

# Trip Reports:

## Swimming in Lake Eyre

July 25<sup>th</sup> 2009

Lake Eyre was all the news: waterbirds in their 1000s; the first fill in ten years; planes buzzing over it and causing traffic control problems according to Auntie ABC. We had to see it! And anyway Victoria was wet and cold and the swine flu epicentre of the universe. Off we went in early June.

We pulled into the Green Lake bush reserve [near Sea Lake] for the first night; a great camping spot and a big surprise. The Lake is full. The locals appear to have done a deal with a local pipeline authority that filled the lake in exchange for using part of the reserve for their pumping works.

All the Mallee birds were back, wildflowers were starting to come out in the scrub—the place is alive again and the great Mallee wheat fields round about were starting to show a fuzz of green as the new wheat shoots sprouted. Hmmm ...how good is that!

Minor problem next day as we headed off for Pinnaroo. Terry realized he had forgotten to get the 30,000Km service done on the Nissan [What? You're joking!!!..expletives] and his new, super -duper phone didn't work! Hmmm..not so good! Luckily my old clunker of a phone was up to phoning around to find the nearest Nissan service centre in Paringa, who did the service but thought the turbo charger may have been spraying oil so they advised us to take it to the BIG Nissan service centre in Berri. A day wasted until we finally headed off for Burra hoping the rest of the trip was going to be OK.

Things improved as it got warmer and the wide open red deserts, saltbush and the purple spine of the Flinders Ranges swallowed us up as we sped past Hawker, and up to Leigh Creek where we over-nighted just outside the town at their very trendy roadside camp spot. It was only a short drive from there to the Oasis caravan park in Marree, our camping headquarters for the visit to the southern track into Lake Eyre.

For those who love "outback colour", the Oasis is a "must visit". It wouldn't make the "Big Four" criteria, but who cares? It's all 1950s green paint, corrugated iron and mulga trees but the old amenities block and laundry work and in season, you need to be there by lunch time or to have booked ahead as it's packed. The manager, a local identity, can help you with any information you need about the district and track conditions. A good pub with new cabins and another caravan park [The Drivers Rest] on the outskirts of town give travellers other options.



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Although we were warned the sand track into Lake Eyre was rough, we found it unbelievably good. The next day when we set off to see the lakes. The track runs in through Muloorina station and is well graded up to the homestead turn off about 50 km in. From there it follows the edge of Lake Eyre South for about 40 km, but it's a good sand track with just a few spots with corrugations and one or two patches of bulldust.

Lake Eyre South didn't fill this year; both Warburton Creek and Coopers Creek have to be running for Lake Eyre North to fill and then overflow into the southern lake. Still, the drive along the lakeside was interesting for the wildflowers [100s of them] and the glittering salty surface of the dry lake bed. We stopped and wandered round, walked on the lake and had a cuppa! By lunchtime we arrived at the edge of Lake Eyre North. This area is a protected national park and the change in the ungrazed vegetation is very noticeable-lots of flowering bushes, wild flowers and a few low mallee trees. About 20 cars were in the car park and lots of people were walking out on the lake. Yes, the water didn't quite fill the whole of Lake Eyre North so this section was also dry but it was a great day of desert landscapes, dry lake beds and driving!

Our best find was the lovely Muloorina station waterhole campsite. It's just past the turn off to the homestead and has new drop toilets, tables and seats and plenty of great camping spots round the spring-fed waterhole. Shelter trees are plenty and a bird watching hide is also provided. At \$8 a night it's a bargain. We packed up the Jayco the next morning and shifted camp to the waterhole. In dry weather you can pull a camper trailer or even a small van into this campsite. I managed to book a flight over the lakes and saw the water at last...lots of brown waves, brown and white salty patterns where it had dried, misty bits and green-sided straggly creeks that had been flowing recently and ours was the only plane in the air!



We cut short our trip [we had intended to continue onto Darwin and Kakadu] as a phone call told us Terry's dad was unwell, but we returned home through Leigh Creek, then along the Peterborough to Broken Hill road, taking two extra days to travel up to Mutawintji National Park – 120 km north of Broken Hill. What a park! Animals all along the road in at dusk; goats, kangaroo, wallaby, cattle & sheep. Great walks and scenery. Must go back! Soon!

Meg Dillon for the travelling Dillons (alias The Grey Gypsies)

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