



Newsletter No. 47 April 2018

*G'Day, Outback Vic here.*

Hi everyone, well I don't know how you feel about 2018, but my question is where is it going? It's already late April and it seems like we just had Christmas, it is no doubt a sign of how busy we have been here at Great Divide Tours, and the rest of the year is even busier.



I had a lovely sunny Sunday afternoon to myself and thought I should get my next newsletter out to you. Actually, my daughter, who is expecting here first baby next month, is having a Baby Shower today and I've been expelled from the house. With 25 clucky girls gathered to throw nappies in baskets, giggle and laugh and generally have a fun time, it seems I am only getting in the way, so I've escaped to the office to write this Newsletter.

*What's been going on?*

The truth of the matter is that GDT continues to grow and it is all thanks to you my lovely clients. 2018 has kicked off in a big way with lots and lots of trip and driver training bookings. On the driver training front we have been extremely busy with no less than 12 weekend courses thus far, 5 corporate groups and 10 private individual training courses being conducted in the first 3 months of 2018. As you see the training centre has been pretty much fully booked every week since the year started.

Our trips have been rather full on too, with the high country definitely being the flavour of the month with us running no less than 8 trips down that way thus far this year. These trips have been a combination of our camping tours, our camper trailer trips and our very successful accommodated 7 day tours.

In fact, our reputation for running fantastic high country tours saw us being asked by the Isuzu I-Venture Club to run a special 4 day high country trip for them in late March. Neill Bell and I led this one, we even had to drive an Isuzu D-Max, which was quite an experience for me. Needless to say the participants had a ball and we showed them some of the best parts of the high country.



**Billy Goat Bluff track is just awesome**

Neill and I returned again just 2 weeks later to take our customers from the November high country trip back to the high country. We planned a special highlights trip with a couple of the truly great tracks such as Billy Goat Bluff and

the Blue Rag Range track in our sights plus a couple of other standout tracks that are not included in our standard 7 day trip. This proved to be a big hit and in fact this group of happy travellers have now asked us to lead a mystery trip into the high country. We will be doing this in November 2018 following the Winter closure of the high country tracks. If you have been to the high country with us and would like to see more of this fabulous location, let me know and I'll organise another trip for you.

### *Light my fire*

Regular readers of my newsletters will know that about 12 months ago I installed a special fire fighting system on my training centre which, amongst its many features, boasts the fact that it has a superb bush land setting (the training centre not the fire suppression system!)



**The scene at 2.15pm on Friday**

Being located in dense bush has its many benefits such as no noisy neighbours and plenty of wildlife ( I adore my family of roos that come down for a drink and feed every evening) but it also means it is located in a bush fire prone area. Well on 19 January when I received a call from my sister who lives just up the road to tell me I had a fire on my back door step, I thought we were going to lose the lot. It seems a neighbour was working in his

shed about a kilometre away when a spark from a welder started a grass fire. This quickly became a blazing bush fire.

It is only due to the fact that we had a south easterly breeze blowing that this fire did not race through my training centre. Despite having what I believe is the best fire sprinkler system money can buy, I definitely did not want to prove it. The local and some from far afield RFS volunteers swarmed onto the fire and fought it for 3 days. I did have a 4wd course planned for the weekend, but we had to cancel it and offered the training centre and its grounds to the RFS as a control point for over 100 responding volunteers. I can't speak highly enough of the great effort these volunteers made and it was amazing to see them in action.



**Thanks guys**

In the end, I was very lucky, the fire got within 50 metres of my boundary fences and eventually burnt down one side boundary and along the rear boundary of my 240 acre property, creating the perfect fire break and hazard reduction around my land. Given this bush had not seen a fire or hazard reduction in over 30 years, we were very lucky with the outcome.

### *Super/Blue/Blood Moon*

My last newsletter was put out rather hastily to advise that in late January there was going to be this very rare occurrence

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and I opened the doors of the training centre to anyone that wished to come and visit it and witness this rare phenomenon. We had about 20 people turn up for the event, unfortunately for most people on the east coast, cloud descended across the evening skies preventing most from seeing the Super Moon. But at the training centre our luck changed at 12.45 am and the clouds parted to reveal the Moon in full eclipse, it was red, it was very large and it was the second full moon in the month (making it blue). Mission accomplished!



**Photo taken by Nic at 1.20am from the training centre.**

### *Happy customers*

With all the trips we are running of late it is important that we remember that without delivering a quality experience we wouldn't be this busy. Brian and Kirsten Sommerville are a husband & wife team who run trips for me, they have led trips into the Simpson Desert, Arnhem Land, up the Canning and now into the high country for me and later this year they will be leading the second of my Kimberley tours. Last week I received the following email from a couple who were led by Brian and Kirsten through the high country in February on our camper trailer trip.

