



Newsletter No. 52 August 2019

G'Day, Outback Vic here.

Hi everyone, Even though its been a month since I arrived back from our Iceland tour it still seems like only yesterday. So this month's newsletter will cover off what we saw and did in Iceland. I also have some great trips coming up most of which have solid bookings with just a few vacancies still available. I would also like to take you cruising around Tasmania, literally cruising on a boat that is and share with you some of the great experiences that many of our clients have indulged in over the past couple of months. So let me get on with it



We were only in Doha for 3 hours, but the size of the airport which needed its own train to get between terminals blew me away. As we took off for another 8 hour flight to Oslo in Norway I stared out of my now window seat at a landscape as depressing as any I have seen. Not a tree or blade of grass to be seen. These middle east countries may be the richest in the world but they chose the worst place in the world to find oil if you ask me.



We loved the architecture in Bergen Norway

Iceland - how was it?

Julie and I departed Sydney early on a Sunday morning, and endured a 14 hour flight to a place called Doha. When I say endured, I don't do a lot of long haul flights and we were only in economy class, so the seating is very cramped and although the movie list was good, after 3 feature lengths movies and with still 8 hours of flying time to go, I was a little over it. I also can't sleep on plane flights whilst sitting up, but the best investment I have ever made was my noise cancelling headphones. They stop all the usual plane sounds and crying babies from irritating and allow me to actually hear the actors in the various movies.

Finally we landed in Oslo, we had decided to take advantage of flying halfway around the world and do a little sightseeing in Norway before our Iceland adventure. So with little sleep after 27 hours of travel Julie and I endured an hour long wait to get through customs in a much smaller airport, then we found our way onto a train which took us into the centre of Oslo after just one other stop, magic! Our hotel was 50 metres away but we first walked 200 metres to the wrong one of course!

We spent a couple of days in Oslo and really enjoyed this charming city, I was especially taken by seeing the original Kon Tiki which I remember studying at school.

Then we boarded the superb train service that Norway is blessed to have and went from Oslo over the snow capped mountains to Voss for a couple of nights and then onto Bergen in another train. Bergen was equally enjoyable and we walked and took boat rides and caught trams and did all sorts of touristy things, we really enjoyed Norway and want to see more of it.



A fjord cruise in Norway

Finally we flew to Iceland and after landing in Reykjavik and taking the 50 minute bus ride from the airport to the city across a lava flow, we were beginning to doubt if this Iceland adventure was a good idea. The scenery between the airport and the city was very drab compared with Norway, even the city was rather dull compared to Oslo and Bergen.



The size of the wheels on our Arctic trucks looked like overkill until we drove on the glacier.

Fortunately, once we picked up our giant Arctic Trucks it was so much better! We spent the next 11 days driving from the left on the wrong side of the road, not that there were a lot of real roads to drive on. The ever changing scenery was literally out of this world, we could have been driving on another planet for all we knew, because this was not Earth as I knew it. Driving across black sand deserts is pretty out there, driving through volcanic ash deserts is up there with it, driving around giant mountains that are in fact remnant volcanoes, which could erupt at any time is plain crazy. Seeing countless waterfalls was stunning, but then driving across frozen glaciers in an Arctic Truck on 38 inch wheels in low range with front and rear diff locks engaged and tyre pressure down to just 4psi, well that is just nuts! Oh, did I mention we walked inside a glacier too!



Driving through deserts of black sand

Words don't do Iceland justice, you really need to see it in person, even my 2000 plus photos and videos can't capture the true awesome beauty of Iceland. But have a look at the Vic Widman Facebook site for lots and lots of video and photos on this amazing adventure.

<https://www.facebook.com/vic.widman>

It was time to fly home, and this we did in one very long 38 hour travel stint via London and Doha again. I've learnt my lesson, never fly more than 9 hours in one go and have at least a 36 hour break between

each flight, that's what I'll be doing next time.



Imagine what its like in Winter!

