

## Australia 2000: The Western Experience

1<sup>st</sup> day:

The shuttle bus of our caretaker picked us up at 4 p.m. and took us to the railway station, where we got into the train to Frankfurt/Main. At the Frankfurt Airport we checked in at the Qantas Counter and had to realize that no seats in window or gangway rows were available anymore. Furthermore it was not possible to check our baggage through to Perth, we had to pick it up in Melbourne and check it in to Perth again at the Domestic Counter. We started at 11:55 p.m., with flight QF6 via Bangkok to Melbourne. The service was excellent and even the seats in the middle rows were tolerably. Even if there was not such a good entertainment program like with Singapore Airlines two years ago, the flight was pleasant and non-boring.

2<sup>nd</sup> day:

We arrived in Melbourne just in time at 4:55 a.m. and it was rainy and quite cold there. After a while our baggage was rolled off the plane and we could pass the duane. Now we finally stood on Australian ground again. We went to the Domestic Counter first, checked in our baggage and strolled around the airport. After this we moved up to the observation deck and watched the planes at the runways. Then we had a look into the shops opening by and by and had a cup of coffee. At 9 a.m. we continued our flight to Perth, took a Yellow Cab there to the Britz Office, where we got our Bushcamper. There were no problems and we even got a sunblind due to the all inclusive package we booked. Now we moved to the city to check in at the Ibis Hotel. We quickly found the hotel but the parking space was very rare there. So we drove another loop to get to the parking garage behind the hotel but we had bad luck: The maximum height was 2,00 meters, but the height of our vehicle was 2,70 meters. So we drove again through the one way roads around the hotel to park the car anywhere behind the hotel, but there were constructions and a mobile crane blocked the passage. The workers were very cooperatively and so we maneuvered our camper into the loading zone behind the hotel and went to the reception then. They were wondering because they did not have any reservation in the computer but when we showed our voucher to them it was no problem to get a free room. But they could not give us a room with a balcony or seaview because the Ibis Hotel has no rooms with a balcony and due to its central location you can not see the water from any room...

Then we asked where to park our car; they had a few roofed park spaces beside the loading zone and our Bushie exactly fitted into one of them. We entered our room next, had a shower and went into the city for a little sightseeing trip. The hotel is located next to the pedestrian zone, from where we walked to London Court and the Jetty later. There we met a sightseeing tour tram and decided for a cruise which was really worth it. The guide recommended 'Northbridge' to us for having dinner there and so we went there in the evening. There are lots of pubs and restaurants in this district and we choosed 'The Fishy Affair' where they served excellent seafood. On our way back to the hotel we saw a pretty nice bakery where we wanted to have breakfast next morning.

3<sup>rd</sup> day:

After we got up we went into the city and bought two cups of coffee and some croissants and muffins in the bakery. We watched out for a bench in the sun to have breakfast because it was quite cold in the shade. Then we went back to the hotel, got our Bushcamper out of the parking space and drove to Fremantle. There we strolled around until 1 a.m. and bought two big seafood baskets for lunch. After this we kept on looking around, buying postcards and souvenirs till we got tired of this. So we watched out for a cafe where we sat down and had a giant cup of ice cream. Meanwhile dusk came and we moved back to Perth. On the way we found Coles market and made an extensive purchase, due to living in our Bushcamper from next week, away from the big cities. After this we drove to Kings Park. At the tram cruise yesterday we stopped there for a few minutes and we really enjoyed the view to the Perth Skyline. Today we wanted to have a look to the "City of lights" in the dark. It was phantastic. Then we drove to Scarborough, visited the esplanade there but did not stay longer because it was already dark. We went to Sizzler for dinner, this steak house chain we already knew from our first Australia holidays. We decided to have a loaded potato with the all you can eat buffet and feasted until they started putting the chairs up and cleaning the room. Full and satisfied we moved back to our hotel. Unfortunately the only space that was big enough for our Bushcamper was already occupied. So we parked in the loading zone and stuck a note with our room number in the window.

4<sup>th</sup> day:

At 6.30 a.m. the phone rang; our car blocked the construction works. O.K. we had expected this anyway, so Andreas dressed quickly, moved the Bushcamper a few meters and went to bed again. We woke up at 9:30 a.m. ... ooops - we overslept. So we had only a little breakfast in our room, packed up our baggage and checked out then. Before leaving Perth we wanted to visit the CALM-Office to buy a 4-weeks-all-park-pass for Western Australia. Unfortunately this office was located in the opposite direction we wanted to move today. However, we even did it because we wanted to visit a big number of parks so that this pass would be very profitably. Then we left Perth to the north and went to the Swan Valley. This wine growing area is not as big as for example the Barossa Valley and not all wineries are open every day. Nevertheless we tasted a number of delicious wines in three wineries and bought a bottle of red wine too. We moved back to the highway driving a little detour and were lucky to see a couple of kangaroos beside the road. Meanwhile it was noon and we still had to go a long way to the Nambung N.P. So we stopped only for a short time at a roadhouse, where we had steakburger with the lot for lunch, and moved on then. Originally we wanted to drive the gravelroad via Lancelin to Cervantes, but there was not enough time left for this and so we kept on following the highway. After all we managed it to reach the Pinnacles before sunset giving us the chance to watch them in the golden light of the last sunrays. We even saw an emu strutting among this peculiar shapes and on our route to Cervantes a couple of kangaroos were to be seen. When we arrived at the Pinnacles Caravan Park we first asked for a powered site (A\$ 15,50), bought a mosquito candle and talked with the young lady at the reception for a while. Later we prepared our Bushcamper for sleeping the first time in it.