*Hi Vic,*

*Now that we have settled back to our everyday tasks I thought I would share a few things with you.*

*First things first. We first experience GDT through training. Yep, we did the 4x4 and camper training back in October 2017. That short 2 days course gave us a lot of knowledge that we have put into practice more than once since. However, always travelling alone we tried to play on the safe side.*

*Then came the opportunity to join the Tag Along Tour of the Victoria High Country. And what an experience that was.*

*We were led by Brian and Kirsten and could not be any happier with them. You see. When someone lacks experience on anything it is reassuring to have capable and gentle leaders. Brian and Kirsten are just that. By just being there we started every day knowing that we could do whatever it was that we were going to do. And if there was a problem we had that covered with the leaders.*

*The trip was absolutely wonderful. We enjoyed every minute of it. And because of the experience in 4x4 in a real world environment we now feel so much safer on our own. But not careless. Just a lot more confident that we can find the right path not the hero's path.*

*The only problem we see with your Tag Along Tours is that we had such a good experience that we now are looking for a time to do it again.*

*So, Vic, Brian and Kirsten, thank you very much for your time and patience with newbies like us. It is people like you that makes life a lot easier for us.*

*Hope to see you all again some time in the near future.*

*Orlando & Huong*

Thanks Orlando and Huong, I am so glad you enjoyed the trip and look forward to being able to share more of this great country with you on a future trip.

### *Not everything goes to plan*

Of course it is not all roses in this line of work, apart from having to cancel a driver training weekend due to the bushfire, a month later we were half way through a camper trailer course when the opposite occurred, also calling a halt to proceedings. We received over 70 mm of rain in just a couple of hours during a weekend camper trailer course and found most of our tracks were flooded. We had no option but to cancel the second day of the training and ask everyone to come back at a later date to finish their training.

Then in late January on the Saturday evening as we were enjoying dinner a huge electrical storm knocked out the power. Now, we need power to run our water pumps so we can have running water and to keep the toilets working. The power was out for 12 hours so we had to fire up the old generator to keep the place going, we all managed despite the tricky conditions, but it was a timely reminder how dependent we are on power, makes you wonder why as a country we have not ensured we always can maintain an adequate power supply?

### *Training is important*

Since January this year I have run three very different training days that I think are important. The first of these was for the Aust Federal Police Rescue Squad, we provided these great people with an Advanced 4wd course, and they were blown away with the new skills we taught them, the tricks of the trade when it comes to 4wd driving in tricky conditions and the safety aspects we showed them when using recovery gear. The second course was for the NSW shop managers of ARB, they hired my training centre for their own workshop training and on day 2 we were

able to take them bush around the training grounds and again demonstrate that no matter how good the gear is that you have on your 4wd, if you don't have the skill to drive in tricky conditions in the first place, it simply won't get you through. The ARB team walked away very impressed with our centre and our method of training.



**It was a pleasure to host the team from ARB at our training centre a couple of weeks ago**

Finally, and probably the most important of them all, I actually ran a course for my own employees, we spent a couple of days going through our own emergency response procedures. I devised various different scenarios based on what can happen on a trip so we could work shop through our response to each of them, document the outcomes and implement change where needed.

My government back ground in business continuity and emergency response management came to the fore, so if you are in a business where you think you might need to brush up or develop emergency response or business continuity, have a talk to me about using my training centre and perhaps I can assist you prepare a suitable training program.

### *So did it fill?*

In December 2018 I embarked on an ambitious project to build a permanent

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water crossing at my 4wd training centre. With the help of a skilled bobcat driver over 3 days we dug a big hole, measuring 25 metres long by 8 metres wide and over a metre deep. I lined the pool sized hole with heavy duty vinyl and then partially filled it with river rock to simulate a real river bed. Then we waited for it to rain. Despite being another rather dry summer, along with our own bushfire threat, the rain did come and it did fill the water crossing, and now we have a perfect water crossing for everyone to experience during our training.



**Our permanent water crossing in action**

### *Rosehill Caravan and Camping Show*

This huge show is on again this week starting on 24 April and running through to 29 April at the Rosehill Racecourse. It is the largest show of its kind in NSW and attracts over 60,000 people. Great Divide Tours will have a display there and we are located in the JR Fleming stand on the ground floor on stand number 266, if you are visiting the show please do your best to find us (the show is so big some say you need two days to see everything), I'll be on the stand on Tuesday and Wednesday and again on Saturday and Sunday. My look alike twin brother, Richard, will be there all this week, and of course on the weekend you can catch up with Wayne and Alex and myself.

