

Saturday 22nd July

South of Karratha

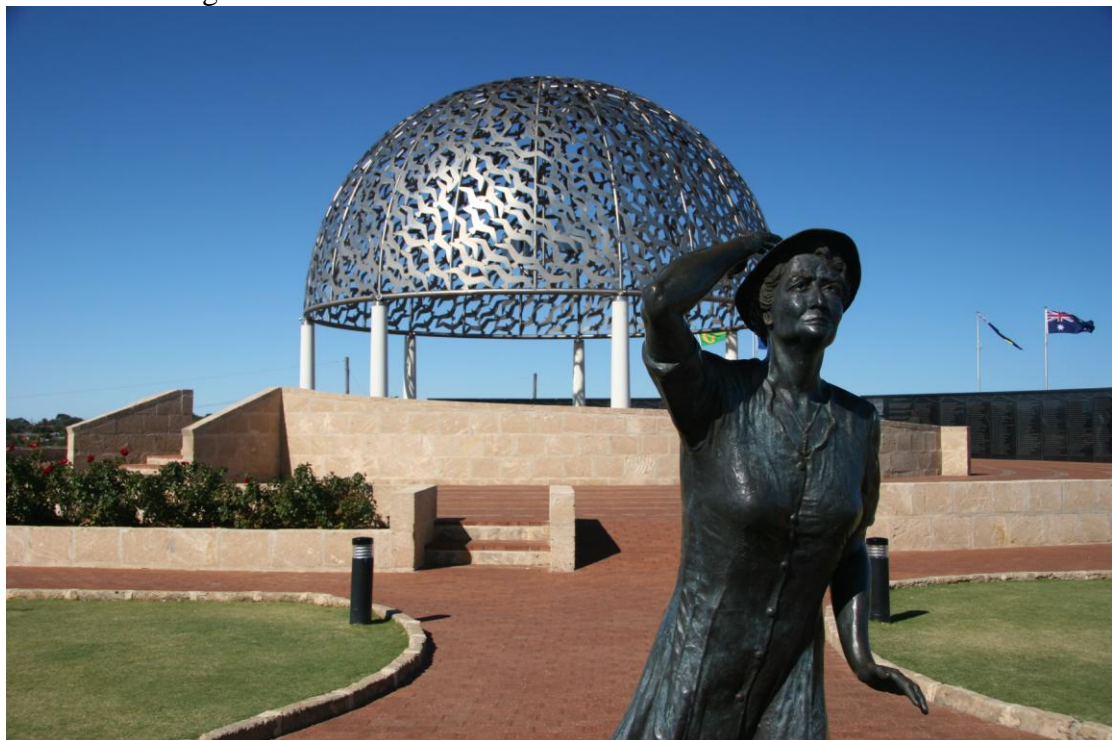
As will become obvious during this tale of my latest adventures, I have been extremely slack about keeping up to date with the journal. At this point in time I have been back from the US for over a week and I still need to finish that part of my story. I have also had an amazing time travelling up the coast of WA and I will lose a lot of those adventures if I don't get cracking with getting it recorded. Just a short diversion from the story. WA isn't an abbreviation of Western Australia; it means Windy Australia. I cannot recall a totally still day since I have been back and if the wind blows from the desert it is cold and carries loads of red dust. Anyway enough of the frivolity and on with the story. I landed in Perth on the 9th July and it was cold so I made my mind up that I was going north. I checked out a couple of things in Perth that morning then purchased supplies and hit the road. I made it to a place called Arrowsmith River before jet lag kicked in big-time so it was time to sleep. I spent 2 days at a caravan park on a farm and it was just what I needed. I have just realised that I didn't take any photos of the place even though it was very pleasant. The next stop was Geraldton and it is one of those towns that I felt good about as soon as I drove in. I found a caravan park right on the beach and started a list of things that needed doing. The second evening there was something special. There was the most spectacular sunset and having taken about 50 photos it is now difficult to choose the best to include here.



I did the tourist thing around Geraldton and had a look at the harbour and checked out the fishing fleet. What do you reckon Rodney, could we do some damage to the offshore fish with one of these?



