no racing on this is a normal road. Before we arrive I had not realised that this is actually a street circuit, so off we go on possibly one of the slowest laps of the circuit, as unfortunately the Tarmac is fairly narrow, has speed cameras and the traffic is two way.

We drive the track taking in the magnificent views that I am sure the racing drivers are not looking at when they travel the same road, we are surprised to see the amount of houses that are track side, there is even a vineyard but it was closed and one house selling mangos by the front gate. I get the vision in my mind of Peter Brock hurtling around the track and putting his arm out to collect a mango. This is not a wide forgiving circuit like Silverstone, if you make a mistake here you have got a problem. As we travel through the esses a tight twisting downhill section, I feel great admiration for the drivers that hurtle through theses corners in the big V8s at speeds 3 or 4 times greater than we are traveling at, they must be a right handful.

We have booked onto a campsite in the Blue Mountains so we set off to find the site it's about an hours drive from Bathurst and we arrive there late afternoon. We book in, get the codes for the gates and facility entrance doors and find our pitch, as usual Ted is erect in a matter of minutes however getting some pegs into the ground takes a little longer, hard is an understatement. We have booked in here for two nights and the plan for tomorrow is to go into the countryside and do some walking. This evening we have a walk around the town, which did not take long, pop into the hotel for a cold one and then return to the site.

We sit at one of the picnic tables and organise our flights from Los Angeles to Des Moines, then we need a hire car to get from Des Moines airport to the Winnebago factory, so I give Mr Rossy P a call in the UK and he arranges it for us at mates rates,

great price Ross many thanks. That's a bit mad when you think of it, phone the UK from Australia to organise a hire car in America, bizarre. After a glass of white wine it's time for bed so good night one and all sleep well.

Day 41

Well this morning we are not awoken by the parrots but instead by the pouring down rain and it is freezing, well freezing compared to what we have been used to recently.

We make a dash for Eleanor and drive up to the amenities and then to the camp kitchen for breakfast. Now we had planned to do a long walk in the national park today but the weather has put paid to that.

So we drive to the scenic views and the local tourist attractions of the Three sisters and the Grand Canyon, unfortunately due to the low mist the views are not at their best, we feel a bit cheated as we imagine being here on a sunny day and our eyes being treated to a truly amazing vista. Once again the weather has cheated the camera lens of any chance of capturing the beauty of this land, if the weather is better tomorrow we will return and try again. For now we will have to rely on the photographs in the Disney experience (shop) to show us what we are missing.

The rain is on and off all day and the mist is so low there is very little chance of any sight seeing today, so we head off into the local town of Katoomba for a walk around and a bit to eat. The town is similar to the others we have visited but has no big shops like BCF but does have smaller shops specialising in outdoor pursuits. We find a cafe to have a sandwich and how do I put this, well it's a bit whacky, the staff are like ageing hippies (old hippies) who have not grown up and who have been something for some time, that said the sandwiches were very good.

We return to the site and it is still cold and damp so we take refuge in the camp kitchen, we chat to the Irish guy and Belgium girlfriend, the ones that are away for nine and a half months, and swap travel stories and talk about our trip to Ireland from a couple of years ago. The camp kitchen closes at 9.30pm so we say our good nights and all retreat to our tents.

Barb reads for a while and I write up the blog then it's time for some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 42

The parrots have stayed in bed again this morning as the rain that started at about midnight has not stopped and is now getting worse, poor little Ted is drowned and has finally been beaten by the rain and is starting to let in. We have checked the weather forecast and it's not going to get better anytime soon so it's time to abandon ship, we throw the contents of Ted into the back of Eleanor. We then have to do what all campers hate doing, take down a soaking wet tent in the rain and pack it up. Now Ted is drowned, he is as wet as a wet thing can be, so he unceremoniously taken down and thrown into a large plastic bag.

We drive up to the amenities and stand in the showers (not France so separate ones) and let the hot water warm our bodies then we make a dash for the camp kitchen for some breakfast. The camp kitchen is full of miserable half drowned campers after breakfast we decide that it is not worth revisiting yesterday's view points as the weather is worse. So we pack up and head out of the mountains towards Sydney.

We end up in Penrith and hey it's not raining, after visiting the tourist info office we head off for the only local campsite, now while Barb was in the info office I had found the site on [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com) and the only reviews written about it are not good, but as it's the only one in the village, we will go and check it out.

I go to the reception and the lady was very helpful, unlike in the reviews, we drive down to the camping area and pick our pitch, it's not raining and it is warm however the sun is not cracking the flags. We get poor little drowned Ted the tent out of the bag erect the inner tent and hang the outer fly sheet over a fence to dry out. Nothing more we can do so we head off to explore Penrith, now Penrith is the home of the National water sports center that was used for the 2000 Olympics and is now used for a number of water sports. One of which is the water jet pack, you may have seen it on the TV you strap a pack on your back which is powered by the engine of a following jet ski get into the water and it will lift you twenty feet into the air, if you can control it.

We sit at the side of the lake and watch various people try it out with varying degrees of success the best getting a couple of feet out of the water before dropping like a stone and getting half drowned, all for the princely sum of \$349 seems like a bargain but we decide to give it a miss and just watch. We return to the site and find that Ted has dried out completely so he is erect in moments as usual.

We go to the camp kitchen and use the BBQ to cook our dinner which is accompanied by a bottle of vin rouge, then it's time to do some travel research for our journey from Sydney to Melbourne and then onto Adelaide. Due to last night's rain we did not get much sleep so it's time to retire to bed, goodnight all sleep well.

Day 43

We awake refreshed after a reasonable night's sleep and after a shower go to the camp kitchen and have pancakes and maple syrup for breakfast. We are in no rush this morning as it is nice to take a break from traveling, so breakfast is a slow relaxing affair. We need to go into town this morning as Barb has broken her glasses last night, not sure if the vin rouge had anything to do with the damage, but one lens out and one arm bent, that's the glasses not Barb.

We drive into town and hunt out an optician we wait while he attends to another customer, while we are waiting I check out the prices of the various specs on display, this may not be a cheap day out. Barb hands her specs to the optician and after a couple of sharp intakes of breath, you know the ones you get from a plumber just before he gives you a price. He replaces the lens and straightens the arm hey presto all fixed and better still fixed for free.

We return to the water center as there is also a canoe slalom course in another part of the water park, there are a number of people coming down the course and we watch them show their experience or lack of on their way down. I reckon that if I had a go you would have to put a bet on which came down first me or the canoe as it is a fair old raging torrent.

It is fair to say that we have not done a lot today and it was nice just to relax ready for tomorrow morning which I suspect may be a bit hectic, as we have to drive into Sydney, collect the motorhome drive 30 minutes across Sydney (one following the other) stop for petrol, return Eleanor to Hertz and all before 11am, should be fun. We best get some sleep ready for an early start, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 44

We have done something this morning that we have not done for a long time, set the alarm for 6.30am, ha ha, we did not need to bother as the dawn chorus is like an alarm clock, we pack Ted and the gradually growing camping gear we have into

Eleanor and drive up to the amenities. After a shower we meet at the camp kitchen and have a quick cup of tea and breakfast.

Then we are off towards Sydney to collect the motorhome, we arrive at the office early and the van is still being cleaned so we do the paperwork while we are waiting, after about 20 minutes the guy brings the van round to the front. It is a Toyota Hi Ace

LWB, and a fairly ageing one by the looks of it, but you not in the position to complain when you are paying 5 bucks a day. We check it over and sign the damage report, the considerable damage report and then we are off we stop a hundreds yards down the road and swap over the ever growing number of bags from Eleanor into the van. Now to get to the other side of Sydney in rush hour without loosing each other.

It's about a 40 minute drive, so we best get going, we are still about 25 minutes from our destination as we approach the airport, Barb flashes Eleanor's headlights so we stop and she suggests that we take the car back to the airport rather than trying to drive into the city, good idea so I ring to check that it will be ok, yes it's ok but they charge \$25 for the privilege but taking into account toll charges on two vehicles and the grief of getting into the city it seems like a good idea, notice I say seems like a good idea.

According to the maps app on my phone we are only three minutes away from the Hertz office so of we go, now Sydney airport is no different to any other international airport, it's busy, badly signposted and there is nowhere to stop. I see a sign for Hertz car returns and turn in, this was the first mistake as number one I am informed by some right jumped up jobs worth car park attendant that this was the Avis return entrance and then number two he informs me that I can not get out as there is a hight limit on the exit lane and the camper van is to high, not a good start.

He suggests well tells us to go to the Hertz desk and see what they can do, I have to say that so far during our stay everyone we have met has been very very helpful. Well it must be the big city because even the girl on the Hertz desk was exceptionally unhelpful and said that there was no point leaving the car at the Avis bay they needed it at theirs, I explained we had only left it there because the jobs worth, had told us to and they are actually only 10 yards apart when you can get to them. I go to get the car while Barb goes back to the van to see how we are going to get it out, as the entrance gate only opens from the outside and it also has one way tyre spikes.

I get in the car and drive through to the exit where jobs worth stops me and says that I can not go out through the Avis exit, now we have a little discussion and he does not know how close he was to getting a full mouthful, but instead I ignore him, drive through the exit gate and go 10 yards round the corner to park up in the Hertz return queue, next to the Avis one. What is it with these people to they intentionally try to make life awkward for everyone including themselves. I return Eleanor with no problems and after getting the return receipt I head back to Barb and the Van.

Barb has found a helpful lady and she explains what we need to do, she has sent a driver to get a car to bring around so that the boom gate will open, then once opened she will hold it open and the I will have to drive out and while doing so will have go through a small gap in the anti exit spikes to make sure we don't puncture the tyres. Hey ain't this fun, well to cut it short everything went according to plan and we are out, Barb gives the lady a hug and says a big thank you. Now wasn't that easier than taking it back into town.

We had planned to drive into Sydney for a look around but we decide to give it a miss and head out of town for the coast and save our visit to Sydney for the return trip. The guy at the motorhome office had suggested a place called Jervis point a coastal town with a National park with camping, it's about 160k away so off we go. We arrive at Jervis point and drive 8k into the National park only to find when we get to the entrance kiosks that it is full so we along with the queue of cars, caravans and motorhomes turn round and go back 8k the other way, surely it would be easier to put a sign at the beginning of the road.

We try a number of sites but they are all full, starting to feel a bit like Joseph again we try one more site, but rather than phoning we just turn up and Barb goes in to work her magic, and yes they have a space. We park up and hey guess what it's beer o'clock so I get a cold one out of the fridge and glass of chilled Chardonnay for Mrs H, after dinner we go for a walk along the beach watching the sunset and listening to the waves crash and then wash up the beach removing our footprints from the sand as they go.

Then it's time to return to the van relax for a while, write up the blog, recover from the stresses of the day and in the end laugh about them. It's then time for bed to catch up on some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 45

It's the weekend so we have a lie in and after a leisurely breakfast, pancakes and maple syrup, we shower pack up the van and leave the site at about 10.30, the plan is to follow the coast road and to do about 200k and then find somewhere to stay. Now there are a couple of things I did not mention yesterday about our new mode of transport, now it's a relocation vehicle so it is only costing us 5 bucks a day which is good, however the 415838 kilometres (which is further than the moon) that are showing on the odometer have not been kind to this little Toyota which as yet has no name, you need gargantuan strength in your left leg to depress the clutch pedal and then you require the same strength in your left arm to engage a gear. Then when you are driving and take your foot off the gas the noise from the gearbox on the overrun is

horrendous, to say that it needs a replacement clutch and a gearbox overhaul is an understatement.

Also there is a significant knock from the suspension but apart from aforementioned and the various battle scars to the bodywork it's ok, the fridge, cooker and stuff function ok and the beds are comfy. Not bad for the money, we have it up to the 110kph speed limit and it manages, however it's much happier at 80kph. We watch as the faster traffic passes us when overtaking is permitted but we are happy to cruise along at a more relaxed speed.

Our 200k drive brings us to Potato head, another coastal National park we drive in, this time there are no entrance kiosks and we find a spot at the top of the hill overlooking the Tasman sea the view is spectacular and it's free, no loos but it free.

We park up and look at the view, at the right time of year this is a perfect whale watching location but sadly not at this time of year, then we see a sea eagle sitting on a rock it's not very windy so there is not much of a chance of it flying too much but it is still a magnificent sight.

While I am taking some photographs I am joined by a chap on a bike we start talking and he tells me that the eagle is one of a breeding pair and that they usually fly together later in the evening. It turns out that he is originally from New Zealand but now lives here and guess what, he supports Manchester United.

We have a FaceTime conversation with Jennie and Antony and we show them around our wonderful location oh and the motor home which is now known as Pikey, they are impressed with the location but not to impressed with Pikey although they agree that for 5 bucks a day, one can not complain. It is great to see them and we chat for ages, telling them where we have been and what we have seen then it's time to say farewell until the next time.

Now the NZ guy may support the Manics but he was right about the eagles, just before the sun starts to set they fly majestically together making the best use of the strong breeze and the thermals. They soar above us and then fly out over the Tasman sea they are a wonderful sight and such beautiful looking birds. Then they fly off this time not to return so we suspect that they have returned to their nest for the night.

The sunset is spoiled by the the low cloud so we will have to wait until morning to watch it creep up over the horizon after it's trip to the other side of the world, well sort of. Now it's time for a bit of reading and time to type up the blog, after making sure all the doors are locked its time for bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 46

I awake just before dawn and sneak (well try to) out of Pikey and get my camera ready for the sun's reappearance, the horizon starts to glow orangey red and it is not long before it pops up over the horizon, slowly at first and then showing itself in full.

With a bright orange glow showering the sea and the rocks with the warm morning light, then as it rises above the sea it burns yellow and hotter getting more intense the higher in the sky it goes.

Ok pictures taken time to go back to bed for some sleep, we awake, get up and sort the van out then it's time for breakfast, while we are having breakfast we are joined by a family of Roo's who stop not far from the van to nibble at the vegetation, they do not seem troubled by us being so close and even when I venture out of Pikey to take photographs of them they are not scared off they just look up inquisitively and then carry on eating, after a while they hop off down one of the many tracks and that is the last we see of them.

We finish packing up the van and then make our way down the bumpy track out of the park, meeting the family of Roo's on the way. We need to travel about 250k today so a Barb takes the first stint behind the wheel. There is not a lot to report about the drive as it is fairly uninteresting, we do pass through a few small seaside towns which are much the same as the previous ones we have visited. We stop for a bit of a break and to swap seats for the next stint, and then continue on, it gets to late afternoon and we start looking for somewhere to park for the night, after a good few journeys down hopeful looking side roads it does not look like we are going to be as lucky finding a room with a view as last night.

Eventually we stop at a rest stop along side a river, this looks like a likely location so we park up, put Billy on to boil and have a cup of tea. We are joined by two more campervans and a couple with a van and a boat which they have just taken out of the river, looks like we are staying here. As the evening draws in we get Pikey ready for the evening as we watch the sun set over the river. Time for a spot of reading and to right up the blog then it is time for some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 47

When we awake all our fellow campers are still with us, Barb goes to use the facilities and on the way back starts chatting to the couple with the boat, they live in Melbourne and are on holiday for a couple of weeks, have been doing some fishing, which it appears everyone does, and caught a small shark a couple of days ago. After breakfast we say our goodbyes and head off down the road towards Melbourne with Barb doing the first stint behind the wheel.

Today is going to be a driving, research and planning day, after about 100k we stop for a break and to do a bit of food shopping. We have decided that we are getting a bit

nomadish, so when we get to Adelaide we are going to stay at a camp site for a week, look around and relax as so far we have covered over 5,400 kilometres and are starting to think that we have wheels on our bums.

During our rest stop we have confirmed the camp site booking, and we have received an email with the latest motorhome relocation deals, on it there is a trip from Adelaide to Alice Springs and one from Alice to Melbourne with a day gap in between. I phone my new found friends at Vroom Vroom and they say that both vans are available for 1\$ a day, result we book them while we are on the phone and we will be on our way to Alice on the 28th January for the princely sum of \$12, that should be an experience.

We have now got some serious planning to do, but we have got a couple of weeks to sort ourselves out. Happy with the days bookings we drive on towards Melbourne and we find a stopping point at the side of the highway, this will be fine for tonight and it will give us about an hours drive into Melbourne in the morning. Then all we have to do is go to the airport collect the next relocation car, take Pikey back and then head off for Adelaide, let's hope that's is an easier transition than the Sydney cock up.

I prepare dinner of spaghetti Bolognese on Pikeys stove, that added to the late afternoon heat makes it a tad warm inside Pikey in fact it's unbearable so we head off to the picnic tables more than likely to be bitten alive, but at least it's cooler. We look at the maps and instructions on getting to Alice, basically make sure you take lots of water, stock up with food, fill up with fuel every chance you get and hope that you do not break down, other than that you will be ok.

We have been joined by one more camper van and I have not seen any wolf masks so it should be ok, after a bit more trip revision, a spot of reading and blog writing it's time to set up the beds lock the doors and get some sleep. So goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 48

Well we have survived another night of roadside camping without being raped pillaged or plundered, now like proper pikeys we drive to the motorway services for a shower and then we have some breakfast in Pikey van. Barb is going to drive the first stint leaving me with the stint that includes finding the car hire office at the airport and making sure that I drive into a car park that I can get out of.

We set off along the highway not much to report about the first part of the drive as the road is a fairly quite dual carriageway, there is not a great deal to say about the surroundings, it's not long before Barb has covered over 100k and it's time for a stop and driver change. The rest stops are interesting here as they can be on either side of the highway, which is interesting as if it is on the other side of the highway you just turn right from the outside lane. Also they can be off down a side road rather than being roadside and the signage gives you no indication where they are so you arrive doing 110k expecting to pull off left onto a slip road, but no to you need to turn right, good fun.

We stop and swap seats and set off again after about 70k we approach the outskirts of Melbourne the highway becomes a more serious 4 lane motorway and the traffic gets heavier, Pikey is in need of some go go juice so we turn off the motorway in search of a fuel station, one is found a couple of minutes later and as we are ahead of schedule we stop for a coffee and a muffin.

Back onto the motorway which soon becomes a toll road, which will need paying later, and on to the Airport we follow the signs to the hire car office and double check for any height restrictions and pull into the parking lot. We explain that we are collecting a car and a helpful guy shows us where to park Pikey, then into the office and within ten minutes or so we have the keys to our next chariot, a Hyundai i20 auto it's grey so it's going to be called Fifty, I will let you work that out.

Next stop is to drop off Pikey at the return centre which is about a 30 minute drive across town, so we set off in convoy, I get to drive Pikey and Barb follows in Fifty. We stop on route to swap our ever growing quantity of stuff this is where we find that Fifty is not as big as our previous chariots but we manage to get it all in, then it's just a short drive to the campervan returns depot. When we get there the guy checks Pikey and he signs the return paperwork and says that we will get the deposit back in a couple of days.

Now it's time to get some miles, sorry kilometres under our belts and narrow the gap between us and Adelaide, Barb takes the first stint behind the wheel and complains a bit about Fifty's lack of power, but then remembers how sophisticated and quiet Fifty is compared to Pikey. We are going the long route to Adelaide as the motorway will be completely boring, it's about a 900k journey without the detours we will no doubt make. We make good time and after a couple of coffee and tea stops we arrive at the town of Horsham, we find a campsite and as it is blowing a fair bit we have Ted erect pdq and tonight we use the guy ropes as well. Now I don't think I have mentioned how hot it is, well it's hot, very hot, topped out at 46c today and it is still 42c at 6.30pm, we go to the camp kitchen and prepare our dinner then we go into town for a look around. We find the Royal Hotel and pop in for a cold one and the added bonus of being able to watch the tennis on the TV. That is until the storm starts and after a lightening strike all the power goes off in the town, so no more beer, no more TV and no more air conditioning, time to leave.

We arrive back a Ted and his fly sheet is flapping in the wind as the storm gets stronger so we nail him down and luckily the storm does not seem to be coming our way, but it is not getting any cooler it's still 38c at 10pm this is just daft. As the rain has stopped we leave the fly sheet open and try to get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 49

We awake early and before the sun starts doing its stuff we have taken Ted down and packed our stuff back into Fifty, then it is over to the camp kitchen for breakfast pancakes for Barb and egg on toast for me. Then it's time for a shower and to get on the road in the air conditioned cocoon of Fifty's interior.

The plan is to drive about 300k to Murray Bridge a town about 80k outside Adelaide, we travel along the Dukes (the hell I will) or is it hazard Highway this road is nearly devoid of bends and is lined with gnarled Gum trees burnt from previous fires and that look like they are from the angry forest of the wicked witch of the north.

The highway is surrounded by farms with thousands of acres of wheat producing fields which have been recently harvested, as we continue down the highway the farmland continues and I think I need to reconsider the size into hundreds of square miles rather than acres. There are also fields that have huge grain storage areas, this is a seriously large operation and I can not even start to calculate how many tons of grain this area produces.

As we continue our journey we listen to the news on the radio and are told that the lightning strikes that sent us home from the pub last night caused much more serious problems, they started 256 separate bush fires, that's insane I can't even imagine that happening and how we would deal with it in the UK, that's easy we couldn't.

We stop off at Tailem Bend historic centre when we drive in there is a line of old trucks rusting slowly away in the sun, it's supposed to be a replica of a pioneer Aussie town with some original buildings. The car park is empty and we like others decide due to the mid forties temperature today may not be the day to visit a dust old township, so we continue on to Murray bridge.

When we arrive at Murray Bridge we head for the information centre and Barb goes in to do her local research, while I stay inside Fifty's air conditioned haven, Barb returns and says that there is a campsite just out of town so we head off to find it. It turns out that this one is an RV only site so it's back to the drawing board while we look at the list we decide that due to the abnormal weather conditions, heat and there

is another lightening storm due later that camping tonight may not be the best idea.

We have a look at a couple of motels and then we find a caravan park by the river which has a chalet available we go and have a look and it's ok, basic but ok so we book in. First job get that air conditioning turned on and up to full cold, we unload our growing number of bags out of Fifty and the suspension breathes a sigh of relief. Time for me as hunter provider to pop into town and get some provisions for dinner and to see if this Optus phone shop fares better than the one in Horsham and has a replacement wifi dongle, so that we can rejoin the world of the tinternet, while Barb sorts out the room and possibly checks out the bed.

Food and dongle purchased I return to the chalet, the a/c has done its stuff and it is now nice and cool, we have dinner watch some TV, load some pictures from camera to computer and separate hard drive backup. I will have to load some more onto the web site tomorrow, but for now its time to write up the blog and then climb into a real double bed for some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 50

Now the plan today was to go to Adelaide, do all the car swapping stuff and go to the hotel, well that was the plan the only problem is that the morning TV tells us it's Thursday not Friday. I appear to of gained or lost a day not sure which, it must have been when we crossed the time zone yesterday between Victoria and South Australia, no in could not have been that as that was only 30 minutes gained, must just be me loosing it. Anyway it gives us a spare day to go exploring before we go into Adelaide.

The owner of the caravan park has suggested we visit the local town of The Hoff, no it's not only kidding, the town is called Hahndorf which I am sure you have guessed is a German settlement. As we left the chalet, Fifty's external temperature gauge was telling us that it was 39c and it's only 10.15am, boy the weather forecasters may be right when they said that today is going to be the hottest January day in history and that this location is going to be the hottest place in the world today, it's a good job I like the heat, he he.

We arrive at The Hoff and it's even hotter now, there are not a lot of people walking around but we like, mad dogs and English men, venture out into the midday sun. This is a fairly picturesque town by Aussie standards and has lots of interesting buildings housing small individual shops, that said half of them are closed or are closing early due to the heat, lack of customers and more seriously the owners are at home ready to protect their homes against any bush fires that may start today.

We stroll down the tree lined street, there's only one, and look at the various shops and galleries, now in my humble opinion the galleries are to say the least are optimistic with the prices they are asking for the artwork and I use the term loosely, they have for sale. If the can achieve these ridiculous prices for this stuff I have found my new profession, to be polite it's poor, to be realistic it's bad and to be completely

truthful it's crap. There are some galleries selling original Aboriginal art which is quite pleasing but again in my opinion they are also a tad optimistic with their pricing so we will not be carrying and thing extra home from The Hoff.

The next place we go into sells pottery, glassware and similar stuff, Barb starts talking to the owner while I have a look around, I find two White Star tumblers the same as they had on the Titanic priced at \$210 now we have a set of six of these at home and I think we paid £60 for the set, now there is profit and there is profit. Anyway the owner is shall we say talkative and we end up chatting for early an hour. When we leave more shops are closing and while talking to the owner of a, surprise surprise, a jewellery shop we find out that there are usually six to eight tour coaches that come to town daily with thirty to forty people on each coach, today they are expecting one coach with eight people on board. So he reckons it makes no sense for the owners of the shops to stay open, if it was me I would stay open, less competition means more customers, more customers = more sales, simples.

On the return journey to Murray we stop of at the Aussie equivalent of B&Q, Bunnings, or as we like to call it Bunnies, they have loads of stuff here Eric, Mike and I would need a van, a very large van to take our purchases home from here. They don't however have a Bear Grylls machete which I keep telling Barb we desperately need, especially now that we are going to Alice, who the f's, Alice Springs.

It's time for the mad dogs and English men to retreat to their chalet for a siesta which would not have happened in a tent, well not in this heat. After our siesta we watch some TV and start thinking about our trip to Alice, once again my cries for the requirement of a B G machete fall on deaf ears, but I will keep working on it, but I do need to check that it will be allowed on a plane in the hold baggage especially into the USA.

After TV it's time to write up the blog and be fully up to date, the first time for a while, we are definitely going to Adelaide tomorrow, I really do need to start checking what day it is, we need to be up early, it's time for bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Well first 50 days done, crikey that's gone quick, today we are off to Adelaide but first we need to have breakfast, shower and then load all our stuff back into Fifty and get it done before the sun gets to high in the sky and it gets to hot. We set off with Barb driving first it's only a about an hour and half drive so kids stuff compared to our recent drives.

We swap seats and head for the airport, let's hope hour a smooth hire car swap over, we need to go to the Europcar desk and then to Budget office when we get to there, after taking one wrong turn we get to the car hire returns depot and yippee the offices are next to each other. In less than 20 minutes we have swapped our stuff from Fifty to our new mode of transport, a white Toyota Corolla which we have called Angie baby, for no other reason than it's registration number is S191ANG.

Next stop to find our hotel which thanks to google maps we get to in 15 minutes, and very soon we have our room key and in no time we transferred our stuff from Angie baby into our room and it's time for a cup of tea. We just have time for a little siesta before we head of to meet Irene and Peter for dinner, we have booked a taxi to take us to the restaurant so that we don't have to drive.

We wait at the hotel reception for the taxi and it's late so I get the receptionist to give them a call to chase them up, about 15 minutes later it arrives, I tell the driver the restaurant address, does he know where it is, does he heck, what is it with taxi drivers are they not supposed to have some idea where they are going. I google the restaurant and show him the map and off we go, we get to the restaurant just as Irene and Peter arrive. After saying our hello's we go into the restaurant, we are shown the fish and sea food selection and are then shown to our table.

We place our orders and Barb is having Bugs, yes I know that sounds different but they are actually like crayfish/lobster tails, we have a very enjoyable meal with a couple of glasses of wine and very pleasant company. During the evening Irene & Peter invite us to join them for lunch tomorrow at their weekend seafront apartment, and then for a tour of the local vineyards for a spot of wine tasting, of course we accept, who could refuse such hospitality. All to soon the evening is over and we say our farewells until tomorrow and thank them both for their company.

We catch a taxi back to the hotel and again the guy has not got a clue where he is going, he heads for North Terrace even though we have told him South but he insists that is where our hotel is, then when I show him the address he says oh that one, we arrive at the motel and we agree a figure for the trip.

Just time for a nightcap and then to bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 52

We have arranged to be at Irene and Peter's at 12 o'clock and if you know where you are going it takes about 40 minutes, now we have had a bit of a lye in, so after a shower we leave the motel just before 11am. We have set the the destination into the mapping on my phone and by all accounts should arrive on time. Well that was the plan until the sat nav takes us to the wrong location, but after a phone call to Peter we are soon at their apartment.

Irene has prepare lunch and after a glass of wine we take our seats at the table on the balcony overlooking the sea which I think is the Gulf St Vincent, it is a stunning view and we enjoy it nearly as much as the lunch that has been prepared for us. Now it's time to head off for a tour of the local vineyards for a spot of wine tasting, we arrive at the first vineyard and sample a few different wines, unfortunately for Peter & I we both have to drive, me a bit later on, so we only have the smallest tastes.

Our hosts know their way around the region and we manage to visit three more vineyards before they close for the day. It's then time to return to their apartment the journey does not take long and when we arrive we unload the days purchases from the boot. It is only then that we find we have a problem, no house keys, both sets of keys are inside, we try the locks with other keys and try a window all to no avail. With no alternative Peter phones a locksmith and he will be with us soon, the balcony patio doors are unlocked and I have made the comment why is there never a ladder around when you want one. So while we are waiting I walk along the road to see if I can find one, and guess what there is two vans parked in the car park with ladders on the roof. Now to find the owners, they are parked by the life guards station so I go and ask if they know who owns the vans and as luck would have it one of them happens to be a lifeguard. I ask if I can borrow them and It is not a problem, so after a phone call to Peter to cancel the locksmith and I return ladders in hand.

Now it was a pity that Phil or Ross weren't with us as they would have been up the ladder and on to the second floor balcony and inside within seconds, it took me a little longer but mission accomplished we are in. What is it they say, you can take the lad out of Liverpool but you can not take Liverpool out of the lad. We return the ladders and Peter makes a donation to the lifeguards fund. Then it's time for a cup of tea and laugh about the recent incident, it's then time to say farewell and thank them both for a great afternoon with a little more excitement than any of us had expected.

We return to the motel watch some TV and then it's time to get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 53

We awake at about 7am watch the news on the TV and the head off to the restaurant for some breakfast, then it's back to our room to get ready to go and have a look around. We catch a tram not far from the motel which takes you to the town centre and it has another bonus, it's free. My town centre visit planning had been going well

until today as I had managed to get Barb there when the shops were shut, today however the majority are open.

So we look around the shops and when my face gets long enough we go and find a drinking establishment and partake in a couple of cold ones, now in the UK it's easy you either have a pint or a half, here you can have a pint, an imperial pint, a schooner or a pot, oh and this is different from town to town, confusing or what. We are going to watch the start of the Tour down under bike race this evening so we get the tram back to the motel for a little siesta as it is getting a tad warm.

The race starts at 7.15pm and is only about 20 minutes away so we leave the motel at about 5.45pm, when we get there we choose a spot at the last corner before the start/finish line and make ourselves comfortable, well lean against the barrier that is. We have a great view of the straight before the left hand bend and the bend, well that is until two minutes before the start when every press photographer in Australia turns up and park themselves in front of us, to say that the crowd was unhappy is a bit of an understatement. The riders will be doing twenty laps of the circuit so we should get a chance of seeing some of the action, we got to see a bit more action than we expected, as the pack come hurtling around the corner there is a coming together and then a massive crash with what seemed like half of the pack hitting the floor. Unfortunately one of the riders is taken away in an ambulance and we find out later he has a broken leg, and that it was Giovanni Visconti one of the top Italian riders and is obviously out of the competition, on the first day. After the race we walk back towards the town centre to find somewhere to eat, now either we have not found the lively part of town or Adelaide is extremely quiet on a Sunday night as there are not a lot of places open. Which we found strange considering the amount of people that are in town to watch the race, after a while we find a Thai restaurant and place our order. We have Mongolian chicken and Mongolian beef accompanied with fried rice, oh and a bottle of vin rouge, the food is great and the wine, well it's ok.

