



G'Day, Outback Vic here.

Well, it's that time of year again, Christmas almost upon us and we are all wondering where did 2017 go. It's been a hectic year for sure, and here at GDT we have been in the thick of it. But now we have two weeks of wind down time before the big day and then we are back into the touring and training. So let's have a look at what has been happening and what's coming up.



Christmas gift ideas

So before I get into the nitty gritty of this newsletter, and with just a few days to go before Christmas are you like me and stuck for gift ideas for your family? Well, I might have the answer for you but it won't help me much, you see Julie just doesn't get it when I hand her a gift voucher for a driver training course or a beautifully wrapped rated shackle. But this might be the perfect gift for you or your partner. We can provide gift voucher for any value to be put towards a 4wd course or a 4wd tour. Imagine the look of delight on your partner's face when they realise they could get to spend a day or weekend or even longer with Outback Vic! What more could a person wish for?

We also have my range of books and DVD's which make great stocking

fillers, and of course we are now selling the fantastic TyreDog tyre monitoring systems, now that would make a great gift, the present that might save a life.

So if you would like a gift voucher just email me at info@4wd.net.au or give Jenny or I a call on 02 99131395.

Outback Icons trips

We held the first of these fully accommodated trips during September and they were certainly a great way to see the outback. In fact, we ended up with an overwhelming response and finished up running 3 trips during the month. Ty and I led two of them, back to back, with the first trip concluding in Port Augusta after visiting Birdsville, and then our return trip commenced in Port Augusta and went to Cobar via Birdsville. Dave Fullerton, who was just a few days back from his two Cape York trips, led the third trip and we passed him on the Cordillo Downs Road on our return trip.



Great scenes throughout the outback

The format for these trips was quite simple, explore all the remote 4wd tracks through the Corner Country, Innamincka and Birdsville along with Marree and the famous Birdsville Track, but stay in the various country hotels and station stays along the way. Dinner and breakfast being provided at our overnight stops. If you have ever had a meal at a country pub you will know that the servings are huge, so no-one went hungry on these trips and some of the smallest pubs and roadhouses turned on the best meals. The weather during all 3 trips was perfect, although on my return trip we had quite a ferocious dust storm on one day, which allowed everyone to see (well almost see it) how the outback can change suddenly into a hostile place, we were all glad we didn't have to camp that night.



Cordillo Downs shearing shed

We also spent some time on Trilby Station on the banks of the Darling River in the shearers' quarters and found the stories of station life told to us by the owner Liz Murray to be fascinating. They are in drought at present and their daily routine is simple, rise at 4am, hand feed the stock until 9pm around their vast property, and then repeat for the next 7 days, then start again. City folk just don't have a clue what it is really like to live on the land.

During each of the trips there was a lot of talk about other possible venues for this type of accommodated trip and I have a couple in mind including the Flinders Ranges and one down the Darling River Run, all I need is the time to plan them and get them on my already very busy calendar, but watch this space as they say.



We enjoyed sunset on Big Red

We are running another Outback Icons accommodated trip in September 2018, so if you are not into camping or just want a break from setting up the tent, check it out on my website www.4wd.net.au

High Country Accommodated trips too

Now we are back into Summer, the high country has re-opened for business and just two weeks ago we had the first of our accommodated trips ably led by Tom Savage. All went well until the last day when flooding rain was predicted (and hit) the north east of Victoria closing the Alpine National Park. This impacted our second fully booked trip and we had to cancel it at the last minute due to the worsening weather conditions. But we have rescheduled this trip for the first week in February and fortunately many of those booked on the cancelled trip

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have been able to rebook this new date. We do have a couple of spots remaining so if you would like to see the high country and enjoy great small town accommodation and meals have a look at the dates of 3-10 February 2018.

High Country camping trip Nov 2017

The week prior to all the rain, Neill Bell and I led the 7 day high country camping trip with a great group of people. We had many highlights on this trip not the least was the fabulous scenery that the high country has to offer.



The Fat Corolla heading into Pineapple Flat

The track over King Billy to Howitt Hut had deteriorated quite a bit and was very slow going for us, down to 3kph for three hours in fact with lots of guiding and assistance from Neill everyone got through under their own steam. A great driving effort by all concerned. Nature through a wobbly half way through this afternoon as we experienced a thunderstorm accompanied by large amounts of pea sized hail, but it all added to the adventure.

