Jarrahdene Campground



It’s New Years Day and we were just thinking about the year that was. One trip in early December certainly stands out!

We had to be in Australind to get some 12 volt work done to the rig, so we thought we’d make a trip of it and go a week earlier.

Best made plans …?

We arrived at the campsite. Absolutely beautiful..very quiet, faced onto the bush, with only one other couple in sight. Unpacked the van, set up outside and enjoyed the serenity.

We hadn't been to Augusta for about 40 years (not since Michael hired a Cessna 172 from the Mobil servo there – long story), so we took a trip and we were pleasantly surprised. Got fuel at the BP service station (it was a Mobil once); and that's what we got – service.

A gentleman came out to pump fuel for us, and a lady came to wash, no scrub, the windscreen. If you have been down the Forrest Highway, in summer, you'll know the amount of bugs you end up with, all over the car!

Had an average lunch by the river. New owners it seems had just taken over, and presumably either they, or the current members of staff, hadn't been to the same school of serving or service as the team up the road at the BP servo had.

Regardless, we had a good day, but on the way back, noticed a huge plume of smoke (we've seen far too much of that during our time in the Adelaide Hills and the Lane Cove National Park in Sydney – that's heralding a bushfire.

We needed some tools for a niggling few issues in the van so we drive on to Margaret River and a hardware store.

We thought we'd head back and when in camp, keep on eye on it, as it seemed to be roaring.
Back on Caves Road, the closer we got, the more severe that now approaching fire seemed, so it's time not to spare any horses.

Nup, not going to happen!

A few klicks out of town the police and traffic control would not let us back into the park, so we were stuck. No matter which road we took, we couldn't get back to retrieve the van.

So we waited for a while, but the fire was well and truly burning, as there was plenty of fuel on the ground. It obviously hadn't seen a back burn for some years. There's just way too much fuel on the ground.

We were advised to go to the evacuation centre in Margaret River, and register all our details. They offered us a place to stay, and a hot shower, but we only had the clothes we stood up in. And all the nerve-soothing wine was back at camp!

After a discussion over a cup of coffee, we'd decided to head back to Perth, clean up and sleep the night, pack some clothes in an overnight bag and head back in the morning.

Needless to say, we did not have much sleep that night. When we got back to Margaret River, it was not certain that we could get to the van, and may have to stay in a motel the next night.

It's marvellous what you think of in these circumstances. On our 3 hour drive back we decided to list everything that was in the van – the full contents. Food, all clothing items, computers, phones, TV, washing machine, shoes, chairs, tables, coffee machine, etc… you get my drift.

When we got down there, Michael decided to go to the Parks and Wildlife office to see if we could find anything out. It made me a bit nervous to see water bombers flying over while Michael went in, but we knew how valuable they were, as we had been though 2 Ash Wednesday bushfires in South Australia and 2 other catastrophic fires – one in suburban Sydney when our street went up.

The guys at DPAW also commented that there would be no local dams left with any water left in them after this!

On his way in, a man came out and asked,"Are you Michael?" When he confirmed it, he said that he was just about to text him to find out where we where. Told us they saw the van a few hours before as they evacuated every campground in the Leeuwin-Naturalist National Park before and it was still ok.

If we hurry, and follow him, he can take us in, away from the fire front the back way to check the van, and if ok, get it and then, get out!

You didn’t have to ask us twice.

Off we raced, following behind, through a cloud of dust. Got to the camping area, there she was, in all her glory, just as we had left her. We were to pack and get out ASAP. It took us 10 minutes to unlock the table and chairs, literally throw them in the car, hitch up, check the lights, and check the load in the van. Our fastest campsite takedown in fifty years!

Peter, the man from DPAW, went off to another couple to pack their camper van, they had been evacuated hours ago, seemingly oblivious to the dire situation they were in, they were taking their sweet time. Peter came back to check on us, and we told him we were ready.

He told us the fastest way out and to hurry. We made it out as the fire was still threatening the park. Poor Peter, he was really worn to a frazzle those couple of days.

We then had another day to find accommodation until we were booked into Potters Gorge, so decided as we travelled along to go to Yallingup.

Noooooo!

Looking up there we saw more smoke! This time in the Yallingup area. Then we came to police roadblocks, and you guessed it, we weren’t going there!

I think we were up to plan G by then, so we decided to go to Bunbury for the night, and then onto Potters Gorge.

Thankfully, the rest of the trip was uneventful (although we did lose our telescopic 3/4G antenna), and we had a restful couple of days, then on to Australind for a few hours for that 12v work to complete the journey.

We had never had a reason to register ourselves and give details in a disaster area before, but it was invaluable to see the process and a town come together.

Has this trip put us off camping? A resounding never!