

Australia 2007

Perth - Melbourne - Mornington OKA Rally - Sydney - Gold Coast

Leg details

Date March 17 - April 5, 2007

Leg Perth - Hyden - Norseman - Nullarbor - Ceduna - Port Augusta - Adelaide - Coorong - Cape Jaffa - Nora Creina - Woakwine cutting - Mt. Gambier - Great Ocean Road - Cape Otway - Mornington - Melbourne - Albury - Moss Vale - Yattah - Sydney - Wardell - Gold Coast

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



We leave **Perth** in the morning of Saturday, March 17th, stop at **Beverly** to visit our friends Cherry and Robert Williamson and continue towards **Hyden**. The country is very dry, all yellow and burned.

We drive until the sun sets and set up camp at the crossing of the **Hyden - Norseman Road** with the Holland Track. The outside temperature is still close to 30°C.

Ruedi notices that the batteries of the back-section are not fully charged. It looks like they have only been charged with the solar panels and not also with the alternator. Checking the alternator reveals a problem with the dual-battery charger that will require some attention.



We continue our way to **Norseman** and hit the **Nullarbor** shortly after lunch. It has not changed much since we came through last time in August 2006 except the construction site that is much longer now. They recon it will be there for another 15 months ...



Again and again we are amazed about the goods that are moved by truck form one side of the country to the other one.

We stay at the **Baxter Rest Area** for the night.

There are tracks at the back of the rest area leading to large camp areas and it is surprisingly quiet for the proximity of the Nullarbor.

Ruedi continues his testing of the electrical fault. It is either the OKA's battery, the alternator, the voltage regulator or the Arid battery charger that is playing up. But this will have to be tackled once we reach Adelaide or Melbourne.

We are surprised how fresh (13.9°C) and humid (80%) it gets out here over night. The plants have well adapted to this weather and seem to live quiet well of this little water they can get.

We continue traveling. After the **Madura Pass** the sun disappears behind the clouds and the temperature drops from some 28°C to 19°C. More and more we see puddles of water on the side of the road.

After the **Nullarbor Roadhouse** we catch up with the rain and stay in it until we stop for the night some 10 km west of the Yalata Roadhouse.

It rains the whole night. The humidity increases to up to more than 80%. Beside the drizzle there is also fog. We continue and find the Aboriginal owned **Yalata Roadhouse** still closed.

Diesel at the **Nundroo Roadhouse** has a good price (it is actually cheaper than in Ceduna!). They also have a display of Aboriginal Art with some interesting pictures, especially the whales and dolphins.

In **Ceduna** we follow the Eyre Hwy towards **Kyacutta** where we turn off towards Port Augusta.

As we pass **Kimba** it looks like the area has received quiet some rain in the last few days. The dams are full and water lies on the side of the road; we even see signs "Water over Road" and flooding. Amazing if one thinks that South Australia is in its 7th year of drought.

As we drive through the **Lake Gill Conservation Reserve** we see a Mini-Van on the shoulder on the other side of the road. When asked if they have a problem a young man explains that they have lost their gears. Only the 4th gear is left and he cannot start with that gear.

We give the van a good push and they manage to drive away. They will easily reach the next village. As we turn the OKA to continue our way we realise a bit too late that the shoulders are too soft for our weight and the OKA sinks in. But we are lucky and with the diffs locked we manage to reverse out of the track and get afloat again.

Lesson learned: don't leave the bitumen in a flood area!

We pass the **Princess Mines** in **Iron Knob** and once again have to take note to visit this attraction next time we come through and have more time ...

Staying at the rest area just west of Lincoln Gap turns out to be a noisy undertaking, the road trains run past all night.

We get up early. The sun is back on the sky, the batteries are being charged again by the solar cells and we have one worry less for the day.

We drive through **Port Augusta** (a dry area), along the **Flinders Ranges**, through **Port Germein** and **Port Pirie** to **Lochiel**.