Although we were late into camp at Howitt Hut due to the difficult track conditions, the scenery at this super location made up for it and with day

light saving in full swing we still managed to see sunset over the snow plains.

On way into the beautiful Wonnangatta Valley we stopped halfway down the Zeka track for morning tea, but upon leaving the clearing we received a distress call from Paul, who was doing tail end for us today. He had inadvertently driven into a large rock on the edge of the clearing and bent the sump rather badly in his Navara.



King River Hut, our base for two nights

Its time like these that you see the real worth of travelling in a group as we all worked together to remedy the situation. Four hours of hard yakka under the Navara and we had it mobile again, good enough to get Paul back home on the south coast to effect more permanent repairs.



Everyone photographs Craigs hut, not me

I received the following email from Paul a couple of days later.

Vic

Now that the dust has settled on our memorable trip to the Victorian high country I thought I would drop you a line to thank you and Neill.

Your knowledge of the high country was outstanding. Not only did you know the tracks intimately but you were able to pass on the history of the area which always makes a trip like this much more interesting.

I must say that I would not have attempted most of these tracks on my own or even with friends. The way you and Neill guided us through what at first seemed to be very difficult situations saw my confidence grow as the trip progressed. One of the rewards of course is the awesome views and spectacular countryside.

But for me the most impressive part of the trip was after I made a stupid mistake (in a car park) and damaged my vehicle quite badly). You, Neill and I must say the rest of the group rallied to repair my vehicle in quite difficult circumstances. This was not easy and without you and Neill I would still be stuck half way up a mountain in very isolated country. You did this very professionally with regard for everyone's safety. You also managed to calm me down and keep light hearted.

Once repairs were completed you saw to the needs of the group then escorted me off the mountain to safety where you had organised dinner and accommodation and a mechanic if required.

I can't praise you and your staff highly enough. You turned a potentially

devastating situation for me into an experience that has left me wanting to return for more trips with Great Divide Tours. I have never experienced this level of customer service before.

Thanks again to you Neill and the rest of the group. And to anyone thinking of this type of adventure, you could not find a better way than to join Great Divide Tours who offer exceptional customer service and support both on and off the tracks.

Paul

Thanks Paul for your very kind words, the way I see it, treat people the same you would wish to be treated yourself.



Following Paul's mishap and after ensuring he was in safe hands, we resumed our trip and continued to explore the beautiful high country. Some of the tracks are definitely in need of some maintenance, as a result I elected not to take the group up the steepest track of all, Herne Spur, due to the real risk of getting a vehicle stuck in a precarious situation. But the adjacent Wombat Spur still provided us with plenty of thrills as we climbed out of the Wonnangatta Valley.

The camp at Talbotville never fails to impress and we even managed our 24 river crossings in two hours, explored an underground mine and enjoyed a sumptuous lunch in the Dargo Hotel. This gave the convoy the opportunity to refuel after 5 days of low range work and some of the fuel figures were worth noting.

My 200 Cruiser 24 litres per 100 k's
Pat's Fat Corolla (also a 200) 28L/100
A Pajero 19L/100
A Ranger 19L/100
And the thirsty FJ Cruiser 34L/100!!

I know these figures seem astronomical but you do need to realise that even slow low range driving may double your fuel consumption, so heed our fuel requirement suggestions when booking your trip.



Glad this one fell that way

One of the many afternoon thunderstorms that we experienced during that week had started a bushfire up near Mt Blue Rag and the Dargo High Plains road was closed to all public traffic, this meant we had to miss the fantastic Mt Blue Rag Range trail, but fortunately I knew of another route that took us past Dog's Grave and then along the equally high Dinner Plain track to

emerge at Mt Hotham at the end of our fabulous 7 day high country tour.