### *New Zealand - the best trip ever*

I have just arrived back home from our latest New Zealand trip and I have to say after running these for the past 9 years, this was the best one ever! This was because on day 2 of the trip New Zealand turned on a real snow job! Snow fell right down to 500 metres and layered all the mountains in a beautiful white dusting. It certainly added already to the amazing grandeur of our NZ trip. But it also meant that several of our planned tracks were now impassable, buried under metres of snow. But our local guide, Steve Beston, knows the Island like I know the high country, and he soon came up with some amazing alternative tracks that were just as spectacular. One in particular around the shores of Lake Hawea north of Wanaka was a real breath taker, literally perched on the side of a cliff it was not for the faint hearted. It was so good that I've made sure it is now included in next year's trip to NZ. I also deliberately ran the trip 3 weeks later than usual to help catch the beautiful autumn colours and this paid off big time, with stunning coloured vistas adding to the snow capped mountains.



**Snow everywhere in NZ, see the last page for more photos of this incredible trip**

A stand out moment was digging or way through a 3 metre snow drift in a blizzard! The 2019 trip is scheduled to commence on 8 April and if you would like to

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undertake one of the best 4wd trips in the world (a big call but I think it's fair) then drop me an email I'll send you the itinerary.

### *Circling the Simpson*

In just 2 weeks time I head out for my 22<sup>nd</sup> crossing of the Simpson Desert. But this trip will be a little different, I'll be crossing it east west via the Rig road, then south north via the Colson Track and then west east via the Madigan Line. An epic trip that sees me needing to carry 330 litres of fuel just to get between refuel points, Being self sufficient for 20 days, and looking after our customers at the same time. I won't have a lot of mobile phone coverage, but when I do I'll be updating the Great Divide Tours Facebook page so you can follow me on this epic trip.

### *Doing it for Prostate Cancer*

In September I'm leading a group of up to 30 4wd drives on a fabulous outback challenge out to Birdsville and back. We are all raising money for Prostate Cancer Research, sadly 9 men a day die from this cancer. This is my chance to give back to our great community, I've been asked to design the route and lead the trip for the various fund raising adventurers. Some of my clients have already signed up for the adventure, and it is not too late if you would also like to join us. Just go to <https://charitycarevents.com.au/pcfarily/> and follow the links to register for this great event. The fees involved cover your accommodation and meals on the outback trek plus the small admin fees which help make it all happen, then you are asked to raise at least \$1500 as a donation towards Prostate Cancer Research, we are aiming for \$30,000 in our first year but it looks like we should easily exceed that already.

If you can't spare the time to join me for 10 days on the outback trek, then you can still support the event by sponsoring my entry in the challenge, simply go to <https://outback4wdadventure.everydayhero.com.au/outback-vic> and make a donation of any size.

Please help me with this important fund raiser, even if you only donated \$10 and everyone of my newsletter recipients did this we would collectively achieve our goal of \$30,000.

### *Need a Plumber?*

While I'm plugging good things If you've got a drip you can't stop, call Stop Drip Plumbing on 0403 847 378.



Ty is of course my nephew.

### *Luke King cracks it*

My nephew Luke King is at it again in 2018, following his dream to be a champion race car driver, and the first round was held on 21-22 April at Sandown in Victoria and he came away with a great result. He missed the opportunity for a good qualifying lap and started race 1 in position 15, and managed to climb up to 10<sup>th</sup> overall. then in Race 2 he converted that to a podium finish in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, followed by the final race where he scored 2<sup>nd</sup> place, giving him overall 3<sup>rd</sup> placing thus far in the series, well done Luke and your team.



**It is great to be a supporter of this young man who displays incredible talent in many fields.**

*What's coming up and what vacancies have we still remaining?*

Just so you don't miss out in case you are thinking of joining us this year, this is how the current bookings look.

**Simpson Desert Safari** in May - I took the final booking today.

**Botswana Africa** in June - we have two trips going and we have just one vacancy due to a cancellation. We can offer a super special price on this spot, but you need to get in quick if you would like an adventure in Africa with GDT. Contact us now for more info!

Our ever popular **High Country** trips have just one more tour before the Winter closures, this is the accommodated trip making the trip very attractive, no tents and no meal cooking as we provide it all, the last trip for this season departs on 19 May and I have 4 spots remaining.