There is not much activity at the road train assembly area, maybe next time ...

We are amazed about the amount of caravans and road trains that travel on this road.

Just before **Port Wakefield** we see a road train that must have been traveling a bit too fast ... now the driver has a lot of time to think about it until the crane has put the truck back on its wheels ...

We arrive at Peter and Margaret's place in **Adelaide**. Their OKA 196 is ready to hit the road (OKAs are named by their serial number).

On Thursday 23rd we hit the road towards Melbourne. It is muggy and the mozzies are pretty friendly.

Peter guides us through narrow roads that are almost too narrow for the two OKAs onto the Princess Hwy (also called South Eastern Fwy) towards east. The county is very dry, no greens to be seen, just brown earth. After passing the **Murray River** the country has a green touch and the trees have fresh leaves. Light rain sets in ...

We follow the Princess Hwy towards **Meninglee**, **Coorong** and the coast. The sun is back and the temperature rises to over 30°C.

As we drive along Peter informs us about the attractions and tracks we can visit next time we are here ...



After **Kingston** we deviate to **Cape Jaffa** for lunch. It's a nice little harbour where the Southern Lobster is fished. The place is under development, channels are dug so future house owners get direct boat access to the ocean.

Driving back to the main road we pass many vineyards and pine tree farms. The wood of the trees is used to build houses. We stay on the Southern Ports Hwy and after **Robe** pass many lakes.



We stop at **Nora Creina**, a private property with a small village of holiday cottages on it.



A walk along the beautiful beach with its rock-formations gives us a chance to cool down a bit (temperature is 34.5°C).

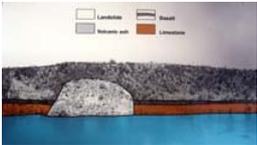
We visit the **Woakwine cutting**. This is a cut through a small hill that was constructed to drain a large swamp.



The cutting is 1 km in length, 28 - 34 meters at its deepest point and 276'000 cubic meters of material had to be removed for it. It was undertaken by 2 men and was completed in less than 3 years. They used a caterpillar D7 tractor, a 7 ton drain ripper, Letourneau 8 - 11 yard scraper and explosives.

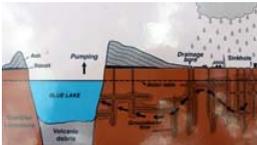


At **Mt. Gambier** we visit the **Blue Lake** and are stunned by its beauty and the deep blue of the water.



Volcanic activity occurred in the Mount Gambier area in recent geological time.

The Blue Lake crater is an explosive structure called a *maar* which consists of a rim of ejected material (basalt and ash) resting directly on the pre-eruption land-surface. The crater, which formed during two closely spaced periods of eruptions some 4'800 years ago (extremely recent in geological terms ...), is one of the youngest volcanoes in Australia. Average depth is 80m, its deepest section 204m keeping the water cold all year round.



Groundwater flow into the Blue Lake is mainly from the regional limestone aquifer (Gambier Limestone). This flow starts to the north of Mount Gambier and, as the groundwater moves through the aquifer, it is replenished by infiltration of rainfall and storm-water.

Mount Gambier disposes of its storm-water via 350 drainage bores and sink-holes through the city. This low salinity water has caused the salinity of the Blue Lake to decrease since the early 1970s.

The colour of the Blue Lake changes dramatically from grey to vivid blue over a few days in November each year. Then after summer, usually in late March, it gradually fades until the grey winter appearance is resumed.



We travel to the **Little Blue Lake**. It is another volcanic lake, quiet deep and its water is also cold.

But after this hot day we are brave and have a swim.

We stay over night and ruin the plans of at least 2 other youngsters that wanted to have a few quiet moments in their cars alone...

After a warm night (24.5°C) with some rain the sunrise is beautiful. Strong winds set in.

