

# The Student's Desk

**ON LOCATION**

Even though I got back home some 5 weeks ago, and most people know I'm back home, I still wanted to write this final chapter (even if brief) on what has been a truly amazing adventure.

It seems every time I write, I whinge about the cost of accommodation. So why stop now? From Ararat, I was to spend the weekend in Melbourne exploring possibilities for future work, and meeting up with the Delica Club. After my experiences at Mt. Gambier, I got excited thinking maybe, just maybe, tourist parks have figured out single people travel too! Not in Melbourne. It seems only South Australia and Northern Territory have made this recognition. Thumbing through my tourist park guide, I discovered tourist parks charging up to \$29/night for a piece of grass! (remember, I was paying \$6/night at Mt. Gambier). With no money in the bank, this wasn't looking good. I thought about putting my haggling skills to good use, but with it being the Melbourne Cup weekend, I stood a better chance at having a winning bet on the Melbourne Cup then getting a discount on accommodation.

I prayed about this and posted a message on the Delica Club Forum on the Wednesday asking if anyone knew of some cheap camping. The next day I got an email from a couple, Paul and Alison – “Here's our number, here's our address, come and stay here...” I gave them a call and made the arrangements. It didn't occur to me to explain I had Cerebral Palsy and what my needs were. I turned up on their doorstep, and it was like, “Surprise! You thought you were going to have a normal house guest...” and their response was like, “Surprise! You thought you were going to have normal hosts!” Not that they had any disabilities. Paul just had an extremely warped sense of humour – even by my standards. In fact, I'm not sure that extent of warpage isn't a disability! He has something about AA batteries and pet cats (?). Alison's efforts to counteract Paul's humour (failing most of the time) just made it even more hilarious. With me in the mix, a lot of laughs were had. The fact I had Cerebral Palsy simply wasn't an issue. I'm increasingly intrigued how some people just about need a “How To” guide before they can relate to a person with a disability, and for others, it's a non issue with even my speech impairment not creating difficulties in communication. It must also be said that I think Paul and Alison told me they have had some exposure to people with disabilities before. It would seem their offer of accommodation was an answer to prayer and a blessing to all.

The Delica Club meet in Melbourne actually happened with about 15 vehicles turning up (pictured below). I think that was almost a club record. After a BBQ, some went off to play in the mud. I declined the opportunity as part of the steering assembly on the Hotel Royal still



needed repairs. I was more interested in nursing it home.

After Melbourne, I headed towards Cann River to camp the night. Unfortunately, after I had done all I wanted in Melbourne, I only got to Noojee and I was to be in Canberra in 2 days time to spend time with another



friend. So it was a long drive out to Cann River the next day, paying a flying visit to Lakes Entrance – a picturesque little town (pictured left). I also enjoyed driving through the lush vegetation that seems to dominate this part of Victoria.

Nearing Cann River, I had thoughts of heading north chancing my hand at finding a campsite around the border. But I knew there was camping toward the coast and so headed south. What appeared to be a short, easy drive home for the night turned out to be a real pain in the neck to get to. The road was narrow and very, very, windy. It was another hour from Cann River, and the final leg was barely more than a bush track. Normally this isn't an issue, but after a long day's drive, and having my steering in need of repairs, it really wasn't my preference.

Going via Cann River gave me an opportunity to see the Monaro Highway, and it was a very enjoyable drive. Along the way I looked for potential campsites, and I was right to camp at Cann River. There are no suitable places to camp around the border. Although, a little further on, 5km off the highway, there's this strange little National Parks and Wildlife picnic ground called *White Rock Picnic Area* (pictured right). It's also a designated campground, although, after pitching a few tents the ground would be full! This may be why it's not listed in any of my camping books.



I would have done well to come here the previous night, except at around 500m in elevation, it would have been a bitterly cold night – as if it wasn't cold enough at Cann River. Nonetheless, I entered a waypoint in the GPS for next time I'm passing through the area. I may come this way on my next trip to Melbourne. From the Monaro Highway, I could see clearly across to the Snowy Mountains and onto the snow drifts from the snow season. Perhaps if I had passed through here a week later, I need not have looked so far to see the snow with an unseasonal cold snap making its effects felt. I arrived in Canberra mid-afternoon and spent time with a friend who also has Cerebral Palsy, comparing notes from our different life's experience. The night was spent there.

Next day I arrived back in Sydney to have dinner with another friend. While I refuse, in vain, to believe Gosford is a suburb of Sydney, it was nonetheless the sign I was back home. It felt like putting on an old shoe – one that had been worn out, having not much left to offer, and really ought to be thrown out! Yes, my feelings of coming home were indeed mixed. The following day, a telemarketer phoned only to hang up because they couldn't understand my speech. That was enough for me to want to pack the Hotel Royal again and disappear for another 3 months.

Since coming home, the laptop I killed has been replaced by model I thought was suitable – an answer to prayer. The Hotel Royal has been repaired. And I've been charging around trying to catch up on everything and trying to adjust to having my existence reduced to a cash cow in this age of consumerism. Or, just as people get home sick, perhaps I'm just holiday sick and need to get back on the road. That won't be any time soon unfortunately.

Below is a map of where I went. Hopefully it will make some sense of where I went with it being cluttered with symbols and names. Unfortunately the GPS data between Paxton and Dubbo has been lost, so a dotted line has been put in its place.

I've already given some thought to my next big trip. I'd like to get up into North Queensland during the 2008 mid-year break, and see what the situation is with Aboriginals up there. I've heard it is different again.

In the next few days, I want to distribute a regular *Student's Desk* where the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the year will be summarized.

Until the next trip the *Student's Desk* will continue off location.

JASON