After leaving the restaurant we find a suitable establishment to partake in a nightcap, well two actually, then we make our way back to the motel is only 11.30 there is no one about and the streets are deserted it's quite eerie, we walk back to the motel and watch some TV before we get some sleep in a real bed, a luxury we will not have for the next 7 days as we will be camping in Ted at McLaren Vale, best make the most of the comfort, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 54

Check out time is 10am so we better get a move on packing god knows how many bags back into Angie Baby, getting the last bag in I feel like one of the guys the pushes the people onto the trains in Japan, but it's all in, the doors close and the suspension moans. Time for a shower before we check out, we are leaving the car at the motel while we get the tram into town as Barb has heard about a food market and wants to have a look, it's only two stops on the tram so we are there in no time. When

we arrive at the market it's a bit like being in France it's Monday morning and most of the market stalls are not open but we wander around soaking up the atmosphere at the stalls that are open.

Now there is another job that needs doing, I have not had a hair cut for over 60 days and I am starting to look like a Troll, we did find a hairdressers in the town centre yesterday but they wanted \$50 and that was not happening. We find a barber in the market, couple of people waiting but he can fit me in, in 30 minutes so I book the slot and we go and kill some time looking around the various shops that we have found at the other side of the market. I return to the barber and arrange to meet Barb a bit later, the barber is Chinese and I am a tad apprehensive of what the end result will be. I did not need to worry as he does a good job, well I think so and I am a lot less Troll like after he has finished, and very reasonable at 20 bucks, but no fear Pierre it's a bit far to keep coming back.

It's time to head off to the camp site so we catch the tram back to the hotel, collect Angie baby and off we go, on the way out of town Barb remembers that there is an outlet shopping village and it happens to be on route, it looks like we are going to see a few more shops before we get to McLaren vale. I won't bore you all with the shopping experience, suffice to say if you have been to any outlet village it was the same. We head off and arrive at the camp site about 40 minutes later and book in, we find a suitable spot and Ted is as usual erect in a matter of minutes, as the wind is blowing a fair bit its guy ropes as well. Then it's off into the village to explore first stop is the tourist information centre but we are a bit late and they have locked up and gone home, that will have to be the first point of call tomorrow.

As we head back through the village we find the McLaren hotel the public house of the village so we pop in for a cold one, we end up staying for our dinner, bit of a strange place I have to say, you go to a reception desk and a munchkin behind the counter gives you a table number and a menu, there is a special board but this can only be seen from the desk, then you go to your table, peruse the menu and when you have made a decision you go back to the reception desk place your order and pay, odd or what. Anyway Barb has a roast dinner and I have calamari and very good it was, we head back to the camp site which is minutes away and before long are tucked up inside Ted ready for an early night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 55

You may remember me telling you that we had, on previous sites been awoken by the dawn chorus of the parrots, well the buggers have you up at 4am here, the noise is deafening and they continue their squawking for at least an hour there must be hundreds of them, if I had Warwick's gun I could not fail to miss the buggers. Finally they quite Down and allow us to get back to sleep for a while.

After no time at all the camp site is awake, and so are we, and we head off to the showers before breakfast, after a leisurely breakfast and a couple of cups of coffee we get ready to go to the beach for a swim and a bit of sunbathing for Barb and sun hiding for me. The beach is only 10 minutes away so we are soon ready for our swim, now bearing in mind the beach is miles long and relatively empty we have to walk for a while to find some sand that is just right for us to put our towels on. Car keys and sunnies safely away under our towels we walk down to the water, you will remember me telling you how hot it is been recently, well the weather must have known were going swimming, as the temperature has dropped to the low twenties and it's also a tad blowy, the wind that is.

We arrive at the waters edge and enter, it's bloody freezing, I get up to my knees and decide, not today sunshine, Barb is a bit braver and gets waist deep before she has the same opinion and retreats to the shallows and joins me for a paddle instead. There is not a great deal to report about the rest of the day as most of it is spent just chilling out by the beach. On the way back to Ted we stop off our new watering hole the McLaren hotel, to blow the top off a cold one, then it's back to the site, a bite to eat, bit of trip planning, reading, blog writing and an early night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 56

Our friends the parrots were not up as early this morning so we managed a lie in until 8am then the usual shower and breakfast routine, today we are going to a town called Goolwa as it is regatta week so we thought we would go and watch some sailboat racing. We leave some stuff that is not required and not valuable inside Ted, and Angie baby's suspension breaths a sigh of relief, before we go we chat to our neighbours for a while and get some good tips for our trip to Alice, who the flips Alice. Then we set off it's only about 45k away so the trip should not take long.

Sure enough the journey does not take long, and neither did the sailboat racing, we did notice as we drove into the town that there was a distinct lack of bunting or sailing type people wandering around, in fact just a lack of people wandering around. We have been to places like Kinsale in Ireland during regatta week and the place was buzzing, not so here. When we go to the information centre we find out that despite all the hype in the tourist magazine about the regatta week, it's more like a day, and that's obviously not today, in fact it's the coming Saturday. We go to the marina to have a look, is there a sail in sight, is there heck, one would have thought there would be someone getting some practice in but no there is not even any racing type boats to ogle at.

We have brought sandwiches with us so after a drive around we find a spot on Hindemarsch island overlooking the mouth of the Murray river, to have our lunch and watch a windsurfer show his skills. After lunch and a bit of chilling out in the sunshine we set off to Strathalbyn, we stop for a cup of tea served in china cups, I suspect purchased from the local charity shops as none of the cups and saucers match. There is a very pretty village green and a few shops and after a walk around and a visit to the charity shop to purchase a couple of glasses to drink our wine from, as wine just does not work out of plastic beakers, then we head off back to towards McLaren vale, on route we stop off at the information centre for a bit more planning.

We have missed the shops so we take the lazy option for dinner and get some calamari with chips and return to the camp kitchen so that we can eat our purchases washed down with a cup of tea. Then it's time to check out the photographs I have taken over the last few days, catch up with blog as have been lagging behind a bit, Mr Kirkwood mentioned during the Tour de France blog that I was always a few days behind after we had visited a major town, I wonder wonder why that is?

After this it's time for bed, resting easy now that the blog is up to date, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

We spoke to Jennie last night and she said that the blog is good but that you all don't need to know that we have breakfast and a shower every day, so from now on that bit will be out, unless there is something exciting to report.

Now as this morning is going to be spent planning and researching the next part of our trip, there will not be much of interest for you. So I am going to fill in with some things that I have not previously reported to you.

When we were bush camping with Warwick, Bruce and Sue the other week we learnt that you should never camp under a gum tree even if it is the only shade available, as gum trees can at any time shed a whole branch and big branches at that. For this reason the tree is known in Australia as the widow maker, due to the number of people that have been killed by the falling branches, especially while camping.

Next one

I forgot to tell you the story about shopping at the local supermarket, we wanted some sliced meats for sandwiches so went to the deli counter, all the meats are priced per kilo and Barb asks the lady behind the counter for the honey roast ham, before Barb can say what quantity she requires the lady asks, "will a handful do" not a weight I have heard of in Tesco's but hey it was the correct amount for our requirements.

Ok back to today while doing our research we have found a camp site not far from Uluru and it's free, it is also a working cattle and sheep farm, now get this, the farm covers one million acres, yes a million acres now that's big I am not sure exactly how big, but as UK farms go it's very very big.

Ok research time over let's go winery hunting, there are two or three within walking distance so we will visit them later when we have parked the car back at the campsite. We arrive at the first point of call, the Scaronetti winery in less than ten minutes, this is a fairly new and impressive building which I guess means expensive, we are welcomed by a charming young lady and start with a sparkling Pinot, followed by a Chardonnay, a Shiraz, a merlot, a sparkling red and topped off with a very desirable tawny port, one could end up pissed at this rate. The prices were not as bad as I had expected and a purchase was made, unfortunately no tawny port as they run out, however if we take our own container we can buy it for \$8 a litre, next mission is to buy some 1lt or 2lt containers and return for the port. We say goodbye with a promise to return for the port.

Bit of a wine fact that you may not know, as I for one did not, out of the top ten wine producing countries in the world with France being number 1 and Germany being

number 10, which country do you think (without googling it) is the 5th in the ranking???

It's China would you believe it

Next stop is a much smaller affair and the welcome is equally as warm if not quite so pretty, we get our tasting a bit back to front at this one and start with a Shiraz, after a glass of water we get back on track with a Chardonnay, a merlot, two more Shiraz oh and a little port for good measure, hic. The wine is pretty good and the prices are very reasonable and with purchases made we say goodbye, and head off for the next one.

If you have been to the wine regions of France you will know that the wineries are virtually next door to each other with only a couple of hundred metres between them, well it is exactly the same here. So we are at the next one in no time at all, this time the welcome is a bit more of a sales prevention technique given by a bulldog sucking a wasp. None the less we are there so taste we will, with much the same routine white followed by red, but with no purchase.

Onward to the next stop which is a bit grander than the last one with a large tasting room and a very warm welcome, the tasting follows the same routine fizzy white, white, red, red, fizzy red, port. Now it is definitely time to start considering which to do, swallow or spit. During the visit we discuss our trip with the lady pouring the none to small glasses of vino. The conversation takes over from the wine tasting and although the server seems very knowledgeable about the wines, none really float our boat, we say farewell without a purchase.

It's definitely time to park Angie baby back at the campsite and walk into town and visit the cellar doors that are hidden behind the various shops and restaurants. The first one we come to is Hardy's but hey, we will try it anyway, the welcome is warm and friendly and again the tastings follow the same routine, whites followed by reds followed by tawny port. We can get this stuff at home, so we say our thanks and farewell.

I have had sufficient wine for the time being and it's time for a cold one in the McLaren hotel, on the walk back to Ted we stop off at the supermarket and purchase a large rump steak for our dinner. We wait our turn for the BBQ which is good as it gives the bottle of fizzy red we are having with it time to chill. The steak is good and thick so it takes a while on the BBQ, Barb has hers still with a pulse, while mine stays on for a bit longer.

After a few more small glasses of vin rouge it is time for a spot of reading, blog writing and then to bed and get some sleep before our mates the parrots awake, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

So new rules apply this morning with no report on breakfast, showers and stuff, today we are off to the town of Victor Harbour. It is only about 40k away so we should be there in about an hour, but it may take longer today as Victor is the end of today's stage of the Tour down under.

We set off and there are lots and lots of cyclists on the the road all traveling to the same destination as us, when we finally arrive the town is very busy and buzzing with activity, as not only is the stage finish in the town centre 6,500 members of the public have ridden various sections of the stage for cancer charity. The town is full and there is Lycra everywhere sometimes to much, far to much, as well as watching the tour and taking in the atmosphere we are on a mission to find a 2 litre container so that we can return to the young lady at the Sev winery to purchase some of their fine Port.

As we stroll through the town we check out the likely shops from which L to purchase the required containers, without a great deal of success. Now we have looked in all the shops in McLaren vale and now all the shops in Victor Harbor without any joy so we revert to going to good old Woolies and buying two 1.5lts of water, classy or what. We depart Victor H before all the riders and coaches decide to do the same.

On the journey back to Ted we call into the Serifino winery, park Angie B and enter the tasting room with our empty water bottles in hand, both of us sniggering at the thought of asking for their fine port to be put into two used water bottles. There is a different lady working today and as I place the Woolies water bottles on the counter I hope that her colleague was not winding us up. She enquires if we would like to taste some wine and I tell her that we would just like to purchase 3lts of port, oh she says no problem give a minute. In no time at all she returns with our two Woolies bottles full of the red nectar, and takes the princely sum of \$24 in exchange.

We are meeting Irene, in Moana beach for dinner this evening so we have a couple of hours chill out at back at Ted before we need to change and head off to Moana. It is only about 15 minutes to Irene & Peters apartment and we arrive at 6.15pm, Irene welcomes us, Peter is on his way to America via New Zealand and is currently in the air, so he will not be joining us this evening but he is in our thoughts. We make our way to the restaurant which is only a stones throw away and are soon seated at our table, we place our food orders along with a request for a bottle of vin rouge.

After dinner we return with Irene to the apartment for dessert and to watch the Nadal versus Federer tennis match on the TV and possibly a glass or two of the red stuff.

We chat as we watch the tennis which is not going the way any of us want it to go, but the wine and the port flows unfortunately I am driving and am not able to partake fully of the hospitality. The evening goes far too quickly and Nadal wins the tennis, but apart from the tennis we have had a very pleasant evening. We thank Irene for her hospitality and say our goodbyes and we hope to see them both in Liverpool when they visit the UK, so that we can return their hospitality.

We return to Ted and a very quiet campsite and then it is time for bed as this is a late night for us, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 59

Today the tour down under starts just up the road to the campsite, we ready ourselves with sun cream, and don our hats as it's going to be a hot one (sorry to rub it in) as there will be a fair bit of walking involved it's trainers not thongs today. When we get to the village it is as you can imagine very busy and again possibly more Lycra on show than is required.

We watch the start and after the riders go out of view the crowd starts to diminish as the followers of the tour ride off to watch from various vantage points. The riders will pass through the village three more times so we will make do with watching from different points in the village, we stroll through the village popping into "The Blokes Shop" for a look around while we wait for the riders to return. There has been a four rider break away and when they return an hour later they have an eight minute lead on the peloton, after watching the first circuit we decide that there must be a better way of watching rather than sitting in the afternoon sun for another hour.

After not too much thinking we come up with ideal plan, walk into the McLaren hotel, get a couple of cold ones, take a seat, watch the race on the TV and then pop outside just before the riders return and go past again. As the race finishes a couple of kilometres down the road we stay in the hotel to watch the end of the race. We are going to a restaurant in the village this evening so we return to Ted for a little rest and to change before it is time to walk back to the restaurant.

We stroll back to the village in the early evening sunshine and have a very pleasant meal, Barb chooses chicken and pork risotto while I have prawn tagliatelle, no wine with our meal tonight instead we have a couple of gin and tonics. Then it's back to the campsite and we have to sample our purchase from the Serifino winery, we sit at one of the tables in the camp kitchen and pour our port into a pair of glasses we have purchased in one of the charity shops. We get some strange looks pouring our red nectar from our woollies bottle, we explain our purchase and have a little tasting session of our own. Our fellow campers are impressed with the port and also the

purchase price, I imagine Serifino may be busy tomorrow with a queue of people carrying empty water bottles.

There is a chill in the air this evening but we are warmed by the Serifino port, after a conversation with some fellow campers we retire for the evening, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 60

Crikey mate day 60 where is the time going, we have now been in one place for nearly a week and are feeling slightly less nomadic and for once we are not sure what to do today. After looking at the maps and a discussion we decide to go to a place called Milanga on the shore of Lake Victoria, we get there and to be honest there is not a great deal to see. However as we park up alongside the lake there is a bit of excitement going on in the lake not far from shore. A couple in a small yacht have come to close to the shore and beached the keel it is stuck good and fast, there are a number of people trying to help free the yacht before it capsizes as at the moment it is at about 45 degrees and facing the wrong way to the choppy incoming waves.

The only problem is that no one seems to have an idea what to do, there are four older guys in a rib with a big motor on the back and obviously not a clue between them and that includes how to control the monster 250hp motor on the back. Then there are a couple of guys in the water pulling on a rope that is attached to the top of the mast, the more they pull the worse the angle gets and the boat gets closer to capsizing, I can see this ending in tears.

Now I have not been sailing for many years but what they are trying to do is obviously wrong and has no logic behind it as everything they are doing is dragging the boat into shallower water rather than pointing towards the waves and dragging it into deeper water, but hey what do I know. The old guys in the rib have spat their dummies out and take their toy home, put it on a trailer and bugger off, leaving the couple on the yacht and the two blokes in the water on the end of the rope to it.

We have had our lunch while all this was going on and it looks like this could take a while so we leave them to it and hope that there is a positive end to the situation. We drive on around the lake to see what else is going on, and stop a bit further around and watch lots and lots of yachts doing what they should be doing, sailing. We have pleasant afternoon in the sunshine and then make the return journey back to Ted, on route we stop to take some more photographs of the Alpacas for Antony as he has asked that we take two home for him, but I am not too sure about that so some more pictures will have to do.

We get back to Ted and chill out for a while, sorry again UK readers we have to retreat to the shade of the camp kitchen because it too HOT, we read for a while and

then have our dinner, prepared on one of the camp kitchens BBQ's, and hey it's HOT behind that BBQ. Then after a couple of glasses of our Woolies bottled port it's time to retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 61

Well it is Australia Day today so there may be a bit of action in town later on, this morning we are just going to chill out at the campsite and relax. Just after lunch it starts to get too hot to sit out so we climb aboard Angie baby get the A/C on full. We head off with no plan in mind and drive around for an hour or so taking taking in the sights, stop for a cup of tea and then head back to Ted.

On the way we stop in the village to see if there is any celebrating and no there isn't doesn't look like they are very patriotic around here. When we get back to Ted there is no parties going on there either just a few flags flying. It looks like we would have to drive into Adelaide and that's not happening.

We have our dinner in the camp kitchen and chat to the people on the next table to us, turns out that they have rented their house out and are having two years traveling around Oz. Makes our trip look like kids stuff again, but they are in their own country not the other side of the world so will have some points back for that.

Bit of a nothing to report day I am afraid so will have to better tomorrow time to retire to bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 62

Couple of jobs to do this morning, clothes washing, Alice springs planning, repacking bags to see if there are any clothes we do not need and can send home and sort Angie baby out for her return tomorrow.

First job washing, clever machines at this site as the machine add the washing powder themselves, suppose it would stop some twit putting the wrong type of detergent in them, now where have I heard that before. Today will see I/we make two schoolboy errors, which I will reveal as the story unfolds. Next job empty are repack Angie baby and then empty my bag and sort out what I don't need, so two piles one keep here one send home, I am quite happy if not smug as I look at my bag and see how little I will be carrying and also by the small amount of clothes I will need to send home, here is schoolboy error number one, I have forgotten about all the clothes in the washing machine, Doh! And double Doh!.

Washing done and on the line we do our Alice (who the f's Alice) planning after an hour or so it is getting too hot to sit and plan, so we decide to go to the beach for a swim. We jump into Angie baby and 15 minutes later are at the beach swimmers on

and ready to go, here is schoolboy error number two, no towels there washed and on the line drying large Doh! Again.

Well we are here to swim so swim we will, the sun will dry us, due to the heat and our body temperatures the water is a tad chilly and as we get waist deep I think I have lost something out of my pocket, well out of my shorts anyway. After our swim we stroll along the beach and in the distance we see a sign which we can not make out. As we get closer we read UN CLAD AREA ONLY, oh it's a nudist beach, now I am not one not to admire the naked human form, well the naked female human form actually, but some of these bodies should not be allowed out in Lycra never mind the nude, I am still in shock. We turn and beat a hasty retreat along the beach and retrieve our belongings, it is too hot on the beach without any shade and we are certainly not buying a beach umbrella to haul around with us. We return to Angie baby and drive into the village for a spot of lunch, after lunch we sit relax, watch and listen to the waves roll in along the beach. On the return journey to Ted we stop off to blow the head off a cold one and a glass of sparkling red, when we return to the site we get the washing, which is now as stiff as a board, off the line and put it in a separate to do pile.

We have dinner accompanied by a bottle of sparkling red and followed by a couple of glasses of our Serafino port, while chatting to our fellow campers and swapping travel stories. Then it is time to retire as we need to make an early start tomorrow to swap Angie baby for our next chariot a 6 berth motorhome, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 63

After the usual stuff Ted is back in his bag and our ever growing belongings are packed into Angie baby and we head off with the rest of the morning commuters to Adelaide. The journey takes a little longer than expected due to the traffic and it is also the kids first day back at school.

We arrive at the Apollo rental office at about 9.45 and there is a bit of a queue, we take a seat and wait our turn, while waiting we listen to the handover procedure which is fairly long winded due to a couple of factors, language barrier, paperwork, sell up spiel, you know the one, extra insurance, excess cover, tyre cover, chair hire and any thing else they can think of oh and then the actual hand over of the vehicle and all it's workings to novice campervaners, this could take some time.

We are now running behind schedule as we need to return Angie baby by 11am, but we wait patiently, more people come in and the queue is getting bigger, it is our turn and the guy is obviously feeling the pressure and is relieved to find that ours is a relocation job and that we have a camper so know near enough how things work. We complete the paperwork and go outside to check over our latest chariot which is a fairly large 6 berth Ford, which was immediately christened Big Berther, within no

time we have the keys and are ready to go. As Barb is not on Angie baby's insurance she is going to have to drive Big Berther and follow me to the airport, we swap all the gear from Angie to Berther and after 20 minutes we arrive at the airport with no drama's. Angie safely returned we can now head off together in BB.

We are making a bit of a detour to see Marion one of Barbs mums school friends that she keeps in touch with, we arrive there just over an hour later. Marion is lovely makes us very welcome and has made lunch for us, we chat about Liverpool and her family, her large family with 22 grandchildren. We look at photographs and exchange stories but all too soon we have to leave and get on our way to Alice.

By the time we stop at a roadside rest stop we have done 350k which is only a small dent in the journey which will be over 2,300k by the time we have been to Uluru, but we have 7 days in which to get there so it won't be a problem. There is one other campervan and a wagon at the rest stop so should be ok, safety in numbers and all that. It has been a tiring day so after a bit to eat we watch some TV and then double checking that all the doors are locked we retire for the evening, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 64

When we awake the wagon has departed but the other campervan is still with us, after breakfast we set off down the Stuart highway towards Alice, there are not many towns or villages on route in fact there are 5 in total with varying gaps between them, everyone we have talked to says make sure you always get fuel and water when possible so we follow their advice. We stop off at the towns on route just to have a look. Not much to report about the one we have been to as yet, but we will get to Coober Pedy tomorrow which is supposed to be interesting, it's an opal mining town so I am sure that Barbara will be interested.

As we get further away from Adelaide the country gets wilder, the Stuart highway is a single carriageway and is as straight as a dye for miles and miles, we can not believe how boring and tiring the drive is, I think that it is a combination of the boredom and the heat, BB air conditioning struggles to keep the temperature down in the cab as the sunshine pours in through the windscreen, have I mentioned that it's hot.

There is scrubland as far as the eye can see it just goes on and on, even though we have been here for a while now it is still difficult to comprehend the sheer size of the country, it's vast and unless you travel it you do not understand how vast by looking at maps, it's mind blowing, oh and hot.

We travel on, swapping seats every hour or so, we have traveled 550k today which although is a distance it's not that far and I have driven further than that in a day by myself, but it is different here even though it should be easier, no bends, no traffic but for some reason it's harder. We arrive at a roadside rest stop at about 6.30pm and decide to stay here the night as the next stop is a further 100k away. We are joined by three other campervans and none of the occupants are wearing and dodgy wolf masks we should be ok safety in numbers and all that, after a sandwich we settle in for the night to ready ourselves for tomorrow's journey. It will need to cool down before we can get any sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 65

We have survived the night without being raped, pillaged or plundered, but due to the extreme heat we did not manage a great deal of sleep, the temperature did not start to drop until the middle of the night and inside the van it did not start getting cool until about 4am only giving us a couple of hours before Mr Sun rises and starts the process again. When we awake are fellow campers have already left they were all traveling in the opposite direction to so we will not see them again.

It's a one hour thirty minute drive to Coober Pedy and when we arrive the temperature is nudging 40c, this is an Opal mining town with lots of people living underground due to the excessive temperatures both hot and cold, there is even an underground campsite, how cool is that. There are lots of shops selling Opal that the owners profess to have mined, cut and polished the stones and also mounted the stone in a verity of gold and silver items of jewellery, clever fellers these miners. We are sceptical to say the least. Our scepticism is confirmed when we see a ring for \$200 in one mine shop and then low and behold exactly the same ring in another for \$400. Considering that there is supposed to be no middle man, the prices considering the quality appears to excessive.

Even though the land is desolate and unused apart from the mining, the landscape has been left scarred by man, the white men have moved in and as time has progressed their digging equipment has got bigger and bigger and now the major companies have moved in with gigantic diggers and related equipment. With just profit in mind and no thought for the land they have changed the landscape of this place forever,

there are piles of slag getting ever bigger, everywhere for miles and miles. Surely in 2014 these companies should be made to leave the land as natural as they found it, in there unending quest for profit. Why are we determined to try and destroy this planet that gives us so much, and which it gives for free.

After some fresh provision shopping we head off down the Stuart highway we are now starting to get further into the outback and the distance between shops is growing, there is a sign at the side of the road advertising a combined shop, petrol station and eatery that is 400k away (you don't want to forget the milk) and is advertised every 100k until you get there. We stopped for a cup of tea when we finally arrive there and to say it was poor is and understatement.

We continue on towards our goal and we see less and less traffic, it gets to the stage when if we have seen 5 vehicles in 100k then we class the road as busy, and everybody waves when they go past no matter what they are driving, well everyone except the trucks. The Stuart is still a straight line with very few bends and the land surrounding it and as far as the horizon is bush land with no sign of life, except for the road kill lying at the side of the road. It makes no sense to us poms why the roo's and other critters make their way onto the highway when there are thousands of acres of bush for them to roam freely without the likely hood of being mown down by a 53 metre long wagon. Yes no 43 footers here these big buggers are 53 meters long, that's about 175 feet in old money. That is until it is explained to you and then it is obvious, during the night the bush/desert is cold but the Tarmac has retained the searing heat so simple they go there to get warm and some pay the ultimate price.

The drive today is no less tiring than yesterday but we travel on determined to get to a campsite tonight with electric supply, we swap seats often to reduce the fatigue which I am now convinced is caused by the boredom, which we try to relieve by playing games like I spy. Just after we cross the border into Northern Australia, which now means we have traveled through 5 of the 7 territories since we arrived, we arrive at the oasis of Kulgera station. What more can one ask for in the middle of nowhere, campsite with electricity, swimming pool, petrol station, shop oh and a bar all for \$20. Apart from the bar the electricity is the next best thing as it means we can fire up Big Berth's air conditioning system in the rear of the van. After plugging Berther into the mains we head off to the bar while they A/C does it's stuff to reduce the temperature from 47 degrees c to something more bearable, when we arrive back it has done its job and it is a much more pleasant 26 degrees.

There is and has been no radio signal, phone signal or Internet signal for the last couple of hundred kilometres and I doubt that we will get any until we arrive in Alice in a couple of days time, so I am not sure when you will get this and more importantly we don't know if Heather has had her baby yet. We may need to find a land line to phone and find out, but for now it is time to retire to bed and catch up on last night lost sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 66

Clicety click day 66, having air conditioning in the van last was wonderful and we awake refreshed and after breakfast and stuff we are ready to go apart from needing to put More fuel into Big Berther. While paying for the fuel we start talking to a couple of guys who turn out to be the new owners of the station, they explained that they have plans to rejuvenate the station as it is looking a tad tired. We wish them well and set off down the Stuart highway to Uluru, it would be interesting to return in a couple of years to see how they have progressed.

As we leave we realise that we have crossed another time zone and that we have gained an hour which means we should be at Curtain Ridge station by lunch time, Barb is doing the first stint behind the wheel. Not much to report about the drive as it is pretty similar to the last 1200k, couple of road trains pass us going the opposite direction, only the three trailer ones but still big and boy do you know when they have gone past, as Big Berther is dragged across the road. We arrive at Curtin Springs at lunchtime, they have unlimited camping but only 8 powered sites so we had been a bit concerned about availability, but we did not need to worry as total number of people staying there, 2 and that's us. We book in and a French guy shows us to our pitch, what do think this is a caravan club site, first job get the mains on and the A/C on full.

The National park and Uluru are a further 70k down the road so after a spot of lunch we set off to see Uluru, just before well 12k before the entrance to the park they, not sure who, have built well what can only be described as a Town called Yulara Ayres Rock Resort with hotels, shops, post office, bank, supermarket etc, it's the full Disney experience in the middle of nowhere designed to remove money from your pocket, oh and at a vast rate judging by the prices. There is also a campsite at the resort and we have decided to stay here tonight rather than driving all the way to Curtin spring. After booking in we head off into the park to visit Uluru, as you approach Uluru it is a magnificent sight and it's sheer size becomes fully apparent. Due to the excessive summer heat the majority of the walking routes are closed, which is unfortunate or possibly fortunate, as you do not only have to deal with the heat but also the flies, which accost you as soon as you get out of your vehicle. To say that they are a pain in the arse my be excessive but they are a nuisance and without wearing a net over your hat and head to keep the rascals out, they attack every orifice from the neck up, they are horrible, so you end up walking around looking like a bee keeper. We

circumnavigate, no we don't we drive around Uluru and then return to the campsite for a chill out but before we return to watch the sunset.

Sunset is at 7.37pm precise or what, and we arrive at the look out point at 7pm to make sure we get a good vantage point, it is a good job we did as there are lots of people there already and many more arrive after us. We choose a good vantage point, Barbs is in the van with the A/C on away from the flies. As the sun sets it cast a warm golden glow on Uluru making it change from orange to varying tones of red as the sun goes down over the horizon casting different shadows on the rock as it goes on it's journey to the other side of the world, and god willing to return to us tomorrow.

As the sun disappears, it's like a Le Mans start as everybody decides to leave at once and we head off in convoy back to Ayres rock resort in varying vehicles to varying types of accommodations. After a bit to eat and couple of glasses of Vin Blanc it's time to write up the blog and then retire to bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 67

We unlike some of our fellow campers have decided not to get up before dawn to watch the sunrise, which thankfully it has, over Uluru and after the usual morning stuff we head off back into the Park to go to Kata Tjuta this is a 120k round trip into the park and it takes us about a hour to get there. As we travel through the Park, Kata Tjuta comes into view, and is no less impressive than Uluru, we stop at the viewing area and after doing battle with flies we manage to get some photographs. We continue on to the Valley of the Winds at the base of Kata Tjuta but there is not a great deal to do as again the tracks are closed due to the heat. Now we have choice wait here until sunset and not get out of the Park until just before 9pm or move on towards Alice who the "*****" Alice Springs.

We decide that waiting for sunset is a no no and head off back towards the Resort to get get some fuel before we head off down the Lasseter highway the longest cul-de-sac I have driven down it's a 490k round trip, knocks spots off Barrow in Furness. Barb has done most of the driving so far today so it's my turn behind the wheel first stop will be Curtin springs roadhouse where we are staying tonight and then onto Kings Canyon. We get to Curtin springs this is a farm and a half, it covers, get this, 1,028,906 acres or 1,608 square miles now that's big. We do a bit of map checking and decide that we are not in favour of driving a 460k round trip to Kings Canyon knowing that the tracks there will be closed as well due to the temperature being over 36 degrees.

Instead we decide to make a start on the route to Alice wtf Alice Springs, we still have a two hour drive along the Lasseter before we join the main road, we set off and it's Barbs turn to drive while I try and catch a nap. We swap over half way and

continue on to the petrol station at the junction of the Stuart highway, owing to the astronomical price of fuel at Ayres rock resort we did not want to fill BB with fuel, as we have done all along the route. Instead I made a calculation of how much fuel we would need to get to the Stuart highway, and now 80k away from the fuel station the fuel warning light has come on, looks like I may have got my sums wrong. We are still in the middle of nowhere and Barb has told me that if we run out of fuel I will be the one walking to get some, but fear not dear readers we get to the fuel station with the gauge showing that we have just 20 kilometres of fuel left, that was a bit close for comfort.

The fuel is still nearly as expensive here and we have 200k to go to Alice so we add enough fuel plus half as much again just to make sure, not going through that again. Don't get me wrong about the price of the fuel it's still cheaper than the Uk but it's about 60 cents a litre dearer than in habited areas. The Stuart is again as straight as a dye and it's 50k before we come to a bend, well curve in the road, we continue on and still have another 100k before we arrive at Alice. We come to a roadhouse, it has powered sites and we decide to stay here for the night, we park up double quick as happy hour finishes in 35 minutes. After a couple of drinks and some food we head back to BB to sample a couple of glasses of Vin Rouge, write up the blog, can't send it as there is still no phone or tinternet signal. Then it's time to retire so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 68

After the usual stuff we set off from the roadhouse at just after 9am with just 100k to go to Alice we arrive there at 10.30, after a drive around to acclimatise ourselves which does not take long as Alice is not that big. We find the Apollo office and the cheapest fuel station as Bertha is running very low on fuel and needs to be full when we return her. We park up in the town centre and go for a walk around as it's Sunday the majority of the shops are closed, bonus, there is however a jewellers open and of course we have to go in, after chatting for a couple of minutes it turns out that owner is from Sheffield, big world small planet, oh we don't buy anything.