We head off and pass **Piccanini Ponds** and **Nelson**, drive through the **Cobboboonee State Forest** to **Portland**. We stay on the Princess Hwy and pass **Port Fairy**, a nice little town. It is the season for the Angus cows to have their little ones. Lots of calves can be seen running around.



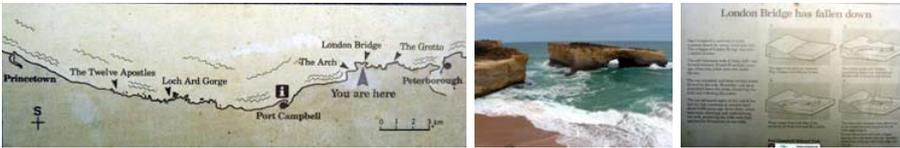
The temperature rises to 32.5°C and the wind picks up clouds of dust that are blown over the country. In **Warrnambool** we have the impression of having a sand storm blowing through the city. The storm increases and the temperature rises to 35°C. Even though it is mid day it feels like dusk.



We measure peaks up to 60 kmh on the wind-meter.



We turn into the **Great Ocean Road** and visit a few of the many lookouts (... Grotto ... London Bridge ... The Arch ...)



London Bridge used to be connected with the main land. Then a few years back the bridge collapsed without any warning. Some people were trapped on the new island and had to be rescued by helicopter. Luckily nobody was on the bridge when it collapsed.



At the Arch the limestone rock has been washed out by water creating "curtains".



As the Great Ocean Road is mainly travelled by tourist (many of them from overseas) signs reminding of the "right" and "wrong" way of driving in Australia have been mounted at the exits from the parking bays.



We pass **Port Campbell**, a busy little tourist village and continue our tourist drive ... the twelve apostles...

On **Wattle Hill** at about 550 m altitude the OKA decides to "auto shut-off" its motor, luckily close to a bay. Ruedi checks all and the only thing that is a bit too high is the coolant. So he tries to restart the engine and there is no problem. Hmmm?!



We proceed to **Wangerrip**, where we turn off, follow a track into the bush and stay over night at a property of a fellow OKA-owner.



The Easter Lilies are still blooming.

It rains all night and the temperature drops to 10.5°C.



We still decide to go on the walk in Oatway National park down to the ocean and find a friendly mob of kangaroos.



The area is also populated by less friendly creatures.

This leech found his way up Susi's sleeve and made himself comfortable on her upper arm.

Sprinkling salt on them makes them flee the scene quickly

We continue on our route and deviate to **Cape Otway** to have a look at the lighthouse.

They charge an entry fee of 12.50 \$ per person which we think is a rip off.

But as it anyway starts raining again and we don't fancy going for a walk in this lousy weather we decide not to go in.



On the way back we find at least 8 koalas in the trees.

During the day the weather improves a bit, but the warmest we see is 16.5°C.

With the strong wind blowing it feels much colder. We are surprised to see so many people still in shorts and even surfies on their boards.



We continue along the coast. The beaches look beautiful in the sunshine.



We catch the ferry at **Queenscliff** over to **Sorrento**.



Crossing the entry into Port Philipp Bay wakes memories of our [trip to Australia on the Matisse in 2005](#).

When we see a large container boat coming in we are ready to go back on board.

We drive to **Mornington**, where we stay at the property of Juergen and Claudia, where the OKA-rally is held.



The OKAs keep coming, some ex-army ones, some built up as campers.
The campers are all inspected and the "big boys" can do some "OKAing" ... (= talking about the ins and outs of "their" OKAs)



Future OKA-driver?



After a cold night with only 8.6°C the sun is up again.
We start visiting fellow OKA-owner and having a look at their vehicles.

Even more OKAs arrive.
By 2 PM 26 OKAs are assembled at Juergen and Claudia's property.
This is record!



At lunch there is plenty to be discussed.