We have two trips going up the **Canning Stock Route** this year, the first one leaves Uluru on 7 June and has 4 spots remaining, the second trip departs Uluru on 9 July and has only one vacancy, so be quick.

The **Big Red Bash** trip is from 6-17 July with head line artist John Farnham performing on Big Red, don't miss this fantastic outback odyssey with 3 day concert, we have 4 spots remaining.



**Join us at the Big Red Bash in July**

Our second **Simpson Desert Safari** tour kicks off out of Broken Hill on 9-22 July and we have just 3 spots left on this one, join us as we cross 1100 sand dunes.

On 6 July we head into the **Kimberley** region on our amazing 26 day trip and we have 3 spots remaining on this trip, and we do it all again 26 July and have just one vacancy on this tour.

We are running two 10 day **Kimberley Cruises** in conjunction with the Kimberley Odyssey cruise ship this year, and we have just one double berth cabin left on the trip departing Broome on 22 August, if you were really keen you could do our 26 day Kimberley 4wd trip commencing 26 July and then join us on this incredible cruise.

We also have two 4wd trips to **Cape York** this year, the trip leaving Cairns on 26 July is fully booked, but our second trip starting from Cairns on 16 August has just one vacancy available, be quick as I'm sure to sell it at the Rosehill show this week, drop me an email now.

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**Arnhem Land** is one of our most popular trips and little wonder when you consider we are the only 4wd tag-along tour operator taking tours into this incredible part of Australia. My trip departing Jabiru on 8 August is fully booked, but I now have a second trip planned to start from Jabiru on 1 September, give me a call for a copy of the itinerary 02 99131395 .

From 31 August we are running our famous **Outback Icons** tour from Cobar to Birdsville and back to Port Augusta, this is a fully accommodated trip with dinner and breakfast provided in the outback pubs, it was a smash hit last year and this year I currently have just one spot remaining on the trip.

Finally here is a trip that has a few vacancies and rates in my book as one of the best we offer. It is our **Flinders Ranges** Wildflower tour, 12 days exploring loads of private station tracks across the Flinders along with a trip to Cameron Corner and finishing underground at White Cliffs, it starts on 31 August and I've got plenty of spots still available.



Getting a different perspective on the Flinders Ranges

### *Fun in the Snow*

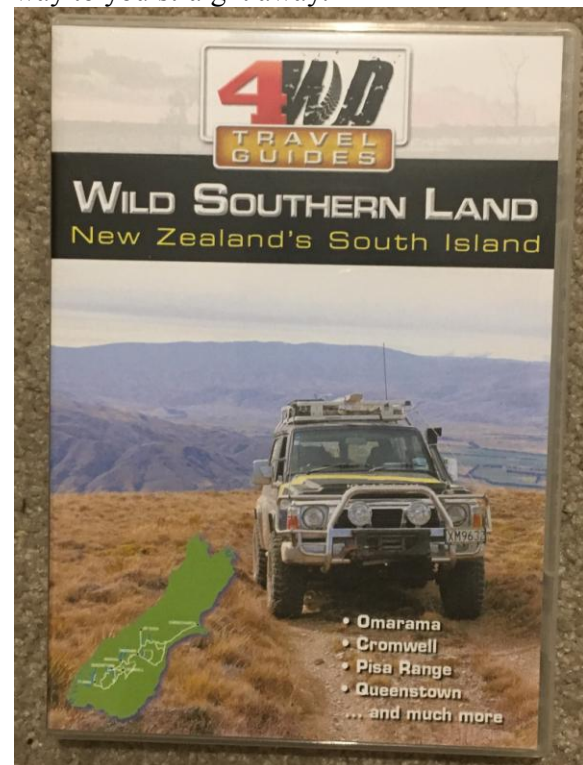
Our Snow Tours in August last year proved to be very popular, and this year is no exception, the three day trip planned

for 4-6 August has already received several bookings and I now have only two spots remaining, so if you were thinking of doing a bit of snow four wheeling and enjoying the delights of Tumberumba and sitting of Santa's knee, then you will need to book this one real soon. Go to [www.4wd.net.au](http://www.4wd.net.au) to make your booking.

### *A great Mother's Day present*

Well? Maybe not, but how else will you get to see it. I have received the latest DVD I was involved in making, it covers my New Zealand tour from a couple of years ago. If you ever wondered why I rave so much about these New Zealand 4wd trips that I offer, then why not shell out the \$30 for purchase and delivery of this DVD and see for yourself if this is a trip you would like to do with me one day.