Now I understand that explorers explore, and without them half if not more of the world would remain undiscovered, however during our trip from Adelaide I have been thinking how did John McDouall Stuart ever find Alice Springs in 1862 on his way north, yes I know this is a daft train of thought but bear with me and think about it for a minute. Our journey has taken us 5 days, and yes including a detour to Uluru I know, but we have been traveling at say an average of 70kph with air con and on route have seen no signs at anytime during the 2500k trip there is what was then a water hole in the middle of nowhere. These were brave men who traveling on horseback I expect, they must have endured extremities of heat and cold, and encountered animals, lizards, snakes and stuff that could kill them, the likes of which

they had not seen before. Well without reading the full story I put the answer to my question down to them finding it more by luck than anything else.

We find a campsite close to town, book in and set up camp and after a couple of cold ones we have dinner and not long after it is time to retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 69

After the usual stuff we head off into town, we find the hotel we have booked and as luck would have it we can check in, we get to our room and unload the god knows how many bags we now have. We are both fairly whacked so we decide to have a rest before we go into town to explore.

Big Bertha has to be back in the box by 2.30pm so I leave Barb to look after the bed while I take Bertha back to the Apollo office, after stopping for fuel I arrive at the office. A friendly young lady gets the paperwork and goes out to inspect Bertha and returns saying that there is damage to the roof that is not on the damage form, here we go, anyway she checks the vehicles history and finds that it has been previously report, so no problem. Next to get the \$1000 bond refunded and the \$50 petrol allowance refund, no problem with the bond but the petrol refund is not showing on the system. After a couple of phone calls with no result and an ever growing queue behind me, I explain that we are collecting another vehicle on Wednesday and we can sort it out then. As it's not too hot I decline the offer of a taxi and decide to walk back to the hotel, when I get Barb thought that I had got lost, well I did stop off for one cold one in town on the way, he he, haven't told her yet.

The last 17 nights camping and Berthaing must be catching up on us as I need a little nap in a real bed, then it's into town to explore, after a 15 minute walk we arrive in the town centre, now exploring Alice does not take long as there is not much to see. And as there is only a limited choice of eateries open we choose a Thai it's not bad but not great, oh and it's got no licence so we don't stay too long. We stop off for a little drinket on the way back to the hotel, when we return we watch some TV and then time for more sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 70

Today was going to be more exploring and trip planning, well it was going to be before we looked out of the patio doors, it is persistently raining, raining are they

having a laugh. Well that gives us more planning time and we need it, as the Internet connection is nearly useless, in the end we give in using our connection, go to reception and pay to use the computer there. This is nearly as slow so the planning takes a lot longer than expected, but as it's still pouring down it does not really matter. We eventually find a deal for a self contained apartment in Melbourne at a great price so booked it is.

By mid afternoon the rain stops so we walk into town, Alice strikes me as it is struggling for an identity, it's not to sure wether it is an old outpost or a new town and in my opinion it's not really succeeding on either count. To be honest I am glad we are only here for a couple of days. After strolling around for while we find a restaurant for an early dinner, I would say if there are any chefs out there looking for employment in the middle of nowhere this is the place to come, as there are none here not even decent cooks.

We stop off to blow the head off a cold one, and as there is nothing happening in town we head back to the hotel to pack our ever increasing baggage, watch some TV, and as we have an early start in the morning it is time to retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Bit of a none day today but will try harder tomorrow.

Day 71

Rather than carry all our bags to reception and leave them there while we collect our next mode of transport, we have arranged an 11 o'clock check out, to speed things up we get a taxi to the Apollo office. We are early and there is no queue so after the usual paperwork and handover we have the keys to a 4 wheel drive Toyota Land Cruiser pop top camper van, named Tonka Toy or TT for short. As TT has two fuel tanks we take the opportunity to fill the reserve tank at Alice prices rather than pay

the obscene prices at the roadhouses on the Stuart. With both tanks full we should have a range of 1200k enough to get us to civilised fuel prices.

As we have seen most points of interest on the way here, today's mission is to get as far down the Stuart as we can, couple of stops first though, we have as usual brought to many clothes with us, so we donate some to the Salvation Army and then go to the post office to send some home. This turns into a bit of a marathon due to the post office prices, rules and regulation, then after returning to the hotel and loading the luggage into TT we are off. Barb is doing the first stint behind the wheel and at first is not too happy with the handling of TT, real 4 wheel drives are not at their best at high speed and TT bucks around like a bucking bronco.

The return drive down the Stuart is slightly less monotonous as we can travel quicker in TT and we have music, yippee TT has a USB socket so we can listen to our iPhone music library as there is no radio reception on the Stuart. After covering 530k we arrive at a roadhouse, we decide to stop here as the next one is 170k down the road after booking in we set up camp there are two other residents, one caravan and one camper van. After plugging TT into the mains setting the bed and moving luggage to the front seats we go inside for a cold one. Now this place is defiantly stuck in a time warp and could be used as the set for an old western movie without too many alterations and the staff could be from the bar in Star Wars.

We return to TT and after a nightcap we retire to try and get some sleep in TT's cosy conditions, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 72

After the usual morning stuff we repack TT, pull down the pop top and set off once again down the Stuart, after 170k we arrive at Coober Pedy, you may remember that this place produces 90% of the world's opals. We stop at an opal shop and while talking to the owner, it turns out that he lives in London for twenty years and owned an advertising company and by the way he talks a very successful one at that. Sold up 10 years ago and now has a mine and a shop in Coober Pedy and also a jewellers in Adelaide.

We chat for ages putting the world to rights while looking at some seriously expensive opals with fantastic colours, we move to the cheaper end of the counter and make a small purchase. It turns out we have been in there for 2 hours, we say farewell as we need to get a move on, and set off along the Stuart with a plan off getting to Port Augusta to stop for nightfall. After an hour or so we stop at a roadhouse

to get something to eat, another one stuck in the dark ages and after tasting the food I think the chef must have previously worked in Alice, I will say no more.

After another 4 hours of not seeing a great deal apart from red bush land, straight roads, we arrive at Port August, find a campsite by the river, book in and pitch up, great site with a cool breeze coming off the river. It will be good to get a cool nights sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 73

More driving today so there is not a great deal to report, Barb does the first stint behind the wheel and it won't be too long before we say farewell to the Stuart highway. With a couple of hundred kilometres done we stop at Port Wakefield for a bite to eat, it's 1.30pm the first place we go to closes the kitchen at 1.30, nope makes no sense to me. We find another cafe which is still open and place our order, and very good it was.

We arrive at Adelaide mid afternoon and finally leave the Stuart highway it's like saying farewell to an old friend as we have been on it for so long. Now arriving in Adelaide mid afternoon on a Friday was not great planning, what planning, the schools are letting out and the commuters are having a early dart Friday. To say the roads are busy is a bit of an understatement, its a bit of a shock to us, as we have not seen this volume of traffic for weeks.

It would have been good to to catch up with our new Adelaide friends but unfortunately time is against us and we need to narrow the gap between ourselves and Melbourne, we are taking the coast road which is a longer slower route than the Dukes "the hell I will" Highway but should be more interesting. We continue on the Princess highway until we arrive at Meningie and find a campsite, we book in and

pitch up on the shore of Lake Albert. With TT set up we watch the pelicans display of synchronised feeding as they all bob their heads in and out of the water in unison, fascinating display.

We have a FaceTime chat with Jennie it's great being able to talk to people on the other side of the world see them and show them your surroundings, all for free, well sort of, technology hey where will it end. We end up chatting to our neighbour and share a couple of cold ones while putting the world to rights, time passes and it's soon time to retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 74

This is a lovely spot and we are tempted to stay for another night, but there is more to see on route, also the weather forecast says that it's going to be in the 40's today so time to move on, we repack TT and depart just after the 10am curfew but we don't get told off. Our planned first stop is Kingston S E which is about an hour and a half away, Barb takes the first stint behind the wheel and TT bucks and broncs down the bumpy, very bumpy Princess highway.

Needless to say our first stop is not as planned and we stop off at a couple of smaller towns on route, we arrive at Kingston and find a cafe to get a bite to eat. Next stop is Robe this is a nice place with lots of restaurants and yippee interesting shops, after a walk around we decide to crack on to Mount Gambier. This route takes us down the B101 although this is a Tarmac road it's surface is not exactly smooth and TT bounces around like Tigger on speed.

We arrive in Mount Gambier early evening, as we drive through the town there are lots of classic cars and hot rods parked outside hotels and some with ribbons on like wedding cars. We have seen a bride and groom having their photographs taken in a park and assume the owners of the cars are wedding guests. As we drive towards the campsites we come to the Blue Lake so named as between November and March the lake is vivid blue, and then the colour changes to grey for the rest of the year, by all accounts no one is sure why or how this phenomenon occurs.

There is a campsite not far from the lake which is one the ones we get a discount at, for being in an Apollo vehicle, so we book in and set up camp, there are a few interesting cars including a Cobra parked around the campsite as well. After dinner

cooked on TT's external cooker we walk to the lake for a better look, the water is crystal clear and vivid blue an amazing sight. We return to TT and after some photograph sorting, blog writing, sending and Facebook stuff, it's time to retire so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 75

On my return trip from the showers I stop off to have a look at the Cobra and start chatting to the owner and ask "have you been to a wedding" he looks at me as if I am daft and says "no there is a classic car, hot rod and swap meet down the road" he must have thought stupid pom. We chat for a while about cars without being rude his Cobra is not one of the best examples, known as a fifty footer in the trade, looks ok from 50 foot away but not too close up.

After repacking TT and head off to find the swap meet, now the Cobra owners description of just around the corner is a bit like a Welsh mile but we eventually find it. There are some interesting cars on display and some right rusting crap for sale, there was a nice boat for sale which reminded me of the old Thames cruisers we used to hire at Henley on Thames many years ago. It was really cheap but Barb reminded me how far from home we are so I don't know how much he will take for it.

We head off down the even bumpier Princess highway stopping off at a couple of places on route for a look around then we join the Great Ocean road which is no smoother than the Princess and for its first part it should be called the Great Forest road as it winds its way through acres and acres of forest. We continue on and the road rejoins the Ocean following the ragged coastline with some breath taking views and bends to match. The coastline is very different to the low lying sandy beaches we have seen previously and is reminiscent of the Cornish coastline with high cliffs and jagged rocks lying hidden in the water waiting to catch out any unwary sailor. We stop off at a number of viewing places and due to the high winds the ocean is putting on a fantastic display crashing against the rocks, it's just a shame that you would need to rappel down the cliff face to get to the beach. We finally end up in Peterborough, not a great deal here one motel, one shop and a campsite. We book in and pitch up next to the river just before it flows into the ocean.

We visit the motel for a bite to eat and have the place to ourselves and after a walk along the beach it is time to retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 76

We depart from Portsmouth and continue along the great ocean road, but not for long as there is a sign for another viewing area more spectacular sights of rock formations being battered by the ocean, after stopping at three more viewing areas we need to press on as we have covered about 10k in two hours. We continue until we arrive at the viewing area for the 12 apostles, a formation of you guessed it 12 rocks shooting out of the ocean close to the shore line, they are a magnificent sight and there are a number of different viewing platforms offering different photographic views.

About 5k down the road there is another viewing area this time to see "The Arch" yes a rock formation in the shape of an arch again it is an impressive sight but we do need to move on. Next stop is Cape Otway this is a special area where Koalas live in the wild, we head off the main road down what is nearly a single track road and it's not long before the little marsupials sitting in the trees at the side of the road, their not doing much but it is great to see them in their natural habitat.

We have not covered many k's as yet today so we need to move on, we say farewell to the koalas and head off towards Anglesea and after a couple more stops we arrive there, not a great deal to report about Anglesea other than this one is not an island but it is costal, couple of shops, one pub and a campsite. As it turns out a very large campsite it's massive, we have been to smaller less populated towns than this place, I kid you not you could get lost. It has got over 500 pitches and not piddling little pitches like you get in the UK, these are proper Aussie size pitches that you could erect a marque on.

Thankfully it's not very busy otherwise I think it would be unbearable, we get to our allocated pitch but TT's power lead is too short so we trek back to the office and choose a more suitable pitch. We set up TT and then go for a walk along the beach, and then onto the only pub in the village. Again we have the place to ourselves, does no one go out around here, at 9.45 the bar tender tells us he will be closing up at about 10pm so just time for a nightcap, 10 o'clock closing it's a bit like the dark ages, anyway when in Rome.

Not much to do now other than walk back to TT and after a bit of reading its time to retire so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 77

Well I recon that we are now about half way through our trip and in just 16 days we leave Australia, where has the time gone. As we are now under 2 hours from Melbourne we have decided to stay here for another night and drive straight to Melbourne from here.

There is not much to report today as we are having a day of rest before we hit a big city once more. After a trek around the site I find the laundry and put a wash on and then have a further trek to find the washing line, cricky this place is big. We walk into the village to get some shopping and a bite to eat and then return to TT for a bit more duvet time.

The day passes and evening draws in, it is time to test my culinary skills on TT,s outside stove, as it is our last night in TT we are pushing the boat out and we searched the shops and finally found the required ingredients this maybe a bit to much for TT,s two burner stove and limited choice of pans. Tonight Matthew we are having Hienz Baked Beans on Toast cut into squares, a culinary delight, followed by a fresh fruit salad and yoghurt.

Barb does the washing up in TT,s external sink only to find that when you take the plug out your feet get wet if you don't move quick, I must have forgotten to mention it. Then it's time for for blog writing, didn't take long, some reading and an early night ready for the big city tomorrow, might have to wear grown up pants. So goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 78

We pack our bags into TT and set off down the great ocean road towards Melbourne a Barb does the first stint and after covering about 150k gets us to the outskirts of Melbourne and kindly let's me do the last bit of the journey through the morning traffic into the city.

We arrive at the accommodation at about 11.30am, Barb goes in while I start getting god knows how many bags out of TT, Barb comes back and tells me we can drive around the back and unload TT in the car park. So we pack the bags back into TT and drive around to the back of the apartments. Now this would have been a great idea if the owner had told Barb that there was a height restriction, and unfortunately TT would not fit in.

We get our collection of bags up to the room which is great and includes it's own small kitchen, we settle in and then the next job is to return TT to Apollo. Barb stays at the apartment to organise the baggage and I set off to the Apollo office which is not far from the airport. The sat NAV on my phone says it's a 25 minute drive so off we go, I arrive at the Apollo office without any dramas and the hand back goes without a problem with TT adding 2680 kilometres to our journey tally. Now to get back to the apartment. I have agreed with Barb that I will use public transport for the return journey but after talking to the lady in the office the first part of the journey will have to be by cab to get to the tram station as we are in the middle of nowhere. The taxi arrives and we set off for the tram station, the driver offers to do the trip to the apartment for forty bucks, now usually I would have taken him up on the offer, but I have promised to use public transport. So I get to the tram station, now they do not take cash on the trams you need a prepaid card called a myki, so first job is to buy one of these, after trying a number of different shops I finally hand over ten bucks and receive a card. Back to the tram stop and I get on one and after about half an hour we arrive in the town centre, time to get off after a walk of about 2 kilometres and a couple more hours traveling time I arrive back at the apartment, hot sweaty and a tad fed up. Now the journey took about 3 hours in total and cost 28 bucks, total saving 12 bucks about £7, next time I will be getting the taxi.

After a shower and a bit of a rest we head off out to get something to eat, there are lots of restaurants and we choose one of the many Italian joints, the food is very good and is accompanied by a couple of glasses of vin rouge. After dinner we return to the apartment and retire to a proper bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 79 to 84

As our days in Melbourne have been fairly similar I did not want to bore you all so I have condensed them and will just let you have the highlights.

After the usual morning activities we set off to explore, it is about a 15 minute walk into town and gosh there are lots and lots of shops. I think I would sooner be out in countryside but hey let's give it a try. It's hot in the city but the sun can not get through the smoke that is in the air from the grass fires burning in the countryside outside of the city, and you can smell the smoke in the air.

We walk around getting our bearings as we do now the shops don't end at the street and there are lots of shopping malls with more shops hidden inside. Melbourne has a tram system which covers all of the city and beyond one circular route is free but you need the MYKI card I mentioned previously, so we need to get one for Barb, we are down at the harbour shopping mall and find the one shop that sells the cards. After purchasing one for Barb and topping up my card we can now get around the rest of the city using the trams and bus system. Now after making a couple of trips and watching the locals it appears that only about 30% of people using the trams actually use the card and pay for the journey the rest just pretend to swipe their card. We decide that when our cards run out of the \$10 credit they have on them we will join the 70%, when in Rome and all that.

Barb tells me that I have been a good boy and not moaned about the amount of shops we have seen or the distance we have walked doing so, and I am allowed a cold one on the way back to the hotel. We prepare dinner in our room and watch some TV before retiring for the evening.

Next morning we make the walk into town and grab a tram to Victoria market, this is a large market selling fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, seafood which is impressive, and then you have the usual market stalls selling the same tat as you get in great homer street at home. We celebrate valentines day outside the market with a bratwurst hot dog, Florentines and a glass of vino in a plastic glass with a foil lid, class you can not beat it.

Then we return to the hotel have dinner followed by gelato from the parlour over the road to the hotel, watch some TV and retire for the evening.

The routine continues the next day with our walk into town to catch a tram we had thought about a ferry trip along the river but after reading some of the reviews on trip advisor we decide against it. So we go to St Kilda and go for a walk along the beachfront watching a couple of wind surfers battle against the very blowy conditions.

Now you may remember me having a rant about how difficult it was to pay over the phone for using the toll roads, well it looks like the rant is to continue as I have received an email from one of the camper van companies saying that there is a fine for not paying the toll. I check our credit card account and the payment is showing on the statement. Ok let's phone them up and sort it out after 2 hours on the phone pressing numbers and never actually getting to talk to a human being at the toll company. I phone the camper van company now I do manage to talk to a human being although not a very helpful one, he informs me that at the current time the fine is in their name and they need to give my details to the toll company to transfer it, until then I can do nothing and they will send the information by post to our home address, I explain that we are leaving the country next week and will not be home until may,

Mr Happy says that this will be a problem as the longer it takes to pay the more the fine gets and there is nothing he can do about it, helpful sod.

We check the infringement web site and this is about as much use as Mr Happy, but we do get the address which is in the city.

We decide to go to the office and set off the next morning with all the information we have including the payment details. After a trek on a number of trams and a good walk we get to the office and wait in a queue with the rest of the convicts, eventually it's my turn and I explain our tale. The lady checks on the system but can not find the details she explains that it did not look as if it had been sent to them as yet and was still with city link and suggested we contact them, now we had tried with no success to contact them by phone, so it looks like we will have to visit their office to resolve the problem. The lady I have been talking to gets the address for me, and yippee it's the other side of town.

After a number of tram rides and another good old walk we arrive at the city link office and wait in another queue, I explain our problem to the lady behind the desk, ok she says can I see your driving licence to prove who you are, nope it's at the hotel, oh hang on I have a copy on my phone, oh ok that will do where is the picture, I explain that it does not have a photograph, oh well ok I will have a look, ok you have paid one but not another one, ok we hadn't realised we had gone on another one can I pay it now, yes that will be \$19 I pay up and go to meet Barb at some more shop we found. What a pain in the bum and all for about nine quid, I think I need a drink.

We set off back towards the hotel and stop off by the hotel, Barb for a foot massage and pedicure, while I go for that much needed drink. After our many trips into the city I have come to the conclusion that the majority of the shops here sell near enough the same stuff that we have at home and then there are some that sell mementoes of Australia which are similar to the tat we get at seaside towns in the uk.

We return to the hotel as we need to pack our numerous bags ready to depart in the morning for Sydney, we have booked a taxi to take us to the airport early in the morning to collect a hire car. After a bite to eat we watch some TV and retire as tomorrow we will be back in Ted, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 85

We meet the taxi driver in the reception area and after a quick chat with the Greek owner of the apartments we set off for the airport, the traffic queue on the highway is bad this morning apparently due to a number of accidents. We eventually get to the hire car office this is an easy collection as it's an all inclusive, fully insured, no bond deal that Barb found on the tinternet. While we are signing the paperwork there are a couple at the next desk discussing the \$1000 bond and the \$3500 excess they are

signing up for, we look at each other and at the lady doing our handover and keep quiet.

We soon have the keys for our latest chariot a Hyundai i20 auto in white named Izzy, we head off back to the apartment to collect our bags and the traffic on the way back is no better again due to a number of accidents. This is a four lane (each way) highway, busy highway and there is some idiots jump starting a car in the outside lane hard shoulder with one of their cars facing the wrong way, madness no wonder there are accidents with mutters like this around.

We get back to the apartment and load our bags into Izzy with a bit of a moan from the suspension, say farewell to Bobby the Greek and set off in Izzy first stop is to go to the cruise terminal at St Kilda to see the cruise liner that arrived this morning. It's about a thirty minute drive and we get there without too much of a problem, after seeing the ship we go to the Pharama market for a look around before we leave Melbourne and head off towards Sydney.

We set off and after we leave the city Barb takes over the driving, we are going to go the coastal route which is a longer drive but far more picturesque than the highway. We stop off at a couple of places and end up at Phillip island and yes this weekend sees the first round of the superbike GP and no we do not have the time to stay, what a complete bummer. We do not arrive until early evening and after setting Ted up we head off to have a look at the circuit and although we can drive in, the actual circuit is closed, job for tomorrow.

After driving to Cowes at the the other end of the island for a look around then it's back to the campsite, chat to a couple of other residents, watch some TV and settle in for our first night under canvass for a while, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 86

It rained a bit during the night so we have to leave Ted out in the sunshine to dry while we have breakfast and other stuff, then we set off back to the circuit just in case there is any testing going on. We get there and all is quiet so no testing so after a look around we head off to a chocolate factory we passed last night, it was a bit of all show and no go, as it turned out to be more of a shop than a factory, then we head off towards Sydney.

The journey along the coast road is slow but it great to see the ocean again as it thunders up the various beaches, we join the Princess highway which is just as bumpy traveling towards Sydney as away from there. We have a couple of stops at different towns along the way but there is not much different to report about them than the other ones we have visited.

The weather has taken a turn for the worse and it rains heavily which stops a great deal of sight seeing but is very welcome by the locals who have not had a drop of rain in the last seven weeks. Could send them some from the UK by the looks of the reports on the TV.

We have ended up at a town called Orbost at a small campsite which only charges \$20 a night let's hope that it does not rain too much and drown poor little Ted, we are going to have an early night so that we can set off early in the morning and get some miles, no make that kilometres done as we still have a 12 hour drive before we get to Sydney, and hey we have already done 600k. So goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 87

Well it may have rained a little at Phillip island but last night it poured down along with epic clashes of thunder and long bright daggers of lightening hitting the ground, it's a good job we are under a tree, well that's the right place to be isn't it? We are sure that Ted is not going to be able to withstand this deluge but the little fellow does his stuff and does not leak one drop we are very proud of him and grateful that we did not have to retreat into Izzy for shelter.

The sun is out this morning so we leave Ted to dry out while we breakfast and shower then we pack Ted away along with all our other stuff which by the end of next week we will have to rationalise and fit into our two bags, now that should be fun but it will have to be done before we fly to NZ. we set off for Sydney which according to the mapping on my phone is 700k and nine hours away, we have decided that each of us will do two hour stints behind the wheel and see how far we can get, we set off with Barb behind the wheel.

We have done the majority of this part of the journey before so we don't stop for a look around just for tea, coffee and a rest, we continue on down the Princess highway. There is not a great deal to report about the journey but we continue on getting closer to our destination every hour, as the afternoon turns to evening we are still about 150k away from Sydney. Decision time do we find somewhere to camp here or push on further, we decide to carry on and get closer to Sydney we find a campsite on the Internet about 50k from Sydney phone them up and book in as we are not going to be there until about 8pm.

We get there just before eight, it's not the best site going but it's only for one night so Ted is erect and we are set up for the night, after a lot of time consuming Internet searching we find a hotel for our stay in Sydney make a reservation. Then it's time for an early night ready for our trip into the big city tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 88

After breakfast in the camp kitchen and the other morning stuff we pack Ted back into his bag, pack everything back into Izzy and then we set off for the hotel. We have arranged an early check in so that we can park up and get into the city. The journey takes about an hour and takes us through the centre of the city but not over the bridge as I had expected, we find the hotel without any problems, any after a quick efficient check in we are on our way to our room.

After settling into our room it's time to hit the town, the journey into the city centre starts with a walk and then a train ride that takes about thirty minutes, when we get to the station we purchase a four day rover ticket that covers all the train, ferry and bus journeys we may need during our stay. Our journey into the city takes us over the iconic Sydney harbour bridge, past the amazing Opera house and in to the city centre, we are off the train and into the hustle and bustle of the big, big city.

We set off for the Rocks, an area by the harbour under the bridge there is a market there so we go for a look around and a bite to eat from the street vendors, then we walk towards the harbour and we find the oldest pub in Sydney and as it is fairly hot we pop in for a swift one. Then we go to the harbour and catch a ferry to darling harbour the journey takes us past the opera house and under the bridge. We disembark, that's nautical for get off, and explore this part of town, more shops and lots of bars / eateries, when we return to the city the working day has come to an end the workers have come out to play. The bars are jammed packed with and people are making the most of happy hour, so it would be rude not to join them, after a couple of g and t's and some people watching, we explore a bit more thankfully all the shops are closing up.

We wander back to the station and catch the train back to the hotel when we get off there is a precinct so we give that a quick look over and then walk back to the hotel, we get to our room tired and footsore. We watch some TV and relax before climbing into a bed that is bigger than Ted, for an early night to ready ourselves for more exploring tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 89

We have breakfast in the hotel and then set off for the city, we are going on a walking tour of the city that starts at 10.30 and takes about 3 hours, we get to the station about 9.30 which if it was a weekday would get us into town in plenty of time for the start of the tour. Unfortunately as it's Saturday the trains do not run as frequently and

added to the weekend line works the next train is not going to get us there in time for the start of the tour, oh bum.

We carry on towards where the tour starts and bump into them coming the other way as we have only missed the first ten minutes or so we tag along for the rest of the trip. It's a good old hike around the city and the guide gives us lots of information as she shows us around. We had thinking about on going on the bridge climb although it is fairly expensive \$245 each so we had been thinking seriously about it. The walking tour guide tells us that if you go on the bridge climb you are not allowed to take photographs or even a camera for that matter and they charge \$30 to take your first photograph and then \$10 for every extra photograph, that sorts that out we will just walk across the bridge for free instead. We continue on around the city walking for about three hours, this is a great way of finding out about the city, and good exercise, if you are visiting Sydney I would recommend this trip and it's free, well that's if your a tight arse and don't leave a good tip.

We return to the rocks street market for a snack and then find the closest drinking establishment for a cold one, then we walk down to the quay and catch a ferry to get a view of the city from the water. We travel to nautical bay on a round trip to take in the sights, you get a great view of the city, the bridge and the Opera house from the ferries, taken lots of photographs just need to sort them out. We walk back into town and take a look at the shops, same old same old, apart from the arcades which are reminiscent of the Burlington arcade, the architecture and the buildings are fantastic and have luckily been restored to their former glory and not destroyed as they so nearly where.

Then it's time for some dinner at an eatery at Circular quay waterfront overlooking the bridge and the opera house, we eat outside so as to maximise the people watching opportunities. The restaurant is on the Opera house, restaurant and bars route and as it is Saturday night there are some fascinating sights.

After dinner we catch the train back to the hotel watch some TV and retire for the evening ready for tomorrow's excursion, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 90

God day 90 where has them time gone, this morning we are going to Bondi beach we set off from the hotel and walk to the train station and after two train rides and one bus ride we arrive at Bondi beach, we walk down the sea front, one gets the idea that there may be money around here I only get that impression when three Lamborghini's pull up in line at the traffic lights, just a few quids worth. Then we go to the Bondi Sunday market, much the same as most other markets but with sun and beautiful people, then we catch the bus back to the city with some not so beautiful people.

Back in town we walk to Hyde park on route to the Barracks museum and as luck would have it there is a wine festival in the park, you buy a glass and tokens and then you can take your pick of wines to try, we start off with some fizz and then a couple of whites. We get a bite to eat at one of the many stalls and then we try a couple of reds. There is a choice stay for longer or visit the museum, the museum wins it's very interesting and Barb really enjoys reading all the history relating to the building.

We then go for another ferry trip this one is the longest route to Parramatta, boy this bugger can go, you could water ski behind this rascal, it overtakes power boats. The trips takes over an hour and when we get there we find that this ferry is not doing the return trip. We check the timetable and it looks as if the next boat is in forty minutes so we take a seat at a bar and wait for the next ferry, when it arrives we find that this one does not return to circular quay. We pay closer attention to the time table we see that as it's Sunday the the last two return ferries are replaced by a bus service, Doh! and double Doh!

Ok now we need to get back to the hotel, we check out the bus, boat and train timetable and there is a station not to far away so we set off for a walk and we get to the station with two minutes to spare to catch the next train. We take our seats and set off for the city, we are both tired and footsore so we decide to catch the connecting train and go back to the hotel rather than going into town.

We arrive back at the hotel and as we still have lots to see tomorrow, we watch some TV and then retire for the evening so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 91

We take our usual walk to the train station and catch the train towards the city, but this morning we are not going all the way into the city and get off at Minsons point, this is last station before the Bridge. Getting off here allows us to walk over the bridge into the city, the views from the bridge a fantastic and plenty of photographs are taken on the journey. After the bridge we walk down to the quay and then on to the Opera house the Disney experience is in operation here as well, so we look around the foyer and at the amazing architecture of this building.

Next stop is another ferry ride to Watson harbour this trip takes us in a different direction than the other trips we have taken and we see different views of the city and it's surroundings, we just take a round trip on the ferry to take in the sights and then it's back to circular quay. Next stop for me is a trip to the top of the sky tower 360 degree observation deck to take some photographs while Barb has a look at the shops in the Westfield centre, we agree to meet in 45 minutes in a cafe that we can see.

Again the Disney experience is in operation \$24 to go to the observation deck and a 3D movie I have a discount voucher from a brochure so that comes into play. I pay up and enter, wait in a short queue and then enter the 3D auditorium now did I say movie it's 4 minutes long, that's just about a YouTube video clip never mind a movie. Next stop is the lift to the observation deck, the lift is cozy to say the least and only holds 6 people at a time, it travels the 250 metres to the deck in 35 seconds and does so without any acceleration and deceleration dramas. I walk around the 360 degree viewing platform taking in the sight and taking photographs on the way around, now there is an external viewing platform that's another \$45 and like the bridge no cameras allowed, so I give that one a miss. The exit is through the ubiquitous shop and you can buy 4 photographs taken from the deck for 40 bucks no thanks, after resisting the urge to buy a boomerang you can then get to the lift down we go. Now they have not finished with the Disney selling experience yet, as when you first go in they take your photograph in a couple of poses, and you now have the opportunity to buy these photographs which have been photoshopped onto 4 various backgrounds, one of which is a giant Kola, I manage to resist coughing up another 40 bucks and say goodbye.

Now to meet Barb at the coffee shop, I am about ten minutes late so I order a coffee and wait, and wait, half an hour passes and I start to wonder what's happened to her, you know it's dangerous she could be any where. I think about going to the information desk just in case something has happened to her, but decide to go for a walk around first. After about ten minutes I find her at a different coffee shop, panic over. We had thought about going on another walking tour this evening but we both feel we have done enough walking around Sydney. Instead we go for an aperitif before heading back to the quay for a bite to eat overlooking the harbour.