Then some OKAs are taken on Juergen's 4WD track.
Amazing little trucks ... even if they snatch an axle every so often ... (only true for the old OKAs, our NT has much stronger axles)



We decide to have a group picture taken.
Drivers and photographers get in position.



What a sight!
26 OKAs lined up ... this must make every OKA-owners heart beat a bit higher

Then we go for a drive through Morningside and have a ball of a time.
Later on in the afternoon the majority leaves.



For the rest it's another Barbie and some more OKAing...

On Monday March 27, 2007, during the morning the last OKAs leave.
Thanks to Juergen, Claudia and family for having us.
It was so much fun!
Just call and the OKAs will be back

We go into town and have the electrical system checked.
As the battery and the alternator are found to be fine the fault must lay within the wiring.
Ruedi gets to work and finds the loose and corroded contact at the central connection point at the starter motor.

After one last night at Juergen and Claudia's we leave towards **Morwell**, where the 20'000 km service will be done by Whitehorse Trucks.
It is sad, but the Arid dual-battery charger still does not work, only the solar panels are charging the batteries in the back.

Looks like there is something wrong with the Arid too.



In Morwell we see this interesting truck.
The semi-trailer can be folded and loaded onto the truck.
Unfolded the trucks carries large logs.

During the 20'000 km service on Wednesday no problems are found during.
So we head straight back to Melbourne because we have the next appointment lined up in the city at 8:00 AM in the morning.

On the way again we get an "auto shut-off" of the motor. Guessing it could be because we are running low on fuel (6%) we switch tanks and try to start the motor.
As the motor does not start even after 8 x 30 seconds of cranking again we need the help of OKA.
After checking all OKA's engineer Lindon recommends one more try but leaving the motor cranking even after 30 seconds.
It starts the 9th time after cranking for 40 seconds non-stop this can't be it Lindon, OKAs developer, promises that he will look for another solution for priming.

Driving in **Melbourne** in the early evening, in the dark, with rain, lots of traffic and narrow, bumpy roads is a nightmare for Ruedi.
But Susi guides perfectly through the city based on a GPS-Route she prepared before hand.
Since we end up in a residential area and to be sure we are at the right place we call Roger Smith (the developer) from Beadlocks Australia.
He allows us to camp in his backyard (which is also his workshop) for the night.

A beadlock is a kind of flat Kevlar tube inserted into the tubeless tire.
This prevents the tire to roll off the rim while driving with low tire pressure.
We have to replace ours as they don't work properly with the bolt-together rims.

Susi is busy answering mails. One of them is from a Swiss couple that has found our web page and wants to meet us.
As they live in Melbourne we quickly answer them and are invited to stay at their property in Heidelberg West, approx. 12 km north of Melbourne.

Fitting the new "SecondAir Beadlocks" and modified valves, takes up the whole of Thursday.
In the evening again we have to drive through the suburbs of Melbourne to get to ABS (Auto Brake Service) in Frankstone.
And again it rains ... the OKA is really not the right vehicle to be driven through a city during rush-hour in rainy conditions ...

Since the owner of the ABS shop is a member of the OKA Owners Group we camp directly in front of the shop.
ABS will fit another break distribution valve for us, which will improve brake performance.
Due to the load, the brake power is currently wrongly balanced between the front and back axle.

Friday is also washing day.
As it rains on and off during the whole day the clothes that cannot be tumble-dried are dried in the truck.
They are placed on the clothe-line inside the truck, the floor heating and the fan turned on.
It works perfectly; another theory tested and proven to work.

Ruedi finds that one of the tires with the new Beadlocks looses air.
So we will have to go back to the shop tomorrow again to get it fixed.



We drive to **Heidelberg West** and find Barbara and Rogers place.
After an extensive inspection of the OKA we soon find ourselves inside the house discussing pros and cons of camper concepts as Barbara and Roger are starting to plan their own rig.
Once again we find that even if you haven't known each other for a long time travelers just have so much to talk about.
Then the laptops are unpacked, pictures shown and time just flies.