Like the 400 metre relay, I swapped batons with Jenny from my office as she flew over to join our second group of adventurers on the second Iceland trip, she too was blown away by the beauty of Iceland. It was well worth the travel and money to experience this once in lifetime adventure.



Drive on a Glacier - Tick!

I initially had not planned to offer another trip to Iceland, but that was before I went, so now we are working on a similar trip in August 2020, a little later than normal in the hope that we might catch a view of the Northern Lights. When we travelled in June, the sun only set for 35 mins, so there were no dark skies during our 14 day Iceland stay, a most unusual feeling waking up at 2 am and seeing the sun shining. More details on our next Iceland tour will be available

shortly, but if you are keen to join us in 2020, please let me know by return email.

What else has been going on?

Winter is our busiest time as far as 4wd tours go, since the beginning of June I've had two Maralinga trips, one Canning Stock Route trip, one Kimberley trip, one Greening of the Outback tour, three Simpson Desert trips, a Madigan Line tour and our annual trip to the Big Red Bash along with a few weekend and day trips up and down the east coast. One weekend we had 6 different tours or courses being delivered. Great Divide Tours is definitely the largest 4wd tag-along tour company in Australia, and that is amazing!

Right now I've got a group trekking across the rocks to the very tip of Australia and another group catching metre long fish and spotting crocs off West Arnhem Land.



There were lots of waterfalls in Iceland

I do like to survey my clients after these trips, and the majority of the time our clients love what we do, sometimes we don't get it perfect but I need to know about that so I can work on it, that's why we do these surveys. But overwhelmingly our clients appear to be very happy, the following is just a sample of the feedback I have received.

Dear Jenny and Vic,

We are finally finished with the washing and cleaning from completing our

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Simpson tour with Brad last Sunday. We are writing to say a huge thank you to Brad and to feedback on what an awesome job he did. For our first tag along tour he has set a very high benchmark of great customer service. We found him to be very knowledgeable of the areas we went to and very capable mechanically and all things 4WD. He was very helpful towards everyone and very aware of the needs and capabilities of everyone in the group, and yet made everyone feel at ease and confident. Nothing was too much for him, and was always ready to assist, lend a hand and fix. He was very approachable when we had questions or queries. He showed interest in everyone's areas of interest as well. His fun facts were very interesting and informative and we enjoyed learning so much about the history of the places we went to. We felt very safe and at ease with him guiding us, as he was very organised and explained things to us e.g. his morning briefings. We had 2 younger children on the tour and he was as engaging with them as he was with the adults. He was also very diplomatic in his interactions with everyone. I don't think we would have had as awesome a time without his easy going yet fun way of keeping us all on 'track', but at the same time allowing us the freedom to take pictures whenever we wanted and having a lot of fun along the way. He added a great deal of value to our experience and we would not hesitate to recommend him to others or to take another tour with him if the opportunity arose again. Thank you Brad! We have a lifetime of great memories from this trip.

As you can imagine when I receive emails such as this one, it makes me rather happy.



On top of Big Red with Brad Bell in July 2019

What is coming up that might interest you?

Over the next couple of months I have a variety of trips that may be of interest to you, so if you are getting a little cabin fever from staying inside during our Winter months, maybe a day away or even a longer trip might interest you. Let's look at these trips in date order . I hope to get this newsletter out to you before the end of the week, so the first weekend to look at is 10-11 August, well I have two great trips on over this coming weekend both of which are fully booked, sorry, not much point identifying these for you or is there? If you are like me, I get excited when the news media starts telling me that we are going to have a polar blast and that's exactly what they are predicting for this weekend. You see, I have the second of our special Snow tours- Christmas in August trips planned for around the Snowy Mtns. Last weekend was the first trip and sadly there was no snow, even Cabramurra failed to deliver - I feel very sorry for those clients that attended, but with Alex leading you and a special appearance by Santa on Sunday evening I hope you still enjoyed the trip. However, this weekend looks like being very different. Now we all know you

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cannot trust the weather man, but if the predictions are correct, this weekend's trip might even find our tour group snowed in! (In their beautiful motel in Tumbarumba we hope) I feel pretty sure this is going to be a fantastic snow event for everyone.