Then it's a short walk to the station to catch a train back to the hotel, when we get off the train we stop off at the beers, wines and spirits shop to purchase a little drink to have back at the hotel. We get back to our room and while packing, partake in our purchase from the BWS, while Barb watches some TV I load the photographs onto the computer. It's soon time to retire ready for tomorrow's drive to Melbourne it's only about 10 hours, without stops and that's the quick way, yippee, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 92

This is not going to be long report today as there is not a great deal to report. We leave the hotel just before 10 am and the idea is to cover as many of 900 plus kilometres we need to cover to get to Melbourne airport, as we are travelling along the main Hume highway which is just a dual carriageway for over 850k there is not a great deal to report about the trip.

It's just a boring tiring drive, after a couple of hours we stop off for a cup of tea to, as the road signs say, Rest, Revive, Arrive Alive. Then we continue on a a town called

Albury on the Murray river we find a camp site book in and set up, Barb puts a cloths wash on while I sort Ted out who is as usual erect in a matter of minutes.

We have dinner chorizo and aspagrass risotto prepared in the camp kitchen, Barb looks for relocation deals in NZ while I get up to date with the blog, then it's time to retire to the comfort of a self inflating mattress and get ready for an early start in the morning, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 93

I don't believe it! It rained last night and the sun has not risen this morning with its usual fierceness and it's only 22c, typical we have clothes on the washing line and Ted needs to be fully dry before he gets packed away ready for his trip to NZ. In reality all this means is we depart the campsite an hour later than expected, as the sun comes out and does it's stuff so no worries.

We head off down the Hume highway with Barb at the wheel and just over 300k to do, the highway is as un eventful as ever and it has got no smoother, can they not lay a flat road surface, at least we are not in Tonka toy and Izzy can ride the bumps a fair bit better.

We have been wondering about transportation in NZ as we have not been able to find any relocation deals to get us from Auckland to Christchurch. Well while we were waiting for Ted to dry out we had a phone call from Will a contact we have made at Imoova one of the relocation companies we have been dealing with, and like a star he has come up with just the deal a luxury 2 berth camper van for 5 bucks a day. We will collect it at Auckland and take it to Christchurch not only is it only 5 bucks a day they also pay the ferry charges, great result, many thanks Will you are a star.

We continue on along the Hume and arrive at the hotel, well I say hotel it's a bar with some rooms bit of a dump but the room is clean and there is even stuff for breakfast and a toaster, and it's only for one night. The next job is to carry our numerous bags into our room and then sort out what goes and what stays, looks like quite a lot will have to stay as we have only booked two pieces of hold baggage. We arrange what we can take and then we need to take the other items to a charity shop, so that someone can benefit from them.

Now it's time to get some food we drive into town to Lygon street where we stayed on our last visit to Melbourne as there are lots of different restaurants to choose from. We choose Italian again and then we get back to the hotel for an early night ready for an early start tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 94

Well even after sorting out stuff that will stay we still have 6 bags to get on board this should be fun, we set off for the car hire office, hand Izzy back without any drama and catch the shuttle bus to the airport. First job check in our hold bags, now it's a DIY check in and we try to check in a couple of extra bags and the computer says yes but wants €120 for the privilege so blow that. There is a member of the ground crew on hand and he tells us that we can each take two bags on board although they are not supposed to be as big or heavy as the ones we have, but then says take them on board and tell the crew that he said it was ok, right result.

We have a look around the duty free shops to kill some time and then wait to board the plane which seems to take an age, we get some strange looks from other passengers as we carry our tramp bags on board and take up twice as much storage space than I suppose we should. The flight is only just over three hours so a short hop really, I manage to watch a film "Last Vegas" which was quite funny and the rest of the flight was uneventful. We are given an immigration card to complete and it asks if we have any food or camping equipment and we tick the yes boxes.

After we go through immigration we are sent to another section so that they can check what food we are bringing in and what camping equipment we have, the food goes through and the rest of our bags go through another X-ray machine and they are ok, but Ted is marched off to a bio chemical inspection department to check that he is not contaminated in any way. All this takes an age but he is returned to us with a clean bill of health, next job is to get to the hotel, the taxis want \$80 so that a no no, Barb checks at the information desk and finds that we can get a shuttle bus right to the hotel.

We get the bus load our 6 bags into the trailer and off we go, we get talking to a couple on the bus who have come to see Springsteen in concert, when we get to our hotel "The Langham" they say bloody hell this looks a bit posh, and we reply "there going to get a shock when we go in then" the commissioner asks "do you have any bags sir" big mistake yes this one, this one, this one, this one oh and these two tramp bags, you should have seen his face, laugh, I nearly wet myself and Barb ran off laughing. We get to the reception desk and the receptionist asks the same question about the luggage and again we start sniggering. Oh yes the commissioner has them, that's fine sir they will be taken to your room, by the time we get to our room we are doubled up laughing and when there is a knock at the door Barb hides in the bathroom while the bags are delivered and placed in the room.

It's getting late so we go for a quick bite to eat and then retire to the biggest comfiest bed in the world.com oh and eat the chocolates that have been left when the bed was turned down, for gods sake, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 95

As we have lost another two hours on the trip to New Zealand we have a lie in, well we are not sure if it's losing the two hours or the fact this bed is fantastic especially when it's compared to sleeping in Ted. Then we catch the hotel courtesy bus into town, we need to do a couple of things while we are in the city first job is to get a NZ mobile phone card and wifi card. There seems to be three mobile networks so we need to find out which will be best for us while we are here. That means travelling to each shop and checking out the prepaid plans, now usually this would be easy as most of the time they are next door to each other, well not in Auckland they are spread all over the city. We finally decide on one of them and in no time at all, our phone is working but the Mifi dongle is proving a bit more of a problem. Then we do the usual tour of the shops to find that they sell the same stuff as they sell in Ozz, and similar stuff back at home. Then we go for a look around the harbour and check out the ferry tickets ready for tomorrow, as we are going to go for another ferry ride.

The city is full of people who have come to see The Boss in concert and as the afternoon turns to early evening the bars start to fill up, so it would be rude not to join them. While in a bar down by the harbour we start talking to a couple who are from Christchurch and they have asked us to stay with them when we get there, it turns out that he is the Superintendent District Commander of Christchurch Police, don't you know.

Then it's time get some food, we return to the hotel for a nightcap, then we go to our room to watch some TV and then retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 96

We get the hotel shuttle into town and walk the rest of the way to the harbour, get a bite to eat and then go to catch the ferry to Rangitoto a volcanic island about a 30 minute ferry ride away. When we get there we catch a coach pulled by a tractor for a trip around the island and part way to the top of the volcano then we set off up the

360 steps to the rim of the crater. The driver was right when he said it was going to be a bumpy ride, in fact it was a bumpy dusty ride. He was also very informative and quite funny with his commentary as we drove around the trip takes about three hours and we get back to the harbour just in time to catch the penultimate ferry back to Auckland city.

As we are somewhat dusty from our excursion we go back to the hotel for a shower before checking out the local eateries. We have chosen Italian yet again and the food is great until we get to the dessert course, when half way through Barb finds what she thinks is a pea, now in the great scheme of things this would not have been a big deal, but they just took it away did not bring a replacement, did not apologise and when asked just confirmed that it was a pea. Shame they spoilt it as the main courses were fantastic but it does make one wonder if there was anything additional in them.

Then we return to the hotel for a nightcap after we have been in the bar for a while there is invasion of people who are band members and hangers on from the Springsteen concert, the Boss does not make an appearance. They have no intention of going to bed, so when in Rome, we eventually retire forgetting we have an early start in the morning, but sleep we will so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 97

Luckily we had done the majority of our packing yesterday so we managed a bit of a lie in, we are going to collect a hire car from a company in town that we have had one from in Oz, we go to catch the hotel bus only to find that it does not start until 10.30am on a Sunday and as we need to collect the car at 10am and check out by 11am this is not good news. I suggest a cab but Barb says let's walk, so walk we do now it was a bit further than we initially thought but we get there eventually. When our turn comes the guy is having some trouble finding the booking, so I give him the booking ref that has been emailed to me after I booked it on the phone. Oh that's the problem the guy who put it on the system had put the 2nd February not March, anyway not a great problem as they have a car available.

After the usual paperwork and sell up routine we are given the keys to a Nissan Note which is obviously a Japanese import and of dubious vintage, but he's ok with us and Barb has named him Zeek, for no reason whatsoever. We are meeting Kym Garry and the boys for lunch but before we do we need to go back to the hotel load Zeek with all our bags, check out and find a camping shop to get a couple of air beds ready for a night in Ted tonight.

We find another entrance to the hotel so we do not have to cart our tramp bags through the lobby to the embarrassment of the staff, we manage to fit all our luggage into Zeek, check out and then set off in search of a camping shop, we find one outside of town which although is a different name to the one we used in Oz is definitely the same company by another name, same set up same type of logo, same stock. The mats we purchased in Oz are on sale here only difference in Oz they were \$20 here they are \$59 each so that ain't happening, but we struggle to find an alternative in the time we have. We set off back into the city to meet Kym, Garry and the boys for lunch, they have been delayed a bit but no prob we need to park anyway. We met them at the harbour, have lunch and a couple of very pleasant hours together, before we need to go our separate ways. It was great to see Kym again and meet Gary and the boys, then we need to set off heading north and find a campsite for the night. We travel for about 130k to a doc campsite that is shown on the tourist map, when we get there we find that it is only for motorhomes or caravans, yippee. We travel for another thirty minutes and find a campsite, of sorts and set up for night Ted is as usual erect in minutes, good job as it's starts to rain as soon as he is up. Air bed well we haven't got any so that's a very quick job, luckily the ground is much softer here than it is in Oz, we settle in for the night longing for the luxurious bed in the Langham, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 98

We set off towards Tewi lakes to another site that is listed on the tourist map which is a couple of hours drive away, there are a couple of things on today's agenda purchase some air beds, ice packs for the esky and food shopping. We stop off at the first town on route and achieve two out of the three, no ice packs but the most important items are stowed away into Zeek as his suspension gives another little moan.

It has rained a fair bit on the way to the Tiwi lakes so there has not been many sight seeing opportunities, when we arrive at the lakes to be honest there is not a great deal there, it would be a great place if you had some form of boat or if there was a gang of you, but we have neither. Also Barb has checked out the facilities and they ain't too good by any standard so we decide not to stay and move on. Now we have two options continue to the very top of the island or go over to the east coast and have a look over there, as we only have ten days we decide changed our plans a bit and head over to the east coast towards Whangarei. Although it's not a great distance the journey does take a while as the roads here are the exact opposite of Oz, more bends than straights, when we get there we go to another of the DOC sites but this is full with a school trip, so we find another site.

This is one of the "Top Sites" gaffs so it should be good, in fact it is very good, we set up site with Ted being erect in moments as usual and it's a good job because as soon as he is up and the air beds are inflated, it starts to rain proper rain. During our first couple of days on the road we noticed two main differences between Oz and NZ, firstly the roads we have been round more bends here in a couple of days than we

went around in three months in Oz. Secondly the weather since we have been on the road here we have had more rain than we had in our whole trip around Oz, I hope that Ted is up to it.

We retreat to the comfort of the camp kitchen and prepare dinner chicken curry and rice, which all had to be cooked in one small frying pan as this site did not supply any cooking equipment, fun but it was good even if I do say so myself. Then after we have talked, had a little drink and written up some of the blog it's time for bed, we are hoping for a good nights sleep on our new air beds, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 99

The air beds are great and we slept well, apart from the rain and Ted needs drying out before we can put him away into Zeek, we leave him to dry in the morning sun while we shower then have breakfast. When we are done he is dry enough to put away and then we set off down the east coast. Barb is doing the first stint behind the wheel and she is happy because she thinks that if she was a passenger around all theses bends she may have been shall we say unwell, if there are too many more bends, I may be unwell.

Again the weather is not too tourist and sight seeing friendly so most of the day is spent on the road, we are heading for another DOC site about 60k outside of Auckland, when we get there this one is also full with another school trip. What is with these schools don't they want any kids in the classrooms, there is another site about a 45 minute drive away and the lady checks that they have availability, and they have so off we go. We are getting tired and ten minutes down the road we find another "Top site" and decide to stay there instead of continuing further.

It's a great site right on the beach overlooking Hauraki Gulf after we have booked in and set up camp we head into town to get a bite to eat, as luck would have it there is a public house so we pop in for an aperitif before dinner. We have chosen Thai this evening and a very good choice it was great food and very reasonable as well, then it's back to the campsite and we watch some TV before retiring for the evening.

Day 100

Crikey one hundred days, 2,400 hours it's difficult to believe that we have been away for 100 days it has flown over and with very, very few cross words, and these have only been at the end of a tiring frustrating day of traveling. The blog is now over 52,000 words which is more than half way to an average novel, if we can make this leg of the journey a bit more exciting for our readers, you never know what may happen.

We have decided to stay here for another night, so the morning has been spent making use of the laundry, and then planning the rest of our NZ trip we have read a number of tour guides, trips and recommendations and have put together our itinerary for the next twenty plus days, which as usual will more than likely change, but we do have the basis of a plan.

Best be making it more interesting than that then, in the afternoon we set off to explore the beaches of the Manley peninsula, to start with the weather is against us, not sure if it has been on the news in the UK but the South Island especially is suffering severe weather conditions and parts of Christchurch are flooded, sounds familiar to the UK. After watching the news I feel for the families in Christchurch who were due to return to their homes today or who have just returned to them after the 2010 earthquake, only to be flooded out, it must be heartbreaking. So a bit of wind and rain here can be dealt with, we travel to both sides of the peninsula and both sides are suffering from bad weather.

Later in the afternoon it brightens up and we go for a long walk along the beach, now Barb is worried that we may get sunburnt, you can't win. The change in the weather has finally allowed for some photographic opportunities which I will post on the web site shortly. After viewing a couple more beaches and stopping for some food shopping on the way we finally return to the campsite at about 7pm, fortunately Ted has survived the weather today and the air beds have not washed away.

After a bite to eat and a glass of vin rouge we watch some TV, and I catch up with the blog, then it's time for bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Ok today our tour proper starts and we head off along route 1 motorway towards Auckland with Barb at the wheel, it is a beautiful sunny morning with not a cloud in the sky and long may it stay like that. Although by now we should have missed the morning traffic, the motorway is still busy but it's not long before we are free of the big city and heading for the countryside.

We head off along route 25 and the 25A towards the Coromandel Peninsula the road takes us through the Coromandel forest and then along the coast overlooking the Pacific Ocean on a road that has more bends than a bendy thing. Today the sun is shining it's warm and the country has finally opened up to us, showing us it's stunning natural beauty, there are some wonderful vistas to behold and the mountains in the distance are shouting Smigel lives here, find him if you can.

We stop at a town called Tairua and park overlooking the Ocean for our lunch which we prepared this morning before we left the campsite, in no time at all we are surrounded by a flock of seagulls, or is that a band, who would like to try some of our lunch. So Barb gives them a slice of lemon, they don't appear to like lemon. We have a wander around the town and then set off for Hot Water Beach.

It's definitely not like Oz where 20k takes ten minutes as there is not a bend in sight, here there is not straight bit in sight so progress is a tad slower. We eventually arrive at HWB park up and walk down to the beach, surprisingly enough the beach is Known as Hot Water Beach because there is hot water, in fact bloody hot water rising through the sand. You can hire a spade from the cafe, or bring your own if you have happened to carry one with you, Bear Grylls would make one or use his BG Machete, if he was allowed to have one, and providing you are there at low tide you can dig your own hot tub, well muddy hot tub. We settle for standing in the flow of the hot water as it flows down to the ocean, and watch as dozens of people dig holes in the sand watch it fill with steaming water and sit in it. In places it's too hot to stand in and you have to run to the ocean to cool your feet.

We go for a walk along the beach in the late afternoon sun, hand in hand at the edge of the sand, isn't that in a poem. Then we head off a bit further up the coast to Cathedral cove to take in the sights, unfortunately we do not have time to walk down the cliff side for a closer look as we need to find somewhere to camp for the night. We are going for a bit of semi rough camping tonight in one of the camp sites in the Kauaeranga National Park, so it's a site in the middle of nowhere with very basic amenities, we arrive in the park and as we have not pre booked our choice of sites is limited to the ones with unlocked gates. We find one called Shag Stream and join four other campers in a large field with a couple of chickens, one of which decides to get into the car as we are erecting Ted.

It's not long before it goes as dark as a dark thing can go and obviously there is no phone or Internet signal, so after writing up the blog and a bit of star gazing, it's a magnificent display due to the lack of light pollution and a new moon. If I was not getting bitten alive every time I venture outside I would be out there taking some photographs, we are going to make a quick dash from Zeek into Ted and then it's time for an early night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 102

Well we have survived another the night in the wild, well semi wild and the rising above the Pinnacles is a sight to behold, as I said the amenities are very limited and we choose to give the long drop a miss and wait until we find somewhere more suitable. Today we are heading for Waitomo which is further south and further inland.

We travel for a couple of hours and arrive at the destination and after a look around decide not to stay and to move on to Rotorua which is a spa town when we arrive we find sulphur scented steam oozing from below ground and finding any route it can out into the atmosphere. In some places it finds it's way into ponds turning them into hot spa pools and in others it finds it's way out through the water drains at the side of the road, there are also pools of hot bubbling mud making gurgling sounds as the hot air passes through the mud.

We head off to find the camp site that we are staying at and when we get there we are given our choice of pitch heated or not heated and with varying degrees of heat. I kid you not some of the site is heated naturally due to the thickness of the earth's crust, like Goldilocks we pick a pitch which is neither too hot or too cool. With Ted erect and our air beds inflated we head off into town, which we have been told is just at the end of the road, to get some dinner.

The end of the road, my bum, it's about 2k into town which in the great scheme of things is not far, but I would have chosen not to wear a pair of thongs to walk that far in. The town is fairly lively with a good selection of eateries we choose a Turkish gaff for a change and the food was pretty good and far better than the service, as it looked as if we had chosen the busiest place in town.

At about 9.30 it's like a switch is flicked and the bars and restaurants start to close and by 10pm they are nearly all shut up and gone, we walk back to the site to find Ted and our air beds as warm as a warm thing can be. It's a fairly strange sensation lying on a hot air bed, anyway it will keep us warm as we settle in for the night so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 103

After the usual morning rituals we head off to the far side of town to see a Geyser which apparently erupts at hourly intervals, when we get there they would like to charge us \$70 each for the geyser experience. Now we have both seen a geyser erupt before and after giving it due consideration we work on the principal, seen one geyser seen them all, and give it a miss.

So what to do now, I had mentioned that I would like to go to Hobbiton the setting of the shire in both Lord of the rings and The Hobbit we have a look at the map and it is about an hours drive away, ok let's go. We set off and while I drive Barb goes on to the tinternet and books us onto the 3pm tour, that should give us plenty of time to get there and have a sandwich when we get there.

Now if this was the USA Hobbiton would have been signposted from just outside Rotorua, we'll not here can we find a sign post can we heck. We end up putting the address into my iPhones sat nav and head of on an adventure of our own up hill and down dale, eventually arriving at the home of Bilbo and his hobbit friends. I get the tickets while barb gets a sandwich, just as we finish our sandwiches a hobbit sorry a member of the Hobbiton team asks if we would like to go on the tour that is leaving now, ok it's only 15 minutes early but it's fine by us.

Our driver / tour guide introduces himself as Henry and it turns out that he is actually the Marketing Director of Hobbiton, don't you know. Anyway Henry is a larger than life guy and boy can he talk, the tour takes about three hours during which time there is plenty of time for photographs while Henry gives us loads of information regarding the film and the actual building of Hobbiton. Jules and Verne manage to put in a guest appearance for a few photographs including a couple with Barb, they are in their element in this environment of time and make believe.

The tour continues around the Shire and after visiting the Party Tree we then go to the Green Dragon drinking establishment for a drop of the local brew, the Green Dragon is a fully licensed premises and they have their own ale, which surprisingly enough you can buy in the shop at the end of the tour along with the flagons we are drinking the brew out of, now there's a shock. Jules and Verne prefer the amber ale and after we have had our "complimentary" drink we board the coach and return to the shop for a bit of a Disney experience at some prices even Disney would wince at, like \$360 for a Gandalf hat, we say farewell to Henry and I tell him that they will make a tour guide of him yet.

We head off back to Ted and arrive at the site about an hour later, first stop is the hot pools at the site there are three of them at varying temperatures warm, hot and bloody hot, the pools are supplied with hot water from below the earth which arrives at the surface at boiling point it is then stored in huge tanks and cooled to the various temperatures before finally reaching its destination at the pools. After a long soak in

the various pools we have dinner in the camp kitchen, watch some TV in the lounge, chat to some of our fellow travellers and then retire to Ted who is toasty warm, we are not too sure about this heated ground lark. Anyway it's time for bed so goodnight one and all sleep well more tomorrow.

Day 104

It has rained overnight so before we can pack Ted away we need to let him dry in the morning sun while we shower have breakfast and stuff, when he is dry he is packed back into his bag and dumped in the boot, we say our farewells to the people we have met and set off to our next destination. Before we leave town we stop off for a game of mini golf, after 18 holes I score a fairly dismal 51 against a par of 45 however Barb only manages 56.

We are heading back to Auckland to collect another motorhome on a relocation deal and we have two options stop off before we get to Auckland or carry on and find a site close to the city, we decide to continue towards the city so that we do not have drive to far in the early morning traffic to the airport to swap vehicles. The weather forecast is not good for this evening and heavy rain is on the way, we decide to find a motel rather than camp and mess around with a wet Ted in the morning. We find a cheap and cheerful establishment on the internet and make an online reservation, we head into the city and after about a four hour drive we find the motel and book in, it is a bit of a travelling workers gaff but its cheap and clean.

We take some of our gear to the room and then head out to find an eatery, the area is very industrial and we drive around for a while before finding a Thai establishment, the food is very good and after dinner we head back to the motel to watch some TV. While we are watching TV we check out the collection and drop off times, while doing so we find that we have lost or gained a day and are a day early for the collection Doh! O well that will give us a free day tomorrow to have a look around the outskirts of Auckland. Its bed time now so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 105

We have arranged to stay at the motel for another night so there is no need for an early start this morning, as we have not seen a real bed for quite a while we decide to have a leisurely start to the day with breakfast in bed while watching TV. Then as we

have time and the space we sort out our bags ready for tomorrows vehicle swap over, time consuming stuff this bag sorting lark and its lunchtime before we head off out.

We are not too sure what to do today as we do not want to go too far, so we go for mooch around the area of Ponsonby for a couple of hours and then head out of town to Mission Bay, we walk along the coastal path taking in the early evening sun. This looks like a popular place as the bars and restaurants are filling up, we plump for good old fish and chips and eat them in the park overlooking Rangitoto Island and the Rangitoto Channel while watching the sun cast its varying shades of orange on the landscape behind us.

We head back to the motel and our room, finish packing our bags ready for an early start in the morning, The Hobbit movie is on TV and we watch it with a slightly different prospective after being to the Shire we can now say hey been there when the opportunity arises. We have an early start tomorrow so after watching the film its time for bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 106

The alarm goes off, which it hasn't for some time as its not been set, we have some breakfast in our room then its time to load our bags into Zeek. The agenda this morning after checking out is, drive through the morning traffic to the Britz motorhome office and collect the motorhome, swap all our stuff from Zeek into the motorhome, fill Zeek with fuel and take him back to the rental company, all before 10am and we cannot collect the motorhome until 9am, this should be fun.

We set off through the traffic and find the Britz office, there is the usual paperwork and insurance upsell to be taken care of, which is complicated a bit by the guy on the desk being French with not a very good grasp of English, but much better than my French I have to say, and also he is not used to handling relocation handovers. Eventually we get things sorted out with a bit of assistance from another member of staff. This has delayed us somewhat and we hurriedly swap all our mountain of bags from Zeek into the motorhome.

We head off to the Apex office Barb in Zeek and me in the latest vehicle a 7.2 meter Mercedes with luck as we travel towards the airport we find the Apex office we are only half an hour late so its no great problem, Barb takes the keys into the office and one of the guys comes out to check that Zeek is in a similar condition as to when we picked him up. All is well with his condition however in our excitement at finding the office so quickly we have forgotten to fill him with fuel, Doh! Again, the guy says its not a problem we can go and fill him up or pay them for the fuel, there is not a great deal of difference so we pay them for the fuel, to save us the time.

Ok on southwards towards Wellington, not a bad morning so far, well apart from the fuel lark, we have done about 100k when I have a thought, you know the one, the heart stopping moment when you cannot find something. I pull over and ask Barb if she has seen my iPad, no is the answer, we look through all the bags but it is nowhere to be found. I phone the motel, both hire companies but to no avail, he is gone and I am not sure where, I now know how Smigel felt when he lost My Precious, I am completely gutted and very annoyed with myself. I phone the police and file a lost item report and the insurance company who will not deal any further with the claim until we are back in the UK, helpful sods that they are.

Not only have I lost My Precious we have also lost about an hour and a half, looking and making the various phone calls. We set off once more down highway 1, Wellington is about 600k away and now we have two options, stop off on route or continue on and see how far we can get. We decide to continue on to Wellington as this will give us a full day to look around before we catch the ferry to the South Island. On the journey highway 1 follows the east side of Lake Taupo which is beautiful and there is some stunning scenery it would have been nice to stop there if we had the time, but we continue on only stopping for a bite to eat, although I don't feel too much like eating and then continue on our quest to Wellington, now in hindsight we should have stopped earlier but we didn't and its now nine thirty and all the sites we try are closed. It looks like being one of those days when your luck is out as we cannot even find a roadside parking space, we Brits are made of stronger stuff so chin up and all that lark. We try one more site at about two minutes to ten and it's still open, just, two minutes later and we have been in the mire.

We find a pitch, plug the van into the mains supply we are both fairly exhausted so after a nightcap and a couple of tries of the find my iPad app it's time to retire, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 107

After breakfast we drive the last twenty minutes into Wellington when we get into the Capital which is not a large city we need find somewhere to park a 22 foot motorhome, this should be fun. Now as luck would have we drive to the harbour and there is a motorhome car park, when we pull in the news gets better we park here overnight, there is electricity to plug into, toilets, showers and it a 5 minute drive to the ferry, right result. There is only space for 39 vans but as we are there early in the morning we get a space, which as it turns out we would not have got if we had turned up later in the day.

We choose our pitch and park Buck House, that's what we have christened our latest chariot as it's the poshest yet, plug her into the mains supply and then make our way into town. We walk around the Capital of New Zealand taking in the sights and then we stop off for a bite to eat followed by a visit to an Irish Bar for a cold one to wash our dinner down. Now Barb is getting a bit fed up of not being able to do her hair properly so we find a hair dresser and make an appointment for a bit later in the afternoon, we stroll around killing time and then return to the salon, I wander around a bit more while Barb has a wash and blow, she would like to get a trim but won't trust someone she does not know.

I get back to the salon just as Barb is being finished off, then we walk down the funicular railway station for a trip to the top, we get there just in time to catch the next train, the journey to the top does not take long, as you guessed it, it's not far, it makes a trip on the Great Orme funicular railway seem like a trip to the moon. Then it's a walk back to Buck House for dinner, seared steak and vegetables with noodles and a teriyaki sauce, not bad in a car park. I did draw the line at using the Buck House BBQ as it was blowing a gale from the sea, I hope the weather is better tomorrow for the ferry crossing.

We have another early start in the morning to catch the ferry so it's another early night and in a car park in the middle of a city, this could be fun so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 108

We have survived the night in the car park with no surprises, which I doubt would happen in the UK and after breakfast and a shower in a car park which was, I have to say a tad bizarre, we head off for the ferry terminal. It's a busy boat this rascal and after an interesting trip up a very steep ramp we are parked up along with lots of other RV's we make our way up the staircase and find a suitable seating location and settle in for the three hour plus a bit journey.

The journey from Wellington to Picton has been described as one of the most picturesque ferry crossings you can go on, and I have to agree with the writers of the travel guide, it is beautiful, with the last hour of the journey spent sailing through the

Queen Charlotte Sound between various islands, you could spend weeks sailing around these islands they are beautiful. All too soon we arrive at Picton it takes about half an hour to disembark and after a drive around Picton we set off for Nelson on the coast of the Tasman Bay.

Although Nelson is only 130k away but due to the road going uphill and down dale and having more bends than a slinky it takes over two and half hours to get there, we arrive late afternoon and have a wander around which to be honest does not take long. We then set off to look for the maker of The One Ring, Jens Hansen, as his shop is in the town, Jens has since retired and his son Halfdan now runs the shop, we have a look around and a chat with Halfdan and leave without The Ring, I wonder if Smigel knows the address.

Barb has found a campsite on the outskirts of town and we find it with not too much difficulty we set up Buck House in a position fitting her stature and plug her into the royal electricity supply. The weather has taken a turn for the worse over the last couple of days as Cyclone Lusi hits the North Island and starts to make its way to the South Island. We have dinner alfresco this evening which seemed like a good idea until it gets a bit chilly and we have been bitten a fair few times, we retreat to Buck House and raise the drawbridge so that the little blighters cannot get us. Then it's time for bed so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 109

After the usual morning routine we set off for Kaikoura on the east coast, for the first part of the journey we retrace our trip from yesterday, as there is no other road. The route is through the mountains which by all accounts have changed in the last forty years as they are now forests and lots of them, as the farmers switched from sheep to lumber. As we head down south a lot of the journey is spent driving through wine regions and we pass Cloudy Bay Winery and within a couple of hundred yards, sorry metres we have turned around and heading back towards the well known winery.

Barb parks Buck House and I ask if she would like me to drive and before I can blink the keys are in my hand, we make are way inside and are greeted at the tasting counter by a lady who explains the different tastings available, which they charge for, cheeky buggers. However you do get \$5 discount if you make a purchase, isn't that

good of them, first time we have had to pay, the Aussies would laugh their heads off but what the heck we are here now. Along with the tasting they offer various things to eat and as the setting outside is so inviting we decide to have a little nibble on the patio as well, the wine what I got of it was very pleasant and so were the nibbles.

After the tasting and nibbles we make a purchase and depart and set off once more for Kaikoura, its slow process down these twisting roads but the views of the coastline are stunning and we stop a number of times to take advantage of the view it is just unfortunate that it has started to rain. We do find a seal colony, well a couple actually and the seals are quite happy to pose for a picture, its great fun watching the pups play while the adults just lie on the rocks. It is late afternoon when we arrive at our destination and the weather has taken another turn for the worse so we have a drive around the village well the one street, now we need to find somewhere to stay for the night. In one of the many guides to the area we have, Barb has found an Irish Hotel / Bar that offers free overnight parking for motorhomes, I give them a ring to ask if we need to book, no is the answer just trip on over and have a beer.

The Donegal house is not far out of town so we are there in no time at all, we find a suitable place to park, prepare dinner and leave it on the stove to cook while we go and make a contribution behind the bar for our nights stay. It's not long before we start talking to the owner who's ancestors arrived here from Donegal in 1854, Murray is a larger than life guy and by the looks of it a very canny Irishman who has made a fair few shillings, while we chat I pop back to Buck House occasionally to check on dinner. While we are talking, Murray who with his lady friend, are demolishing bottles of white wine at a considerable rate, tells us that if we want to get up early in the morning we can meet the Prime minister as he is paying Murray a visit. Not sure which Prime Minister it is but I wont be getting up early to meet him and by the way the white wine is going I am not sure Murray will either.

We say our goodnights and return to Buck House for dinner, after dinner we decide that it is not a good idea to return to the bar and Murray as things could get messy and we may start celebrating St Patricks day early. We read and chat for a while and then retire for the evening so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 110

Well to say it rained last night would be an understatement, it did not stop and still hasn't we are just glad we are not in Ted as we think he would have been swamped and we have missed the Prime Minister. Never mind lets have breakfast instead, after breakfast we head in to town and follow the coast road along a peninsular along which we find more seals. There is one sitting on one of the walkways and I suggest to Barb that she goes and stands by him or her not sure which, go on get a bit closer, no closer, a bit closer, then Sammy the seal barks thats close enough thank you, and Barb jumps backwards fairly quickly.

