

A Wander in The Wonderful West – and A Taste of Margaret River

I have written this not because it is an MX5 story but rather because the enjoyment of our holiday was enhanced by the Western Australian (W.A.) MX5 Club's efforts and to engender interest by eastern MX5-ers to visit the West. It is a long way to go, but is well worth the effort.

Whilst preparing for a holiday in the SW corner of W.A. last Spring (2016) I was lucky enough to note that, provided in our electronic NSW MX5 *Club News*, was the e-link to the “*Go WEST - NotMeet Notes*”, kindly shared by the W.A. MX5 Club with their fellow clubs in the East.

And what a lucky find that was - set out in modules covering specific geographic sectors within reasonable driving reach of Perth, the “*NotMeet Notes*” provide a marvellous resource of information on where to go, what to see and where to find accommodation for anyone interested in a driving holiday in the SW corner of “The West”.

Rather than an enthusiastic MX5 foray, our visit was to be a driving meander around the Margaret River region by two couples in the “*no longer young*” age group, driving a hired Toyota Aurion. But the *NotMeet* notes, particularly those for the “*Geographe*” and “*Perth & Surrounds*” modules, allowed us to not only make the most of our visit but also to expand our experience by a couple of days driving beyond the immediate area around our base of Margaret River township.

These forays included Cape Leeuwin, near Albany, where the lighthouse (built in 1895) stands guard over where the Indian and Southern Oceans meet at the remote SW corner of Australia.



Not only was the Cape impressive but, along the Karri forested Caves Road coming back from Albany, not only did we find a hidden Gallery but the wildflowers were out in their varied fields of colour and the forest floor seemed to be carpeted with Arum Lilies.



An African beauty out of place & unloved in W.A. - beautiful to behold but a pest in the west.

Another really enjoyable day was one spent driving from Margaret River on a 300km loop to Nannup and Bridgetown and then back to Nannup along the Blackwood River (an enjoyable *driver's* road) before returning back to our Margaret River base via Busselton. Needless to say there were several stops along the way - at wineries to sample their wares and to replenish our caffeine levels. Nannup is a quiet, picturesque village and Bridgetown interesting for both its history and the 270m Jarrah railway-bridge (the last of WA's large timber bridges) as well as the intriguing Brierley Jigsaw Gallery located in the Information Centre.



Wildflowers and a big Jarrah Bridge



Jigsaws - not pictures

The coastal region near Margaret River is not only renowned for being a place of big waves infested with surfer-consuming sharks and sweeping beaches but also for the adjacent surfeit of eateries and vineyards, much more interesting to a group more interested in supping than surfing.

It is here the real reason for our visit The Wonderful West lies – to have *A Taste of Margaret River!* And very enjoyable it was too - as testified by my expanded waistline on our return home! (I am still struggling with my weight reduction penance!). There are a number of wineries with varied and interesting architecture. Unlike the unloved Arum Lilly, the South African “*Cape Dutch*” architecture typified by the buildings at Voyager Estate seems to have found a welcome home in Margaret River. A more modern, but also appealing, aspect is represented by the Black Brewing & Vintner Restaurant, with its lake and fountain which, rising some 20m into the air, seems to work consistently and well, unlike the one in Lake Burley Griffin here in Canberra!



Voyager Estate Winery



The Black Brewing & Vintner Restaurant

There is fantastic food to be had almost everywhere in the well-named gourmet region of the South West, ranging from “*upmarket*” in the vineyard restaurants, through the whole spectrum to “*healthy*” (organic) in quaint (but often unlicensed) cafes. Thankfully, being in Margaret River, the latter category was supported by small wineries nearby, with interesting names (like the rustic *Mongrel Creek*), which provided not only decent wine but did so at very reasonable prices.



Rustic Mongrel Creek - good wine!



Vasse Felix Estate

Too many to enumerate here, the light lunches we devoured (*with prices ranging from jaw-dropping to reasonable*) were without exception of a very high standard, enjoyed in good company and in surroundings ranging from high class to rustic café - all with excellent staff.