They are even predicting snow for Braidwood!

But wait! there is more! I also have our Hill End Abercrombie tour on this weekend with an overnight stop in Oberon. That same Polar blast is expected to drop snow on the Central Tablelands, which is exactly where this trip will be held. Now, provided everyone can get safely to the meeting place in Lithgow, this should be a load of fun for everyone and it is very likely that those lucky people on this fully booked trip will also get to do some snow driving. I will be watching the weather with excitement, I might even take an impromptu drive up into the mountains myself to get myself a snow fix!

18 August a 1 day trip in the Blue Mountains

So this is a week away from us and is our great Cox and Kowmung river tour. Just a day trip in the Blue Mtns, we meet at Lithgow and then escort you along the Cox River to a delightful bush setting beside the river for morning tea. We then follow the infamous 6 foot track (Who knows how it got its name?) all the way to Jenolan Caves. The road passes right through the archway at the caves. We then drive up the other side of the Jenolan Valley and out to the strikingly beautiful Kanangra Walls. After lunch and a walk to view the Walls, possibly one of the best views in NSW, we then follow the steep low range tracks across the Kowmung river and through the pretty valley known as Dingo Dell. The trip will conclude back near Little Hartley around 5pm. A brilliant day in the bush. I have 6 spots on this day trip at present and the cost is just \$250 per vehicle.



See this great view on this one day trip
22 August Cape York

Well this is a long shot, but my second Cape York trip commences out of Cairns on 22 August, so in theory its not too late to join us, it concludes back at Cairns on 9 September, a trip to the tip anyone?

24-25 August Driver Training

If you have not joined us as yet at my beautiful 4wd training centre near Braidwood, maybe this is the best time to do it, I'll be down there doing the training so you can brush up on your 4wd skills, the cost is \$650 and includes 2 days of training for 2 people and is fully catered with camping on my beautiful property included.



**Learning how to save on tyre wear?
Well not really, but definitely learning
how to use your traction control!**

29 August - 6 September The Darling River Run

This is a fully accommodated trip, which means no tent and apart from bringing lunch all the meals are included. We start in Lightning Ridge and drive through the Culgoa Flood plain which is the head waters of the Darling, then we overnight at the following spots, Bourke, Trilby station (Right on the banks of the Darling) White Cliffs Underground Motel, Broken Hill for two nights giving us time to explore the town of Silverton, the Mundi Mundi plain and maybe even the Dog Fence along the border, then Menindee, Kinchega National Park, Pooncarrie, Wentworth where we see the Darling join the mighty Murray, Mildura for two nights, Mungo NP and the Walls of China, then back up through central west NSW to Hillston for our final evening together. Brian and Kirsten will

be leading this trip and I still have 4 spots available. The cost is \$6,900 per couple and includes the tour, accommodation each night for 9 nights, dinner and breakfast for two for the 9 days and an evening paddle boat dinner cruise on the Murray.



Down the Darling

*I have 1 spot remaining on our new
accommodated trip to the Flinders
Ranges 9-20 September.*

That's right, just one spot remains on this cracking trip. Starting from Broken Hill to Port Augusta via the Flinders Ranges. It is very similar to our usual Flinders trip and we will still visit a number of private stations and explore their 4wd tracks that they have opened to the public for a small fee. This includes Horseshoe Top End, Arkapena, Merna Morna, Willow Springs and Sky Trek, Mt Newman and of course Arkaroola with its Echo Back Camp track and Ridgetop trail.