5<sup>th</sup> day:

We got up at 7 a.m. and had breakfast in our camper due to the chilliness outside. Then we went to the reception and changed some travellers cheques into cash. The young lady asked, where we want to go today and told us that there is a new sealed road between Cervantes and Jurien following the coastline. Later this road meets the Brand Highway so that we did not have to drive back the road from Cervantes to the highway (a detour of about 40 kilometers at all).

But first we drove to the seaside to visit the Stromatolithen before we set out for Geraldton. It was quite windy and so it was not easy to keep on track with our hitop camper. On the way we made a short stop in Port Denison and about at lunchhour we arrived in Geraldton. We read about the best lobsters of the whole westcoast caught here and so we watched out for a seafood restaurant. But the town seemed to go down anyway any restaurants were closed at all and we could not find any seafood except the ordinary fish & chips, only fast food in any variation. The marvellous old cathedral was the only thing worth seeing in Geraldton. So we just visited a shopping mall to accumulate our inventories and moved on then. We only made a short stop for having a coffee and kept on driving the Brand Highway to the Kalbarri turnoff. When we reached the entrance of the Kalbarri N.P. there was not lunch time left until the sunset and so we visited only the Hawks Head Lookout and did a short walk down to the Murchinson River. Then we went to Kalbarri and spent the night at the Red Bluff Caravan Park (A\$ 12). We cooked a pot of tortellini because we have not eaten any warm meal today. While sitting beside our Bushcamper having dinner we saw vehemently lightning in the distance which came closer later in the night and it started raining.

6<sup>th</sup> day:

Today we took on a couple of things, so we got up at 7 a.m. and had breakfast outside the camper this time. After leaving the campground we went to the Coastal Gorges and walked down to Mushroom Gorge and Beach Rock. The Island Rock view was very impressive too, from the lookout above we could see dolphins down in the water. Then we went back to Kalbarri with a short stop at Red Bluff on our way. At lunchtime we visited Rainbow Jungle, a large, marvellous birdpark where we could watch many multicolored parrots. About 1:30 p.m. we left this park. We had a yoghurt and a banana as a short snack, refueled our car and drove to Z-Bend and The Loop. It was already at 4:30 p.m. when we left the Kalbarri N.P. and we still wanted to reach the Shark Bay today. We liked this park so much that we absolutely did not think about the time. We arrived at the Overlander Roadhouse at 7 p.m., where we stopped for dinner. It was already dark since two hours and we had to drive very carefully due to the lots of kangaroos and cattle beside the road. At 9 p.m. we finally reached Monkey Mia. There was nobody at the reception anymore and so we asked for service at the restaurant. After a few minutes somebody came to the reception and were lucky to get the last powered site (A\$ 18). The cash box was already closed and so we were told to pay text morning at 8 a.m., the time when the dolphins come to the shore too. We still took a shower and spent some time sitting behind our camper having a bottle of wine before we went to sleep.

7<sup>th</sup> day:

Exactly at 8 a.m. we were at the reception desk to pay for our site. Then we went to the beach, where a couple of prying tourists and a number of rangers already stood in the shallow water. At about 8:15 a few dolphins came, firstly swimming formations in the distance but coming closer by and by. The rangers told a lot of interesting facts and in the end the dolphins were fed with some fish. At 9 a.m. we started again, stopped at Shell Beach for a short visit and were back at the Overlander Roadhouse at about 11:30. Now we moved on following the Northwest Coastal Highway to the north. A few minutes past 1 p.m. we arrived in Carnavon, where we watched out for a pretty nice restaurant for having lunch and finally found the Old Post Office Café. After lunch we went to a Bank for changing some travellers cheques into cash and then we bought some wine and beer in a bottle shop. Following we wanted to refuel our car but the Shell station was closed, the Ampol was rebuilt at the moment...finally we got fuel at the BP, the last station in town. The attendant there told us that they had heavy damage due to the floods last month and showed us marks of the water below the window ledge. This was also the reason that the other fuel stations were still closed.

We left Carnavon and went to the Blowholes north of the town. We have not been so lucky to see a blowhole in action so far, two years ago in Kiama and at the Great Ocean Road there was not the right weather for this. Even today there was almost no wind, so we did not expect anything spectacular. But here at this rocky beach the giant waves of the Indian Ocean rolled on even without strong winds and broke at the rugged cliffs then. Mighty columns of spray and water raised from the blowhole followed by an angry rumble. It was an overwhelming view indeed. We followed the coastline on a gravelroad then, because we read about the wreck of the freighter 'Korean Star' lying here. Firstly we had to pass road constructions, then the road became worse more and more leading away from the coast. There were no roadsigns anymore and the time hurried by. After about 100 kilometers we gave up our quest and turned back. When we reached the sealed highway there was a sign showing the direction to the wreck right where we came from. Obviously we must have missed a turnoff or it was hidden anyway due to the roadworks there... Now we moved on to Coral Bay on the highway. The last hour we had to drive through the dark again, because we spent a lot of time in the quest for the wreck. We stood at the first campground in Coral Bay (A\$ 20) just at the entry, left of the Reef Café. We strolled around a few minutes and watched out where to book a snorkeling cruise next morning. Then we had ham & eggs for dinner.

8<sup>th</sup> day:

The day before we had crossed the tropic of capricorn and so we thought to be in the warm tropics now. But the night was quite chilly. We got up at 6:30 and had breakfast in our camper. At 8:00 we went to the office, payed for our camp site and asked what cruises would be available. We were in doubt if there would be whalesharks out there in the early June but they offered whaleshark-watching-cruises indeed. Even humpback whales, they told us, were to be seen. But the cruise was A\$ 280 per person, ok they use a plane for piloting the ship right to the whales and this must be a unique experience... But more than DM 700 for this trip was more than our limit for this day and we wanted to go snorkeling anyhow today too. So we asked for other choices and they offered a swim-with-the-Manta-Rays-and-snorkeling-cruise for A\$ 95 per person to us. We liked this offer better, got our swimsuits and cameras and went to the beach then. There we got a wetsuit each and Anthony, our guide, waded to the ship with us, where Stewart, our skipper, already waited. The cruise was very good, there only were two more pairs with us, one of them coming from Cologne as we got to know later. First we went to a bay where a couple of Manta Rays were and we jumped into the water right behind them.

