

**THE CHRISTENING AT OALLEN FORD or CARP CRUSADERS**  
**25<sup>TH</sup> – 28<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2008**

It's been a long time between drinks and despite the fact that after fourteen months I'm still not drinking alcohol, that's not what I mean. It's' been almost that long since Von and I have been away in with camper trailer and it's that, that has been giving me withdrawal symptoms. Our last trip with the trailer was to Tasmania in March of last year and next major trip will again be to the Apple Isle, this time with intentions of spending more time in the north east before again trying to catch the illusive Tassie Trout that last year suffered no danger from my angling attempts.

Having identified Oallen Ford as potential camp site earlier in the year from the latest version (4) of the very useful Camps Australia Book which I received as a Christmas present, I was beginning to think that my attempts to get away for a few days would be thwarted as plan after plan disintegrated. Firstly work got in the way, then Von had something else on, then visitors Malcolm and Antjia from England and then finally there was Kermit.

Kermit is our green ride on lawn mower. Kermit has had an interesting life with us to say the least, suffering a few injuries tackling tasks in the paddocks somewhat above his recognised capacities, some of which necessitated hospitalization. Our latest plan for Oallen Ford was to leave on the Saturday, visit with John and Fien, Von's parents, then leave on the Sunday via the Braidwood Road through Nerriga for our camping sojourn. Given that we are still having the occasional house inspection we thought it prudent to mow on the Friday before going away and Von, not have ridden Kermit for while volunteered whilst I finished off some work on the computer.

Not many minutes had passed before I could no longer hear the sounds of mowing and Von appeared at the door to tell me Kermit was sick and did not want to cut grass. This was not what I wanted to hear. After some investigation we discovered a guide pulley for the blade driving belt was missing in action so it was back to the paddock where Von had been mowing to see if we could find the missing bits. We found the pulley and a bracket, but the bush and shaft and maybe other bits were no where to be seen.

I now discovered something seemingly quite important about ride on mowers, or at least their engines: they don't like being tipped over sideways too far, which is what I had done when trying to look under the blade disk to see why Kermit wouldn't mow. I now had oil in the carby and Kermit wouldn't go at all. Shit.

Shawn at the tractor hospital was polite but firm, there was no chance of a pick up today, but the ambulance would be there on Monday morning by ten am. I was polite but dejected, thank you, I'll be here, but please come early as we were supposed to be out, so we'll be waiting. Our trip was foiled again. We did visit Von's parents but returned home on Sunday and, after waving Kermit goodbye on Monday morning, finally made it out of the driveway and headed south.

We are planning a big year of traveling in 2008, Tassie in April, then Queensland from Hervey Bay to Cook Town in June and July after we complete our lighthouse keeping duties on Fraser Island in May and with several new bits of equipment to christen I was keen to do this on a short trip trial before taking off on our extending tour itinerary.

Knowing that at Lake Tinaroo, a key destination on our Queensland trip where I hope to make my dreams of catching a barramundi come true during our week there, campers are not allowed to use generators and that there will almost certainly be other sites where this is the case, I had decided to buy a second deep cycle battery so that we could alternate one to the other and not need 240volt power. In order to keep the batteries charged, Bryan Evans, friend, motor mechanic and person of great handyman talent had helped me configure the Patrol to charge the deep cycle batteries whilst we were traveling. Actually, helped is not the word – he essentially did the job whilst I watched and did whatever menial tasks he thought I wouldn't stuff up.

So, this wonderful charging system had to be trialed. Again because we would be spending at least one week with just twelve volt power, I had purchased two new lights for the annexe section of the "Tuthilton", more powerful than the others we have so as to make reading and not tripping over everything in half light a possibility of an evening.

Yvonne was given a small DVD player for Christmas so was keen to try it out in situ as it runs on either twelve or two forty volt power systems so that was another new thing, as was the 2 horsepower outboard that Bill Bezzina has lent me for use with our tinny and I certainly wanted to give it a run before taking all the way to Tassie.

My last episode with motor and boat ended in a minor disaster when, not only did my four horsepower outboard let me down mid Lake Roseberry, which meant a long row home, but the starter cord broke and my clumsy attempts to fix it ended in a bigger mess with the recoil spring unwound and no hope of putting it back together. I was waiting for this year's trip before having all of that attended to at the outboard motor hospital – seems like we have a lot to do with hospitals – but Bill offered me an alternative.

Apparently he had this virtually new motor sitting under his house for a few years after only using it once on his little boat which was then stolen from atop the water line at his house in Currarong. So, although we fired it up in a garbage bin of water at home, I needed to know that it would work on the back of the boat.

And last but certainly not least, we have a new mattress to christen, courtesy of Lyn and Bryan Evans who, being minorly vertically challenged, had a shorter mattress made for their new caravan and offered us the brand new original innerspring mattress that came with the van. Needless to say, once we knew it would fit our trailer, we graciously accepted their kind offer and in return I upgraded some software on Bryan's lap top and copied several dozen music albums for him.