There are three different ways you can do this trip with us. First up there is the fully accommodated tour which includes dinner and breakfast each day. Then you have the option of camping on the trip and doing your own meals, and finally you can do the same trip and elect to camp but join us for dinner each night at our various accommodation locations. The prices are as follows:-

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Fully Accommodated: \$7990 for 2 people
Camping with Dinner supplied: \$5290
Camping only : \$3990
I rate the Flinders as good as the High Country so if you have a spare fortnight available think about joining us on this great trip.



Stunning vistas on our Flinders trip

On the 8 September our ever popular Stockton beach trip

You will need to be quick to get on this one if you would like to have a fun day with the family on the beach, I have just 4 spots remaining.

5-7 October 3 day long weekend tour

Every long weekend we take a trip, which is a camping trip with no trailers permitted, into the beautiful Bendethera Valley just south of Batemans Bay. Camping for two nights beside the crystal clear Deua river and following some of the best low range 4wd tracks in NSW. I've two bookings thus far, so we still have a few spots left.

An Outback photographic tour 26 October to 2 November

I announced this trip in the last Newsletter and its almost full, I have 3 spots only remaining, so if you own a camera and wish to learn how to use it from an expert photographer as well as enjoy a great

outback NSW 4wd trip, then check this out.

In October this year Neill Bell and his wife Gail will be leading an 8 day trip which starts from Sydney and heads out to Menindee and returns via the Warrumbungle Ranges. Gail has studied photography under Ken Duncan and knows how to take a pretty good photo. She also conducts learning programs in other forms of recreational activity and is quite versed in an easy going and sharing of knowledge approach. So with the great skills of Neill as a tour guide, if you've been away with him you will know exactly what I mean, and the easy going and approachable poise of Gail I believe this will be a fantastic trip.



A 8 day photo tour to some amazing locations in October 2019

We won't be spending every minute of the day looking through a camera lens, but we will be touring some great country and making sure we are camped at fabulous locations in time to then explore the local area with Gail beside you giving tips on all array of photographic capability from picture framing to night time star trails and depth of field . If you have an SLR camera and want to know what all those other dials off Auto really do in a fun atmosphere this is the trip for you.

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Tasmanian 4wd trip 22 November - 10 December 2019

My first Tassie trip is fully booked, it commences from 1 November but the good news is I now have a second trip commencing from 22 November, I have 3 vehicles booked on it and can confirm that this trip will be going ahead. I'll be leading this one personally and I'm really looking forward to showing you the best that Tassie has to offer. Actually I'm really excited about the itinerary I have put together as it comprises all the better known tourist attractions along with a lot of the lesser known spots as well as some great 4wd locations. November will be here before we know it, so if you have 19 days to spare please check this one out on my website at <http://4wd.net.au/4wd-tours/extended-safaris/touring-tassie-19-days>



Touring Tassie is full of wonderful sights

High Country Huts tour 22-28 November 2019.

This is a new trip on our calendar and within a few days of announcing it, it was booked out. So I have now listed a second trip commencing on 22 November. This is a 7 day trip that visits at least 20 of the high country huts. The trip is led by Wylie McGinnes my resident 4wd trainer at my training centre who is also a member of the High Country Huts restoration

association. A portion of your tour fee will be donated to the Huts Association to assist with the ongoing upkeep of the huts. I have a few vacancies on this second trip if you are interested. See here for more details <http://www.4wd.net.au/4wd-tours/2-7-day-tours/victorian-high-country-huts-trek>

Tasmanian Cruise March 2020

Well, here is another bucket list item. We all know (don't we?) that Tasmania is not only a great road trip. But being an island, Tasmania has some of the most pristine, wild and beautiful coastline in the whole country. So I thought why not have a look at it too?

Coral Expeditions have a luxurious cruise ship which spends the summer cruising around Tassie and I've got 10 cabins reserved for us. Would you like to join Julie and I on this magnificent 7 day cruise out of Hobart to Bruny Island, then down around the bottom of the island, and then back up to Maria Island before bringing you back to Hobart.