Because we had missed Blue Rag and Billy Goat Bluff due to the car problem, we vowed to bring everyone back to see these iconic spots. This will take place from 25-28 March 2018 when I lead a special "High Country Highlights" trip. I have 2 spots available on this special trip if you would like to join us. We will visit Wonnangatta Valley, drive up Zeka Spur to Howitt hut, drive over Mt Wellington, and visit the Pinnacle Lookout, drive down Billy Goat Bluff Track and camp in beautiful Talbotville and depart the high country via Mt Blue Rag.



We had a fabulous time two weeks ago in the high country

The Reason we do reccies

I've been taking 4wd trips into the Snowy Region for over 20 years now, and over New Year and Easter we offer a great 4 day trip which has basically followed the same route throughout those 20 years. However, my guides have been reporting that a couple of the tracks we usually use were becoming quite washed out and difficult to negotiate, so when the 7 day high country trip concluded Neill and I

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ducked off to resurvey the route we usually use. Lucky we did, because what we found was downright tough going, with every chance of getting stuck and most likely damaging a vehicle, that is not why I go four wheel driving and I don't believe it is your agenda also.

So finding about one full day of our trip now no longer accessible, we set about finding alternatives. And Wow! Did we find a couple of superb trails to replace them! If you like driving in snow gums and fantastic views, then you will love the changes we have made to our 4 day Man From Snowy River tour. We have two of these scheduled over the New Year period with each starting at Jindabyne. They then head off in different directions to meet up two days later before crossing over and completing where each commenced. The trips start from 11am on 29th December and conclude on New Year's Day, so if you would like to have a very different New Year's Eve take a look at this great 4 day tag-along tour. We offer it at Easter also.



The scenery is amongst the best on our 4 day Snowy Trip

Whilst doing this Reccie, at the end of a long day of four wheel driving Neill and I found ourselves on top of helipad with

360 degree views. I decided this would make a great camp site for us, barely enough room to erect our single tent, it's not a spot I would normally choose (by the way – we found an even better camp the next day to use on the tour). After setting up the tent and as the sun set over Mt Kosciuszko We were startled to look up and see a wild brumby had wandered into our camp and was standing just 10 metres away from us. The brumby stayed all night, we could hear his hoof prints throughout the night around the tent and the next morning whilst being disappointed that a thick fog had enveloped our mountain we were delighted to see our brumby friend still keeping us company. A magic moment in the high country for sure. We saw several more brumbies during our reccie and although these are feral animals and can cause a lot of damage to the fragile alpine land, they are certainly a grand sight running through the snow gums.



The Brumby that wandered into our camp on Mt Meenak (in the background, not Neill)

The other trips

So whilst I've been going from Birdsville to Dargo we have had quite a few other longer trips on the roll. Tony had a tough gig in Arnhem Land made

even harder by some great fishing, wondering remote coast lines that less than 0.01% of the population get to see and camping with real crocodiles. He then took off for the Flinders Ranges but before all of that he completed his first Canning Stock Route trip. He must have enjoyed it because he put his hand up to lead it again next year (by the way his trip in 2018 is now fully booked and we are taking bookings for a second trip to be led by Tom). Tony has written a couple of articles for Unsealed 4x4 based on his Canning experiences so keep an eye out for them in future issues. But as with some trips his first Canning had its share of drama too, a medical issue beset one of our customers and Tony needed to evacuate him to a local community nurse who arranged admission to Newman hospital where a good recovery was eventually made.

Meanwhile on the Cape of York, Dave "Coighty" Fullerton was entertaining the troops big time. We again ran two Cape trips with Coighty at the helm, the feedback on his trips is always excellent, either that or he pays my customers a lot of money to send me glowing emails on his ability, humour and leadership.

In my last Newsletter I mentioned that we had reintroduced our 3 day Snow tour during August. Alex led two of these and crikey! Did they get some snow on them. The new accommodation in Tumberumba was perfect, the meals fabulous, Santa was a hoot but the snow that dumped on the tour was definitely the icing on the cake. Check out this trip in August 2018, it is definitely not one to miss.

During the second trip one of the vehicles slipped off the track into the

gutter and necessitated Alex doing a rather delicate recovery, all part of the day's work in Alex's book, but I did get this email later from the person involved.

Good morning all, just checking in after our weekend snow trip with Alex. Just wanted to let you know we had a fabulous time and Alex the perfect guide and host and night time entertainment lol.