Starvation rations @ Leeuwin Estate Restaurant



Another light lunch for Diana and me

One thing that cannot be ignored is the number of “...bups, nups & ...other ...ups” in this region. The place abounds with quaint names like Boranup (interesting gallery hidden away in the Karri Forest), Nannup (nice village with lots of flowers everywhere), Gnarabup (popular shark surfing area) next door to Prevelly (has a Cretan Orthodox church & a story) and Wilyabrup (Black Brewing Co.) to name but a few. Dr Google tells me that the “...up” means “*place of...*” in a local Aboriginal language. Oops! I almost overlooked Cowaramup, with its surfeit of black & white replica cows everywhere! And lots of ring-necked Cowara (Aboriginal name) parrots (aka the Purple Crowned Lorikeet) from which I understand the village draws its name - not the cows!



Some of the many Cowaramup Cows



Pedestrian Cowara Parrot

But this epistle being theoretically a car/driving oriented story, I should mention that there is a small private collection of classic cars at one of the wineries. And I saw another unusual (*more frightening than interesting*) vehicle perambulating along Mill Point Rd, on the foreshore in South Perth – a driverless electric bus! And I use the term perambulating advisedly, I could walk almost

as fast. It must have been a lot of fun for the cars that followed patiently until it pulled into a designated stop point! In my mind, these things will never replace an MX5 - or any other car fit to be taken on the winding roads that give enjoyment to a *driver* - of any age.



Private collection SL180 & MGB



Crikey! No Driver?!

Returning to Perth, we located ourselves on the waterfront at South Perth, just a few minutes by ferry to the city. It proved to be good choice of location for our accommodation, being within easy walking distance (even for a geriatric like me) of an interesting range of eateries and even closer to the Boatshed Café on the ferry wharf - with excellent views and good food and coffee. Their breakfasts were so good we even returned there for lunch with a view!

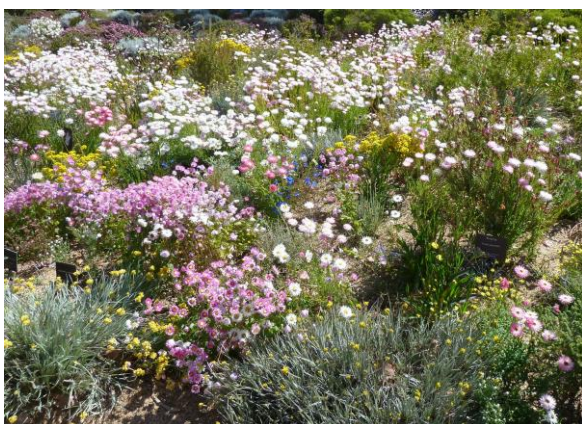


At the Boatshed Café - South Perth wharf



Perth City

Of course we visited the Botanic Gardens to see their wildflower displays and went by ferry down the Swan River to wander the streets of Old Fremantle - and, naturally, we had to sample the local seafood (lobster and scallops), helped along by a nice local Verdelho. The Fremantle waterfront eateries offer any foodie an abundant choice of excellent seafood (& wine) at reasonable prices.



An *almost* wilderness of wildflowers



Sumptuous Seafood

A short walk from the ferry, away from the Fremantle waterfront, reveals some lovely old colonial era buildings to wander around and a visit to see the historic artefacts and stories of

discovery in Maritime Museum is well worthwhile. And of course the Fremantle waterfront had a well preserved and interesting old “tall masted” ship tied up just for us.



An interestingly adorned old building

and a tall ship - Fremantle

On our return ferry ride, the mansions on the northern shore displayed the wealth of the minerals boom millionaires for all to see as we cruised slowly around the bay between Peppermint Grove and Dalkeith. But Perth is not only about mining magnates’ homes - a walk from the ferry quay up through the city and over the Horseshoe Bridge brings one to the Art Gallery of W.A. where it is easy to spend a few hours taking in their diverse collection of paintings and artefacts.