The coast off Bruny Island

I have reserved the cruise starting **2nd March 2020** for Great Divide Tours clients.

The cost is \$6720 per person for a luxurious Promenade Deck Category A room. The price includes the following:-

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- 7 nights accommodation on board
- All meals, morning & afternoon teas
- House wine & beer included with lunch & dinner
- Captains welcome and farewell drinks
- 24 hour barrista coffee and soft drinks YAY!
- Excursions aboard the Zodiacs
- Guest Lecturers (not me)
- Transfer to the airport or hotel at the end of the cruise
- My great jokes - ok this is not part of their package.

Have a look at their website for more details on what we will be doing and seeing, it looks fabulous.

<https://www.coralexpeditions.com/au/cruises/tasmania/7-night-hobart-hobart/>

The really good news is if you book this special Great Divide Tours cruise with me, you will be eligible for a special discount on my future trips, contact me for more details.

The bad news is, I have 10 days from now to fill the 10 cabins I have reserved, so get cracking and email me at info@4wd.net.au and let me know if you wish to join Julie and I in March 2020.

Kimberley Cruise April 2020 , 2 cabins only

That's right we have just 2 cabins remaining on our amazing 14 day Kimberley cruise from Wyndham to Broome on the Odyssey Explorer in April 2020.

How do I describe this trip? I've done a lot of travel in and around Australia over the past 45 years and the cruise along the Kimberley coast is the stand out best trip I have ever done. Words don't do the scenery justice, the boat is beautiful, the

food amazing and I can't think of a single thing not to like about this trip. I have 8 of the 10 cabins filled so we have just 2 twin cabins remaining, see here for the details <http://www.greatdividetours.com.au/4wd-tours/extended-safaris/cruise-the-kimberley-coast> Don't miss out on this trip, it is a real bucket list item and worth every red cent of the tour fee.



14 days on this luxury boat, life is good

Route 66 in 2020

I've had a good response to the possibility of doing route 66 so here is the info on it again, let me know if you are keen to join me next year. It may be 12 months away but its time to confirm the bookings, if you have already been in touch with me regarding this trip expect an email from me shortly.

I've found an Australian tour company in USA that facilitates us Aussies driving Route 66. I'm working with them to organise a Route 66 trip in October 2020, so let me know if you would like to receive more info on this trip. My plan is to add a few days of 4wd fun too and whilst I'm still sorting this out I hope to have firm details in the next couple of months. So if you are keen on a 20 day Route 66 trip plus a 5 day 4wd trip in an off road vehicle please drop me an email and I'll put you on the further info list.

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Prostate Cancer Fund Raising Rally

I helped organise the first of these rallies last year. Our target was to raise \$30,000 for research into prostate cancer, it is the number one killer of men in Australia. In the end the trip attracted 37 vehicles and we raised over a whopping \$200,000!!!! Many of the participants were clients of mine and no doubt read about this venture in my infrequent newsletters, so a big thank you to those that participated and those that were able to donate but not actually enter the event.

Now I don't expect that we will achieve that kind of figure again, but you never know. So this year I am leading the second of these outback adventure drives to continue raising money for cancer research for prostate cancer sufferers. This year we will start in Lightning Ridge and follow the Darling River to Broken Hill, spend some time exploring Eldee Station and then continue down the Darling to the Murray. We have included a paddle steamer dinner cruise, we will explore Mungo National Park and finish the drive in Tocumwal.



The Prostate rally is a fun event, you should join us in September

If you would like to join me on this fund raising event which includes all your accommodation and meals (dinner breakfast and lunch) and raise money for Prostate Cancer research and have fun

doing it then please go here to register <https://charitycarevents.com.au/pcfarrally/> or just donate to my goal to raise some money by going here <https://2019outback4wd.everydayhero.com.au/vic-widman-raising-money-for-prostate-cancer-research>

Need a plumber?

This add brought to you at no cost to either party, just give Ty Widman a call if you need a plumber, I put my reputation on his work ethic.