All of this plus some rearranged and reordered things in the trailer and a new storage platform in the back of the Patrol were reason enough to warrant a trial trip to make sure it all worked and sort ourselves out ahead of what we hope will be a great year of traveling.

And so it was that around 2pm after an easy three hour trip that included cappuccino and muffins at the Sutton's Forest Macca's we arrived at Oallen Ford. All we knew of our destination, gleaned from the Camps Australia book was that access was 200 meters east of the bridge and overlooking the Shoalhaven River. Reality was that access was about 50 meters west of the bridge, but when you're in the middle of nowhere such details don't matter much as there ain't nothing else around.



The view from our camp site to the Shoalhaven River

Bill had told us that years ago it was a place he and his mates frequented when they were panning for gold so we expected that it would probably still be a popular spot on weekends and holidays which, once we had inspected the various sites, was confirmed in our minds. There were tracks and sites pretty much at road level on both sides of the road then others down closer to the water and on this Monday there were two vehicles on one side of the road seemingly stopped for a break rather than making camp, then another vehicle on the other side of the road where we ended up but they too did not stay. We selected a sandy site close to the water at the end of the track and had Oallen Ford to ourselves.



Camp site at Oallen Ford

We were a little rusty setting up camp but still streets ahead of our first attempts when the camper was new to us and us to it so on this February day when one could have rightly expected very high temperatures and lots of humidity, neither was too bad making the set up much more pleasant. Our camp site was lovely, water views and what's more, water that looked deep enough to try out the boat and motor right in front of camp. The river is quite attractive at this point with some narrow shallow rapids interspersed with wider deeper pools.

I had brought the light fishing tackle, more to see how everything fitted and stored rather than expecting to use it, but when musing over a time some years ago when Rowan, Charles and I walked down Long Nose Point into Bungonia Gorge not too far from here and caught carp in this very river using corn kernels, Von volunteered that she had brought a tin as part of our vegetables for the trip. Needless to say, we opened the can and proceeded to the water's' edge to see if the carp were still about.

Well, what fun we had for the next few hours as timidly at first then throwing caution to the wind, baby carp decided they had a taste for corn. We ended up with a couple of dozen fish ranging from about four inches to ten inches in length, all of which went into a

bag for burial later on and we felt good about doing our little bit environmental protection work.

Pleased with our efforts we enjoyed barbequed sausages for dinner and sat around our first camp fire in more than a year. It was actually quite cool in the evening and we were glad of the fire's warmth as the darkness gradually closed in on our tranquil setting and for a while, misty rain threatened to spoil the party but not to be deterred we stayed by the fireside until bedtime.



Yvonne with our first day's carp catch from the Shoalhaven River

Tuesday morning and I was up six thirty, thrilled by the fact that I hadn't had to make an exit during the night, most unusual for me these days. With Von still sleeping, or trying to do so through the commotion of me making coffee in the half dark of the annexe, I decided to take a chair down to the water and see if the carp were feeding again until Von was up and about, managing to catch another half dozen babies.

It was a lovely peaceful time on the water with a variety of birds beginning their day. Whip birds called to each other from the trees across the water and a willy wag tail wagged his tail as he effortlessly darted to and fro just above the water, each time picking off several insects before heading back to shore.



The Oallen Ford bridge on the Shoalhaven River

After breakfast we explored the river bank back to the road and beyond before running out of a track in the increasingly thick undergrowth so clambered up an embankment and returned via a farmers field, startling two kangaroos and watching rosellas and bower birds along the way.

Our camp site is reasonably free of rubbish, I mean it's there if you go looking, but pretty good. The same

unfortunately cannot be said for most of the Oallen Ford

camp sites that we passed on our walk. It's such a shame that people don't take their rubbish out and evidenced by the amounts of toilet paper near bushes, can't even be bothered to dig a hole when they get the call of nature.

Back at camp it was time for one of the christenings, putting the little outboard through it's paces. Now this motor has a strange set up as there is no reverse gear and more importantly, no neutral, so the motor starts in gear, which when you have the choke on gets quite exciting. Anyway, with Von at the pointy end of the tinny and me at the other, we cruised a hundred meter stretch of the Shoalhaven River where the water was deep enough to run the motor although at one point I had to physically tilt the skeg to keep the prop off the bottom. But we had fun for half an hour and the good news is that whilst I won't be going anywhere fast, the little motor seems to work fine, so look out Tassie trout.



The little outboard pushes the eight foot tinny along OK

In the afternoon big brother carp must have been hungry as I hooked one that took off like a train, straight downstream about thirty meters. Geez it was fast, but a great thrill as I was only using the light rod. I called to Yvonne to bring the landing net and camera and was very happy to land the fish that weighed in around two kilos. The fishing wasn't as fast and furious as Monday, but having now caught a decent fish it didn't matter.