The accommodation was excellent and meals were as well, the Christmas dinner was so yummy.

Alex's cool head in the face a very difficult recovery (ours) was great and not once did he make me feel responsible for getting into the situation and to the credit of the other travellers there was nothing but support.

The next day was less eventful and some snow play, waterfall walks and beautiful forest drives made the day before just a memory. If you can let Alex know the Pajero is like brand new again thanks to Dennis's detailing skills. All in all a great weekend, we met some lovely people and have great memories. Thanks again and regards Janine and Dennis.

For anyone that has travelled with Alex they know he throws his heart and soul into these trips, well done Alex!



The view from our Motel in Tumberumba

If anyone has any photos from either of our snow tours, especially of the snow, I would appreciate it if you could email them to me, I must teach Alex how to take photos.

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Driver Training

We've had lots of driver training taking place at our "World's Best Practice" training centre over the past few months (We were audited and that is how they described our training facility).

I'm very pleased to say that following a call for tender from the Australian Federal Police that Great Divide Tours has again won the right to provide 4wd training to the AFP for the next 3 years. It is obvious that they find our training centre to be the best available for their training and that our delivery is perfect to their needs.

But it's not just Government agencies that recognise our centre of excellence, we recently hosted a 4wd weekend for Parramatta Mercedes Benz with close to 70 personnel attending, we not only provided the catering, accommodation and training but I think we had the biggest collection of Mercedes cars and 4wdrives ever seen in Braidwood, check out the photo below.



There was \$1.5M worth of cars at our training centre!

We might have a world's best 4wd training centre but that doesn't mean we can't make it better. Just last week I spent a few days at the property

designing and building what will become a permanent water crossing. It measures 25 metres long, 7 metres wide and up to 700mm deep. We have dumped 50 cubic metres of river rock into its base to not only give a firm base to drive over (under water) but replicate a real river bed crossing, having just completed many of these in the high country I assure you it is as real as one can get.



Digging digging digging



Waiting for the rain now

I'm expecting it will fill over the storm season in January and February but if not we will arrange for a very large water truck to attend the training centre.

Lucky as Bro

That is what Tony Davys is saying after falling ill shortly after returning from his 3 month tour guide stint that took him to

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the Canning, Arnhem Land and the Flinders. It was his birthday in mid October, but he awoke feeling a little off, something that often happens when you are gluten intolerant. But by late that day when the stomach pains were becoming unbearable it was time to visit the Braidwood hospital. Next thing he is being whisked off to Goulburn hospital by ambulance and the next day they are operating to remove his appendix. Sadly, the offending and very poisonous appendix burst during the operation which meant Tony's internals needed to be flushed off all the poison. This has left Tony in a very fragile state and he has been off work or on light duties since mid October as the pain slowly subsides and he regains some of the 5kgs he lost.

The really scary thought was that if this had occurred whilst he was on tour in some of the very remote places that we get to, well it would not have had a good outcome at all. Makes you want to go get your appendix out just in case!

What's coming up?

The next few months continue to be very busy for us, here is a schedule of what is coming up and what few vacancies we have remaining.

29/12/17 - 1/1/18 Man From Snowy River we have one trip fully booked and now a second trip with 4 vacancies, a great way to escape the crowds and spend New Year in the Aussie bush among the brumbies.

29/1/17 - 4/1/18 High Country camper trailer trip - 1 Vacancy only

3-9/1/18 High Country camping trip - Fully booked

10-16/1/18 High Country camping trip - 5 Vacancies

7/1/18 Stockton Beach - 5 Vacancies



20-21/1/18 Driver Training - 1 Vacancy

3-10/2/18 High Country Accommodated trip - 4 Vacancies

11-17/2/18 High Country Camper Trailer tour - 2 Vacancies

It is also worth noting what availability we have on our extended tours for 2018 as some are filling fast and if you were thinking of joining us then may I suggest you book soon to avoid missing out.

6-16 May 2018 Simpson Desert Circumnavigation - I only announced this trip in my last Newsletter but it is already fully booked, I am looking at the possibility of a second trip a week after the start of the first so let me know if you are interested.