In the evening it is still rather unpleasant weather and the temperature feels colder than the 12°C seen on the thermometer.
So we leave the floor heating on and enjoy the comfort of our warm and cosy home.

The next day at Beadlocks Australia they find that 3 tyres are loosing air, so we loose half a day.
It's a bit of a shame as Barbara and Roger had planned to show us a bit of Melbourne and its surroundings.
Well, next time

On Sunday, April 1, we wake up to wet roads but the sun is shining.
After a long breakfast we leave Barbara and Roger and head north on the Hume Hwy.
Thanks for having us and see you sometime on the road again!

We pass **Wangaratta, Albury, Gundagai** and again have no time to visit the many attractions.
The more we get into the hills the more it must have rained during the last few days.
The hills are covered in a light green and there is even a bit of water in the creeks.
Outside of **Yass** we stop for the night. It is a cold night with just 8.9°C.



We wake up to a beautiful sunny day. We leave the Hume Hwy at **Moss Vale** and take the route to **Kangaroo Valley**.
It is a narrow road and we have to cross 2 passes with steep ascends and descents.
The OKA is at its limits, the weight pushes it downhill and the gears are not strong enough to hold the truck, an exhaust break would come in handy.
It feels the same as when we drove our Landrover Defender "Millimeter" .
The valley is very beautiful, the views stunning. We will come back ...



We reach **Yatte Yattah** and are welcomed by Lyn and Ron Quigley, fellow OKA-owners.
We have a good time talking about vehicles and traveling. We learn a lot about how the country people react and what we should not do.
In the evening we can assist with the sheep, bringing them to the paddock.
We sit until late and enjoy Ron and Lyn's company.
Thanks for having us.
Hope to see you on the road in your OKA!

It is already Tuesday, April 3, only 3 more days until the Easter-weekend, so we better get going to be off the road by Easter Friday.
We pass **Sydney** through the suburbs on the Cumberland Hwy, a 4-lane divided road with lots of traffic lights and drive-ways exiting directly onto the highway.
We wonder, how bad it must be going through the city ...
Then we enjoy the easy traveling on the hwy to **Newcastle**.
The OKA goes well with speeds up to 122 kmh (downhill). On straight roads the max. speed the heavy OKA achieves is 110 kmh.
The highway is almost finished up to **Taree**.

As we travel north the humidity and the temperature rise (overnight temperature now stays close to 17°C).
We continue traveling up the coast.
To Susi this wakes memories. She was here some 20 years ago. Then there wasn't much between **Kempsey, Coffs Harbour** and the Queensland border.
Today it is like driving from one town into another one, lots of cars, lots of people ...

We reach **Wardell** and turn off to Gerry and Corinne's place, where we will stay over night.
We haven't seen each other since we were at Chambers Pillar near Alice Springs with the Toyota last year.

Gerry and Corinne are tour operators working out of Alice Springs. We had some technical discussions last year regarding the reception of the Globalstar Sat-Phone.
Even though the Globalstar Sat-Phone is supported by the Australian Government it has some large areas where there is no reception on it.

We had perfect reception at Chambers Pillar and their Globalstar Sat-Phone did not receive anything. As this is no good for a tour operator that depends on a tool like that Gerry and Corinne are seriously considering changing over to the Iridium Sat-Phone like we have one.



On Thursday morning some more ideas are exchanged. Gerry is currently working on the conversion of one of his Toyota Coasters. There is a lot to be told and time flies. Thanks for having us and see you again in Alice!



At lunch Susi almost walks into this beautiful specimen of a spider. Shortly after lunch we reach the **Gold Coast** and manage to slip through before the Easter traffic jam starts.



We arrive at **Merrimac**, where we meet Susi's brothers Hans Peter and Bruno with his wife Silvia. We will stay there for a few weeks, take care of Susi's father who lives close by in Nerang, do some administrative stuff and prepare our next trip.