For anyone (such as an old pilot like me) interested in aviation, the RAAF Association’s Aviation Heritage Museum at Bull Creek will provide an absorbing half day. Their Lancaster bomber, which makes an imposing centrepiece, was based in New Caledonia post-WW2 where it was used by the French as a maritime patrol aircraft. Acquired by the RAAFA museum from the French, it was flown from Noumea to Perth before taking up residence in Bull Creek. Its sister aircraft, also acquired from the French in Noumea, is now the fully restored and flying central aircraft of the *Battle of Britain Flight* in the UK. When acquired by the UK it was flown in 1964 to England from Noumea, staging through Port Moresby in PNG. I was one of the many pilots that, early in the dim pre-dawn light, stood on the edge of Runway 14 at Jackson Field (now Moresby International Airport) as the Lancaster lined up for take-off. I can even now clearly recall the crackling roar of its four un-synchronised Rolls-Royce Merlin engines, shrouded in flaming purple exhaust gas, as it moved and, slowly at first, rumbled away to the SE before, heavy with fuel, it sedately climbed away over the carcasses of several Liberator bombers lying drowned in Bootless Bay to disappear, on its way to the England via Singapore, into the growing light of dawn. Perth does provide a range of interesting stuff to see....

As an MX5 driver, I tend to note them as they pass by, but the only MX5s I recall seeing in W.A. was one itinerant passing through Margaret River township - and Aart Ter Kuile’s car when I met up with Barrie Parker and Aart for coffee (Barrie was in the family vehicle) at the Boardwalk Café on South Perth wharf. Barrie and Aart are, respectively, President and Vice-President of the W.A MX5 Club. I can only offer my sincere thanks to both of them for giving up family time to meet with me and for offering not only spontaneous comradeship to a fellow MX5-er from the eastern states but also for inviting me to participate in one of their local runs, even offering a seat in one of their cars. Unfortunately, I could not avail myself of that offer but it clearly underlines the fellowship of kindred spirits that our little cars engender.

Despite the good work put in some several years ago by our ACT Chapter’s “*Let’s Go West*” team, led by Bricet Kloren, our Chapter’s great MX5 foray to the West did not eventuate - and probably never will as a group endeavour by our members. The tyranny of the distances involved and time required to drive across the Nullarbor and back is, in my opinion, too great for an organised Chapter “run”. It is probably less complicated than driving from London to Istanbul, but the distances are about the same. I think this constraint is also recognised by the W.A. Club, as their “*NotMeet*” information indicates that, whilst they would enthusiastically welcome a proper NatMeet over there, it is just not going to happen anytime soon.

However, they do really welcome any visits by those of us from the East who are interested in MX5-ing. The W.A. MX5 Club have put a fantastic effort into preparing the very comprehensive "NotMeet" information package, which is readily available to all on their web-site at <http://www.mx5club.com.au/index.php?ID=24>. It is a great aid to planning a driving holiday.

The not-so-wild-West is wonderful and well worth a visit by anyone with the inclination to drive some enjoyable country roads, and to indulge in excellent food accompanied by great wines in surroundings both interesting and pleasant. Other than driving across the well named *Null-arbor* over to the West, there are the options of putting your car on the Indian-Pacific, which is in itself an interesting train trip worth doing at least once. Or you could do what we did - fly over and drive around. I am confident that the Perth MX5-ers will give you a warm welcome regardless of your mode of arrival and type of car you are driving whilst there.

And at <http://www.uniquecarrentals.com.au/product/mazda-mx5-gt-roadster-2015/> you can now even hire an MX5 in Perth - a 2015 ND GT! Reportedly, Hertz also have Toyota 86s available.

All you need is a couple of weeks and motivation - ***Go West*** and have a great time... as we did.

Words and Photos:

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Vale - Little Blue Toy



Ave – The Enn Cee @ Noosa