21/5 - 3 June 2018 Simpson Desert Safari - 4 vacancies

2-16 June 2018

Our amazing Botswana Trip we have just one vacancy available



That's a big mouse!

6-17 July 2018 Big Red Bash

This year the key artist will be **John Farnham** along with a huge array of additional great bands such as the Hoodoo Gurus, the Angels, Daryl Braithwaite, Jon Stevens, Kate Cebrano, The Black Sorrows, Russell Morris, the Wolfe Bros and many more.

I only have 4 spots available on this trip so be quick, it will be an amazing trip.



The Big Red Bash will be amazing in 2018 with John Farnham as the headline artist

9-22 July 2018 Simpson Desert Safari

6 spots vacant

6-31 July 2018 Kimberley Explorer

Now Fully booked.

26 July - 20 August 2018 We now have a second **Kimberley trip** being led by Brian and Kirsten and have 5 spots on it still available.

9 July - 3 August 2018 Canning Stock Route - Fully booked

7 June - 2 July 2018 - We have added a second **CSR trip** with 6 spots available at present

26 July - 13 August 2018 Cape York Fully booked

16 August - 3 Sept 2018 Cape York Our second trip is filling fast with just 3 spots available at present.

2-10/8/18 Cruise the Kimberley Fully Booked

22-30/8/18 2nd Cruise the Kimberley has just 2 double cabins remaining



8-27 August 2018 Arnhem Land only 2 spots remain on this amazing tour.

31/8 - 8/9/18 Outback Icons trip - our accommodated outback trip to Birdsville has plenty of spots available

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3-14 Sept 2018 Flinders Ranges has 6 spots still available



The Flinders Ranges is possibly the most underrated location for a 4wd tour

Prostate Cancer Fund Raiser

Did you know that an average of 9 men die every day from Prostate Cancer in Australia!

54 new diagnosis of Prostate Cancer occur every day in Australia!

One in 8 blokes will be affected by prostate cancer!

Medical research will keep 92% of men alive 5 years after diagnosis - but wouldn't it be great if we all knew we would still live longer than 5 years?

So it's time to do your bit.

I have been invited to be the Route Director on a new fund raising car rally to be held from **22-29 September 2018**. We will start in Cobar and head to Innamincka via Cameron Corner then onto Birdsville and into the Simpson Desert before tracking down to Marree, then through the Flinders Ranges to end in Broken Hill.

There is an entry fee of \$660 to cover insurances etc plus \$2830 per couple to cover accommodation and meals except

lunch each day of the rally and then you are asked to raise at least \$1500, all of which goes to Prostate Cancer Research, we hope to raise \$30,000 in our first year, that is just 20 4wd drives but wouldn't it be great if we could raise more.

Have a look at your calendar for next year and see if you can take a week out to help raise money for something that might one day affect you (if it already doesn't, most men don't even know they have prostate cancer!)

To register or for more details drop me an email at info@4wd.net.au See the flyer attached to this email newsletter.



Join us on our fund raising outback bash in late September.

Vic's 4wd tips

Drop your tyre pressures when you go off road. Why? Because it gives your vehicle a bigger foot print which means more traction. It allows the tyre to mould over rocks, tree roots and rough ground rather than bouncing over these objects. If a tyre bounces it is losing traction.

But wait, there is more! By dropping tyre pressure you also drastically reduce the chances of getting tyre punctures, for

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the same reason, the tyre can now mould over the sharp objects which prevents them from piercing your tyre.

Drop tyre pressures for safer and better 4wd driving.

I use 25 psi when off road and lower of course when on sand, around 17 psi.



Even the tyre experts know to drop their tyre pressures when off road.

Vic's gripe

I'm still on about idiots that stuff it for the rest of us, I came across this scene at Charlies camp on Davies High Plains only last week. If you see someone doing this, don't intervene as no-one can be trusted these days, but if you can get a photo of their 4wd or at least report them to the local Ranger with their rego number then they will take action. The sooner we stamp out this idiocy the better.