It was really impressive to swim so close behind or beside this big fish gliding smartly through the water. Then they took us to a shallow reef where we could go snorkeling, watching the colorful corals. It was phantastic, the beauty of the Ningaloo Reef is likely to be the Great Barrier Reef we visited two years ago. Later they showed a place to us where we had the chance to see turtles in the water and to go snorkeling again. After lunchtime we were back in Coral Bay where we talked for a while with the people from Cologne and had a shower then. After this we mounted the sunblind to our camper and laid back in the shade for a short time. In the afternoon we strolled through Coral Bay, shopped a little bit and had a Long Black and donuts in a bakery. Later we jumped into the pool for a while, wrote some postcards and read in our travel guides for planning the next days. We cooked pasta for dinner, added a can with mushrooms and garlic and opened the wine from the Swan Valley.

9<sup>th</sup> day:

This night was very chilly too. We got up at 7:00 and had our breakfast outside the camper this day. After we packed up our baggage we bought some donuts, threw the postcards into the letterbox and drove to the highway then. On our way we saw a couple of termite mounds and even bushfires later. We refueled our Bushcamper at the Nanutarra Roadhouse, had fish & chips for lunch there and left the highway then to get to the Karijini N.P. Gradually the first foothills of the Hamersley Ranges raised from the plain and the landscape became diversified. But even though the run protracted we reached the turnoff to Tom Price in the early afternoon. The highway to Tom Price was via Paraburdoo, but there was a shorter gravelroad leading directly to Tom Price. We drove on this gravelroad and decided to visit the Hamersley Gorge first, before looking for a campground. The gravelroad was in good conditions and we could go about 80 km/h, except some hard dips and a number of floodways carrying pretty much water. A few minutes before sunset we arrived at Hamersley Gorge and walked down the steps to the waterfall. It was a marvellous view: the porous stonelayers of the deep cut gorge in the last rays of red sunlight. On our way back we had to take care due to the long shadows of trees and bushes hiding many hard dips in the road. Anyhow it became dark very quickly, a couple of kangaroos crossed the road and all at once we found amidst a scared herd of cattle. We were quite eased when we left the gravelroad behind and moved on the highway to Tom Price, even if there were cattle at the roadside too. We passed the city of Tom Price to get to Mt. Nameless Camp Park (A\$ 18). Here it was quite cold, so we had dinner in our camper and went to bed soon.

10<sup>th</sup> day:

At 7 a.m. we got awake by the many birds at the campground. After breakfast we drove to Tom Price to refuel our camper and we even checked the airpressure of the tyres. Then we moved into the Karijini N.P. On the way we saw one of the giant trucks used in the local ore mines. Unfortunately it was not possible to visit these mines at weekend. So we moved on and left the highway at Mount Bruce to get to the Oxers Lookout. There we enjoyed the marvellous view to the crossing of Weano Gorge, Geoffrey Gorge, Hancock Gorge and Knox Gorge. We had a look on the walking tracks and their description in the map and decided to walk down into the Weano Gorge. In the beginning there were steps there until we reached the creek at the bottom. Then the way led further into the gorge and we had to wade through water as deep as our hips. The gorge became more and more narrow and at the end a waterfall fell into the Handrail Pool. There is a small rail and a rope with kinks beside the waterfall one can use to step down to the pool, giving the pool its name. It was really idyllic here. The track

crossed the pool, leading further into the gorge but becoming harder and more difficult so we decided to turn back due to the less time we had. When we were back on top we went to the Geoffrey Gorge Lookout and started the walking track into the gorge. These gorge was quite different to the Weano Gorge, it was a reckless climb to get down to the water. On the way we met a man coming up who told us, the climb would be not so hard but we would have to swim the last part to get to the waterfall. When we reached the bottom (and the climb was really tricky after all!) we watched out for an option to get to the waterfall without swimming. We waded through the water and climbed around the most tricky passages and finally got to the lower pool. We enjoyed the silence and the loneliness there for a while before we climbed up again. After this straining part we still drove to the Knox Gorge Lookout and walked to the Kalamina Falls. Then we moved on to get to the Dales Gorge, where we wanted to spend the night. On our way we saw a car with a flat tyre and picked up the driver. He told us that he is a teacher and that he spends some days with friends from Karratha here. He asked us to bring him to the Fortescue camping area to get a lift jack from his friends. So we drove to the campground which offers a lot of sites in different loops. We searched one after the next loop until we found his friends. Then we watched out for a beautiful site for our Bushcamper and finally found one in the Europe Loop, opposite a BBQ-Area, near the starting point of the walking track to the Circular Pool. Later we went over to the BBQ, where it was quite bustling. First a group of young people used the gas barbecue to prepare a delicious vegetable mulligan, later an Australian family grilled steaks there. We met a German teacher there, who told us that he and his wife had worked in Australia for 2 1/2 years and that they now travel the country for six months before returning to Germany. He also told us, that the ranger will give a slide show at 7 p.m. at the camp site entrance. We sat in our camper for a while, wrote some postcards and took our flashlights then to go to the slide show. It was really interesting what the ranger told about flora and fauna of the Karijini N.P. We especially liked the pictures of gorge sections, where no one can get to without an experienced guide. When it got later it became more and more chilly and so we were lucky anyway when the show was over and we could get into our warm sleeping bag. The night was cold and clear, but so we could enjoy a marvellous sky full of stars no one would see in a city.