\$30 includes postage to you, just drop me an email and we will get your copy on its way to you straight away.



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Better still, drop into our stand at the Rosehill show and pick up a copy and save the postage fees!

### *June Long Weekend trip*

Every June long weekend 9-11 June 2018, we run a 3 day trip to one of the best 4wd camping locations in NSW, the beautiful Bendethera Valley on the south coast just inland from Moruya and just 2 hour's drive from Canberra. It is cold in June as you would expect but the base camp for two nights beside the Deua River in the very picturesque valley and the fantastic 4wd action that surrounds the valley helps keep you warm, as will our roaring camp fire each evening. I already have 4 vehicles booked on this great trip being led by Alex, so if you would like to join us for some Winter camping fun, may I suggest you book early as I have a feeling this one is going to be fully booked before too long.



**Lots of great river crossings on this trip**

### *So what is new?*

Anyone that has followed us for a few years will have seen GDT grow from leading 4wd tag-alongs along the eastern sea board and providing one of the best 4wd training programs to become an international touring company, that has diversified into the adventure tourism market. Our grass roots are still firmly planted in providing the best 4wd training experience available as witnessed by the

investment I have made in my Braidwood 4wd training centre and our 4wd tag-along tours that now explore every corner of Australia. But we have diversified with our overseas trips to places like New Zealand, Namibia and Botswana.

The adventure tourism side of things is reflected in our Kimberley Cruise program both this year and next year. So what else can you expect from the team at Great Divide? Well, I have a few things in the pipeline such as our Iceland 4wd trip in 2019, in fact this one proved so popular that we have now filled two trips next June and July! I also have an idea that I would like to see the Northern Lights whilst doing a cruise down the Norway coast, if that sparks any interest, let me know and I'll develop the idea further.

I'm pretty keen to take a 4wd trip through Madagascar too and reckon we will get this up and running by 2020.



**Our African trips are proving to be very popular**

Planning and coordinating adventure style travel seems to be my strength and given I have a passion for driving and touring, I reckon plenty of you also share this passion, and it doesn't always have to involve a 4wd. In fact, just like me, I bet quite a few of you have another motor vehicle tucked away in the garage (or perhaps even a motor bike) My Toyota 86

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is sitting in my garage just waiting for me to take it for a long drive along the Great Ocean Road. So that is the plan, around February 2019 I am going to take a long drive on some of the best roads in the country, through the Snowy Mountains, over the Great Alpine Road in Victoria and along the Great Ocean Road and up to the Grampians, all on sealed roads and all designed for your favourite road going machine. It's just a twinkle in my eye at the moment, but it will be around 10 days long, be fully accommodated with dinner and breakfast included. If you have a special car or bike that you would like to unleash on a totally organised trip, drop me an email and you'll get the chance to be the first join me on the "Great Aussie Road Trip"



**Do you have a special car in your garage ?**

### *Controversy Corner*

It wouldn't be a proper newsletter if I didn't have an opinion on something, would it! Recently I saw some testing being carried out on the use of snatch straps and the effect of putting an air break on the strap. In case you are not sure what I'm talking about, let me explain. When using a snatch strap or winch cable or any length of cable or strap or rope in a recovery exercise it is always prudent to try to dampen the rebound action of that cable or strap in the event of something breaking. Only recently another four

wheel driver lost his life when a recovery went wrong and the strap rebounded and hit him!

To date, all our training has told us to put something over the strap/cable that is under tension, this might be a recovery blanket, a jacket, a towel, a sleeping bag, anything to arrest the rebound action. In the test I saw, the use of a single un-weighted recovery blanket actually had very little effect on arresting the rebound action of the snatch strap it was used on. It wasn't until two recovery blankets weighted down with 5kgs each of sand were used before any arresting of the rebound of the breaking strap occurred.

This highlighted to me that not only people like me who are accredited 4wd trainers, but the manufacturers and retailers of recovery equipment need to look at a system of arresting the rebound action that actually works. Whether this be the use of two weighted recovery blankets or another means of arresting the energy in the strap/cable, something needs to be approved as the industry standard. I'm going to keep working on this one as it might save someone's life one day.

In the meantime, when and if you get involved in the recovery of a vehicle using any strap or rope or cable under stress, please use at least two proper recovery blankets and fill their pockets with sand or soil.

Stay safe over the Winter months and I'll try to get another Newsletter out to you before my Kimberley Cruise in August, remember, we have one double cabin left on this amazing trip!

Regards

Vic Widman

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Look over the page for more scenes from my New Zealand trip last week