Luke King Racing

My nephew Luke King sadly did not achieve the results he wished for in the 2017 Toyota 86 racing series. A combination of a vehicle down on power by 10% compared to the rest of the field and other drivers putting him into walls basically ruined his chances. But that is motor sport. He was in 4th outright place at one stage despite his unknown power loss. But the good news - despite his bad luck, his efforts in the media did not go unnoticed and won the award for the best media coverage during the series. Luke had regular spots on his local radio station 2GO at Gosford, he had a great social media profile and worked hard at spreading the word of keeping healthy and chasing your dreams through numerous schools etc during the year, well done Luke.

Great Divide Tours became a major sponsor for the Bathurst round and the 86 looked stunning in its 4wd.net.au livery. We then had it on display at the Sydney 4wd show at Eastern Creek in October and it attracted a heap of attention.



The 86 looks great in the GDT livery, make your dreams a reality!

Then just last weekend Luke arranged a sponsor thank you drive day at

Wakefield Park and turned on a few hot laps with his major sponsors and supporters doing the driving under his skilled guidance from the passenger seat.

I have to say, Luke sat in that hot car for 6 hours showing many of us how to drive a race car very quickly around a race track, it was an amazing effort from this young man and shows his passion and commitment to his sport, his health and his sponsors, thanks Luke for making my sponsorship money a wise investment.

Now for next year's series and accomplishing that dream of winning a championship.



10 mins in the race seat and I was done!

Social media

I might be a 63 year old baby boomer but there is no doubt I have embraced social media or at least Facebook. I have two appearances on Facebook, my personal page called Vic Widman of course and my business page called Great Divide Tours.

When I'm away, which is more often than not, I'm posting photos and videos of my travels all the time or at least whenever I have mobile service. Most of these are informative, designed to make

you jealous of me, but occasionally I'll put up a funny video, as you know, I can be a bit left of field with my slant on life. But hey, if it makes you laugh who cares and if it doesn't, lighten up a little.

Anyway, check out my Facebook pages and keep up to date on this crazy life that I lead.

What does a tour guide do for holidays?

I do get asked this a lot. So this is what Julie and I did recently. I went on a South Pacific Cruise on Radiance of the Sea. I've never been on a cruise before, but know a few people who have, they all rave about them and keep going back for more and more. So it was a little foreign at first, I upgraded our room to balcony suite and am glad I did, it was very nice.



The closest I had been to a cruise was on one of these.

It was one of those music themed cruises with various artists performing all over the ship and at night, the entertainment was great. There was plenty of food and the service terrific. We enjoyed the cruising and lazing around the pool, it took me about 24 hours to sit still.

We visited Isle of Pines and Mystery Island, which were both very nice.

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Then on day 4 I came down with the dreaded Cruise flu, spent a couple of days in the cabin whilst Julie enjoyed New Caledonia and sniffled and ached my way back to Sydney, and had the side effects for the next month back at home. Julie came down with it too once we were home. So that was my holiday, not impressed with cruising I'm afraid, catching someone else's germs when I made sure I didn't touch any rails etc and cleaned my hands all the time, half the ship had the sniffles by the time we got back to Sydney. So next holiday might be in a remote bush camp by ourselves!



**See! I can relax without a 4wd
(almost)**

But wait, there is more!

I always like to have some big news in each Newsletter and this issue its a double whammy, on the home front, my recently married daughter, Emma, is now expecting her first child in May next year. Congrats to Emma and Mike and thanks for making me a Grandpa again (My younger daughter Lisa has already blessed Julie and I with two beautiful grandchildren).

And ! In 2019 we are planning a 4wd trip to Iceland! We have again teamed up with Self Drive Adventures to offer our Great Divide Tours clients the opportunity to do something very few

people ever get the chance. A fabulous 14 day 4wd safari across the small country of Iceland. If you are like me and don't know very much about Iceland, you may be surprised to read that it has some stunning scenery dominated by huge waterfalls, deep gorges and volcanic landscapes that still hiss and steam. In fact we will visit the largest volcanic canyon in the world.

I have attached the itinerary for the 2019 trip to this newsletter email for your info. We can only take 6 vehicles, so if this one interests you please sign up early as I do expect it to book out. Julie and I will be escorting you along with our own local Icelandic guide. Bring on 2019!



Finally let me wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and if you are having a few days off please travel safely.

Regards

Vic Widman