11<sup>th</sup> day:

We got up at 7:00, had breakfast at the BBQ-Area and started the walk to the Circular Pool Lookout then. There we informed about the walking tracks through the Dales Gorge and decided to go the whole loop. First we climbed a steep descent down to the bottom of the gorge, where we turned to the left to get to the Circular Pool next. We took a refreshing dip in the ice-cold water before we went back. Then we walked through the Dales Gorge (with a number of water crossings) to the Fortescue Falls. There we met the German teachers from last evening and they described the way to the Fern Pool to us. We still walked to the Fern Pool, before we climbed up to the top again and walked the Callitis Track and the Gorge Rim Walk back to the Circular Pool Lookout and then back to the campground. When we arrived at our camper we lunched a little snack and left the Karijini N.P. then. On our way we made a short stop at the Munjina Gorge Lookout and later at the Auski Roadhouse. There two giant Roadtrains entered the highway just before we restarted, so that we had to overtake them, pretty hard thing due to the fact that these more than 50 meters long vehicles go more than 100 km/h too. But so we got some spectacular scenes for our private holiday video. Originally we wanted to drive to Port Hedland making a little detour via Marble Bar. But it was quite late already and we did not want to drive in the dark again due to the many kangaroos and cattle at the roadside... When we arrived in Port Hedland we went to South Hedland, the living part first to go shopping at Coles and Liqueurland. Following we moved to the Big4

Cooke Point Holiday Park, where we spent the night (A\$ 18). The Campground was really tidy and surely had the best cleaned showers and toilets we saw until now. But on the other side the sealed ways and single trees inbetween had a very sterile and unnaturally effect, we liked the last night in the bush better (even if there were no showers and no drinking water at all). We had fresh salad and bread for dinner behind our camper and watched the long trains leaving into the Pilbara Region. Then we took a hot shower (quite necessary after these days in the bush) and went to bed then.

12<sup>th</sup> day:

Today we had a giant hop to go. From Port Hedland to Broome, about 600 kilometers quite monotonously road without any change. We started after the breakfast at about 9 a.m., only made a short stop for taking some pictures in Port Hedland, but there was nothing spectacular besides the harbor, the railway and the roadtrains. It was a drably ride, only bushland to the left and to the right. So we were lucky to find the turnoff to the Eighty Mile Beach near Wallal Downs. But even here we only had a short stop visiting the fishermen at the beach and the funny birds in the covey where we parked our car. Then we continued our ride until we reached the Sandfire Roadhouse where we got burgers for lunch and moved on then. There were still about 150 kilometers when the vegetation got opulent and the bushland turned into little trees. But the cyclone `Rosita`, which rushed through here a few weeks ago, left a trace of destruction: broken trees, a lot of them burned due to the bushfires occuring again and again. A few kilometers later we saw a dark cloud on the horizon. We expected a thunderstorm to come, but when we got closer, fluffs of soot flew through the air and we realized, that there was a large bushfire on both sides of the road. After few minutes we could see the flames covering large areas, the sky became dark and even on the road we could only see few meters ahead. It was like in a volcano-movie and we were really eased when we had passed this fire because the smoke and the smell of soot pervaded into the car and we did not know when to get back into clean air. We arrived in Broome about 4:30 and went to the tourist office first. There they told us that the Gibb River Road was still not reopened due to roadworks between Kalumburu Turnoff and Homevalley Homestead. We were really disappointed because this killed all our plans for the next days. We went to the Cable Beach Caravan Park next, but we did not like it there because it was very large and the sites were as close together as in the proverbial fishcan. So we moved on and found the Tarangau Caravan Park a few hundred meters later. At the entrance we read sign: `The quiet alternative`. And it was quiet there indeed, not so many people and so we decided to spend at least the first night here (A\$ 20). It was quite interesting that hundreds of dragonflies whirred there; we had already read about the increased insect population due to the heavy rainfalls of the last months but here we really could see it... When the dusk came all the dragonflies disappeared at once. We had dinner beneath our camper and had a look into the maps and travelguides then to work out an alternative plan for the case that we really could not go via the Gibb River Road.

13<sup>th</sup> day:

Today we wanted to visit Broome. So we drove to Cable Beach after breakfast, but the beach did not look as marvellous as we read about it. The cyclone left its trace here too, a lot of sand was blown away and so the beach was not very inviting. Then we went to Guntheaume Point, where ancient dinosaur tracks should be visible at low tide. We arrived there only a few minutes after the low tide level, but we could not find any dinosaur tracks and we could not believe, that some the washed out holes there should be those tracks. So we went back to

Broome and visited the Japanese and the Chinese Cemetery there. After this we moved to Chinatown and walked up and down the Carnavon Street. Here was the real center of the city having a couple of shops and cafés. We found an indigenous-art-shop where we bought two beautiful aboriginal paintings and talked to the lady behind the desk for a while. Then we watched out for a nice café where we had pasta with prawns and calamares for lunch. At 2:30 we went back to Cable Beach because we wanted to join the 3 p.m. feeding tour in Malcolm Douglas Crocodile Park. The tour was quite interesting, even if the boss was not right there; he was actually working at home finishing his latest tv-series. After leaving the Crocodile Park we drove to the Old Jetty and to Carnavon Street again. We bought a carved boab nut in the indigenous-art-shop and drove back to the Tarangau Caravan Park then. On the way we stopped at a big shopping center to buy some food and kerosene for our oil lamp. Friends gave us a kind of survival pack at home and we had taken the oil lamp with us. Due to our candle was already gone we gave this lamp a trail this evening having bread and fresh melon for dinner.