The town also has a memorial to the HMAS Sydney, which was a light cruiser. This ship was lost with all on board off the coast of WA after engaging a German raider during WW2 and no trace of it has ever been found. The dome has 645 Silver Gulls, one for each man lost. And the statue of the woman signifies those left behind and still not knowing.

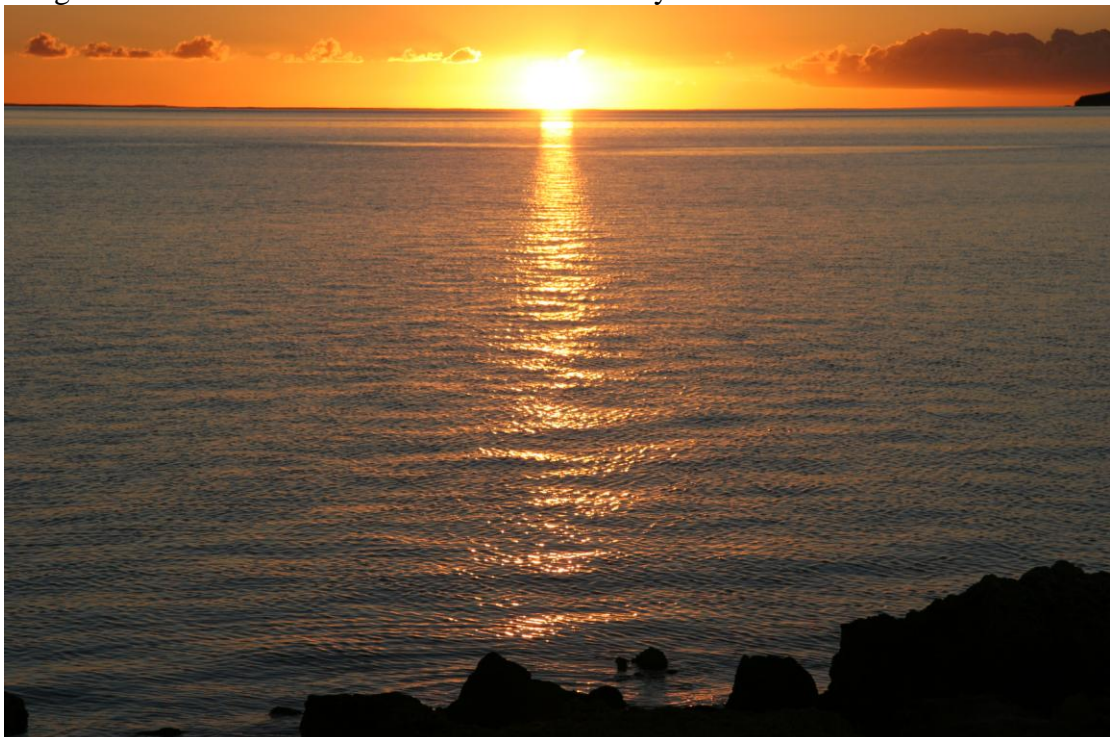


I spent 4 days in Geraldton and managed to get the tyres rotated on the truck and lots of other jobs done that make life a little easier on the road. I also fixed up my jobsearch registration and got it up to date. This is still the only freebie I get from the government so I make it work overtime. I discovered that the place to be is Karratha

to look for some short-term work so here I am. It has taken me almost all week to get here because it is 1200km (700 miles) and I came the long way. After leaving Geraldton I travelled via Gregory and Kalbarri on the coast because the highway takes the shortest route, which is inland. I reached the Overlander roadhouse mid afternoon and decided to go and have a look at Shark Bay. I had to drive 100km (60 miles) off the highway to get in there but it was worth it. The free camps in there are special and while they have no facilities the absolute waterfrontages are priceless. You can go to sleep at night lulled by the little waves on the beach.



I am so thankful that I have 4wd so I can get to the really good spots just by driving along the beach and this is the sunset taken from my chair next to the truck.



The next port of call was Carnarvon and really I don't know why I bothered, it is another one of those towns that didn't feel right or comfortable. I did stay 2 nights because the caravan park was cheap and there was a bonus when I went grocery shopping.