We head back into town and have a quick wander around then its time to head off for Christchurch, the journey is and up and down hill and again as twisty as a slinky, the weather is pretty dire with constant drizzle followed by heavy rain and low cloud which is a shame as it is covering all but the lowest hill. When we get to the coastal part of the route the sea is showing its strength and power, and crashing into the rocky coastline. We stop at various vantage points to watch in awe at the immense power it has and it is only showing a fraction of its potential we will have to wait and see what Cyclone Lusi brings with her later this evening when she is due to arrive with us.

We arrive in Christchurch and go for a drive around the city before we find a site to stay at, its unbelievable looking around at the devastation caused by the earth quake in 2011 there are still parts of the city that look like Beirut, we cannot understand why they have only now started to demolish half standing buildings and not yet started to rebuild. It is far too wet to walk around so weather permitting we will find out more tomorrow when we explore the city.

For now we find a campsite not far out of town, I catch up with the blog which some of which I lost when I lost My Precious, and have had to rewrite and then the last couple of days I had not done because I did not have it, but like a Phoenix rising from the ashes it is back up to date and I have reverted back to a laptop. It is late now and it's time for bed let's hope the Cyclone does not disturb us too much, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 111

So cyclone Lusi did not hit us during the night and we are safe and sound, after the usual morning ritual we have a couple of hours to kill before we get into the collect hire car and drop off motorhome routine, first we head for the sea and park up on Christchurch's coastline to watch the rolling waves crash on the shoreline, although the weather is better and the sun is shining there is still a fair wind blowing in from the sea causing the larger than average waves.

After a while we move onto a suburb called Lyttelton now the description in the travel map reads like this, its worth popping over to the nearby bohemian community of Lyttelton for a coffee. Where you can enjoy an amazing view over the Quail island to Diamond Harbour and Mt Herbert, its goes on for much longer describing the attributes of Lyttelton. Well let me tell you believe none of it, is has a harbour which is totally reliant on the lumber industry with loads of logs everywhere, the view is not bad if you take out the harbour and just look skybound and the town comprises of one street, the service in the best looking of coffee shops was abysmal if not rude and

was inhabited by some proper weirdoes. Whoever wrote the description in the travel guide must have been pissed or on something when they visited. Ok rant over let's move on.

It's now time to swap vehicles so we head off for the airport, first stop Apex rental to collect our cheap and cheerful hire car, no probs here and we given the keys to a Nissan Tiida which will be known as Matt "Matilda" now this is a better car than we had expected so we are happy bunnies. Next stop petrol station to fill up Buck House, this takes a while as we cannot find it, eventually we fill BH's tanks and then head off for the Britz rental office, on route we stop and swap all our stuff from Buck into Matt this time making sure not to leave anything on the roof before driving off.

We arrive at the Britz office and it is very busy, there is one guy doing the returns and he looks a bit manic, when he has finished with the last return it is our turn, after chatting for a while he tells us that there are 56 vans coming back today and he will have to deal with all of them. Our return goes ok until he mentions the diesel fuel surcharge which we are not aware of, while we have been here we have commented on the price of diesel as its cheap, bloody cheap at \$1.47 per litre, that's like 75p. Well it turns out that there is a government surcharge of \$4.70 per 100k so we owe them \$65 which is no great shakes but its still a bit of a rip.

We head back into Christchurch and find one of the many waste land car parks that are available around the city centre where buildings stood until the 2011 earthquake, the city centre is still waiting to be rebuilt with some buildings needing to be demolished before the rebuild can start. Shops and business's are operating out of containers and one of the main streets is full of these posh container buildings, we wonder why it has taken so long for the rebuilding of the city to commence.

We head out of the city and find a campsite about 50k away, we book in and find a pitch we get Ted out of his bag, its like saying hello to an old friend and he is erect in no time, then we find the camp kitchen and the slowest BBQ in the world to prepare dinner. After dinner we watch TV for a while and then return to Ted and the luxury of airbeds to get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 112

Ok so no cyclones, earthquakes or anything serious last night but it did rain and we found out that we had pitched up not too far from the main road oh and the railway deep joy. We had been awoken a couple of times by wagons and trains but nothing

more serious. After taking Ted down, having breakfast shower and stuff we head off south towards Mt Cook the highest mountain in New Zealand.

I take the first stint behind the wheel and for a change the road is straight for 150k we stop off a couple of time to look at the towns as we pass through them and then we stop off for a picnic lunch as we drive through another forest, the weather is not good with rain and very low cloud. We stop off to put some gogo juice into Matt and the lady tells Barb that the weather will get better as we get to the other side of the hills, and low and behold she is right, is she a witch, when we get over the hills the clouds lift and Mr Sun comes out to play we have glorious weather as we come to lake Tekapo and the views across the lake are sensational we then head off down a cul-de-sac longer than the one to Barrow, to Mt Cook we pass lake Pukaki and again the views are fantastic this time with Mt Cook in the distance. It is difficult to describe the raw beauty of this landscape but it sure is beautiful.

We stop a number of times for photographic opportunities and finally arrive at the Sir Edmond Hillary Centre in the late afternoon, after a look around the centre we head off for Mt Cook base camp, well its not really base camp but it is a camp site close to the base of the mountain and the view is spectacular. There are limited facilities but no cooking facilities so I am cooking tonights dinner with one gas ring and one pan which is fun, after dinner we sit outside at one of the camp tables, it goes dark early in the mountains so its an early night, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 113

It may have been a fantastic view before it went dark but boy when it went dark it went cold so we are awake a couple of times during the night and awake early this morning after breakfast we get ready for a walk towards the base of Mt Cook and lake Hooker which is fed from the mountains and the Hooker Glacier

It has rained through the night so we leave Ted erect and move him into the sunshine to dry out while we set off along the path on a 10k hike to Lake Hooker and the start of the path is fine but as we travel on it is apparent that our footwear is not ideal, me in a pair of thin soled trainers and Barb in a pair of Primarni pumps, but there are people on route in similar footwear so, on we go. As we head towards the mountain the views are spectacular and the path raises and falls as it weaves its way through the hillsides, at times the path gets a bit tough with large ragged rocks waiting to gouge at your ankles should you get your footing wrong.

The walk takes about two and a half hours, including Photographic stops, there are three suspension bridges to cross which Barb is not too happy about but as long as I don't jump up and down things are ok. We reach the end of the hike which ends at Lake Hooker with its grey coloured water and blue coloured ice flows from the Glacier. After a sandwich its time to make the return trip, which is quicker due to the lack of Photo stops. I am happy that we have managed the hike without any slips,

trips or falls, as you know Barb does struggle with gravity at times and can loose the battle over a two inch step requiring various hospital visits, but not this time all is well.

When we set off we had moved Ted into the sunshine to dry out and had not pegged him down properly, well while we ware away the wind had got up and blown him across the campsite, luckily he is not damaged so we retrieve him and get him in his bag as soon as the wind will let us. Then we set off towards Queenstown, we will need to find a place to stay on route as its after three o'clock now, we are not going to do our usual and try and get as close to our destination as possible today we find a site in Omarama just after 5pm and thats us for the rest of the evening. We prepare dinner in the camp kitchen and sit outside in the evening sun for an alfresco Thia green curry.

When I was booking in the guy in front of me who was on a motorbike was booking into a cabin and as mad as it sounds it was only \$15 more than camping, that make no sense to me but what the heck so treated Barb to a cabin for the night. After dinner we watch some TV and then its time to retire so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 114

After the usual morning stuff we set off for Queenstown its about a 150k drive and the road climbs through the Lindis valley and over the Lindis Pass which is weaves its way through the mountains towards Lake Dunstan. We continue on and as we approach Queenstown which is the home of commercial Bungy jumping we stop off at the Pillars of the Kings at the River Anduin to watch the Bungy jumpers throw themselves, sometimes with a little help, off the bridge towards the river below, with the choice of dunking their head in the river or not. We decide to give it a miss and continue on our journey to Queenstown arriving at lunchtime, its fairly busy and we eventually find a parking place. After a walk around we stop to have dinner outside a pub overlooking the lake, they have got one of those shark like submarine things here that you may have seen on the TV and for a mere \$200 you can have a ride, but at that price we give it a miss.

We have noticed that activities here are expensive like \$620 each for a 20 minute helicopter ride over Mt Cook which must have been spectacular but at a spectacular price. We have decided that due to the prices over here we are going to leave our rafting, sea kayaking, jet skiing and possibly other activities until we get to Fiji and the States where they may be slightly more reasonable. We depart Queenstown and head off towards Dunedin this is another three hour drive through some beautiful countryside, it is late evening when we arrive at the campsite we have pre-booked booked a cabin at the site as again they are only a few bucks more than camping also the further south we go the colder it is getting especially during the night.

Its not long before we are settled into our cabin with would you believe the heater on, and just as a passing thought, during our visits to various campsites we have noticed remarkable differences between the caravans here and the ones in Ozz, in Ozz they are massive twin axle jobs fitted with everything you can think off including washing machines and costing in excess of \$100,000. While here they are still using vans from the 1960's and before on a regular basis, they are antiques and lots of them look like they should be scraped. Well time to retire and get some sleep so good night one and all sleep well.

Day 115

Well I am glad we did not camp out in Ted last night as it was extremely cold it was even cold in the cabin and we had to have the heater on again during the night, I have had another technical disaster, the lap top has been running a bit slow so last night after writing up the blog I set the virus software to do a scan. When it finished it had found a couple of things that it said should not be there and removed them, it then said to restart the computer, so I did and would it restart, would it heck. Whatever I try it won't reboot, oh flipping heck.

So after the usual morning routine we head into town to have a look around and also to find a computer whizz to sort the laptop out. We have asked at the campsite but they cannot recommend anyone so its going to be pot luck, we head into town and headed for the tourist information centre to see if they can help. I park and Barb goes over to the info centre and is back in a couple of minutes as she had found a computer repair shop just by behind us.

I go into the shop and explain to a Chinese guy what has happened and he starts talking about reformatting the disc and reinstalling windows, EEEEEK the complete blog is on there and like a twit I have not backed it up. We discuss this idea for a bit longer and then he manages to boot it up in safe mode and save the blog, ok now you can do what you need too. He says to leave it with him and he will give me a ring.

We set off for a coffee and a walk around the town, not much to report about the town centre, other than the usual shops it has a fantastic railway station building and it also has Baldwin Street the steepest street in the World, and boy it is steep, very steep. I get a phone call from my Chinese mate to say that its fixed and ready to collect, we head off back to the shop and yes its fixed and without losing any of the data, well done that man.

Time for us to head off to our next destination Invercargill, as you will have guessed there is a Scottish theme going on at the southern tip of South Island including Dunedin which means Edinburgh in Gaelic. We set off along the scenic coast road and due to the computer repair we are running a tad late, we arrive at our first stop off point Nugget Point on a Penguin hunt. We park up and set off down a track to a purpose made hide, there is one solitary Penguin on the beach, his mates must be off having a swim and scoffing out at sea. Like Attenborough, well his crew, we stand

there waiting for the return of the Penguins but time moves on we need to leave and find somewhere to stay. So just one guin spotted not great but better than none, I bet you the rest of the little buggers arrived back just after we left.

We have a two hour drive to get to Invercargill so we best get a move on, the road is windy and progress is slow we eventually get a phone signal and manage to book into a site just outside the city. We arrive at the site just after 7pm and check in. Just down the road to Invercargill is Bluff which is famous for Bluff oysters and this is about as far south as we are ever likely to go as the next stop is Antarctica and the South pole which is only 4800k away, no wonder it's a bit chilly around here.

After a bit to eat it's time to write up the blog and this time back it up and then it's time to retire for the night so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 116

Last night we had a look around Invercargill and to be kind to it, well it's a bit of a dump, which was confirmed when we got an email this morning from Linda and Doug, Doug has been here many times when he was working deep sea and describes the place as, the arsehole of the world, and we cannot disagree. So there is no looking around the town this morning we just breakfast shower and bugger off.

Today we are heading for the Fiordland and Milford Sound it's another 300k plus drive but we have an early start and with any luck should be there mid afternoon, Barb is at the wheel while I navigate, god help us, and check the tinternet for a place to stay. There does not appear to be any cheap and cheerful places to stay in Milford Sound so we check for places out of town and I find "Knobs Flat" which is basically in the middle of nowhere, in the mountains 65k each way from, well anywhere and no such thing as a phone signal. I phone and yes they have a cabin available so we book in for two nights not knowing really what to expect, other than don't forget the milk.

The journey takes us through some beautiful countryside with tree covered mountains in the distance, there is a haze over the landscape this morning as Mr Sun dries last night's autumnal dew. We arrive at Te Anau which is the closest town to Knobs Flat, we stop off to go to the launderette, a spot for lunch and to do some provision shopping before we head off into the mountains. With clean clothes, provisions and a full belly we set off to see what the accommodation at Knobs flat has to offer, its about an hours drive and when we arrive the description on the tinternet was correct, it is in the middle of nowhere, but beautiful does not do the surroundings justice it is simply stunning, in a valley surround by mountains to the west and east with snow capped mountains in the distance to the north.

Dont get the wrong impression there is nothing grand about the Knobs Flat, this is basically a campsite with some cabins, I go to the reception and press the intercom

button, hi there, hi this is PH I booked in earlier, oh yes hi Paul I will be with you in a minute. Minutes later a guy arrives from god knows where on a bike pulling a trailer dressed in shirt, shorts and wellington boots from, hi everyone calls me PC how do you do, fine thanks, nice guy but odd, I book in and PC tells me about a couple of must do walks while we are in the area, obviously has not seen our walking boots, well lack of them.

He tells me to follow him on his bike and he will show us to the cabin, when we get to the cabin I introduce PC to Barb, who says PC? Yes everyone calls me PC, Predates Computers, Oh ok. PC shows us the cabin which although basic has everything you need bed, table, kitchen, bathroom oh and the best view going. Our cabin faces north and with mountains on each side and snow capped mountains in distance the view is fantastic. You would pay the cost of the cabin just for the view I cannot wait for tomorrow's sunrise.

Its back to nature no tinternet, no phone, no TV, I will go mad by Monday, I won't really as the peacefulness is wonderful. Barb has a few delicate things to wash and we have a minor disaster as she cannot turn the taps off and the sink starts to flood, after a bit of mopping up I prepare dinner which is washed down with a glass of Cloudy Bay.

As the sun starts it trip to the other side of the world and hides from our view behind the mountains to the west it still shines its golden rays on the snow capped mountains in the distance to the north. The view from our cabin is a sight to behold and I am sure that we will be treated to a similar visual experience in the morning when Mr Sun returns casting his warming glow from over the mountains to our right.

It is 8pm when Mr Suns golden rays finally leave the mountain tops and day turns to night and the opposite will happen in the UK when Mr Sun shines his golden rays on you, well that is if it's not raining. I write up the blog while Barb reads her book, now that Mr Sun has gone the darkness has descended and dark it is bloody dark there is no light pollution here just the twinkles from the stars in the heavens above, Mr Moon has not shown his face or glow above the mountains as yet and it is nearly 9pm.

The country air has got to us both and we are having an early night and as we are staying another day we do not need to be up at silly o'clock, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 117

It was great this morning waking up and knowing that we did not have to rush and get ready to leave, as we had booked in for two nights, it is a long time since we have stayed anywhere for longer one night and it is tiring moving around so much. It was

nice to have bit of a lie in and a leisurely two course breakfast, after breakfast I go for a walk to see a waterfall while Barb has a read and a relax.

The waterfall is about a thirty minute walk from the cabin through the woods which surround Knobs Flat, it is a little chilly as I enter the woods as the sun has not yet fully risen over the mountains. The track is narrow and climbs steadily through the woods upwards towards the beginnings of the mountain side, there are lots of animal burrows along the path, and I imagine the forest being full of life during the night but at the moment they are either sleeping or are masters at playing hide and seek.

After slipping and sliding over various obstacles such as fallen trees I arrive at the waterfall which at this time of year is only just a waterfall, but I imagine during the rainy season is a raging torrent. After taking a number of photographs I retrace my steps down the path stopping at the river for a couple more photographs and then return to the cabin. I shower while Barb makes our packed lunch and then we head off for Milford Sound.

It is about a 60k drive to Milford sound, mind you it's a 60k to anywhere from Knobs Flat, and its 60k of bends joined by a couple of short straights, we will follow this route again tomorrow when we go for our boat trip on the Sound, but there are a couple of short walks we want to do and we will not have time tomorrow. This has got to be one of the most beautiful picturesque journeys you can make the views are breathtakingly gorgeous. About 30k before you arrive at Milford you go through the Homer tunnel which is single carriageway controlled by traffic lights, once inside the tunnel the walls are ragged and it looks like the mountain has been attacked with axes all the way through. No fancy mole like boring equipment has been used here and no attempt has been made to smooth the rocks surface, it also falls steeply towards sea level.

As you drop and turn the S bends you get a view of Milford Sound, in the travel guides the description goes something like this, wet or fine Milford Sound is an awesome sight, sheer granite cliffs tower into the sky and plunge into the depths of clear water, while Mitre Peak stands like a massive sentinel, guarding this amazing fiord, given time I could write this crap. However it is true, it is simply stunning and we cannot wait to see more on our boat trip tomorrow.

According to Maori legend, Tu-te-raki –whanoa carved out the fiords with his adze Te Hamo, he started in the south where he created a rough coastline with many islands. By the time he had reached Milford Sound he had perfected his technique and carved an awe-inspiring fiord. Piopiotahi (Milford Sound) was his greatest achievement. The goddess of the underworld, Hine-nui-te-po, came to see the handiwork of Tu and was so alarmed at the beauty of Piopiotahi, that she worried that once people had seen the fiord they would not want to leave its beauty. To encourage humans to leave the area she released sandfly into Milford Sound, now that did the trick as these little buggers bite and sting like heck.

On our return journey we stop off for a walk to Chasm falls, this time there is a much wider purpose built track to the falls and this one is bigger than this morning's but again due to the time of year is nowhere near its full height or force, looking at the photographs this must be an awesome sight when in full flow, there are trees, big trees that are lodged fast in the rocks which have been carried down from the mountains when the river has been in full flow, I imagine the noise must be deafening standing on the bridge, if you dare, with the water cascading down below you.

We head off back to Knobs Flat have dinner and pack our bags and the car ready for an early start in the morning as we have to be back at Milford Sound ferry terminal at 10am. With everything but the essentials packed away its time for an early night so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 118

The alarm goes off at 7.30pm, alarm clock what's all that about, the mountains are covered with low cloud and as we, sorry I, pack the final bits into Matt it starts to rain. As we depart Knobs Flat the rain get a little heavier, and continues to get heavier the closer we get to Milford Sound, by the time we arrive there, how do I put it, well its pissing down and pissing down hard at that.

This does not look like the ideal day for a boat trip, but what the hell we are booked on and also I am not driving down that cul-de-sac again other than to leave, we ask the guy on the reception desk what the weather forecast is for the rest of the day and its much of the same, so we will have to live with it as the boss is in charge and what he says goes.

We board the ship and find a suitable arrangement inside at the front of the boat, we set off into the sound and now the rain is battering against the windows, I bet there are loads of seats available outside on the upper deck. Yesterday we saw the sound from the shore in brilliant sunshine and today we have rain and low cloud, however what the rain has done is to bring the mountain sides to life with cascading waterfalls where yesterday there was none.

Although it would have been great to have a nice sunny day for the cruise we have to count ourselves lucky to see the sound in both conditions, the water falls that yesterday where mere trickles are now rampaging torrents falling from 70 meters down the mountainsides of the fiord. The Captain nudges the vessel under the largest of the falls and we the fool hardy who are outside on the lower decks, get covered in the spray as it hits the bow of the ship.

The boat returns to the harbour and we say our farewells to our fellow seafarers and then make a dash for the car and the heater as it is still raining persistently. Now Barb is in desperate need of a roast after not having a roast dinner for a couple of months, so after stopping at Knobs Flat to get our washing off the line, we drive 60k the other way to Te Anau for a Sunday roast, we arrive there at about 5.30 and get a table, and its a good job we did as within a short period of time the place is rammed, mind you I am not surprised as it is only \$15 a head, and it was pretty good. After our roast it was time to set off back to Knobs Flat, so today in short we have driven 240k to see a fiord, a waterfall and have a roast, and I am glad we did as it was all very worthwhile. However it was tiring and its time for bed, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 119

We awake to another rainy morning and after the usual morning activities we set off towards Queenstown which is a good 400k drive, as we will be retracing our steps along the same roads there will be less need to stop and look at the views, and its a good job too, looking at the weather.

I won't bore you with the drive as it's the same as three days ago but in reverse and as most of the day is spent travelling this edition of the blog is not going to be a long one. We stop off for a bite to eat at a small one horse town and just as we park the car a coach arrives full of Japanese tourists, we make a run for the cafe before we are stuck behind 50 Japanese not knowing what to order. We had placed our order by the time the invasion commenced and our fears where correct it was pure chaos at the counter, although it did make great people watching. Eventually their tour guide arrived to help sort out the chaos, this made for even better people watching as was

the Japanese version of Brendan from coach trip, a short rotund Japanese guy who was as camp as a row of pink tents, and he was in a proper flap by the time he had finished organising his passengers.

Then it was onto Queenstown we have booked on to a camp site and have elected to have another cabin due to the weather conditions, we stop off at the town centre for another walk around. Queenstown is a nice town and the capital for adventure activities you can do just about anything you fancy from here from jet boats to sky diving. We may have a go on the jet boat tomorrow weather permitting.

We head off to the campsite and get ourselves booked in after a bite to eat we watch some TV well the one channel that is available on the TV in the camp kitchen, then its time to retire for the evening so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 120

When we awake the weather is much the same and after showers, breakfast and stuff we go down to the jet boat for a look but there is no point going on it as the weather is abysmal. So we set off north bound, today's blog looks like it is going to be even shorter as it is pouring down so all we are going to do is drive. As it is not worth stopping anywhere just to get wet and look at the low clouds.

After driving for about 4 hours we arrive at the town of Timaru we have a look around the town not a great deal to report just another town with the same old shops. Barb treats herself to a pedicure with some sparkle pink nail polish, then it's time for some provision shopping and campsite hunting.

When we find the site we understand why it was cheap its like Faulty towers including the staff which are from Nottingham, the accommodation is not the best but its only for one night, I am not convinced that the wall mounted two bar electric fire without a guard would meet UK standards but at least it puts out some heat until the wind timer runs out.

We meet up with two other couples while we are having dinner in the camp kitchen and end up chatting with a little drinket until its time for bed, it is a bit chilly in the cabin so the warmest place is in bed so that's it for today, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 121

When we awake and venture outside it is a bright sunny morning but bloody cold in fact there is frost still lying on the ground. We shower and have breakfast say farewell to our fellow travellers who say it was a bit chilly in their camper vans last night. We set off northbound on highway one with Barb at the wheel it is a beautiful morning

with bright sunshine. To the east we can see the mountain ranges in the distance, and overnight the peaks of the ranges have been dusted with a light covering of snow which glistens in the low morning sun. It is a wonderful sight which stays with us for many miles as we drive parallel to the mountain for most of our journey.

We are again going to cover about 360k to get to our planned destination of Kaikoura which is a coastal town we visited on the way south but did not stay as the weather was not good due to Cyclone Lusi. Hopefully as the cyclone has long gone the weather should be better. As we near Kaikoura the road follows the coast and the waves of the South Pacific Ocean are battering the rocky shoreline it looks fantastic, not sure that you would want to go swimming in it, but it does look impressive.

We find a campsite and again wimp out and pick a cabin rather than Ted, he will think that we have fallen out with him, but it is still too cold to be camping and a cabin is only £10 more than a tent pitch, mad as that sounds. We head off into town and after checking tomorrow's weather we book onto a whale watching cruise setting off at 10am, yippee I can't wait. We stop off at the chemist to get some travel sickness pills for Barb so as not to spoil the trip for her, and after a walk around we head off back to the campsite.

After a bite to eat its time to get the camera batteries charged up ready for tomorrow mornings adventure, they are that sure that you will see a whale that if they do not find one they will refund you 80% of the cost of the trip. I recon that they have a plastic whale tail anchored out at sea that we will just see in the distance, but we will have to wait and see. Time for an early night ready for a Moby dick adventure tomorrow but with a camera not a spear, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 122

The alarm sounds well after I am awake this morning as I am excited and cannot sleep as we are going whale watching this morning. After showers, breakfast and stuff we set off for the whale watching departure office. We arrive much earlier than necessary but it will give us time for a coffee before we board, we go to the desk to pay but are told that we cannot pay until 10am as they are waiting for weather reports from the boat that is currently out at sea.

While we are having a coffee the information board says that there will be a 10.30 sailing but due to adverse weather conditions the infirm, pregnant women and children under 6 will not be allowed to travel. As we do not fall into any of those categories and Barb has taken her sea sickness tablets it looks like we are going.

When we go to the desk to pay and get our tickets the guy behind the desk goes through the pregnant, infirm and age questions with us and after rechecking the age question, issues us with our boarding cards.

Then it's time for a safety briefing before we go on a short coach trip to the harbour, glad it's only a short coach trip as I don't like coaches, before we board we are given

another safety talk, serious stuff this. When we get on to the boat we find the seating arrangements similar to business class flying. After we talk our seats we are told a bit about the boat and for it's size it is a pretty fast boat capable of 35 knots, and we are also told that we will be travelling between 8 to 15 miles out to sea in order to find the whales. As we get into the open sea it is a tad rough and as the boat hurtles forward it crashes down off the tops of the waves with spray shooting into the air from the twin hulls of the vessel.

We continue out to sea and after a while we stop and the Captain puts a microphone into the sea to locate a whale, we head off to the area he suspects the whale to be and then we stop and we head outside while the boat bobs about on the waves. We wait and before too long we see the spray from the whale's blow hole as he comes to the surface. He swims around for a while with only the upper part of his body out of the water, because if he raised his whole body out of the water his body weight would cause his body to collapse.

After a while the crew tell us to get our cameras ready as the whale was about to dive, and they were correct as moments later he takes one more breath and dives to the depths of the Pacific Ocean he leaves us with the all important fluke (tail fin) shot. After he goes for a feed at the bottom of the ocean we watch some Albatross and other sea birds for a while, then we set off to follow Moby and wait for him to come to the surface again. The guides have judged by the time he was on the surface last time that he has not gone for a deep dive and should be back soon.

They obviously know what they are talking about as not before long he is back he does not stay above surface for long this time and he leaves us without showing his tail fin as he dives, but hopefully I got the photo shot last time. We return to our seats as the captain opens the throttle and we head back towards land. We make an unexpected stop as the crew have seen a school of dolphins and we go back on deck to take some more photographs. Then it's back to our seats and we head off back towards dry land we say farewell and thanks to the crew and get the coach back to the main office and to Matt.

After a bite to eat we head off to the motel we have booked into for the next couple of days as it was only a couple of bucks more than a cabin and it was even getting cold staying in the cabins so there is no chance of Ted coming out to play. We book in and get the key to our room then we start taking our bags in ready to get them sorted out for our flight to Fiji on Monday. We go to the Donegal hotel for a roast dinner which is where we stayed at in the camper van on the way down the coast a couple of weeks ago.

Then its time to return to the motel to watch some TV, and then to retire for the evening, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 123

As we are not moving we have a leisurely start this morning and as the motel room has kitchen facilities we have a late breakfast and then set off for some seal watching.

We go to the same places we went to a couple of weeks ago and as the weather is much better with no cyclones on the way we can spend more time watching the seals antics. We have been told that there is a walk to a waterfall that the seal pups go to, to play while their mothers go out to sea to feed.

As we walk up the path we see one pup making its way up the stream through the ragged rocks, we are a bit quicker than the pup and get to the waterfall before it does. When he gets here he will be a bit cheesed off as there are no other pups here for him to play with. We take some photographs of the waterfall while we are waiting for the pup to arrive, not before long we see him making his way upstream, when he arrives at the lake he stops to have his photograph taken before jumping in for a swim.

He does not seem to mind that he is on his own and plays around in the water stopping occasionally for a photograph, I have put Jules and Verne on a rock at the edge of the lake for a photograph and just as I do Sammy seal decides to jump out of the lake onto the rock right next to J&V, he looks at them and for one horrible moment it looks like he is going to pick them up in his mouth and take them swimming with him. Then he looks up at me gives a little bark so I move out of his way and he jumps off the rock knocking J&V for six on his way past, but at least he does not take them with him, time travellers they may be but I am not sure how long they can hold their breath for under water.

We leave the seal pup to play with himself in the lake and head off back down the path to the Ocean, we stop off at a couple more seal viewing points and then it's time for a cup of coffee so we head into town to the coffee shop. Then it's time for a bit of provision shopping to get some food for tonight's dinner. We return to the motel watch some TV and I prepare dinner, Thai green curry with chicken and mixed vegetables with noodles and rice.

I had thought about going out to take some night sky shots, but low cloud has put an end to that idea so it's dinner some more TV and then time to retire for the evening, so goodnight one and all sleep well.

Day 124

Well this morning is another lounge around morning apart from doing some clothes washing ready for our trip to Fiji, and we need to organise our bags and also sort out what we are going to leave and plan where we are going to leave it, rather than leaving it all in the hire car as we did in Oz. Barb put the washing on while I sort out breakfast and then we just have the small problem of drying all the clothes as the weather is not fantastically warm today.

After brunch we head off out for drive and an explore as we have done the coast road northbound and southbound we are going to head inland and see what we can find, we head for ???? which is about a 70k drive, Barb is at the helm and we head off into the hills well the start of the mountains, the road weaves it's bendy way through the hillsides and the sun is shining it's afternoon golden rays on the mountains before us to the east. There are some great bends on this road which was made to be driven in a nimble Caterham with a load of bhp, grippy tyres and full harness belts, on a warm sunny day it would be exhilarating with the wind blowing through your hair and wondering just how tight the next bend is going to be.

We arrive at the alpine resort and as it is only just autumn the resort and the lifts are not open yet but when gaze at the mountains ahead of us you have to let your mind do it's stuff and imagine the snow covered mountains glistening and coloured various shades of orange by the late afternoon sun. We stop for a while and admire the views and then Barb gives me the helm and we set off back towards Kaikoura, there is not a great deal between here and our destination which is a bit of a blow as there is still a fair way to go and the fuel light has come on.

We continue on in fuel reserve mode, slowly up the hills and coasting down the other side, with the needle on the fuel gauge heading past E for empty. With what must have been the last dregs of fuel left in the tank we arrive at the petrol station and fill Matt with gogo juice ready for the trip to Christchurch tomorrow. We get back to the motel and reclaim our clothes from the washing line which is still damp due to the weather conditions, with no dryer in the laundry we need to get them dry ready for the trip tomorrow. Back at the room it's windows closed, air con off and the two bar electric fire on full, it's not long before the room is as hot as heck and clothes are drying as fast as a fast thing can.

With all the washing dry in the hot house, we head off into town for some food and after the usual check of every restaurant available to man, we pick one. We both choose surf and turf with a glass of the local brew, followed by creme brûlée then it's back to the motel. We finish off packing ready for tomorrow's early start and then it's early to bed, early to rise, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 125

The alarm wakes us and after the usual morning activities we pack our bags into Matt, hand back the room key, say farewell to the owner and set off for Christchurch with Barb doing the first stint behind the wheel. First stop is the campsite that we stayed at the other night to leave our remaining food supplies for our fellow campers to use. Then on to Christchurch amazingly we are ahead of schedule even after stopping at a few towns to find a charity shop at which to donate the camping gear we do not have room for, not Ted as he is safely packed away in Barbs bag, however as it's Sunday they are all closed.

As we have time we stop off for brunch at an Irish cafe just outside Christchurch, their version all day traditional Irish breakfast, was not like anything we have ever had in Ireland and I doubt they knew what it should be like. This is a bit strange as there are lots and lots of Irish "builders" helping with the rebuilding of Christchurch at the moment and by the looks of it they have years of work ahead of them. We carry on with our quest to find a charity shop and just before we are about to give up we find a Salvation Army hostel, which is a very large and active organisation over here. Barb takes in a large bag of stuff and the gentleman she sees is very, very thankful of the donation he said that it was very good of us to find them on a Sunday and that they we make sure that the items go to a worthy recipient and that make a difference to someone's life.