14<sup>th</sup> day:

We got up at 6 a.m. and left Broome after breakfast. A few kilometers before arriving in Derby we visited the Old Prison Tree there. We reached Derby at 10:30 strolled around for a while and went into the Main Roads Office then to ask for the conditions of the Gibb River Road. It was still closed between Kalumburu Turnoff and Jacks Waterhole. But the lady in the office told us, that they are confident to reopen the road tomorrow or the day after. However, Bell Gorge and the Silent Grove Camping Area, where we wanted to spend the night today, would be still closed until late July. So we decided to camp at the Windjana Gorge tonight and to go to Mt. Barnett Roadhouse tomorrow, where we can ask for the road conditions again. But first we continued visiting Derby and at about 11 a.m. we asked for lunch at the Rock Café. The waitress there was very friendly and told us that the kitchen would not start before high noon. But she gave us some good hints what to see and to do until then. So we went to the jetty next. We arrived there at low tide and saw a sailboat lying almost on the dry. But we also could see the marks of the high tide; Derby has the highest tidal difference of Western Australia, more than ten meters. Then we saw some mud crab fishers on the jetty and on our way back we asked them if they already caught something. They answered: "A lot of mud, but only few crabs..." At 12:00 am we were back at the Rock Café and had the delicious Barramundi with baked potato for lunch. After this we drove to the Gibb River Road where we had to join a band of cars. There was nothing of the big solitude we read about...we only hoped, that this would not continue the whole road through the Kimberlys. After 130 kilometers we took the turnoff to Fitzroy Crossing, passed the Windjana Gorge and moved on until we arrived at Tunnel Creek. Here it was not so crowded, even if we met a tourist group later. The entrance to the tunnel was not just simple, but really worth it, even if we not walked through the whole tunnel. We still wanted to visit the Windjana Gorge, so we started again soon and went back. We reached the carpark in the light of the setting sun and walked into the Gorge. The steep rising rocks looked golden in the last rays of the sun and few meters later we were lucky to see three freshwater crocodiles. Two of them were lying on the shore and did not move when we came as close as two meters to take a photo; the third swam lazy in the water. We went back to our car, moved to the campground and cooked a can of beans for dinner. Later the ranger came to take the camping fee (A\$ 7 per person). When he saw us sitting with our oil lamp having a glass of wine he said: "Look there, isn't it romantic..." He asked if we were from Germany due to our Britz-Camper: "Whenever I see a Britz, the chance is high, that these are Germans". Next to us there was a big group of people coming

from Melbourne. After dinner they sat around a fire and asked us to join them. It was quite funny and we kept on talking until late...

15<sup>th</sup> day:

We got up at 6 again, moved back to the Gibb River Road after breakfast, and drove to the Lennard Gorge turnoff first. The 8 km track were very rough and was a probation for car and driver. After about 30 minutes of rattling and beaming we arrived at the gorge and we were the only people there. We climbed down to the water, had a short dip and moved back to the top again. Then we drove back to the Gibb River Road. Unfortunately the turnoff to Silent Grove and Bell Gorge was still closed, so we moved on until we reached the Adcock Gorge, where we walked in too. After walking a while Andreas jumped back abruptly. A snake crossed our way, being disturbed by us obviously. We did not know, what snake it was and if it would be poisonous to us, so we kept in distance to it. Later we identified it at a picture to be probably a very poisonous Curl Snake (red-brown back and a light green to yellow front). On the way back we saw a couple of multicolored parrots flying from tree to tree. We kept on driving the Gibb River Road to Galvans Gorge, where we of course walked in too. Here it was idyllic indeed: At the upper rim there was a big Boab standing, from where the water felt down in two cascades...really marvellous. From here we drove to Mount Barnett Roadhouse, where we refueled our second tank (A\$ 1,20 per liter, the most expensive fuel of our whole travel, but not uncommon here in the middle of nowhere). We wanted to spend the night here to walk to the Upper Manning Gorge next Morning. So we payed the camping fee (A\$ 7 per Person) and asked for the road conditions. And here we got the redemptive message that they had reopened the last part of the Gibb River Road today, with extreme caution, but right in time to fit our schedule. We watched out for a nice site, took a bath in the Lower Manning Gorge and had dinner then. Opposite of ours there was a Maui-Camper standing, german tourists too, coming from Dresden as we found out later. We joined them in the evening and talked a while. They told us, that not only the roadworks were the reason for closing the road for such a long time but the high waterlevel of the Durack River. The first people coming through from Kununurra today told about water as high as their hips. So we thought over our plans for the next days because water damage was the only thing our insurance did not cover.

16<sup>th</sup> day:

After getting up at 6 and having breakfast we started the walk to the Upper Manning Gorge. The first part we had to swim through the Lower Gorge, but we preferred to take the 30-minutes-walk around it due to we had the cameras with us. Then we had to walk more than one hour and we saw large areas that had turned from green forest to a black plain due to the many bushfires. But when we reached the waterfalls this compensated the straining walk we took a shower under the waterfall and swam around in the pool before we started walking back. On our way we met the german man from last evening, talked a while and swapped our e-mail-addresses. Then we drove back to the roadhouse, where we had a Meat Pie for lunch and asked for the road conditions and the Durack River again. We also met two swabian people there which just came from the other end of the Gibb River Road and had no problems to get through. On the contrary they were a little disappointed that the road was in that good conditions. So we were calmed now and thought to get no problems too. So we decided to visit one ore gorge on the way, the Barnett River Gorge. But after we followed the first sign to this gorge we could not find other signs anymore and the track divided a couple of times. Finally we found the river, but we could not see the gorge anywhere. But we had two