Outback Tours in 2020

Just a quick note to let you know that I am already getting some solid bookings for next year. My Canning Stock Route trip in June 2020 is already fully booked and I plan to run a second one in July. The High Country trip commencing 29 December 2019 is now fully booked, fortunately I have a few spots available on the trips commencing 3 January and just 2 spots available on the camper trailer friendly high country trip starting 6 January 2020.

The High Country trip in April 19-25 has only 1 spot remaining.

And my Arnhem Land trip in August 2020 has just two spots remaining, so if you are considering any of these trips please contact me asap.

Driver Training

Things continue to grow and grow in this market and we are getting some great feedback especially from our major

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corporate clients. I'm also doing a lot of work on the property, with general cleanups around the grounds, (lots of hard work involved there) installing some new 4wd obstacles and hopefully in a few weeks installing a massive set of solar panels to make us as green as possible. I've also put all my senior trainers and myself through extra training and assessment training, a requirement of offering nationally recognised 4wd training. With Wylie and Brad Bell undergoing the full TAE40116 Training and Assessment course, this is no mean feat either with over 15 days of face to face training followed by hours and hours of homework. I expect they will be fully qualified by the end of September. In the meantime Neill Bell, Bruce Cohen and myself now hold the senior trainer qualifications as above.



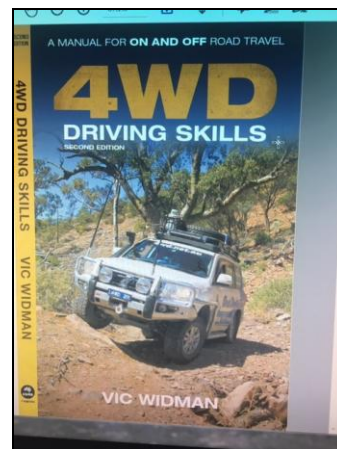
Collecting firewood is an ongoing task at the training centre.

The other really big news is that after 18 years I have finally convinced the CSIRO, who publish my 4WD Skills book, that it was time for a re-write. I have spent the past 6 months totally rewriting this training book, and updating it with all the new technology and 4wd recovery methods. It was a mammoth task, and they agreed to my

suggestion to make it a full colour book this time. With over 62,000 words of my wisdom on 4wd driving, it also addresses all of the 4wd curriculum in the various nationally recognised 4wd courses that are available. This means it can be used by people such as I that offer nationally recognised 4wd training.

The book is currently at the printers and its arrival is expected in September.

Watch my website and Facebook sites for the announcement of the availability of this book. I expect it to be the go to book on 4wd driving.



I'm super excited about the imminent release of my new book.

4WD Tip of the month

Last weekend Brad Bell was helping me at the 4wd training centre, and I convinced him he needed a tyre pressure monitoring kit for his Cruiser. All my 4wd drives are fitted with this after market device which tells me at a glance what pressure is in my tyres and alerts me if a slow leak should occur. I sell these kits for \$290. Well, I convinced Brad he should have one and in a couple of minutes he had it fitted to his Cruiser. Would you believe that 30 minutes later on his way home the low pressure alarm in the monitor started beeping, and sure

enough he had staked a tyre, which was now deflating slowly.



That's a strange way to collect firewood!

The TPMS system saved him ruining a perfectly good and expensive tyre or worst having a blow out at highway speed. Talk about lucky. I sell these gadgets either at the training centre or from my home in Sydney (we can even post it to you), and this would make a great Father's Day present, just \$290 per kit (suitable for 4 wheels, we can get 6 and 8 wheel units for those that tow too).

Finally

I hope everyone is keeping well and hope I have whetted your appetite to join us on one of the great trips that we have on offer. Stay safe everyone.

Vic

A few more photos from Iceland



Lupins grow wild in places



Beautiful lakes



How is that for a group photo!



Driving across a black sand desert



Tyres at 4psi on a glacier