Once hooked, the carp took off like a train on a 30 meter run

Around four pm though, our peace and tranquility were shattered when a vehicle pulled up fifty meters away and began to set up a light camp. Soon after two other vehicles arrived and for the next few hours cars came and went, one with a very loud exhaust and one with very loud music that was left on when the car was parked. They were Hillbilly types, big with beards, one with long black pony tail and a black cowboy hat but they had a couple of kids with them and three dogs.

By the time it was dark though, they had settled down to their beers around a camp fire and in the warm glow of our own fire we watched the light show from an electrical storm not too far away and thought about catching more big carp.

After dinner we had gone back to the water and caught several more small carp, all of which were airmailed up the beach in readiness for another burial service. "last cast" I said to Von as the light was almost gone and almost before I'd finished speaking the line peeled out from my reel and another big one was on.



Yvonne's bloody carp

I handed the rod to Von and she masterfully played the fish for about five minutes then brought it in nicely over the net for me to land. It was almost identical in size to the big one caught earlier in the day so we were once again pleased with our carp crusader work.

We both woke cold on Wednesday morning, crazy for February but a good lesson to make sure we have plenty of bedding on hand for our Tassie trip. So far, not so good in regard to the christenings and tryouts. Everything is working well except for two major things, being the gas shower and the new deep cycle battery. After charging its little battery for twenty four hours, the gas shower still 'screams' a shrill warning when turned on and was not indicating full charge. This is disappointing as the unit is only just over twelve months old and only been used a few times.

Probably more disappointing though is the Remco battery, just under \$400 worth and it doesn't seem to be holding and discharging a proper charge. It took twelve hours of generator time to charge it on Tuesday and by Wednesday evening after only running the Engel for the day, it already did not have enough charge to power our 12volt lights. Just as well we are on a trial run and not one of the major trips and hopefully I can get these issues resolved in the next few weeks before we leave for Tassie.

We spent the morning of our last full day here wandering up the river in the other direction, although the track petered out fairly quickly, which forced us to follow trail bike tracks that took us on a big loop through the bush for an hour or so which was pleasant enough. The afternoon was again spent trying to catch fish and whilst we managed another ten or so it wasn't 'hot' sport so I guess we really have had an impact on the carp population with our haul of over sixty fish from this little spot.

We also had new neighbours turn up this morning with an old caravan, an old guy, Eddie, his very fat wife and their three dogs. They set up where the Hillbillies had been as they were leaving just as Eddie and his ensemble arrived. Later in the day after we had introduced ourselves, Eddie presented us with a couple of what he called 'wood worms' that he had bought to bring fishing. He proudly read from the container that they were put out by 'Moons, 1966'. "Gee" said I, "They're old!" Eddie took about fifteen seconds to process this before he laughed, then thought it necessary to explain that Moons had been in business since 1966 but the worms weren't that old.

With the carp wising up to our corn we tried the Moon worms and managed not only to catch a few fish, but also an unfortunate snake neck tortoise. Whilst Von held his head (I was actually pleased it was her doing that although I don't think the tortoise could do too much damage) I managed to get the hook out of his lip with some long nose pliers and when Von put him back in the water he paddle out of sight just as fast as his little legs would go.



Yvonne and her catch of the day – not happy Jan!

Eddie and 'the fat one' had an interesting camp set up, an old tarp off the front of the van for an annexe of sorts and a wire cage for the two Jack Russell terriers, assumedly to keep them from running wild or maybe just running away. The third dog, a graying red cattle dog was apparently good enough not to be caged and quietly minded his own business around the camp. The two Jack Russells were allowed to go to the water with their owners on a fishing trip, but it wasn't long before Eddie was trudging back up the sandy beach to get the cage for them after a prolonged period of yapping.

One of these dogs must have been quite good though as it didn't get a mention from 'the fat one', but the other, which we guessed was her favourite was called Gwendolyn. I've never heard of dog called Gwendolyn before and probably never will again. Gwendolyn was obviously the trouble maker and the whole time it was out of the cage, 'the fat one's' voice could be heard calling out that daft name over and over again. Judging by the amount of response from Gwendolyn to all the calling, I don't think the dog had much liking for its name either.

We've become familiar with packing up a wet camp and this one was unfortunately to be no different. After basically good weather all week, it poured during the night and although it had stopped by morning, the skies were threatening and the day was cold so we actually thought it a plus that it wasn't still raining as the car was packed and the trailer folded up.

We drove home via Nerriga to Nowra over some sixty kilometers of gravel road that is undergoing a ninety million dollar make over. It felt like we were traveling through a Mad Max movie in places with huge machines and equipment ripping up and reshaping the road surface and surrounding areas. In Nowra we called in to Von's mum and dad for lunch and as they had other guests, were treated to prawns, trout, chicken and lots of other yummy stuff, much better than the sandwich we had expected, before driving the final leg home through Kangaroo Valley to a waiting pussy cat and yes, you've guessed it, more rain.

The TV news tonight informed us that it has already snowed in Tassie and we're not going for another month. I wonder if they make electric blankets that work off 12 volts ?

Written by Gordon Tuthill February 2008