experiences that were not exactly nice. First: We walked along a path following the river and we decided to cross the water. But after the first step Andreas engulfed in the mud as deep as his knees. Second: On our way back to the Gibb River Road we missed the detour of the very softened road and got stuck with our camper. It was a week clay, a lot of water and nobody around, so we almost got in panic. Doreen already thought to hurry back to the road to get help... At least it was possible to move the car half a meter forwards and backwards and so we were confident to swing it until it gets free. But we did not succeed, our Bushcamper sank deeper into the mud and all four wheels turned free. So we gave up these efforts and watched out for some loose wood in the vicinity first. We put this wood and some firm clots of mud under the rear wheels and a big bough under the left front wheel. After some failed trials, where our camper got muddy from the wheels to the roof, we finally made it and got free again. All this lasted only 10 minutes, but for us it seemed to be like an hour. We drove back to the Gibb River Road and moved on there. On the way we saw bushfires again and again and later we passed a section where they still had road constructions. But after we were through there the road was in really good conditions and we could go 100 km/h and more. After a while we reached the Durack River which had a high water level indeed. We knew that a couple of others did manage it to get through so we did not worry about it and moved slowly into the water without proving its depth. It got deeper and deeper and finally reached the doors of our camper. Even if it smelt wet the engine kept on running, the wheels turned and so we reached the shore anyway. A few minutes past 5 p.m. we arrived at Durack River Station at Jack's Waterhole where we spent the night (A\$ 6 per person). We parked our Bushcamper nearby the water and enjoyed the setting sun before we had a hot shower. Then we cooked pasta for dinner and had some glasses of wine as usual.

17<sup>th</sup> day:

We got up at 6 a.m. and had breakfast outside our camper. We saw a couple of multicolored parrots and after a while a big swarm of white cockatoos came yelling loudly and sat down to the meadow nearby the water. At about 8 a.m. we started again and continued driving on the Gibb River Road. On the way we could enjoy some breathtaking views to the Kimberly Plateau, the valleys and the Pentecost River flowing down there. After a long descent we suddenly stood at the shore of this augustly river. Its width was about 150 meters and there were only two rows of stones marking the ford. We could not guess how deep the water would be and there still were some cars waiting at both shores. So we had our doubts first but we remembered, that the road was open to all vehicles, even without 4WD, so we shifted the lowest gear and started moving into the water slowly. In the beginning it was quite smooth, but the water got deeper then and the ground seemed to be loose gravel. One time we thought that one wheel had lost ground contact or the gravel had moved under the wheels. But we could keep the wheels turning at all and reached the shore luckily. After all the water had swapped over the rear lights (one of them did not work anymore after this) and the running board. After we stood on the dry again the other cars started moving into the water one by one. Obviously they had waited until somebody succeeded in crossing the water first to guess the water level. In our opinion it was wrong to open this part of the road to all vehicles, even if it was no problem at all for our Bushcamper. We moved on to Emma Gorge. This was located on private ground of the El Questro Station owning large areas here. It was very commercial right here, a lot of buses and guided tours came here and even for the walking track to the gorge five bucks had to be payed. According to this we met a couple of people there, even more than at the whole Gibb River Road until now. But fortunately there were not so many people in the gorge itself. A big waterfall gushed in a pool and even sideways a little water felt down into the pool or aside, just dependent on the wind. The water in the pool was

ice-cold and we really had to overcome to have a dip in it. When more people came to the pool we left the gorge again and kept on driving on the Gibb River Road until it ended at the Great Northern Highway. Here we met people which asked about the road conditions and told us to refuel the car in Wyndham due to much higher rates in Kununurra. So we moved to Wyndham first and enjoyed the view from the Five-Rivers-Lookout there. We saw the Durack, Pentecost, King, Forrest and Ord River to join before disemboguing into the ocean. Then we drove to Wyndham, refueled our car at the Esso-Station right at the entry and asked the attendant what to visit in town. She told us a couple of things, but we did not want to stay for a long time and so we only turned a loop through the town visiting the harbor, the old hotel and the Dreamtime Park, a monument dedicated to the aboriginal people with huge sculptures made from bronze. Then we started for the way to Kununurra, but turned off to 'The Grotto' on our way and walked down to the pool. After this we moved on to Kununurra without another stop. We found the Airport right when we arrived and booked a scenic flight over Lake Argyle, the Bungle Bungles and the Argyle Diamond Mine with Alligator Airways for 6 a.m. next morning. Then we went into the city and bought some food at Coles as like beer and wine in a bottleshop before driving to the Kona Lakeside Campground where we checked in for tonight (A\$ 18). After our dinner and a shower we still had a glass of wine, but went to bed soon because we had to get up very early next morning.

18<sup>th</sup> day:

Today we got up at 4:30 and had two muffins and a glass of chocolate milk for breakfast. At 5:30 the Alligator Airways Pickup Service took us to the airport. We made the scenic flight (135 minutes, A\$ 170 per person) in a Cessna 207 together with four other tourists. First we flew across Lake Argyle, then we moved to the Bungle Bungles, where our pilot turned two loops, so that everybody could enjoy the spectacular views to this 'bee hives'. On the way back we flew across the Lake Argyle Diamond Mine and some more times we could see bushfires in the Kimberlys. After this phantastic flight we got back to the campground and moved into the city then, where we had a second breakfast with a Long Black and donuts in a bakery. Then we went shopping for a while, bought some souvenirs and went to Kellys Knob Lookout later. There we passed the carpark and moved up some more driving through a small gate and two other cars were following us. When we reached the top we had a beautiful view, but stood in front of a satellite-antenna obviously being serviced at the moment, and we almost had not enough space to turn our car. The other cars had to drive backwards the narrow path and the mechanic working at the antenna only shook his head. We turned, moved back to the carpark and followed the other people to a little bench. One of the other drivers smiled and said: "Never follow a Britz-Camper...". We told him that this might be the gregarious drive, like sheep do. Here at this bench the view was not as good as on top above and so we looked around and found some steps leading to a lookout. We walked up there, Andreas only said "määäääh" and the other man said to his family: "C'm on, let's follow these people again". Here at this lookout the view was quite good and we saw Kununurra, the Hidden Valley and the Kimberlys raising up in the background. After this we drove to the Hidden Valley, walked along the tracks there and enjoyed the marvellous views. At lunchtime we returned to the city and changed our last travellers cheques into cash. We asked the lady behind the desk if she could recommend a good restaurant to us and she told us to go to the 'Chopsticks', where we got a delicious Barramundi for lunch. Then we visited Ivanhoe Crossing, but the ford was flooded so that no car could cross the river there. Even the picnic area was flooded too and right beside it was a sign warning of saltwater crocodiles. We still visited the Top Rockz Gallery and left Kununurra then. After a short time we reached the border to the Northern Territory (fortunately the fruit fly control was only in the opposite

direction) and a few kilometers later the entry to the Keep River N.P. Originally we wanted to visit the Aboriginal Rock Arts here, but almost all tracks were still closed due to flood damages. So we moved to the Gregory N.P., enjoyed the view from a lookout to the Victoria River and went to the visitors information then. There we read, that most of the tracks were closed too, there was no way to get to Limestone Gorge and Jasper Gorge at all. So we decided to try to see something more of this park on our way tomorrow and to drive to Timber Creek yet. When we arrived there we visited the Old Police Station, although the museum was already closed and drove to the Wayside Inn then. We got a powered site there (A\$ 15) and went to the pub for dinner. Even though if it was quite small, they had a snugly atmosphere there and we got really good lab chops and rumpsteak for a reasonable price there. We abode there for a while, had a drink and talked to the bartender, who told us that he will visit Europe in September.

19<sup>th</sup> day:

When we came into the Northern Territory the day before we had to preset our watches 1 1/2 hours. So we could sleep longer this day, even if we got up already at 7 a.m.... We had breakfast outside our caper and they already turned on the sprinklers around. To tell the truth, the campground looked trimmed anyway. After breakfast we started up again, but due to roadworks on most of the tracks we could not see anything more of the Gregory N.P., except Old Victoria River Crossing, Kuwang Lookout and an about one hour walk to the Escarpment Lookout. Only the 4WD-tracks we would need two or three days for were opened, but we did not have enough time for this. So we reached the Victoria River Roadhouse already at noon, had two veggie-pasties there for lunch and moved on to Katherine then. There we only refueled our car and kept on driving to the Cutta-Cutta Caves, where we joined the 3-p.m.-tour and visited the cave. After this we returned to Katherine and went to the visitors office to see, how to visit the Katherine Gorge tomorrow. We did not like the guided cruises due to the masses of tourists and therefore booked a double canoe (A\$ 51) for the whole day. Then we went to Woolworth for shopping and moved to the Katherine Gorge Caravan Park in the Nitmiluk N.P. later. On our way we already saw a couple of wallabies on the roadside and when we had dinner outside our camper they came closer so that we could feed them. Wow! Later in the evening we strolled to a phonebox and called the Qantas office to reconfirm our flight. Then we opened a bottle of wine and wrote some postcards. Finally we had a warm shower and went to bed, but we could not get asleep soon due to hundreds of bats that came at night and hung themselves into the trees above the showers making a big hubbub.

20<sup>th</sup> day:

The bats made a heavy noise at night but even though we slept very well. We went to the Kookaburra Canoe Rentals after breakfast, where we got our canoe after 8 a.m. and started paddling at once. After about one hour we reached the end of the first gorge and visited the Aboriginal Rock Paintings there. Then we had to carry the around the rapids to the second gorge but this was quite a way with the heavy canoe and so we tried to paddle the first part, where not so many rocks were in the way and the water level still seemed to be high enough. But it was hard work due to the quick flow and we got quite wet. What a luck that we got a cask that was (almost) waterproof for our photo and video equipment. We matched it with the second try to get through the rapids and carried the canoe the rest of the way then. Next we paddled through the second gorge until rapids blocked the entry to the third gorge too. But

here the way was not so long and we could pull the canoe through the water along the shore. The third gorge was quite short but we had some beautiful views to waterfalls there. We moved to the end of the gorge and pulled the canoe out of the water there to have a picnic yet. Then we walked some meters and had a look into the fourth gorge. We found a couple of rapids and rocks there, so we would had to pull or to carry the canoe most of the way through this gorge. So we decided to turn back and drifted downstream, watching the marvellous waterfalls beneath the gorge and having picnic stops two times. But we did not walk any of the walking tracks to the waterfalls because we had walked so much during the last day, we preferred to be lazy today. At 4:15 p.m. we returned the canoe separated the dry clothes from the wet ones and had a shower then. After this we strolled to the visitors center, bought some postcards and a food can which we had with the rest of our pasta for dinner this evening. After dinner we opened a bottle of Western Australian Merlot and thought the last day over before we went to bed.