Nice though and Barb thought that he was very genuine and was glad we could help someone in some small way.

Then it's onto the motel we are staying at for what will be a couple of hours as we have to be at the airport at stupid o'clock tomorrow morning. It's only 12 o'clock but our room is ready and we have had an added bonus that they do free airport transfers even at stupid o'clock. We book our transfer, head off to our room and empty still to much luggage into the room, then we need to return Matt to his owners at the hire office which is not far away. Barb stays at the motel to sort the rest of our stuff out while I go and fill Matt with fuel and then take him back to the hire office. No problems with the return procedure and Matt gets a clean bill of health, now to get back to the motel, the lady at the hire office asks if I would like a taxi but as it's only a couple of kilometres I decide to walk. The lady at the office looks at me and says, you be careful crossing that busy road, I say that I will wondering if I look six or eighty six. After managing to cross the main road safely, all by myself, followed by a quick stroll I arrive back at the motel and on route discovered that without transport there are not any places to eat.

Due to the lack of local eateries we have dinner in the motel and then return to our room to see if we can loose anymore items from our baggage, I manage to reduce the weight considerably by emptying a couple of bottles of the amber nectar we still had.

Then after final packing we try to get some sleep before the alarm will sound at 2.30am, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 126

The alarm sounds in what is the middle of the night and we awake from a restless slumber, you know the one when you go to bed early knowing that you have to be up at silly o'clock to be somewhere. We still have some breakfast provisions but at this time of the morning we give it a miss and opt for showers instead, we go to the reception area as quietly as the wheels on our bags will allow, where the transfer bus is ready and waiting.

There are only us and the driver the more sensible guests are still in bed and will be getting later more expensive flights, we are at the airport in less than ten minutes and there is a distinct lack of people around. Yesterday when I was discussing with the hotel receptionist what time we needed to be at the airport it was decided that as we were getting a domestic flight with an international connection we should be there 3 hours before. However she then told me that the airport did not open until 3.30am so we decide on that time so as to give us 2 hours check in time.

At 3.40am the place is like a ghost town, when we get to the automated check in desk and put our passports into the machine it will not let us check in, and there is no staff around to ask. By now a couple more travellers have arrived and have tried unsuccessfully to check in, good so it's not just our passports the machine does not like, as we walk away we find a small fairly well hidden sign that says that the automated check in desks do not come on line until 4am, could have had another hour in bed.

Good enough at 4am the machines are fired up, we check in and our slightly overweight bags head off along a conveyer belt and will hopefully meet us in Fiji, we with our slightly overweight hand baggage including Barb's tramp bag head off for the security checks and the departure gate. It's not too long before we board and as it's only a short trip it's not long before we arrive at Auckland, when we land I expected the trumpeting sound followed by everyone clapping that you get on one of Mr O'leary's flights, when they touchdown on time.

Next we catch a bus to the international departures no bags to collect but we do have to go through security again, this time they are a little more observant and would like to check my bag, looks like I have put a small key ring size multitool in my hand luggage rather than my hold luggage, Doh. Eventually we find it and the security guy checks it out says it's ok as the blade is under forty millimetres long, which is strange as Barb had a pair of scissors confiscated in London which were in a sowing kit out of a Christmas cracker.

We find a place to sit while we wait for our next flight and FaceTime, Jennie, mum and dad and Sharon, no point of trying to contact Phil as he is mountain biking in Scotland. Then it's time to board our next flight which will take approximately 3 hours, usual flight stuff with no much to report, film, music, food well sort of and then we are here.

We go through passport control and collect our bags and then through another security check to make sure that we are not bringing anything into the country that should not be here. The bags have to go through a bio testing machine and the guy in charge obviously does not like the look of Barb's tramp bag, asks the usual questions, where have you been, how long are you staying, do you have somewhere to stay. Then decides that he would like to check my back pack and Barb's tramp bag a bit more carefully, after a quick search they are happy that we are not international smugglers just a couple of nutty English with a tramp bag.

Then we catch the transfer bus to the hotel, check in and go to our room, Barb is not overly happy with the room but then I remind her that it is only £35 a night and we are only staying for two nights while we find somewhere else. After putting our bags in the room it's time to go and explore, we ask the receptionist about walking into town, she suggests that the bus or a taxi would be a better idea as the taxi ride would be \$9 less than three quid taxi it is. The taxi driver asks if we would like to go on a bit of a tour and after a bit of price negotiation we set off he takes us to three or four places and then we have arranged that he will drop us off in town and collect us later.

Now this sounded like a good idea until we start walking around, harassed to death in a matter of yards, cannot be doing with this for two and a half hours it's worse than Egypt, if that's possible. After falling into the visit our shop trick once we say no to all the other invites we are given and fair scamper down the Main Street sure that we will find an Irish bar, well your bound too there is one in every town. Well not this one there is one bar which I check out but it will not impress Mrs H, we chat to a guy who wants to help, wants to help my arse he wants to try and sell us something.

As we make our way back through the town I see a place called The Farmers which the guy that wanted to help mentioned, so in we go and actually it's not bad and at £1.50 a pint it's getting better. Barb suggests that we should eat here due to the lack of alternatives so we place our order, the food is good and we sit outside overlooking the river, well murky river. Then we head off to rendezvous with the taxi driver and hope that he is not on Fiji time, luckily he is waiting and we are back at the hotel. After a nightcap tired and weary we head to our room for an early night to catch up with the lost sleep from last night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Sleep we did I awake just after nine and Barb comes too at 9.45 if we hurry we should just make breakfast and we do, after breakfast it's time for a swim in a pool that it does not look like they remove the fallen leaves from very often. Today we are not going anywhere as our first job is to find another hotel to stay at which is closer to a beach. There are plenty to choose from most of which are on the islands the prices are either extremely low or very expensive and we are finding it difficult to find one at a price we are willing to pay.

We eventually find one that looks like it meets the criteria and make the booking we will see tomorrow if the description on the tinternet is correct our if poetic licence has been at play. For now we sunbath for a while and after Barb goes for an afternoon nap for a bit more sleep catch up, while I catch up with the blog which has just tripped over 67,050 words so is on the way to the size of an average novel and I wonder if I do have one in me and what it would be about, a greater understanding of the English language and a greater vocabulary would certainly help but whatever her name is wrote 50 Shades of Grey and made a fortune without either, just filth and innuendoes, hell I could do that.

We meet back up at the poolside at 4.30pm just half and hour to wait before happy hour begins, we are eating at the hotel this evening as we can not be bothered going into town as there was only the Farmers club to go to. After a glass or two of the local brew we go for dinner, for a hotel it's reasonable 24 quid for three courses, oh for both of us that is. After dinner we return to our room to watch some TV, read, repack our bags and catch up with the blog. Then it's time to get some more sleep, why is it when you have lost some sleep you need twice as much to catch up, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Yet another hotel move today so after breakfast and stuff we finish repacking and head off to reception to check out, we have arranged for a taxi to pick us up at 11am as there is no point rushing to the next hotel due to check in times. After checking out we dump our bags and take a seat in the foyer and start having a look at planning the USA drive from Iowa to San Francisco. While we are there we start talking to a Scottish couple who are staying at the hotel for a week, and are not too happy about the idea, he described the hotel as more of a sentence than a holiday.

We chatted for a while and they have been travelling since January, and had the same problem as us in finding a hotel here that was not at either end of the price scale, so I was not sure why they had booked in here for a full week, but they weren't happy about it. The taxi guy has been waiting for a while so we say goodbye and wish them luck, then we set off to the next hotel which is about a half hour drive. When we get there we are told that our room has been upgraded to a sea view which is a bit of a bonus, as it's a fair hike from the reception to the room the taxi driver drives us down to the room.

It is better than the last establishment and we have a large room with its own terrace overlooking the sea, by the looks of it there are not many guests staying at the resort at this time, unless they have all gone out for the day or they are good at hide and seek. After having a look around I don't think the blog will be very interesting for the next days as there does not look like there is going to be a lot to do, and as the water sports are expensive to say the least, we will not be participating in any silly jet ski antics.

After settling into our room we chill out by the pool, now there is a chance that we may get bored, as without leaving the resort there is nothing to do other than chill out, there is a shuttle bus that goes into town but as we have already had that experience we won't be heading back there any time soon. After a bit more sitting around we go for dinner at the beach front restaurant, and then it's time to watch some TV and then to retire for the evening so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Looks like it's going to be a bit of a slow blog day today, as we have not done a great deal other than sit around and do some route planning for when we get to the USA, by the looks of the drive the first leg is going to be a bit boring so the plan is to do as many many miles as possible as quick as possible. This will give us more time at the interesting bits, like the Grand Canyon, Vegas, Death Valley and possibly Yellowstone to see if Yogi and Boo-Boo are in. We have also emailed the rental office to see where we need to go to in LA to do the paperwork, looks like it's about half an hour from the hotel so we need to find out the best, well cheapest way of getting there.

Well that's the morning gone, we share a pizza for lunch and then it's a bit more of the same doing nothing, now this should be good but as we have been on the move nearly every day for the last couple of months. Sitting down doing nowt is not easy as we have been used to seeing and doing something different every day, so we have booked on a boat trip to a local island tomorrow. The weather is warm but overcast so no sunbathing just a bit more sitting and reading.

We watch some films and then go for dinner, not that I wish to moan but, the service is not very good and the food is not great, it's ok but not great, but as they say you get what you pay for. They would blame it on Fiji time here as they seem to blame everything on Fiji time, I would blame it on the management as the staff seem to do what ever they want, definite tail wagging dog. We tell each other to stop moaning and relax ok just the one Mrs Wembley, fully relaxed we return to our room as we have an early start in the morning, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

We awake early ready for our trip over to an island, I open the curtains and it's raining, that's not a good start, we go for breakfast umbrellas in hand and the weather does not seem to be getting any better. However we still have an hour before we depart and like eternal optimists we wait for an improvement while we have breakfast.

The weather is not getting any better in fact it's getting worse, I go back to our room to get our wet jackets. The resort has a couple of boats moored on the jetty, a big one that they normally use for transfers to the sister hotel, that we think we are going on and then a number of smaller ones that do not seem to move or at least they haven't since we have been here. By now it's proper rain you know the stuff that wets you, ok it's pissing down and pissing down hard at that. The crew bring out some bin bags and start wrapping the belongings of the other passengers in bin bags, and then ask to wrap our bags in the same. Barb enquires as to why this is happening as the big boat has plenty of cover and protection from the elements, it is only then just before we board that we find out that as there are only four passengers, us and two girls that are transferring to the sister hotel, they are planning on using a small uncovered boat.

Barb tells them that there is no chance of her getting on that boat for a ride that will take half an hour only to get off soaking wet, she tells them that we will not be going and want a refund. They do not appear to be very happy but finally agree that we can change the day of the trip until tomorrow, the two girls board the boat and are now dressed in bin bags themselves as they do not have any coats with them. The boat sets off with them huddled together behind the helmsman for a trip that takes about an hour and a half.

Right that's the excitement over for the day coats off and time for another coffee it looks like the rain is in for at least the day, so it's more reading, more films and then an afternoon siesta. The resort is one of those in the middle of nowhere so without getting a taxi somewhere you can not really go for a walk, I may have lost my mind by Tuesday. As we had lunch we skip dinner watch yet another film and as we were up early this morning and will be again tomorrow, it's time for an early night so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 131 where are they all going, and what a difference a day makes I have opened the curtains to find a beautiful blue cloud free sky the sun has not yet fully risen and the ocean still has the fantastic orange colour, cast by the sunrise and you know it's going to be a great day. We go for breakfast and register for our trip, lots more people going on the boat today so it we defiantly be the big boat although today it would not matters the smaller one may be more fun.

After breakfast it's all aboard the Skylark, actually the boat is called "Aditaki" a twin hulled aluminium vessel that takes thirty or so passengers and is powered by two massive Mercury outboard engines, we set off and are given a safety talk including how to put on a life jacket and jump in the sea. I am not to sure he was very happy when I asked is that the point in time when the sharks get you, I was told that there are no sharks in these waters, well they said that in Jaws and they were wrong then.

After the safety talk the Captain opens the throttles and off we go, for a big boat it can shift at a fair rate of knots and it is not long before we arrive at Denarue the island we are going to. Everyone else is going to the sister hotel on another island further away for a day of sunbathing, we check with the crew about a collection time and it's a bit, well later, yes but what times later oh some time between 3.30 and 4.30ish you know it's Fiji time, ok see you later.

We walk up the gang plank to the marina and have a look around the shops of which there are not many but at least you do not get the arse harassed of you as you walk around. Part of the fare includes a Bula bus pass for the day which you can hop on and off where you like. The bus travels around the various hotel resorts on the island and our first stop is the Hilton resort and we stop there for a while and have coffee and cake, then we hop back on the Bula bus and go back to the marina.

We go to the Hard Rock Cafe for a cooling refreshment while we are there a waitress walks past with an extremely large margarita glass containing what looked like a margarita and an upturned bottle of corona beer. When she returns I enquire as to what it was and she tells me it's the special cocktail of the month, a Margarita Corona, ok we will try one of those. This could be dangerous a bucket of margarita and a bottle of Corona hopefully the margarita it is not like the ones I make at home, in a glass that big, we may loose a day if it is.

After the special margarita we hop back on the Bula bus this time we go to the Sheraton hotel, we go into the jewellery shop and wet the leg, that's motor trade talk for waste the time, of the staff at the Rolex counter, well they were only standing around gabbing. After a look around and a bit of a sit, we hop back on the Bula bus back to the marina, Barb had seen a place to have a manicure for 30 bucks, less than 10 quid, we pop in and yes they can fit her in.

While Barb has her manicure I go to the man crèche at Lulus bar to wait for her, the bar overlooks the harbour and at just after 4pm there is no sign of the Skylark,

Captain Pugwash or Barb for that matter, Barb arrives a couple of minutes later and eventually at about 4.45 the Skylark arrives.

We get on board and set off back to the resort at full throttle, when we arrive there is a live band playing at the pool bar / restaurant, not sure how alive or what they are playing, we retreat to our room in need of a shower after a hot and humid day. Neither of us feel the need for food so we watch a movie, no not that type, and retire for the evening, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 132

Nothing planned for today so it may be a bit of a boring blog day today, but it may be what we need as tomorrow is going to be a long day, we are off to the good old US of A, but our flight is not until 9.30pm. After breakfast we lay out on the sun beds and do some more USA planning, it looks like this is going to be another drive that does not improve our carbon footprint.

It's hot today in fact very hot and the swimming pool is calling so it's time for a swim and play in the pool, now although the temperature outside the pool is in the thirties the water temperature is not. Like a pair of wimps we enter the water gingerly and after pontificating for far too long, we finally immerse ourselves in the cooling water, which as usual is ok when you're in. We have the pool to ourselves, well in fact we have most of the hotel to ourselves, it does not look like occupancy percentage would be a high number, I think that it may actually struggle to get into double figures.

After splashing about for a while it's back to the sun beds which we move under the trees for some shade from the fiery hot sun as it burns down on us from the heavens above. Time for a bit more reading, blog writing and Internet searching for our USA adventure in the RV, then it's time for a little siesta before dinner. We were going to treat ourselves on the last night to one of the lobster dishes that are on the menu but based on the previous dishes the chef has managed to turn out we decide to give it a miss and wait until we get to San Francisco.

There is a singer of sought's performing in the restaurant this evening or was it one of the cats being stood on, this guy would not make a living in the UK and I will say no more than that. After dinner we have a nightcap at the bar, we are the only residents left in the bar or restaurant and it's only 9pm, we give in and retire to our room watch a movie and then it's time for sleeps, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 133

We depart Fiji today and not before time, not to sure what it is but it's just not us, other people we have spoken to love it and they even like the food that comes out of the hotel kitchen, we are either fussy or they are easily pleased, I think that it's the latter. Possibly if we had chosen a different hotel with a bit more life it would have been better, or if we had stayed at the Hilton or Sheraton that we went to the other day, but they come with a price we where not prepared to pay.

Anyway we are certainly chilled out and ready for the USA leg of the journey which, to begin with, will be a bit of a mission and a fair bit of traveling. Back to today check out day, you know the one, the tab in the bar and restaurant is closed, you don't want to go in the pool and have to carry wet costume in your bags, you feel a bit like a nomad with no place to go, this feeling is compounded by the fact that we do not catch our flight until 9.40pm.

To ease this feeling we have arranged to keep our room until 6pm when the taxi will collect us, this will allow us to have a shower and set off refreshed for a long flight crossing a couple of time zones on route. The blog is just about to trip over 70,000 words so it is well on its way to novel status, I wonder just how many it will be by the time we get home, if you would like to have a guess we could have a closest the bull, shit, competition, send your answers on a postcard or sealed down envelope, actually email would be better.

We walked up to reception to pay our dues this is the first time we have been there since we arrived, o the first bill they print off they have forgotten to put the accommodation charges on, unfortunately they are not quite that daft and realise their mistake, we pay up and walk back down to our room. We go to the restaurant for a bit to eat, we go for a pizza as it's the safest option, tab has been closed so we pay cash, after a bit more sunbathing it's time for a little siesta. After our kip we finish packing and then wait for the taxi.

The taxi arrives on time and we set off for the airport, we go through check in and security and as we still have some Fiji dollars we have a little drinket at the smallest airport bar going. As it's a night flight after a snack and a drink you are put into sleep mode and the flight is un eventful, other than we have time traveled in so much as we leave Fiji at 9.40pm on the 8th the flight is about 10 hours and we arrive in LA at 1.30pm on the same day, we have arrived before we left, now that's time travel.

Amazingly Barbs tramp bag does not cause any alarm bells to go off as we pass through immigration and security and we are at the shuttle bus stop in no time at all, then we set off for Sunset Blvd, interesting driving that's all I will say. We arrive at

8400 Sunset Blvd and we are soon checked in and in our room, we have a slight problem as we need to get to the Apollo office to complete the paperwork for the RV, we enquire at the hotel reception on transport arrangements, not good news a taxi or a private town car, is going to be expensive and to get there by public transport is a mission in itself. However while we have been at the reception we have been chatting to the assistant manager, who says hey want do you want to go I could take you for less than that if you like. We negotiate a price and deal done and we will go at 2pm the next day when he finishes his shift.

After a quick freshen up we head off out on to Sunset Blvd we have tickets for the hop on hop off bus, but we need to get some food first and head to the bar opposite the hotel and hey it's happy hour all drinks and appetisers are half price. We order a couple of beers and a combination platter which when it arrives would feed a small army. Then we head off to catch the bus and when it arrives we take a seat on the top deck to take in the sights, we travel down Sunset Blvd to Hollywood and the on to Rodeo Drive, eh there's some brass around here. We continue on the journey looking at the various points of interest, we arrive at the walk of fame and the Chinese theatre and everyone else gets of the bus, we stay on as we are still four stops from our hotel, then the driver tells us this is the last stop, this is the same guy that when we got on had said the bus would be going back past the hotel, I give in.

Let's walk it's a nice warm evening, now that sounded like a good idea, after walking for some considerable time we discover we still have over a mile or more to go, eventually tired and weary we arrive back at the hotel. Now shall we go out again or be sensible and get some sleep ready for tomorrow's mission. We take the sensible option watch a bit of TV and then retire ready for tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

After the morning routine we head outside into the brilliant sunshine, hop on the bus travel to Rodeo Drive and hop off, now I said that there was some brass around here and I was not kidding, Bentley's are like bottoms (everyone's got one), Ferrari's are like Fords, Roll Royce Phantoms are comment place, Porsche are just a posh VW Beetles, oh hang they are aren't they, and Bugatti Veyron's well there are a couple of them knocking about. We carry on window shopping and eventually venture into one of the dress shops, now I had forgotten that the yanks don't get British humour, as a young assistant ask me where we are from and I tell her Liverpool England, she says that's a long way away, and I say, yes not bad for a day trip, went right over her head.

We carry on with the window shopping a couple of the shops are vulgar enough to display prices, good job they all don't, as you would have a heart attack. Barb finds Harry Winston's and finds some yellow diamond earrings in the window, the stones are massive, I shudder to think what they may cost, the same as a large, very large house I suspect. No celebs knocking about, well that we can see anyway most likely in one of the gargantuan Phantoms with blacked windows that are driving around. We turn the corner onto Beverley with shops with slightly more realistic price tags. We stop for a bite to eat I order a sandwich and Barb has a salad, when they arrive the sandwich would feed a small town and the salad a small country supplied with endless coke and coffee, insane.

Now we need to back to the hotel, to get our lift to the Apollo office, so we hop on the bus but realise that it will not get us back in time, we get off at the next stop which is the hotel and get a taxi, proper miserable git of a driver, Barb asks him if we could have the a/c on, his response I have got the windows open, begrudgingly he does happy bastard. The ride is only a few minutes and only costs \$10, when I pay him and he tells me that it is usual to tip taxi drivers, I say that I usually tip for good service and give him \$1 and say here have that, then I get out double quick.

We meet up with Carlos and after dropping some stuff in our room we set off to the Apollo office, bugger me he has got a Honda Accord, we have a good chat on the way to the office, he has been here for 25 years and is originally from Puerto Rico, it takes nearly an hour to get to the office and when we get there we are met by the charming Angelica. While we are completing they paperwork Angelica is slightly confused by our driving licences, as she has not seen this type before, I explain that they are more than likely older than her, she blushes slightly and Barb tells me off for embarrassing the young lady.

Paperwork complete we say farewell to the lovely Angelica and set off back towards Hollywood with Carlos who is going to drop us off at the Fisherman's market instead of the hotel, so that we can have a look around the market, the small shopping mall

and get a bite to eat. Hey guess what we find in the market, yep a bar and it's happy hour so it would be rude not to partake in a cooling refreshment. Then we have a look around the shops, thankfully there are not many of them. We have another look around the market, we decide that we are not hungry due to the size of the lunch portions so we wander around looking at the sights.

Now it's time to go back to the hotel but how, taxi or bus, worried that we may get the same taxi driver, yes I know very unlikely, we opt for a bus ride, after stopping a few as we don't know which one to get, we find one that goes to Sunset Blvd and then we will have to walk from there, \$1.50 for both of us sounds like a bargain. We get back to the hotel, hot, tired and footsore, so we retire to our room to finish packing and to get ready for another day of travelling, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

After the usual morning stuff we take our accumulation of bags to the reception area and do the checking out stuff then we wait for the shuttle bus to arrive to take us to the airport. The shuttle bus arrives a couple of minutes late but that's no problem, we say farewell to Carlos and his staff and start to load our bags into the bus, the driver asks which airline we are traveling with and I say American Airlines when I get in the bus Barb reminds me that it is United that we are flying with, oops. I tell the driver that we are travelling with United not American, he is having a bad day or he is just a miserable bastard as his response is WHICH is it United or American, biting my lip, I apologise profusely and say United, just before I tell him to F off. There are 5 passengers on the journey to the airport and we are tossed around like dolls it's like being in Whacky Racers with the steering wheel, accelerator pedal and brake pedal being like an on off switch. Needless to say that when we arrive at the airport this miserable git does not get a tip not even one single solitary dollar.

We have a two flight to catch today the first one to Denver and then a connecting flight to Des Moines, as we are going into the airport we are asked if we are checking in, bit of a stupid question as we are lugging 6 pieces of luggage with us, yes we are, would you like to check in here, what's the difference, well you don't have to wait oh and you can tip here, ok we will check in here will our bags go through to Des Moines, yes they will, ok. Now on every other flight we have been on the weight limit has been 23kg (and we have been a tad over that) now in the good old US of A the weight limit is 50 US pounds, and both our bags are 2 pounds overweight. You can take some items out or if you leave them in the charge will be \$100 per bag, so in the middle of the pavement we start taking things out of our hold luggage and they are now just under weight, guess what, we put the items in our already overweight carry on bags, and that's ok. Is it me or is this just fucking daft, it's no wonder the whole world is stressed out, do the people making the rules think about what they are doing, of course not they just take the big money and go home happy as a pig in shit.

Time to chill while we wait for our flight, as we wait at the departure gate it is amusing watching other people rush to get on the flight and we can never see the point of getting on first, your there, you have a seat number it's unlikely that they are going without you. We take our seats and it's not long before we are airborne after a very uninteresting three hours we arrive at Denver airport, we get our boarding tickets for the next flight and head off for a bite to eat before the next leg of our journey. Then it's a trip to the departure gate and again we watch as there is a rush to board the plane, we wait patiently with some other travellers and then take our seats and very soon we are in the air, this is a shorter flight than the first and no sooner are we up than we are down. We wait with anticipation as bag after bag go round and round, eventually my bag appears and the zip has split open, obviously been mishandled, nothing to do with there being too much stuff in it, anyway it looks ok and Barbs follows shortly after.

Next appointment is at the car hire desk, our thanks go to one Mr Ross Floyd Patterson for arranging the hire car at "mates rates" and I am now officially his man

from U,N,C,L,E. After waiting at the Enterprise desk, as that's who Ross works for, we are told that it is an Alamo car that we are collecting, we join another line and collect, well our choice of car, we have a laugh and a joke with the guy at the desk. Then it's off to the motel which is about a half an hour drive, the car is great it's brand new with 500 miles on the clock the only problem is that some soft sod has put the steering wheel on the wrong side.

Oh Christ they drive on the wrong side of the road as well, we arrive at the motel, of sorts and I check in, after taking a few things to the room we pop out for a bite to eat before the 11 o'clock doors locked curfew, the restaurant is a strange place not quite as strange as the staff or the customers, ourselves excluded, and we scamper back to our room ASAP. Then after a laugh about our recent exploits it's time for bed ready for our trip to the middle of nowhere tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

The alarm sounds at 7am and by 8am we are departing Faulty Towers the third and on our way on a 150 mile drive to the middle of nowhere, we share the drive and arrive at our destination the Winnebago factory nearly an hour ahead of schedule. We are not sure where to go and as the site covers 200 acres this could take some time.

We head for the information desk that runs the factory tours but the lady does not know where we should go, we are introduced to a guy called Harvey who is very friendly and as helpful as he can be, he knows that we are coming and that the guy we are to see will be there at between 11am and 11.30am so all we can do is wait as we are earlier than we expected. It turns out that Harvey is 72 years young and has worked there since he was ten years old with the founder of the company, he retired a couple of years ago but now helps out as a tour guide 4 days a week, his knowledge of the company must be invaluable, he has lots of stories to tell and shares some with us over a couple of cups of coffee.

I could have stayed there all talking to Harvey but it is now just after 11am and we need to try and find the guy that will do the handover, we drive over to the other side of the highway to the clubhouse which is where we are supposed to meet the handover guy. I go into the clubhouse and there is not a soul in sight, we drive around and still no sign of life, there are lots of RV's waiting for delivery and when I say lots

I do mean hundreds, they are lined up all over the place. Harvey had told us that Apollo rentals had purchased a number of Winnies and as the one we are collecting has a retail schmetail price of just under \$80,000 it looks like it could be a big order, it's not until later that we find out how big.

We return to the clubhouse and there is an RV parked outside and it has our name on the drivers window, hey the tooth fairy has been, but there is still no one about. There is another building in the distance so Barb drives down to it to see if there is anyone there while I stay with the Winnie. While I am waiting a chap rides past on a bike and stops for a chat, turns out that he owns a 42 foot Winnie and is there having it serviced we chat for a while and he rides off for a chat with Harvey. eventually a guy arrives, introduces himself as Scott and asks if I am Paul, no paperwork checked, ok I will show you around the vehicle, I have a feeling that this guy is a bit stressed out, well it's more than a feeling, this guy is heart attack material.

He has been showing us around the vehicle for about twenty minutes getting more stressed out, before his boss arrives and takes over while Scott beats a hasty retreat, this guys a bit more laid back and we end up redoing most of the handover. While we chat it turns out that Apollo have just purchased 600 of the things in one go, bloody hell I think, that's big biscuits, ok they won't have paid anywhere near retail, but at retail \$80k x 600, that's 48 million dollars bloody hell that's a lot of money. I then find out that 400 of the buggers are on a two year buy back deal, I hope that they have got their sums right or that could be expensive.

Anyway handover completed we are ready to go me in Minnie Winnie and Barb in the Hyundai, we set off back to Des Moines airport to drop off the hire car, on route

we stop off for a bite to eat and a quick kip. We arrive at the airport and Barb takes it into the return centre, I cannot go in due to the height restrictions, Barb has done very well driving on her own all the way from Forest City in a car with the steering wheel on the wrong side, something she has never done before. We set off together In Minnie Winnie towards Salt Lake City which according to Sylvia sat nav, is only 1156 miles away, won't be getting there tonight then. We drive for about another 100 miles and running out of both energy and time pull off the highway to find somewhere to park up for the night. We see a sign for RV parking, Barb goes in to enquire, \$24 including electric and wait for it, breakfast, listen up Caravan Club, including breakfast, bloody bizarre that's all I can say.

We go over the road for something to eat and find our second result of the evening, the beer is \$2.50 a pint, after some food and a pint we return to the RV park to get some well deserved sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

After breakfast in the motel, which I can still not get my head around 12 hours later, we set off down highway 80 for 437 miles, is Sylvia having a laugh 437 miles, no she is not we double check on the map and that's the next time we will change direction, bloody hell I thought Australia was big. Off we go it seems to take a long time to get from a to b here, I think we have been brainwashed by kilometres while we have been away, as you cover them much more quickly than you do miles, surprising that isn't it. After a while we need to get some gogo juice for Minnie, we find a fuel station and after a bit of naffing about getting the fuel out of the pump into Minnie, the fuel is going in and in and in I check underneath to make sure that the fuel is not coming out of the bottom of the tank, but no it's staying in, 38 gallons and \$145 later it stops going in, bloody hell it averages 8mpg, it's a good job they are paying for the fuel.

We continue on along interstate 80 after about an hour it's time for a rest stop and we pull off the highway, yippee we have found an outlet shopping mall, so we have a look around, well I have a look in the Bose shop while Barb visits every other shop in the place, we may as well be in Cheshire Oaks. We continue on and now we are looking for a supermarket so that we can do some food shopping, Barb checks the tinternet for the location of the nearest Walmart store and finds one about 20 minutes away. We park up grab a trolley and start shopping as we have a big fridge and a freezer we do some meal planning and stock up for the next week, and possibly a bit longer, bet the wine won't last that long.

We continue on along highway 80, there is not a great deal to tell you about the journey as like most motorways there is not a great deal to see, the only comments I would make is regarding the standard of the driving and that is, it's bloody awful and so are the road surfaces. At about 6pm we exit the highway and find a campsite by the side of Johnston lake, we park up plug in and that's us for the night, we watch some TV, write up blog and then settle in for our second night in Minnie Winnie, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

We wake up it's a tad cold and when we open the blinds and look out of the windows we find out why, it's snowing and snowing hard at that, we pack up, unplug Minnie from the mains hook up and set off on today's trip. When we get onto the highway it's not just the snow that we have to contend with it is also blowing a gale across the highway now Minnie is particularly susceptible to crosswinds, due to the fact that she has the aerodynamics of a large brick. As such she is blown all over the road, add this to the archaic steering which has as much feel and free play as a 30 year old Transit van, if you ever drove one you will know what I mean, makes for a very interesting drive.

Due to the weather conditions progress is slow and we have to keep stopping to knock the ice of the windscreen wipers so that we can see where we are going, the drive is interesting to say the least and at times a bit unnerving. The road climbs steadily for most of the day and we imagine that the views would be pretty good, unfortunately at the present time visibility is 200 yards at most. So unfortunately we can not tell you what there is to see as we can't see a damn thing, we have managed to cover a couple of hundred miles and are not far from this mornings destination of Cheyenne. The weather is getting worse, a sign starts flashing at the side of the road saying that the highway is closed and all traffic is to leave the highway at the next exit.