I learnt a few things about the local wildlife and while these are only Pythons, this fellow also handled a number of the more deadly species that abound in this area. He and I had quite a discussion and he gave me a CD to help me identify whatever I may come across. He also assured me that I would come across quite a number of both types, harmful and harmless because of the way I travel and camp. He was proved right yesterday when I spotted two of the harmful types along the side of the road as I was travelling.

I moved on from Carnarvon and decided to take someone's advice and go and have a look at Ningaloo Reef. In future I will be a little more circumspect when it comes to other peoples advice about going places and I will ask a few pertinent questions. Questions like what are the road conditions and are there any facilities at the camp areas etc. The thing about really bad roads is you reach a point of no return and all you can do is hope it doesn't get worse. I camped on Ningaloo Station and right on the beach again all for the princely sum of \$2.50 a night. I suppose they figure that if you survived the drive in it wouldn't be fair to charge more. This is a working cattle and sheep station but I am sure there are more kangaroos and goats than cows and sheep.



It is a popular holiday spot and school holidays are just finishing here this weekend so there were still a lot of people around. The fishing was evidently pretty good behind the reef but in the morning there was at least a 3-metre (10ft) swell breaking on the reef. I used the big lens for this photo and the breakers are about 1500 m or about a mile offshore.



My next decision was should I continue on through Ningaloo station and the national park to get to Exmouth or go back the way I came. I was told there was a creek crossing in the national park but it was easy so on I went. When I reached the creek crossing I discovered that my timing was good and it was about the bottom of the tide but that didn't alter the fact that the middle of the creek was still about 60cm deep

(2ft) and I had 50 metres of soft sand to get through first and then a climb up soft sand on the other side.



I studied the crossing for about 30 minutes and had 3 smokes in that time and thought about all of the bad things that could happen. The deciding factor ended up being that if I chickened out then I would have to contend with about 70km (40 miles) of one of the worst roads in Australia to go back the way I came. I don't know what I was worried about because it ended up as a cakewalk. The truck handled it brilliantly, almost as if it didn't exist, but I must say, being very honest, that I have very little memory of how it all worked. I was so totally focused on getting through to the other side I wasn't able to enjoy the experience.



I reached Exmouth about lunchtime and it was another case of not being impressed by a town. Are you all catching a trend here? I am beginning to dislike towns and cities unless they have special qualities that appeal to me and my tastes. One of the things that turned me off Exmouth was \$1.67/ltr fuel and I was forced to fill up here and it cost about \$300. I had to fill up here because the next fuel stop further up the highway was at \$1.80/ltr. Now I would like to point out to my American readers that this is about the equivalent of \$5.50/gal for you. Please consider yourselves fortunate to only be paying \$2.70/gal.

This part of the trip was interesting to me for a couple of more reasons and I have photos to show you. The first new sight was a termite mound and these things are everywhere. I think it is because there are no trees of any significance that they build these mounds out of the soil where they live.



And there are lots of them.



The second thing that was new to me was the road train. These vehicles are allowed to be up to 53 metres long (170ft) so you have to be very sure of yourself if you want to overtake one on the highway. I personally would not even entertain the idea because they will travel at 100 kph (60mph) with no problems.



This fellow was checking his tyre pressures before he loaded up with cattle to take them 1000km (600 miles) inland to better pasture. I forgot to ask him but my guess is he would load between 100 and 200 cows on this rig. My stop for the night was a roadside camping area at a place called Barradale on the Yannarie River



It was amazing to see the flocks of birds that came into these water holes in the evening and early morning. Some of these flocks of small birds would number in the hundreds and they would perform an aerial ballet. Travelling in this part of Australia can become tedious because of kilometre after kilometre of nothing so I tend to get excited about anything out of the ordinary here.

I reached Karratha on Saturday afternoon and after checking out the caravan park I decided to drive back out of town 30 km and camp in the bush for a couple of days. I thought \$28 a night for an un-powered site was just a little bit over the top.

This was a brilliant little place that has a river with running water and surrounded by wildflowers.





I am going to bring this section to a close now or it will be too large to email. I also need to put more energy into finding a job for a couple of months so I can rebuild my cash reserves.