21<sup>st</sup> day:

We got up at 7 a.m., left Katherine after breakfast and moved to the Edith Falls. There we walked the round walk, even if it was somewhat adventurously below the waterfalls; obviously the way across the water was particularly torn away during the wet season. We had to walk on the only left balk of the bridge and a tree trunk to cross the water. But the walking track was quite nice and we enjoyed a couple of marvellous views to the Edith Falls. But anyway it was a straining walk due to the warm and muggy air, we tardy came to tropic regions at all. We still walked to the Lower Pool and bought an icecream at the snack kiosk there. At 12:30 we left the Edith Falls and moved to Pine Creek, where we had a look to the Old Gold Mine from the Mine Lookout. At the fuel station we refilled the gasbottle for our gas-barbecue and had a meat pie. Then we drove to Hayes Creek and left the Stuart Highway there to get to the Douglas Hot Springs. The hot water arises directly out of the ground there and where it merges with the cold water from the river the temperature is pleasant for swimming. After this we moved on the Scenic Drive Route to Adelaide River. On the way we were lucky to see a swarm of black cockatoos. Back on the Stuart Highway we drove to Darwin then, where we went in a food store first, to buy something for breakfast tomorrow. Then we moved to the Shady Lane Caravan Park to get a powered site (A\$ 20). After having a shower we went into the city to have dinner at Tim's Surf `N` Turf. We already knew this restaurant from our last stay in Darwin two years ago and were looking forward to it all our journey long. We were lucky to get a parking space at once and even a table in the restaurant. We remembered the Seafood Platter for two persons (only A\$ 26) and decided to have it again...it was really delicious. After this great dinner we drove around in Darwin strolled along the Mitchell Street and visited the Night Markets. Back at the campground we still had a bottle of Chardonnay and enjoyed the warm night.

22<sup>nd</sup> day:

We got up at 7:30, packed our baggage after we had breakfast and started cleaning our Bushcamper inside, above all removing the red dust, which has set everywhere in the car. Then we drove to a fuel station in the city and cleaned our camper outside using a water pressure jet cleaner. But many of the insects at the roo-bar and the camping roof could not be washed away... Then we moved to the city center, made a shopping trip around the Smith Street and bought some souvenirs like roadsigns and can-cooler. After a short visit to Woolworth's we went to a food-mall for lunch, strolled through the city for a while and

bought a bottle of Western Australian Merlot and at least a Didjeridoo. Then we drove to the airport to check-in our baggage. But unfortunately they did not open the flight until now and so we locked our cases and the Didjeridoo in a box, refueled our camper and dropped it at the Britz-Office then. They had no objections and even did not look for any damage, maybe due to it was so well cleaned. So it did not take us very long there and we took the City-Shuttle (A\$ 2 per Person) to the center then. We strolled around the Smith Street and the Mitchell Street, had a cup of coffee at the Café Uno and spent the rest of the afternoon at the beach and the esplanade. Originally we wanted to have dinner at Sizzler's, but some time ago we got a hint from Michael Stadler (<http://www.network-23.com/australien>) to visit the Hogs Breath Café in Darwin. Fortuitous we found it opposite of the Sizzler, it looked very inviting and we liked the menu too. So we decided to have dinner there and enjoyed two phantastic steaks. Later we went back to Smith Street, where we met the pair from Cologne we knew from the snorkeling tour at the Ningaloo Reef. We talked a while to them and so the time hurried by. After having a drink in the 'Salvatores' we took the City-Shuttle to the airport (A\$ 18 due to the airport is located outside the city). There we got into some warm clothes, because we had a few hours stop in Sydney tomorrow and had heard about quite low temperature there. We checked-in our baggage next and reserved two seats in the last row for the flight from Sydney to Frankfurt. At 1:20 a.m. we took off to Sydney.

23<sup>rd</sup> day:

We arrived in Sydney at about 6:30 a.m. and had to preset our watches half an hour. The hyper-modern skytrain from the airport to the city announced for June 2000 was still not finished yet, so we took the Airport-Shuttle-Bus (A\$ 10 per person both ways) to Circular Quay and told the driver to pick us up there at 1 p.m. Then we went to 'The Rocks', bought two Long Black and donuts for breakfast in a bakery and sat on a bench with it. It was early morning and the streets were still quiet. We went up the George Street and moved to Darling Harbour then. There we got into the Monorail, went a loop with it and strolled through Darling Harbour later where the shops opened one by one. Doreen bought a new watch due to her old one was out of order for a few days and so she got another nice souvenir from Australia. Then we went to the quay, where we visited the clone of Captain Cook's 'Endeavour' and took a ferry to Circular Quay (A\$ 3,70 per person) later. Since our last visit two years ago some things had changed here, new hotels and flats were built at the boardwalk. We walked around the Opera House watched some groups of bridge climbers at the Sydney Harbour Bridge and strolled through the Royal Botanic Gardens before we returned to Circular Quay. There we had lunch at Café Bianchi and enjoyed the few sunrays breaking through the clouds. After this we still walked a small loop through the city and got picked up by the punctual by the shuttle that took us back to the airport. There we visited some shops at the International Terminal and took off at 3:40 p.m. to Singapore. We arrived at 10 p.m. and had an one hour break there, just enough time for having a look to Terminal 1. Even here many things had changed. Two years ago this terminal was new built and only a few shops were opened. Today it was quite crowded here, unfortunately we did not have enough time to visit Terminal 2, where the swimming pool and the internet cafe are located. Our plane to Frankfurt took off late at about 11:30 p.m.

24<sup>th</sup> day:

We arrived in Frankfurt just in time at 5:30 a.m. and did not have to wait long for our baggage. Even our Didjeridoo had overcome the flight very well. At the duane they did not check our baggage, if we would have known this we would have brought more of the Australian beer and the delicious wine with us... We took the city rail to Main Station, where we read about an Intercity Express Train leaving to Leipzig in twenty minutes. We did not right believe this, because until we left three weeks ago this route was only driven by a normal train. We asked at the information desk and they told us that this is new since they changed the time schedule in late May. Another benefit was, that our Rail & Fly Ticket covered this Express Train without any surcharge. So we arrived in Leipzig at 10:45 already and were back at home at about 11. But anyway...these three weeks had passed much too fast.