Oh great 7 miles from Cheyenne and we have the option of stopping in the middle of nowhere or to continue on the highway not knowing what may happen, we take the sensible option, chicken out and pull off at the next exit. We need fuel again so we make that our first stop just in case the weather gets worse, now I think I mentioned that buying fuel here is to say the least a pain in the arse, 95% of the pumps are prepay but the pumps will not take UK cards, as for security reasons the machine asks for a zip code which we don't have. What you have to do is to go into the station tell them which pump you are on and leave your credit card with them, which is not ideal, while you add the fuel, then you have to go back and continue the transaction but some of the machines will not except your PIN number and decline your card. If the assistant knows what they are going or for that matter is bothered they can override the pin authorisation and just go for a signature, this is worse than France, well apart from the language barrier in VIVE Le France.

Right so it's snowing like a rascal and it's freezing when I pull up at a pump, I go inside and explain to the assistant how I would like to pay, now this guy is either related to the shuttle bus driver in LA or is just a complete miserable bastard, I leave him my card and he shrugs his shoulders, I go outside and freeze while Minnie gobbles up gallons of fuel. Eventually the pumps stops and greedy Minnie is satisfied. I go back inside and the assistant looks at me as if he had never seen me before which is a bit odd as I am wearing the high viz fleece that I purchased in a charity shop in Australia for five bucks and must stand out like a sore thumb. I don't imagine he gets many scousers wearing a high viz fleece trying to buy fuel from him, I explain that I had left my card with him, he grunts and points at the card,

yes that's the one, he processes the card and says enter your pin, I explain that the pin won't work, he looks at me and says enter your pin, ok so I enter the pin, he looks at me and says declined, I say I knew that would happen can you put it through with a signature, his response, it's declined. Ok use this one, is it a credit card, yes this one is, can't use it you need a zip code, oh for fucks sake. I refrain from giving him my thoughts and instead give him the cash get my change and depart, wishing that his next poo is a hedgehog, no make that a porcupine.

I get back into Minnie muttering and moaning about, well everything, I thought that this was the land of customer service, we drive over to the RV park and book in, we park up and plug Minnie into the mains and get the heating on high. We prepare dinner and have the first descent meal for quite a while, then we watch some TV, have glass of wine, write up the blog turn the heating up a notch and then retire, hoping for better weather when we awake, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

We wake up this morning to find snow covering everything and not just snow it's freezing and everything is covered in ice, we turn on the TV to see what the weather reports are saying, now we can see a few vehicles on the highway but the TV is saying that it is still closed, now that's just great. We try the radio and that is of no help either and we also try the highway information phone number, which confirms that the highway is closed in the direction we want to travel, but should be open by 9am. As it is only just past 6am so we decide to have a coffee and a tea and wait it out for a bit.

We have breakfast and make a dash through the ice and snow to the showers, the sun has risen and is gradually thawing things out, the telephone information service now says that travel should be ok after 11am, which is good news as we were beginning to think that we would have to stay another night. While we have been waiting for the all clear to leave we have been looking at our route options, and as the weather reports for Yellowstone are not good we give Yogi a ring and say that we won't be coming and that it's ok for him to stay asleep. Seriously the weather outlook for that area is bad and not the place to be taking a 5 ton RV, especially when it's not yours, oh and it handles like a pig.

We are going to head south west towards the Grand Canyon and then onto Vegas and hopefully some warmth, but before we get there we have to get to Cheyenne down towards Denver and then the small task of getting across the Rocky Mountains, this should be fun. Now if you have previously read my last best seller, Hawkeyethenoo The Scotland Road Trip, you will know that we do not have a great deal of luck with the water works of a motorhome, sorry RV, and you may remember the comment, you will have to go to Inverness for one of those. Well even though Minnie only had 10 miles on the clock when we collected her, her hot water system has not been working since we first tried to use it on Friday night, even after following the instructions we were given at handover, which were flick this switch and wait for 10 minutes for hot water to do dishes and 20 minutes if you want to use the shower.

Well we have tried 10, 20, 30, 40 minutes and still only cold water out of the hot tap, I phone Winnebago on Saturday morning and surprise surprise they are closed until Monday, so as it's Monday I give them a ring and I am told that I am doing everything that needs to be done and that there must be a problem so I either need to take it back to them or take it to a dealer. I explain that there was little to no chance of us turning around and going back to Forest City and that we would find a dealer and take it there to be sorted out. Barb has found a dealer, Winnebago, not drugs, on our new route just outside Denver, so at 11am we set off, when we get to the main road conditions are much better and we set course for the Winnie dealer.

We arrive at the RV dealer and explain the problem, there is a bit of err how do we do this or rather how do we get paid for doing what we need to do, after a while they sort

out how they will get paid by Winnebago warranty, we hand over the keys and go for a wander around the pitch to look at some of the Monster RV's they have for sale, we go into a few of them and they are huge, if Minnie Winnie only manages 8mpg I shudder to think what these things do especially the one that has a 600hp badge stuck on its rear end. Then we wander around the accessory shop, gosh there are lots of bits I could buy for Gloria but getting them home may be a bit of a problem.

After about 2 hours we are told that Minnie is ready to go, we say our thanks and set off towards the a Grand Canyon when we get through Denver and onto the I70 highway Sylvia says continue on this road for 483 miles, what, yes 483 miles until we next turn off, best be getting the pedal to the metal then. The I70 goes through and across the Rocky Mountains and climbs steadily to just over 10,000 feet when you then go through the Eisenhower Tunnel, this lulls you into thinking that you are nearly through the mountain range, well your not and not by a long straw. This road makes crossing the Pennines look like crossing the road we have been driving through them for over an hour and there is no sign that they are ending. Mind you the scenery is spectacular, snow capped mountains reflect the orange glow from the setting sun simply beautiful, I suggest to Barb that we stay here overnight and she looks at me as if I have lost my marbles, what happens if it snows again tonight we could be snowed in for a while, fair point so we continue on until we start to descend and we find an RV park in the lower part of the Rockies.

We park up and plug Minnie into the life giving supplies of water and electricity, however we are told that it is going to freeze tonight, no kidding, and we will need to disconnect the water supply before we go to bed. Another proper meal tonight, sausage in onion gravy with mashed spuds and carrots. After dinner we talk and realise that in Liverpool it is already the 15th April the anniversary of such a tragic event 25 years ago when 96 people went to watch their team play football, and never returned. Twenty five years later their families are still fighting for justice, a justice that will soon be theirs, tonight we go to bed with the 96 and their families in our thoughts and prayers, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 140

Bloody hell 140 days and I don't know where the have gone, but we have enjoyed every single one on of then, well nearly every one, we have woken to morning blessed with brilliant sunshine, although it's was cold last night, very darn cold. The sun has not yet risen high enough to send its warmth to the left side of Minnie and there is still ice on the floor next to the leaking faucet, that's a tap to you and me. I set off for the showers and I am immediately set upon by our neighbours 3 dogs, well dogs is a bit of an exaggeration as the three together would not make a sandwich. We end up chatting for about 20 minutes, that's me and the neighbours, not the dogs. Turns out that they have done nearly the same trip as us, as the live in Des Moines

and had been to Cheyenne and are now on their way to Las Vegas, they have given us the address of an RV park in Las Vegas and said that they hope we can meet up there in a couple of days, I can't wait.

I finally get to the showers and then sneak back to Minnie without being seen, Barb has got the inside of Minnie ready for departure so all I need to do is unhook the electrics, oh and empty the bog, I do get all the best jobs. After the poo jobs are done we set off down the highway, the sun is shining and it's a beautiful day. The highway takes us through world famous skiing locations such as Aspen and Vail just to name drop a few. As we continue on through the mountain range the views just get better and better, my eyes struggle to convey the never ending pictures of beauty to my mind, it is like communication overload, there is so much to see and enjoy, the landscape is a never ending cascade of beauty. The visual experience makes your senses tingle with delight, seriously it is that wonderful you have just got to see it.

We continue on naively thinking that we will be out of the mountains in an hour or so, the hours pass along with the miles and we are still 7000 foot above sea level with no end to the mountain ranges in sight. We make a fuel stop and make some lunch in J C Penny's car park and then Barb pops out for half an hour to have a look at the shops. Barb is now up for having a go behind the wheel which is great as it will give me a bit of a rest, we set off and very soon Barb has the pedal to the metal, she is taking to Minnie like a duck to water, despite not being used to driving anything this big. Just a quick point on Minnie when we were at the RV dealer yesterday I had to get the chassis number and while doing so I looked at the rest of the info on the vin plate, and on the plate was an explanation of why she can be a bit sluggish. Minnie is weighing in at just under 6 ton, there is nothing Minnie about that.

Time is getting on and we need to find an RV park for the night, Barb has found one on the map which is in a National park, it's 25 miles off the main highway, after thinking we had taken a wrong turn a couple of times, going off road due to some roadworks and just as we are about to give up we arrive at the site. It's a great site on the shore of a lake and there is only one other RV on the site, we park up connect Minnie to the power supply and open a tin of Bud. We watch the sun set over the lake and then have dinner, then it's the reading, blog writing time oh and another little drinket, then it is time to retire so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 141

In the morning we set off with Barb at the wheel and Sylvia tells us that the journey is 450 miles and will take 7 & 1/2 hours, bloody hell that's a while. After about 30

minutes we rejoin the I70 and continue on through the mountain range and again there are some wonderful sights to behold. The drive through the mountains is unending and Minnie's archaic transmission changes down two gears at a time, and it's only got four, every time we encounter an incline, this causes the engine to scream it's nuts off to 5500rpm on a rev counter that only goes up to 6000rpm. You are forever backing off the throttle to make it change up a gear.

We meander on along the I70 and then turn off onto I89 this road weaves it's way through even more mountains, we arrive at the town of Panguitch and stop off for a bite to eat, not great but the coffee was good. When we where in Australia and New Zealand we visited a number of antique shops and Barb has wanted to visit on here since we arrived. There just happens to be one at the end of thematic street so off we go, what can I say after visiting a munger of these establishments we have decided that in Oz, NZ and the good old US of A, that antiques and curios is a misspelt anagram, of a right load of old crap.

Our plan had been to stay at the campsite at the North rim of the Grand Canyon but when we arrive there it is closed as is the North rim of the Canyon until the 15th May, planned that well then. We continue on and make progress, be it slow progress as the road goes on and on for many miles, time is getting on and we need to find somewhere to park Minnie and give her a rest. During our journey so far there have been RV parks everywhere but not on this road, we wonder if it is something to do with it being Indian land. We continue on and finally arrive at Cameron, now Debbie and Brian have told us about this place and along with the trading post there is also an RV park of sorts, we book in and before we park Minnie for the night we pop into the Trading Post to see what they have to offer.

They have to offer everything that is Native Indian and a lot more the place is jam packed with stuff from bows and arrows, tomahawks to pottery and blankets, in fact anything you can think of that is todo with the Indians, Route 66, cowboys, the Grand Canyon and well America in general. You could spend hours looking around in here, it's a shame that some of the stuff says made in China, but hey that happens everywhere. It's then time to take Minnie over the road and park up for the night, as we drive around the RV park looking for a suitable spot, Barb is particularly impressed by the guy having a wee outside his caravan, needless to say we park as far away from him as we can.

Then it's time to make some dinner and have a cold one, after dinner we check out our plan for tomorrow, sort some photographs out and write up the blog, no Internet connection here so adding it to the web site will have to wait until we get a connection. Then tired and weary after 7 or so hours on the road it's time for an early night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

After breakfast we set off for the South end, no not Dingle, the south end of the Grand Canyon, Barb is at the wheel and this leg of the journey should only take us about an hour and a half, before we go we pop back into the Trading Post to have a look at the ceiling in the restaurant and as Brian had told us, it is something special. We also have to add some gogo juice into Minnie's ever wanting fuel tank. We are only on the I89 for a couple of miles and then we turn off onto the I64 which takes you to the entrance to the National Park, oh and the payment gates, mind you 25 bucks for what you are about to see, is a small price to pay.

When you drive through the gates you still have another half an hour or so before you get to the main visitors centre, but to wet your appetite you can get your first sight of the Canyon a couple of minutes after entering the park. Stunning does not do it justice it is breathtaking, awesome, wonderful words can not explain the beauty in front of you, it is totally over powering you just stand there in amazement trying to comprehend what you are seeing. We continue on towards the visitors center stopping at every opportunity to have another look at the fantastic views.

When we arrive at the center it appears that everyone else in America has had the same idea the place is ram packed, they are well geared up for RV's and have a designated car park for them, only one problem it's full. We drive around for a while and eventually find a space in which Minnie's none to trim bodywork will fit into. After a coffee and a look around the center we board one of the free shuttle buses that will take you around the park, some of the roads in the park are closed to normal traffic so you have to use a shuttle bus to get these areas, and it will save using Minnie's fuel.

We travel on three of the routes today each of them stopping at different viewing areas, with each of these showing you different aspects of the Canyon they are all so fantastic it is difficult to pick which is your favourite, there is one called the Abyss as when you look over the side it drops 3,000 feet straight down to the canyon floor. Time is getting on and we need to find another place to stay, we try the RV park and the campsite in the park but they are both full, we had forgotten that it is Easter week and the kids are off school, that explains the volume of people in the park. We head out of the park and find an RV park just down the road, obviously Phil and Kirsty's location, location, location rule works here as well, as this is the most expensive site we have stayed at to date, but at least it's close for our return to the canyon tomorrow.

Time is getting on again and as I prepare dinner Barb takes our clothes to the laundry as we are running out of clean stuff, after dinner it's the usual blog writing, discussing the days events, which took some time today due to the magnitude of what we have seen. Then it's time to retire for the evening to clear our heads ready for more of the canyon tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

The weather is not looking too good this morning and we have decided to move on towards Las Vegas, we ready Minnie for departure and set off back onto the I40 for the drive that Sylvia tells us is going to take four and half hours. We are on Route 66 and stop off at a fuel station that has some classic and hot rod cars parked outside I take some photographs and pop into the shop which looks small from the outside but it turns out to be a Tardus it is massive, Barb comes in and we have a look around. There is some great tat to be had it just a shame that the majority of it has made in China stickers stuck to it.

We drive for an hour or so and arrive at the town of Williams, this is the last town on Route 66 to be bypassed by Interstate 40. We have lunch in a restaurant, well I say lunch, our restaurant experiences so far have not been good, and this one was no better, I think that Gordon Ramsey needs to visit every restaurant going especially the ones we have visited, the food is bloody awful. We wander around the town and visit some of the shops that are still hanging onto its Route 66 heritage selling anything you can think of with Route 66 written on it, again this is spoilt by the made in China stickers.

It's a great place and a great experience but I would like to see more original stuff and less of the Chinese stuff, rather than driving all the way to Vegas we are going to stop at Kingman and have an early stop over, and then make our way to Vegas via the Hoover dam tomorrow. I must remember when we get home not to moan about the state of our road surfaces, the I40 towards Vegas is to say the least diabolical and added to the gusting winds that blow Minnie across the road make for a trying drive. We arrive at the RV park and it's great to park up and have Minnie connected to the services before it goes dark. It's also good just to chill out for a while and to ready for Vegas which is going to be full on and a blast, but for tonight we chill out and watch some TV. After a couple of Margaritas and some more TV there is just time to write up the blog which if I can string this out for a bit longer will trip over 78 thousand words, there done it, now it's time to retire for the evening, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

LAS VEGAS Here we come, we pack Minnie up ready for intergalactic travel to Las Vegas and set off towards Vegas we are going to stop at the Hoover Dam on the way as it would be wrong to drive past and not stop to see such an amazing piece of engineering. After a self imposed diversion that's another way of saying we went the wrong bloody way, which was pretty stupid considering that there were not that many options. Anyway we arrive at the Hoover Dam and the first stop is to walk across the new bridge spans the Colorado river was opened in 2010, it was the first concrete -steel arch bridge to built in the USA and it incorporates the widest concrete arch in the Western Hemisphere and is also the highest bridge of this type in the world.

The bridge is an amazing feat of engineering in itself and also gives you a fantastic view of the Dam itself, when you get to the middle of the bridge and look over the top of the wall, it's a long a long drop to the Colorado river in fact it's a drop of 260 meters or 840 feet, whichever you prefer it's a long way down. Then we drive down to the Dam as we are in an RV we go to a separate check point where an officer checks all the storage lockers with me while two others check the inside of Minnie. No TNT or Semtex discovered so we are on our way to drive over the Dam and find a place to Park Minnie, which with every man and his dog being there is not an easy job. So Minnie is more abandoned than parked but parked she is and we make our way back down, we walk across the Dam and after a cooling drink in the cafe we head off for the tour of the workings of the Dam.

The first part of the tour is a film show and then we journey downwards 530 feet to the original tunnels that made the Colorado river bypass the the base of the dam so that building could commence. The Dam was built at the time of the Great Depression and if you were lucky enough to be one of the 21,000 working on the project you were paid \$1 a day and got 2 days off a year, the task and it was a task, of completing the dam was done two years ahead of schedule and came in under budget, unlike any of today's projects on both accounts. Unfortunately it did cost the lives of 12 men during the research and building, when the dam was opened or closed whichever way you look at it, it took the mighty Colorado river about 12 months to fill Lake Mead.

After the tour we head off towards Las Vegas we arrive in sin city about 2 hours later and find the RV park that was recommended to us by a couple that we met at a previous RV park. Now their interpretation of close to town, in a good area, secure and a great site, must be different to ours. It's miles out of town, in what looks like fort apache, oh and it's a dump. Now Brian had mentioned that there was a site on the strip so we head in the direction of the bright lights, we find the RV park behind Circus Circus we check and they have space so we book in, park up and phone the other park and tell them that we will not be turning up.

We plug Minnie into the supply and after a quick wash and freshen up we set off for the strip, we purchase a three day bus pass that will give us unlimited bus journeys

around Vegas. It is Saturday night and Easter weekend and the place is rammed packed but we manage to get on the first bus that comes, the driver is a larger than life character and along with the unscripted commentary he gives, when passengers get on and off he says thank you in 20 languages. The trip down the strip is slow progress due to the volume of traffic, the time it takes to get passengers on and off and also the time it takes the traffic lights to change, they take an age. As we are tired and time is getting on we get off at Caesars Palace and wander down the strip our eyes agog at not only the buildings but also the people. After an hour or so we catch another bus back to Circus Circus and then to Minnie to get an early night ready for an early start tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

We awake and get ready for our Las Vegas experience and unlike the saying "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" we will tell you all about our experiences, after breakfast we head off for our first real look around sin city. Our plan is to break our tours into day and evening expeditions spilt with a little afternoon nap, so here we go, we catch the bus back to Caesars Palace this time for a look around the hotel itself. If you have been to sin city you will understand the enormity of it all, if not then it is difficult to find the words to explain the sheer size of things, but I will try. We get off the bus on the strip outside Caesars, now here is the thing that you need to try and understand, the walk from the strip to the hotel entrance takes ten minutes and these ten minutes are spent walking through the grounds of the hotel. When you eventually get to the entrance and open the doors you enter another world into which you are welcomed with open arms, these are not like hotels we have in the UK they are more like small towns with shops, lots of shops, make that lots of expensive shops and restaurants, lots of restaurants, not small restaurants, we went in one that seated 420 customers. Then you have the hub of the hotel, the Casino, this is an enormous room full of every type of slot machine available and there are hundreds of them and then there are the gaming tables every type of gaming table known to man. It is an awesome sight and your mind struggles with the enormity of the place which is at least the size of a couple of football pitches, once you are in it is difficult to find your way out, obviously this is their intention as everything is designed to remove money from your pocket. If you are playing any of the tables or the slots you will be offered free drinks at any time of the day, as day and night does not matter here, the 24 hours just roll on 24/7.

We are lost in another world, amazed and astounded and this is just the first of our hotel/casino visits, we have been in here for a couple of hours and are still trying to find the way out. The place is full of bling, bright noisy slots, it's tacky, over the top and FANTASTICALLY AMAZING, I just love it, wouldn't like to marry it but for a holiday affair it's great fun. We eventually find an escape route and leave Caesars knowing that we will return before we leave sin city, next door is the Bellagio, well I say next door it's a camel ride away and if you enter from the strip there is a lake, yes a lake this is not like one of the piddling little water features they have outside hotels in the UK this is a lake you could go sailing on, it also has fountains that put on a display that could put out a fire at a petrol refinery. The display is fantastic shooting water skywards and is accompanied with a light and sound show to match the magnificent water display, nothing is done by half's here. Once inside the Bellagio you are treated to the same display of shops, restaurants, slots, gaming tables, bling and things as at Caesars Place but in my opinion with a bit more finesse and luxury, I love this place even more than next door. We spend another couple of hours wandering around, it's strange but time just goes and your not really sure where it went and you would like it back do that you could enjoy it all over again.

We stop off for a pizza in the Bellagio which was good, unfortunately as I have mentioned previously we have had a couple of shall we say dodgy meals on route to Vegas and I think that one of these has thwarted our plans, as how do I put this, now

that we have eaten something neither of us can be to far from a restroom for any length of time. We think that it would be a good idea if we returned to Minnie en-route we find a pharmacy purchase some tablets and get a taxi back to the RV park as the bus ride may not be a good bet. When we get back to Minnie we are both feeling a bit sorry for ourselves and as most of you will know this condition makes you feel weak, tired and washed out. We spend the rest of the evening drinking water and feeling more sorry for ourselves and a bit cheesed off that a bug of some kind is cheating us out of our time on the strip. We retire for an early night hoping that we feel better tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 146

We awake still feeling drained and tired after a restless nights sleep, we think that it's best to have a rest day today, take another tablet and see how we feel later on. We spend the morning watching old TV programmes you know the ones we thought were great when we were kids. One of them has a driving scene, you will remember the ones, it was shot in a studio with a stationary car and the scenery is moving behind it, and the driver makes exaggerated movements of the steering wheel, well the last bit reminds me of driving Minnie as you are forever moving the steering wheel to keep her going in some form of straight line. We rest and snooze for most of the day and by early evening feel able to venture out into the big bad world of sin city.

We set off on our now normal route through Circus Circus this hotel has the same agenda as the other hotels on the strip but seems to be geared for shall we say the lower end of the market, as the shops are proper tacky and even though people do not dress up to go out in the more upmarket establishments, here well they are just scruffy and the place itself looks like it could do with a good scrub, but it is the shortest way to the strip from the RV park. We catch the bus along the strip and although it is only a couple of miles the journey takes ages we need to get two buses this evening as we are going to Fremont Street for the Fremont Street experience. Again this is another place that is difficult to fully describe and do justice to, if you have been you will understand, this is more insane than the strip, open your mind and I will try and explain to start with you have a wide paved covered street that spans a couple of blocks, part of which has a zip wire running the length of it above your heads, then on either side of the street there is an assortment of shops, bars, casinos, restaurants, food stalls, outside bars with scantily clad young ladies dancing and cavorting on the bar, lots of bright lights and lots of noise. In between all of these there are various stages with live performers doing their stuff, such as a Elvis impersonator who is throwing teddy bears into the audience while singing, I will let you guess. Then there are a couple of guys playing electric double bass and they are pretty good, mixed in with all this there are lots and lots of street performers, doing anything from card tricks to contortionists, then add to this lots of people dressed up as, well anyone you can think of really, but here's just a few, Elvis, Superman, The Blues Brothers, Marilyn Monroe, every super hero you can think of, Darth Vada,

Kiss, Transformers, John Wayne, Show Girls who weren't really dressed in a great deal, all of whom are trying to get you to have your photograph taken with them and of course pay them for their participation. Added to all this there are the general public, there are some strange people on this planet and lots of them seem to congregate here, it's like being in a bar in a Star Wars film, this is a great place for people watching, totally insane.

After "The Experience" we travel back to the strip to visit a couple more hotels/casinos we stop off at Paris which of course has an Eiffel Tower not a little pretend one a two hundred foot one, with a restaurant at the top, inside is of course the ubiquitous casino, shops, bars and restaurants with a French theme, this one does not really float our boat so after a walk around we head off back to the strip. We visit the Venetian this is another high ender and not only does it have casino and the rest of the trimmings this has the added attraction of a Venetian canal running through it complete with bridges, full size gondolas which you can ride on while being serenaded by the guy rowing it, oh and it's also got St Marks Square, again don't for a minute think that this is miniature because it's not, the canal goes through the hotel for at least a hundred yards and is lined with shops such as Cartier, Dior, YSL, LV the list goes on. It's an amazing sight, bloody ridiculous but amazing none the less.

We go back into the Casino and play a couple of the slot machines and partake in a couple of free well apart from the tip drinks, while putting a couple of bucks in the machines, before we know it it's 2am and defiantly time to catch the bus back to Minnie. When we get there it's straight to bed to ready ourselves for a full day tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

We are feeling better this morning and as we have not eaten for a day or so we are a tad peckish and decide that we will go for breakfast at the Bellagio, we leave Minnie at just after 9am and I am sure that there is a time stealer around here as we do not get to the Bellagio until 10.15 and by the time we get a table it's 10.30. I have messaged Debbie and she sent me a message back saying that it will end up as brunch, by the looks of it she is not wrong, it is a buffet breakfast with a selection of food that just goes on and on. By the time we have got to the pancake stage they are starting to serve the lunch buffet and the rare roast beef looks to inviting to resist, and then there is a never ending selection of cakes. On a serious side the amount of food on offer is slightly obscene considering the amount of people that are starving in the world, but I am not going to get on my soap box about it, as I am there eating it with the rest.

Right so that's half a day gone and god knows how many pounds added, we need to go for a walk but let's have a drink first so sit at a slot machine receive two beers for a two dollar tip, this is great sport. Next stop the Mandalay Bay this is the hotel that Richard and Lin stay at when they come to sin city, this place is huge even by Vegas standards, outside it has six or seven beaches with various types of pools attached to each of them including a wave pool. The size continues once you are inside this place is not a hotel it's a small city you could go in here and never find your way out, it would be like being lost in space, if I stayed here I would never find my room. I shudder to think what this place cost to build and then I shudder again when I wonder how much money it makes.

Those readers who have been to sin city will have realised that we visit the casinos in a very random order we do this as we like to experience both the inside of the casinos and the then the strip itself and go for a spot of people watching as there are some proper sights to see wandering around. Anyway next stop Planet Hollywood another massive casino with lots and lots of shops and really in my humble opinion not a great deal more, well apart from the fact that Brittany was performing there although we did not see her. Then New York New York this place is mad as a box of frogs it has a Statue of Liberty outside not a small one and it also has a roller coaster a proper big one outside the hotel but not just outside it comes through the inside of the hotel, now that is nuts, we do not stay in here for too long as one of the bar tenders rubs us up the wrong way, but hey there are plenty more joints on the strip to visit.

Our next point of call after a stroll along the strip and a little drinket at one of the many bars is Ballys this is one of the long standing establishments on the strip no fantastic gobsmacking things to report about this establishment but we do watch

some of the tables for a while, before placing a couple of bucks into a slot machine and very soon receive two very large gin and tonics in exchange for a small tip. We are surprised as to how long we manage to play the machines for without adding any more cash and still the free gin and tonics arrive. Time flies by and the next time we check it is 2am again by the time we arrive back at Minnie it's after 3am and it's straight to bed to be ready for our last day in sin city tomorrow.

Day 148

Today is our last full day in sin city so we need to cram in as much as possible things to do and people to see and all that, we have not seen a show yet as we have been trying to get tickets for Elton John but as yet have been unsuccessful well we could have had tickets for last night but at daft money so we will try again today. First stop this morning is one of the shopping malls we catch the bus outside Circus Circus change buses at the Bellagio and then on to the mall, big it is, but disappointing as Barb does not manage to find a pair of jeans, four months we have been looking for a pair jeans for gods sake it can not be that difficult, I go to Matalan fat waist dwarf leg hand over ten quid job done but no four months on and we are still hunting for a pair of jeans it would be easier to find a breeding pair of white rhinos than these jeans.

Anyway back on the bus to the strip and we head for the Quad hotel which houses what is allegedly the largest collection of vintage cars for sale under one roof, it does have some beautiful cars but I am not sure about the Peugeot 505, Ian says it's a future classic but in that case so is a Ford Focus, mind you now that I have said that have you seen the price of an Escort Mk1. Now a bit more shopping at Fashion world or something another shopping mall on the strip, after a number of visits to different outlets we may be in with a chance of purchasing the holy grail, after a couple of try on for size a pair of jeans are purchased, our quest is over, alleluia. Now I need a drink we see a sign outside one of the more seedy slot machine establishments advertising Michlob for \$1 a bottle that will do me. The beer is fine but the place itself and it's patrons are a little on the seedy side of the strip, but hey they also do margaritas for a buck a glass well plastic cup. We partake in a couple of the expensive beers and then depart.

Next stop is Wynn this is one of the newer hotels it looks fantastic with its golden glass and is equally fantastic inside, once past the decoration it's the same script gaming tables, slots, shops, bars, restaurants and free drinks when gambling this place does have a very plush feeling to it, but I still like the Bellagio. We have still

had no joy with tickets for Elton so we are going to go out for a meal instead. We catch the bus back to Minnie to freshen up and get a bit dressed up to go out, something that the majority of the people visiting the strip do not. We have found it strange that even at night time when you go to the hotels/casinos which house some of the most expensive shops around, people are dressed in well, their scruff.

We are going to PH Changs a Chinese restaurant in Planet Hollywood so we take our usual walk through Circus Circus and catch the bus down the strip to PH, and then play hunt the restaurant we eventually find it and we are shown to a table. While we are chatting to the waiter he tells us that he is moving to England with his wife/partner/girlfriend for 12 months as she is going to work on Strictly come dancing as a choreographer, I ask him who is going to replace Bruce but he says he does not know. We have a great meal followed by the largest slice of chocolate cake you have ever seen, good job we only ordered one between us.

Then it's time for a wander down the strip to try and walk off the chocolate cake, we stroll along the strip taking in as much of the sights as we can on our last night in sin city, we end up at our favourite casino the Bellagio. We play a couple of slot machines and receive the now expected complimentary drinks, the time stealer has been at work with time passing without you noticing. Barb has gone to play another machine due to fag ash Lil who has seated herself a couple of machines away. I think that I doing well as I am up about 30 bucks and then Barb returns with a payment slip in her hand and has won 219 bucks, well done Barbara.

Time has marched on and it's getting late, well early and it's time to leave the Bellagio well after one more complimentary drinket, then it's time to catch the bus back to Minnie. By the time we get back to a Circus Circus it's after 3am and when we get to the front doors it looks like there has been a bit of excitement while we have been out, as the sliding glass doors on the right are cordoned off and have what look like a number of bullet holes in them. Time to beat a hasty retreat to Minnie and double lock the door, we check the news on the tinternet but there is no mention of any incident at the hotel, we need to get to bed and get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 149

We ready Minnie for departure and we are ready to go to at just after 10am we have a couple of places to go before we leave sin city, first stop is a gift store that is about a

mile away from the RV park, it advertises itself as the largest gift shop in the world.

We head off and after a couple of nearly legal U turns we arrive at the store, as we imagined it has a full selection of a proper load of tacky tat, it has a wide selection of tat from plastic slot machines to pink gorilla outfits. I think that you would struggle not to find an item without a made in China sticker stuck to it. We depart without making a purchase well apart from a bottle of water.

Next we have a drive down the strip and a couple of the main side roads that run off the strip, just to have a look around, nothing catches our eye so we set off towards Death Valley. Thirty minutes after leaving the strip you are in the desert and there is lots of it, we continue on through the desert for mile after mile and as we do so I look at the bleakness of the wilderness surrounding LV and wonder how it ever came to be, I will read all about it later, you can bet your bottom dollar the Mob and corruption was involved.

After traveling to over 8000 feet we begin to descend into Death Valley, well after we have stopped to purchase a ticket to enter the National park, the descent continues and continues and until we are at about 200 feet below sea level, and not far from the lowest point on our wonderful planet earth, oh and it's hot bloody hot. The scenery is stunning and the vastness of the place is difficult to explain but again Bear Grylls would struggle to get out of here, well without a helicopter that I suspect they may use in some of his programmes.

