

The Magic MX5 Zoofari

28 - 30 September 2013 // Report & photos by Diana and Ken Keeling

The Canberra Chapter's Magic MX5 Zoofari has been held and everyone seems to have not only enjoyed the driving but also had a good time at the ***Taronga Western Plains Zoo***, Dubbo.

Our run started reasonably early on Saturday morning with the objective of reaching our overnight stop at Mudgee in time to visit some of the region's wineries. The morning dawned cool and clear and the forecast predicted a weekend of more of the same - good weather for MX5-ing! Our pre-departure point at *Maccas by EPIC* saw everyone assembled in good time for our departure, remarkably on schedule, at 8.15am. I suppose 7 cars and 13 people is a more manageable sized group compared with some of our previous weekend forays.

The run up the Federal Highway to Goulburn was uneventful but, as is the way of these roads, boring! The driving after Goulburn was more to the liking of MX5-ers and our first stop was at Taralga - to get a caffeine top up for the addicts that find 3 hours too long to survive without a *fix*. Oh! The looks of bewilderment when we arrived outside the Taralga Hotel shortly before 10am to find the place appeared to be firmly closed for business!



Guess where?

However, not all was lost. Some sharp-eyed person spotted that a side door was open, so we all trooped in to find the cleaners hard at work – and a dismayed publican. But the prospect of starting the day by selling 13 coffees was sufficient temptation to ensure *mine host* did not usher us all promptly back onto the street. Not only did the coffee arrive with minimal delay but also several plates of *gratis* bikkies. Excellent service and a definitely a place for MX5-ers to call into again. Only when we were leaving did our host reveal that he had only earlier this year sold his own MX5 - as it was “*mostly sitting unused in the shed*”.

After coffee, we all enjoyed a good run toward Oberon, taking the virtually unused (no logging trucks on weekends!) Shooters Hill Road from its' junction with the Abercrombie/Taralga Road at the Little River Bridge. The morning's run brought us into Oberon just before noon for an early-ish lunch at the interesting Cafe Savanna. By Making prior arrangements we had ensured that a table was ready for our group and everyone enjoyed their lunch. Some also did a bit of retail therapy among the knick-knacks that the Café always seems to have to tempt the unwary.

Because of the potential for a smoke hazard on the Castlereagh Highway near Cullen Bullen, we diverted from the originally planned Oberon/Portland/Mudgee route and went via Bathurst to join the highway to Mudgee at Ilford, with a short loop through historic Sofala on the way. The alternate route was no real hardship as all these roads are quite interesting to drive and in good condition.

Arrival at our motel in Mudgee was later than planned and our group seemed more interested in getting out of the cars, settling in at the motel and going for a walk than in visiting the wineries. However, *the Second Mudgee Wine and Food Frolic* was being held in the centre of town and provided a very convenient opportunity to sample the local wines. Our Saturday evening therefore started with a wander through the street festival before going to *Isabella's Trattoria* Italian Restaurant where everyone had an enjoyable evening and we all left very satisfied with the authentic Italian food and local Mudgee wines.



@ Breakfast in Mudgee

Sunday morning was another beautiful start to a day's drive and it was tops down for the short run to Gulgong. The historic village of Gulgong provided enough interesting things and buildings to keep us all occupied for over an hour.



Guess where - again?

Gulgong to Dubbo was via the less travelled roads, arriving in good time for a very enjoyable lunch at the historic Milestone Hotel.



Ready for Lunch in the dungeons @ The Milestone Hotel, Dubbo

After lunch, it was a short run to the Zoo to check-in and move into our en-suite "Zoofari tents". Very upmarket! And a fence to keep out the animals out (or us in?)



Malcolm's Tent

We arrived with just enough time to unpack before the afternoon's "behind the scenes" tour, complete with a very close encounter with a lioness, which startled everyone with a coughing roar – very impressive from only 2 meters away!



Who is for dinner?

Joining us for the afternoon bus safari were Dubbo-based fellow MX5-ers and members of the RPM Chapter, Michelle and Rohan Matthews. After the bus delivered us back to the tents, we had just enough time to change and then participate in the wine tasting at the Lodge before a sumptuous dinner in very convivial company. Our day finished off talking in the Zoofari Lodge after another “*behind the scenes*” tour as the animals were bedding down for the evening. As our evening closed, we bade farewell to our Dubbo MX5-ers - with a promise to join them on a RPM run in the future.

Monday morning had us waking, pre-dawn, to the sound of lions roaring in the not-too distance. Very different to our usual alarm! But very appropriate for our Zoofari adventure.

Before breakfast, there was another interesting tour of the animal areas not open to the public, before we had a massive breakfast to keep us from starving on the run back home.



Hi! My name is “Lofty”. Did you bring breakfast?

Monday also saw an unusual outbreak of democracy - where the group were actually asked what they would prefer to do. Should we head off, as planned, via Forbes and Parkes for a wander through and lunch at the Japanese gardens in Cowra? Or stay longer at the Zoo? “***Stay longer at the Zoo!***” was the unanimous cry.

So, being accommodating, we rejigged our plans, opting to leave Dubbo after lunch and then travel home via the shorter “via Wellington and Canowindra” route, rather than via Parkes (with a stop off at the Radio Telescope) and Forbes as originally planned. That little foray can be saved for another weekend excursion sometime in the future.



Lia and Peter head home – in company with Malcolm

Two cars had to leave early due to commitments back in Canberra. The remainder broke up and individually went off to commune with the animals before regrouping for lunch at the Zoo's cafeteria.

The run home was uneventful, apart from the excitement of an ambulance "flashing" us on our way to Wellington – Rohan at work and returning to Dubbo from Orange. After a short lunch break at the Cowra Rose Garden rest stop, the group broke up and we made our way home individually.

Great weather, good driving, enjoyable companionship, new sights and interesting places. Plus, the benefit of some potentially new friends – our MX5-ers from the RPM Chapter.

Yet another very successful "weekend away" for the Canberra Chapter.

The Zoofarians were:

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|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| • Diana Keeling – <i>organiser</i> | Ken Keeling |
| • Bricet Klore | Bob Judd |
| • Iris & Tony McDonald | |
| • Helen Kemmis | Mike Masters |
| • Mal Bernhardt | <i>"Malcolm's Tent" photo per Mal Bernhardt</i> |
| • Lia & Peter Battisson | |
| • Jill & Denis Wicklander | |
| • Michelle & Rohan Matthews – RPM Chapter | |