We arrive at the RV park which is in the middle of nowhere but has space for about 200 RV's a couple of restaurants, a couple of bars and oh an 18 hole golf course, this could only happen in the good old USA. The night sky out here is amazing due to the lack of light pollution, and the heavens have put on a fantastic display for us this evening while we have our meal under the stars. After dinner the flies are starting to be a bit of a nuisance so we retreat into Minnie for an early night so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 150

In the morning we set off for Yosemite national park it's a bit of a trip, that according to Sylvia will take just over 6 hours without stops, and that's based on a car not a six ton

truck, so it may take a while longer. We head off towards the park and the drive out of

Death Valley goes on and on, it takes a couple of hours to get out of the desert this place is vast. We have finally arrived at a town that has some form life so we stop off for a bite to eat at the most respectable place we can find, to say that the waiter is just learning his trade is an understatement, Barb orders an omelette and I order a burger, should not be too difficult even for this guy, Barb's omelette arrives followed shortly after by a bowl of something and I am not too sure what it is but it resembles a bowl of gruel. I ask the incompetent waiter what it is and he replies brûlée, oh that's great but I asked for a burger, oops I take this away then. He returns a while later with a burger which to be fair was not bad and then the bill which is about 30 bucks, I put down a fifty and when he collects it from the table, he asks do I want change. Darn right I do, cheeky sod nothing wrong with that part of his training then.

We continue on and by mid afternoon we arrive at the town of Bishop there is an RV park but we decide to continue on to the next town of Mammoth Lakes which is about thirty miles further. There have been high winds all day which have been blowing Minnie all over the place today, the road signs have warnings that the winds will get worse later so we best be moving on ASAP. We get about half way to Mammoth Lakes and it starts to snow and the closer we get to Mammoth the more it snows and snows proper snow that's sticking like jam on a blanket. By the time we get to Mammoth we are down to 15 miles an hour, less than 100 feet visibility and the snow on the ground is over a foot deep. We arrive at the RV park and they are shifting snow with a bulldozer, this does not look good, we go to the check in desk and ask what the weather outlook is. What we hear is not good, they are expecting another two foot of the stuff overnight and all the roads through Yosemite are closed and they do not expect any of them to be open until next week. Shit this does pose a problem as the only other way to San Francisco is to turn around head south and go on a 500 mile detour, bad timing or what if we had arrived yesterday we would have been through the park before all this white stuff fell from the sky, oh bugger it.

Now shall we stay here and risk being snowed in or do we try and get back to Bishop and then head south, on top of this we are not dressed for the snow and the guy at the reception desk did look at us a bit strange when we are standing there in t shirt, shorts and flip flops, well it was 80f when we left this morning. We can not risk being snowed in so we have to try and get out of Mammoth before it gets any worse, by the time we get back to Minnie she has a good covering of snow on her and the wipers are frozen. We head off and follow a snow plough for a while and then we turn off on to the main highway which is down to one lane but passable, after about 15 miles the snow clears and the wind starts to blow.

We eventually arrive back at Bishop and find an RV park, as the office is closed we find a pitch and park Minnie, relieved to be out of the snow, it's getting late so get a bite to eat and try to find a weather forecast for tomorrow but we do not have a great deal of success so we will have to try again in the morning and then make up our

minds as to which way to go. Then it's time to get to bed after a fairly stressful day so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 151

First job after breakfast is to find out what the weather situation is, Barb checks with the reception and they say that three or four wagons were blown over on the highway last night but they are not sure what the snow conditions are like further up the highway. We watch the TV but the weather reports here are like politicians, you know they go on for hours talk a lot but tell you nothing of any importance. We stay at the park until after 9am to give the elements chance to sort itself out, we head off down the road to find the tourist information office, the first one we find is shut, now that's helpful. We find another one a bit further down the road and Barb goes in to do her stuff, the guy is very helpful and checks out the routes for us and finds that one of the routes through Yosemite has been cleared and is open.

As that is the shortest quickest route we head off in that direction, there is a fair amount of snow around but luckily not on the road, this is good news as when we turn off the main highway the road gets extremely narrow, bendy and hilly. Minnie makes slow progress along this meandering country road which again has us climbing to above 8000 feet. After a couple of hours we need to stop for a coffee and a bit of a break, we find a road side cafe and when we get inside we think we have entered a different time dimension, it's historic and there are three people at the end of the bar knocking back vodka martini shots at a good rate and it's only 11.30am.

While we are there a couple come in, they have run out of petrol and have coasted down the last hill, he asks the guy behind the bar how far the nearest petrol station is and it happens to be 8 miles away. Oops not walking there then, we offer them a lift but they have decided to phone the recovery service, they are very grateful for the offer and we chat for a while mainly about our adventure, which they want to know all about, I get their email address and say that I will send them a link to the blog, we say our farewells and set off once more.

As we are about to exit Yosemite we find an RV park in the woods alongside a river, Barb goes in and books a spot, when she comes back she comments that the owners are shall we say a tad strange. This is definitely good old boys territory and we expect to hear duelling banjos playing at any time, I think we may be double locking the doors tonight. After dinner we settle in for the night wondering what wild life will be wandering around while we are asleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 152

Another day of travelling through this vast country today we have two options today drive all the way into SF or stop just outside the city and drive in tomorrow, the price

of parking Minnie makes up the decision for us as parking the RV in the city is going to cost an arm and a leg. We check out a couple of parks on the Internet which will leave us with a drive of about an hour and a half into SF. There is not a great deal to report about today's drive as most of it is on main roads with not a great deal to see.

We head off towards the the town of Lodi which is where we have located the park we are going to stay at. We arrive at the park just after lunch book in, park up and plug Minnie into the power and water supplies, we have stopped early today as we have some journey planning to do and also we need to wash some clothes. The wifi connection is not good at our pitch, so we go and take a seat in the reception area. We have a bit of a travel list to arrange which includes, flights to New York, hotel in New York, shuttle bus from hotel to airport in SF and shuttle bus from airport to hotel in New York all of which will need to tie into each other.

This task would not be that difficult if we had a decent tinternet connection but we haven't and it keeps dropping off, the process takes much longer than we expected but we get there in the end and while we have been doing our research the our clothes have been through the washing machine cleaning process. As tonight is our last night in Minnie we need to pack up our stuff and devour the contents of the fridge, first job to pack our stuff away and make sure that we have emptied Minnie's many cavernous cupboards. We appear to have acquired another collection of bags which we will have to condense down prior to our flights to New York.

Next we prepare dinner which we eat alfresco with a bottle of the local Chardonnay under the setting sun, very pleasant, we have driven through some of the local wine producing areas on our way here an while looking at the winery's I have commented to Barb that the Californians do keep a neatly trimmed bush. After a bit of TV we retire for the evening ready for our final leg into San Francisco, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 153

Time to set off to return Minnie to her owners, but not before we have emptied her waterworks as if you don't they charge you \$150 to do it for you, today's task include

driving into San Francisco centre to drop our bags off at the hotel, then return Minnie and then return to the hotel on public transport, this should be interesting. We leave the RV park after setting the hotel address into Sylvia, who tells us the journey should take just under two hours. However it looks like it might take a bit longer as the traffic is extremely heavy.

We arrive at the bay bridge with it looks like the rest of California it is absolutely jammed there are eight or ten lanes of traffic going in one direction queuing for the toll booths, this highway makes the M6 look like Penny Lane. Not only is the approach wide, the new bridge which was only opened last September is also long, at just under four and a half miles, it is a fairly amazing structure. We follow Sylvia's instructions and continue on through the traffic towards the hotel, the roads are interesting to say the least, and the excitement is increased as at times you are driving down tramways. We eventually arrive at the hotel and drop off our bags, now it's time to travel to San Jose to hand Minnie back.

I have set Sylvia to avoid toll roads and to use the shortest route by the time we arrive at the Apollo office we could get a job as San Francisco tour guides as she takes us all around the houses to get there, but get there we do. The return goes well and we have a bit extra to pay as we have exceeded the mileage allowance mainly due to the diversions we have had to make due to mother nature's weather. Next task is to get back to the hotel we get a taxi the couple of miles to the train station, ok how we do get tickets and which ones do we need, we find an office but we can not buy tickets there we have to get them from a hole in the wall. We need a \$4.35 ticket first prob the machine will not take 20 dollar notes and that's the smallest note we have, so we first have to find a change machine before we can buy the tickets, ok tickets purchased time to get a train.

Now which one, from which platform going which way, for a super power nation the directions are limited to say the least, we board a train that we think is going in the right direction but it is not until we get to the next station that it is confirmed that we are going the right way. When we get off the hotel is only a ten minute walk away, we get there finish our registration and get our room key then there is the small job of getting all our bags to the room. The room is bijoux and compact, that's estate agents speak for small, but it's fine and the hotel is right in the middle of town. After unpacking a couple of things we freshen up get changed and then it's out to explore, there is an Irish bar a couple of hundred yards from the hotel so that's our first point of call.

We order drinks and it turns out that the bar tender is from Donegal and went to Liverpool university, big world small planet. We chat about his time in Liverpool and after a few drinks it's time for us to return to the hotel so we leave Foley's Irish bar and return to the hotel, we head up the road towards the Hilton, not that we are

staying there but it's on the way to our hotel. We watch some TV and retire for an early night so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 154

Our first real day exploring San Francisco is here and after breakfast we head out into the sunshine, first job is to buy a rover ticket for the transport system, then we get our first tram car to Fisherman's wharf. As we ride one of the original trolley cars I think about all the car chases that have been filmed here and especially the car chase of all time, of course I am talking about the driving battle between Steve McQueen in a Ford Mustang GT and Dodge Charger driving by Bill Hickman in the film Bullitt which was released 45 years ago. We pass the famous Lombard street which is in the film it is the section that drops steeply for one block containing eight tight hairpin bends, during the film the dodge loses a wheel trim well it actually loses 6 during the chase which is clever as it only had four.

We get off at Fisherman's wharf and walk up to pier 39 taking in all the sights and the atmosphere as we go, there are lots of eateries and shops that unfortunately sell the same Chinese tat that we have seen elsewhere. While walking around pier 39 we can hear sea lions barking and initially I think it is a recording for the sea lion centre but then we look out to the water and there are hundreds of them basking in the sunshine making one hell of a noise. We stop off for a bite to eat and choose the local speciality clam chowder that is served in a soda bread bowl and then we catch the tram back into town, and visit yes you guessed it the shops.

On the tram car ride back my mind goes back to another old TV favourite, a The Streets of San Francisco with Michael Douglas and Carl Malden, him with the big nose. After a bit of shopping we head back to the hotel for a little nap before we go out tonight. After our nap we ready ourselves to go out, now neither of us are feeling 100% ok in the digestion department so we don't feel like eating, we head out and find a bar that is playing live music, well one guy on a piano but he is pretty good so we stay for a while. We chat to a couple from New Zealand they have obviously been out longer than us and have consumed a few more beers than us, but we have a laugh then it's time to head back to the Hilton, walk straight past and return to our hotel.

Then it's time for bed so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 155

Today we are going to visit Alcatraz so after breakfast we head off on our favourite tram car ride, as we travel on the tram I wonder how many thousands of people have

travelled on this tram since it was built in 1893 and I think about the stories it could tell, we travel to Fisherman's wharf and then we catch another tram to pier 33 to catch the ferry to The Rock. Now this is big business as over 1.3 million people visit every year and today is no different as the boat is near enough full, it only takes twelve minutes for the boat to get to the island and then we are asked to congregate on the dock for a safety talk before we set off to tour the prison.

After the talk we head off up the steep pathway to the main building we form a line in the shower block while we wait for the audio tour equipment to be handed out, now if you where a prisoner here in the 29 years that it served as a prison you would not want to drop the soap in this room. We walk around listening to the commentary I stand in one of the cells which measure 9x5x7 feet that is, and that's not big by any standard, and certainly not as luxurious as the last cell I stayed in, in Oxford prison which is now a Malmaison hotel. I touch the walls and the bars of the cell and again my mind wanders into the past and I think of the people who where locked up in here for years of their life and the stories that could be told.

Bill Baker who was prisoner 1259 and was incarcerated here 58 years ago, is actually in the prison today signing copies of the book he has written "Alcatraz 1259" he is now 81 years and back on the rock but this time as a visitor not an inmate and like us can leave later today and go home, it must be very strange for him to come here on a daily basis. It is time for us to escape the rock and it's a mass escape as the ferry is nearly full again. Once back on the mainland we head back to the hotel only this time we go a different route which is a bit of guess work but we get there in the end.

We get washed and changed and head off to a Thai restaurant for some food as we have not eaten for 36 hours and are a little bit hungry, it is fairly basic but the food is good and very reasonable. We have had a tiring day so after our meal we head back to the hotel to watch some TV and an early night, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 156

This morning we are having a lazy morning and then it's time to set off out into San Francisco for another day of exploring and today the mission is to get to the Golden

Gate Bridge using public transport. We have asked at the hotel and by all accounts there are a number of different ways of getting there but they are not sure which is best. We head off and ask google for help and no problem it gives us all the options available, we pick the route with the fastest route and set off towards the bus stop when we get there, the bus that Google tells us we need to get, is not listed on the bus stop. When a bus arrives we ask the driver for directions and he tells us we need to cross over to catch the bus from the other side, so we cross over and catch the bus as suggested after four or five stops it is obvious that we are going in the wrong direction. We get off, cross over the road and catch one going the other way, again we follow Googles instructions to the bus stop and again when we get there the suggested bus does not stop there, time to give this shit up and get some lunch.

During our late lunch we decide to pass on the trip to the bridge today as time is getting on and we are a bit fed up trying to find our way there. We head back into town for a look around and to visit some more of the shops. We go to union square and there are some artists display their works and we spend some time there looking at the various styles of their craft. Then it's back to Macy's but this time we take the lift to the Cheesecake Factory it is absolutely packed, and there is a wait of about 30 minutes for a table we are given one of those buzzer things that tell you when your table is ready so it's time for a bit more people watching. In the end we give up on the table idea and get two slices of cheesecake to go, well it should be slices of gold cake judging by the price so it best be good.

On the way back to the hotel we stop off at the Irish bar and make the most of what they have to offer during happy hour, then it's back to the hotel for cheesecake and some TV, the cheesecake is very good and to be fair one slice between us would have been more than sufficient. Then it's time for sleep so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 157

Right we are ready for our trip to the bridge, Barb has done some route planning and now knows the correct route, we take the short walk to the tram and take our position

in the line. While waiting in the line I am reminded about the stupidity of the human race, what is it with people that strap a backpack on their back that by the looks of it weights a fair weight, and then forget that it is there. You know the idiots I am talking about the ones that turns around in confined space knocking everyone for six and are not content on doing it once, why don't they either keep still, watch what they are doing or put the thing down. Then while we are waiting for the tram in a queue and there are two American couples talking behind us, now we are outside the Sir Francis Drake Hotel and they have guys dressed as Beefeaters as doormen, so one guy comments about the doorman's attire, and his mate replies to his three friends, oh yes Sir Francis Drake and the guys in the red outfits look after the Vatican, and his three friends reply, oh do they that's neat, laugh I nearly wet myself, and again I wonder how this country became a super power and has managed to stay one.

Still laughing we board the tram to Lombard Street, the one of Bullitt fame, after taking some pictures of the bendy bit we walk in the opposite direction towards the next bus stop. We catch the bus and this one takes us straight to the Bridge information centre and yet another Disney experience, yes a shop. After reading some or the facts and figures about the Golden Gate Bridge we set off to walk the bridge, a Barb decides only to walk part of the way saying well when you have walked one bridge, we arrange to meet back at the info centre and I continue on to the other side of the bridge. There are great views of the city and Alcatraz from the bridge, when I return we catch the next bus back towards Fisherman's wharf.

We arrive at the wharf and after a look around and some more walking we stop of for a libation and a snack at one of the bars and then we head off back into town, walking most of the way only catching a tram for the last part of the trip. Footsore and still a tad thirsty we stop off at the bar that is part of the Hilton and after two drinks we head back to our hotel to pack ready for our departure tomorrow. After packing we watch some TV and then retire for the evening so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 158

We finish packing and take our bags to the reception desk for them to look after until later when the shuttle bus will collect us, then we head off to get a late breakfast and

then for our last look around more tram car riding and yet more walking. As we have walked around this city we noticed that there is a sad side to it as well as the historical and for a moment I need to be serious. It is blatantly obvious that this country has a number of people who for one reason or another have some serious mental health issues, and rather than being cared for by the specialists that they need, they are left to walk around cities such as this. They are distressed, in turmoil with themselves or whatever demons they have to deal with, and from what we can see are left discarded by society to wander around aimlessly, shouting angrily at the world around them not knowing where they are or what is happening to them. It is a sad indictment on this powerful country that it leaves these people to their own devices and I suspect turns it's back on them hoping that the problem will go away, not wishing to face the issue, but go away it will not. It will only get worse and the longer the government tries to avoid the issue the worse it will get, and like a house of cards it will collapse around them with horrendous consequences, and the politicians just hope that it won't happen on their watch, but be warned for one day it will, and the lunatics will take over the asylum.

Right that's my rant over, I dislike these transfer days as you feel like you are in state of abeyance with no home and not wanting to stray too far in case you get stranded and can not get back to catch your lift to the airport. We wander around continually clock watching until it is close to our pick up time. Then we pop into the Irish bar for a quick refreshment it is now time to board the roller coaster otherwise known as the super shuttle bus to the airport. The journey takes about 45 minutes during which we suffer the now expected whiplash injuries and endure the g forces that usually only F1 drivers and fighter pilots have to deal with. After being bounced around it is mercifully our turn to get out of the ride from hell, and this guy expects a tip, he is sadly mistaken, well unless he would like some driving lessons.

I do need to mention the public transport system in San Francisco, to ride on the trams or buses you have a couple of ticket options, you can pay \$6 for a one way ticket or \$15 for an unlimited day pass for any mode of transport going, so it's a no brainer really. We purchased the \$15 ticket and managed to get four full days and god knows how many rides out of it and then gave it still unused to the doorman at the hotel so that he could sell it on to the next travellers, darn good value for money. It's all a bit boring for the next couple of hours as it is the usual check in your bags, go through security, have a drink, board the plane, take off, fly for about seven hours get off wait for another plane and then follow the same routine all over again. During which time day has become night, night has become day and in between we need to get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 159

We arrive at Newark airport collect our bags and head for the shuttle bus collection area, we phone super shuttle to advise them of our arrival and the operator tells us a

driver will be with us in about twenty minutes. We take a seat and wait, sure enough twenty minutes later the minibus arrives and we join a number of other passengers for the trip into New York. Obviously these drivers all go to the same driver training academy either that or they are all related, after another dodgem ride we arrive in Times Square New York at the Edison hotel which was opened by Thomas Edison, he was a bright lad that Edison chap.

Our room is not ready so we stow our bags with concierge, obviously there is a tip required, as we are tired from the journey we take a seat in the lobby and within an hour our room is ready. The hotel is a bit tired and in need of some TLC but hey it is right in the middle of Times Square and the life that goes with it. Our room is the usual American affair with two double beds just in case you fall out with each other, we unpack a few items and choose a bed to catch a quick nap before we venture out into the bustling streets of New York.

The flight coast to coast has taken its toll on us so we do not awake until the early evening, we decide that tonight's excursion will not be a long one and that we will just explore Times Square and get ourselves accustomed with our location. We get changed and ready ourselves for the big city, we head out into the bright lights of the square and stroll around looking at the sights and the shops, which unfortunately sell the same made in China tat as the other places we have visited.

We get a bite to eat, no stop that is not possible in America and definitely not possible in NY, they sell a pizza for one that would feed eight, sandwiches that would do for a carry out for the week, salad that must have been a small field and pasta that would feed a family of six for a week, the portions are ridiculous to say the least. We eat what we can but it does not look like we have touched our pasta and we are asked if everything was ok, yes it was great we just could not eat anymore of it.

We venture out again and hustle and bustle of this city has not relented one little bit, no wonder Mick Dundee was shocked by this electrifying experience and it just goes on and on, no matter what the time, as Frank said this is the city that never sleeps. Well we need too and we head back to Thomas's gaff and to our bed the one on the right by the window we watch TV for a bit and then with eyes too weary to stay open it's time for sleep in readiness for a full day in the city tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 160

So it's day 160 now that is scary to think that we have been away for 160 days and it now seems like a blink of an eye, we have been to so many places, met so many

people and have seen so many things. I am glad that I have written this blog to remind us of all the wonderful and some not so wonderful days that we have had on our journey it is also strange and wonderful to think that in a matter of days we will be home, my emotions are pulled in many directions and I think that both Barb and myself long to see our friends and family. However we have one more city to explore and it's a big bugger as well so we best be getting on with it.

Now this is a big city and one with lots of tales and history to tell which we are not going to find out by touring around by ourselves, we buy tickets for the hop on hop off bus tour which is not the quickest way around the city it is in our experience very informative and helps you plan for the next couple of days exploring. We purchase a three day pass and board the first tour bus not far from the hotel, there are 5 different routes and our plan today is to fit in as many complete tours as we can that way we will see all the sights, if only from a distance and also know where we want to go in the limited time we have in this metropolis of around 8 million people.

First we catch the downtown bus and as we travel down 7th avenue we see the last array of shops including Macy's the second biggest shop in the world, we have the biggest Harrods in London, then the Empire State Building this is just an amazing building, 102 floors, standing 1,250 feet, built during the Great Depression and opened on the 1st May 1931, just one year and 45 days after breaking ground, no other building of this size has been completed in such a short time, even with today's modern equipment. I will revisit this magnificent building but for now we carry on we our bus ride.

We continue on and see lots of fantastic buildings and architecture, and then we arrive at ground zero there is lists of building work going on and a number of new buildings rising skywards like the Phoenix from the ashes, showing the world the strength of this City and this Nation, this will be another destination we will visit more fully during our stay. Then we see Liberty in the distance another stop we will make over the next day or so, I don't want to make this a sightseeing guide of NY so I have missed out chunks of stuff that given time we will visit during our stay.

We catch the next tour bus which will take us uptown towards Central Park and another place I must visit, the Dakota building, on our way the tour guide gives us lots of information and we take in as much as we can but it is getting to the stage of information overload. We drive alongside Central Park and as we drive past the Dakota building the tour guide plays "Something" over the headsets and I can feel the the tears welling up in my eyes, as I write this I have the same song playing on my iPhone and guess what the tears return and I remember hearing the news of Lennon's death.

Moving on we catch the third bus of the day and again we are bombarded with information, this trip takes us to Brooklyn but not over the Brooklyn bridge as commercial traffic is not allowed over the bridge, on the return trip to Times Square the traffic is particularly bad as a number of roads are closed as Mrs Barak is in town.

Attending some fund raising do, we actually drive past the venue and see a couple of people walking up the red carpet stopping to have their photograph taken in their fancy frocks and suits. Not too sure who they were but it wasn't posh and becks although they are there.

We return to Times Square with a list of places that require further investigation, after a walk around we get a couple of slices of cheesecake and a bottle of vin rouge and head back to our room. Cheesecake wine and TV that's us done for the day but with a plan in our heads for the next couple of days, tomorrow's tickets for Liberty are sold out so we get them for the day after with a 1pm arrival time, that done it's time to get some sleep, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 161

We go for breakfast and then hop on the hop on bus to ground zero the journey takes a while due to the traffic and it would have been quicker on the subway but hey we

have paid for the bus tickets and every mickle makes a muckle. We arrive at the site get our tickets then we stand in line and go through the airport type security. There is still a lot of building work going on but the memorials are finished, it is a very moving experience walking around them reading the names of nearly three thousand people who lost their lives on that terrible day 13 years ago. The memories of watching the events on TV come flooding back and I would say that it must be impossible to come here without shedding a tear, it is a very moving experience. This feeling is intensified when you watch someone place a single white rose in the name of a loved one that they lost on the frightful day.

Next we visit the two churches closet to the fallen towers that people went to, to pray during that fateful time, they seem to have a special stillness about them and it is amazing that they are still standing considering there age and the short distance they are from where the towers once stood. We walk up Broadway from ground Zero and continue on, now the sensible thing to do would be to catch the tube but we decide to walk, take in the sights and have a look at the shops, now this seemed like a good idea when we started however it's bloody miles. Next stop the Empire State Building, Barb does not fancy going up to the top so we arrange to rendezvous back at the hotel, that will give her some shopping without me time and give me time to explore the building and the views.

The building is as beautiful inside as it is magnificent outside, I take my place in yet another line to get my ticket, next the ubiquitous photograph with the green background, now I have to go back to my previous comments about the stupidity of the human race. I take my place in front of the screen and the next minute there is a guy who I have never met standing next to me while the photograph is taken. The guy taking the photograph thinks we are together and I am not bothered as I did not want a photo of me in front of, on top of the building, what an idiot I hope that he did not want a photograph, then it's sky bound in an elevator that makes your ears pop. I can not get the fact into my head that this building was completed in just 410 days although another tour guide said it was 431 days whichever it is, it is still incredible that in 1930 without all of today's equipment that the workforce completed this mammoth task in such a short period of time it must have been one manic building site. The view from the observation platform is also stunning you can see for miles and it's also a long way down when you look over the top, not surprised Barb did not fancy it. I spend a good while up there looking out over New York looking splendid in the brilliant sunshine, and then it's back into the spaceship elevator back to the ground floor.

Now it's back to walking the twenty minutes back to the hotel when I get to the room Barb is already there and is not planning on moving, not to sure how far we have walked today but it was a good distance, do weary and footsore we are done for the day. After a glass of wine and some TV it's time for bed to get ready for the Statue of Liberty tomorrow, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 162

We go to a different eatery for breakfast this morning and then it is onto the bus down to the ferry terminal at the bottom of the island, at the ticket office we do not need to stand in line as we have pre booked our tickets online and just need to collect them. Then we go through the airport type security scanning system again, then we line up to get on the ferry. When everyone about 600 people are eventually on board we set off on the short trip over to the island. Once on the island we have a quick look around and then it is time to go inside well that is after we line up again and go through yet another security scanner. We can only go to the first observation deck as the Crown is closed, you do get a great view of NY then it's back inside to have a look at the history of the Statue. While reading about Liberty Barb finds a section where the French are congratulating the Americans on gaining their independence, I interpret that into the French saying well done for giving the British a kicking, something the French have never managed to do.

After a look around it's time to line up once more to catch the ferry back, then we catch the tube uptown none of that silly walking lark today, we catch one train to 59th street and then catch a second to the Dakota Building. This is another moving experience as I stand in the spot where Lennon was killed on his way back from a recording session. Again the memories flood back and I remember hearing of his tragic death, only one life lost at this place but one that touched so many and continues to do so and a life that changed the music industry forever. We cross the road to Strawberry fields and the Lennon memorial park this is another emotional experience with people laying flowers with tears in their eyes on the Imagine memorial, while a guy plays Yesterday on his guitar. Some of these kids would not have been alive at the time of his death, that is the difference he made to music and continues to do so.

Next we board another train and head back towards Times Square, we take a little diversion to the jewellery quarter so that Barb can look at all the sparkly things that she can not have. There are dozens of jewellery shops each with a person outside trying to drag you in if you stop for more than a couple of seconds, and other members of staff waving to you from inside. We finally escape and head to the reduced price ticket office at Times Square to see what is available. They have tickets for Les Mis so that's got to be the one, with two tickets purchased we head back to the hotel to get washed and changed. Now this is the first time in about 5 months that I have worn grown up shoes, pants and a shirt well that is if they fit me, hey and the do, just, next stop the bar for a quicky before the show.

We go into the theatre which is smaller than I imagined and take our seats and chat to the couple sitting next to us who are from Brazil and have not seen the performance before, I ask if they have any tissues with them as there will be tears. At the beginning of the performance we are slightly concerned at the standard of the show

but as it progresses we need not have worried as it was great and yes there were tears, and a standing ovation. After the show we return to the hotel with slightly red eyes, and then retire for the evening to ready ourselves for our trip home. Can you believe it our journey is nearly over and we will be in our beloved city of Liverpool within 24 hours, the months have flown by but will remain in our memories for ever. For now it is time for bed to cram in as much sleep as possible, so goodnight one and all sleep well, more tomorrow.

Day 163

Well it's home time today I finish my packing and Barb pops out to get a couple of things from the shops and returns with sandwiches and coffee, we check out of our room and then just have an hour to kill before the shuttle bus arrives. The hour passes quickly and our journey home commences, it turns out that the shuttle bus driver is either related to the other shuttle drivers we have travelled with or the all trained at the same driver training school for fairground dodgem drivers. The journey to the airport takes about an hour and a half and we arrive at JFK with slightly sick and with mild whiplash.

It never ceases to amaze us that each airport we travel through has different security measures and here we are subjected to a full body scan followed by a close body frisking and then our cabin bags have to go through a bio scan. Once through security we find an Irish bar, yes I know that is a surprise to you all, but not as much as a surprise as I got when they charged me \$10.33 for a pint of the local brew. We take turns in having a look around and we are both surprised by the size of this part of the airport, as we expected it to be much bigger than it is.

Then it is time to leave New York on the first of two flights home, regrets I have a few but then again too few to mention, we sit on the runway for about 45 minutes before we take off, but the guy in the front seat tells that he will put his foot down and make up the time during the flight. The flight is not full and Barb finds an empty row of four seats and settles in for a sleep during the flight, leaving me with our original two seats which is fine. The flight takes about 7 hours and we arrive at Heathrow without a great deal to report and very soon we are off the plane and on our way from one terminal to another to catch the next flight to Manchester.

The Manchester flight is just a short hop and only takes about 45 minutes, so it's not long before we are waiting to collect our bags in baggage claim, then we are outside and guess what, correct it's raining. It's not long before Richard collects us and we are on the last part of our journey home to the wonderful city of Liverpool. After many weeks of travel we arrive at Dunbabin Road and after covering over 33,000 Air miles, over 18,000 Road miles and I shudder to think how many miles on foot, we open the

front door of number 68, the place we left on the 27/11/2013, before Christmas, before Barb's birthday, before Jennie's birthday and over five months ago.

We walk through the door with mixed emotions, we loved our time away but we love our home and the realities that face us are closer now than they have been while we were away but whatever happens we will be together and we will find happiness in what we have. Our trip has been an amazing adventure, during which we visited some fantastic places and had the honour of meeting some beautiful people. We would like to say a very big thank you to all the people we met, that touched our travels and our lives, they need to know that they made a difference to our trip, we learnt a lot from them, and made wonderful friendships in such a short period of time.

So not to name names and in no particular order our thanks go to Warwick, Bruce and Sue who we met in, well a campsite in the middle of nowhere at the beginning of our journey when we had very little camping equipment. Bruce had fantastic stories to tell of their travels around Australia and we now have a new recipe, a cheese and onion toastie cooked in a pan, that is called called a Bruce. Cathy and Brian in Brisbane, thank you for inviting a couple you have never met to spend Christmas Eve with you at your home it was a wonderful heartwarming experience. To Irene (Cathy's sister) and Peter for the wonderful time spent at McLaren vale and at their apartment, including breaking into to it, due to the lack of keys, we thank you for that time and your company. To Marion thank you for a wonderful lunch and your warm hospitality, to Kym, Gary and the boys it was great to see Kym after so many years and we all spent a wonderful afternoon together. If any of you ever visit the UK we would love to meet up and if you need somewhere to stay our door will always be open (provided we have somewhere) it will be our pleasure to have you and to show you our fantastic city, this invite is extended to all the wonderful people we met during our travels.

Well dear readers our odyssey has come to an end, and we know not what will happen in the future, we have had a fantastic time, visited wonderful places that will live in our memories forever, and to the surprise of some we did not try to kill each other in fact if possible Barb and I have grown closer to each other. If you have read, followed and enjoyed our adventure thank you, if you haven't, well tuff and please let me know and I will not bother sending you any future instalments. For the time being the blog has just tripped over 91,866 words (there is a novel there I am sure) and the journey is over, so for the last time in this adventure, goodnight one and all sleep well, no more blog tomorrow, but who knows what comes next.

