



CAMPERS CHATTER

Thank you Sandy van Rooyen for the camp report

“CHAMPAGNE” @ GREYTON

17th – 18th January 2020

ONE SOGGY NIGHT @ “CHAMPAGNE”

Campers:

Trevor and Sandy
Johnny and Sandy
Greg N. (only recently back from Canada, Glynn opted to stay at home for some peace and quiet – good call Glynn ☺)
Craig (Rina still overseas with her family)

Ginger and Ruth
Greg and Jenni

Gianni and Sally
Theo and Libby
Annie, PJ, Tara, Frank and Stanley

Guests:

The Ockers Family

The camp at Champagne this month is most probably going to be another one of those camps that we will be speaking about in months to come – like “Peace of Africa” (July 2013) outside Porterville and the “EFF” (evacuate ‘flippen’ fast) Camp at Welgegund (July 2015). For those of you who were at these camps, although they can be considered “disaster” weekends, they are remembered with a kind of perversely weird and wonderful “fondness” and have contributed to a great many conversations at camp. I must admit though in the 10 years Johnny and I have been camping with the Club, we have very rarely had to pack up in the rain (mostly down to Sandy B’s amazing camping crystal ball) and we have never experienced flooding at a campsite despite reports and photographs of flooding at other campsites like Klipkrans, Rivierzicht and Champagne which also makes that list. If my memory serves me correctly, a previous camp at Champagne which was scheduled at the beginning of 2018 had to be cancelled and moved to December 2018 due to flooding and excessive mud so it looks like the beginning of the year is not a good time for Champagne ☺, although in saying that, a GLASS of Champagne is always good any time of the year ☺☺

We arrived at camp to find Trevor & Sandy and Greg & Jenni already set up. It wasn’t raining thankfully but there were signs of several muddy patches where the grass was missing. The trees at this campsite have grown tremendously since we first started visiting this campsite and it remains a favourite with everyone. As we were setting up, more and more campers arrived and found their preferred spots. Poor old Craig was last to arrive as usual and arrived in the dark, parking his rig right on the front next to the river so he could literally cast his fishing line from his bed into the river, if the caravan was parked the other way around that is. Both Craig (who was minus Rina as she is still overseas with family) and Greg N. (who was minus Glynn because she wanted peace and quiet after their holiday in Canada), didn’t unhitch their rigs from their vehicles or put up tents and this decision turned out to be a very wise one.

I was very impressed with Annie who had towed her caravan to Champagne (I have never had the confidence to tow our caravan) and with the help of some of the guys, managed to get parked and set up ready and waiting for the rest of her family to arrive.

I must confess that the farmer had warned us that there was rain predicted for the weekend but that he didn’t think the river would flood. However when Greg P. asked him later in the day about the river flooding, all he got was a shrug of the shoulders and a wry smile. I suppose one can’t predict what will happen with nature but the rain which continued on and off Friday and into Saturday and the fact that the river was very high to begin with and level with the campsite

didn't bode too well. However we were all desperate to camp, so chose to ignore the tell-tale signs of a "disaster" looming.

Note to campers when camping in intermittent rain and mud – "Do not wear slops with smooth soles!" In the words of Doc Wayne, it's definitely a HAZARD. Several campers were seen slipping and sliding during our short weekend with Sandy Biggs taking a real tumble just outside her tent and managing to crack her 5th metacarpal bone which for us non-medical people, is the bone in the hand on the pinky side – however we didn't know this at the time and only had the bruising and swelling to go on to see that something was wrong. Who says you can't do the splits anymore Sandy B. – yes you can, I saw it with my own eyes. For the rest of the short weekend, Sandy's hand was strapped up whilst the other hand held a glass of wine for the pain.

For the first time in a long while, we had a whole load of children at camp which was lovely to see and believe me, did they have a ball in the mud and running around, gradually disposing of all their clothing as they went, with Frank and Stanley leading the charge. Johnny asked the group of little boys who was the



naughtiest of them all and one of them put up his

hand (complete with mud on his face) and said he was but he didn't mean to be. So cute! Thankfully before they hit the showers as they were covered from head to toe in mud, they all followed PJ (Tara's husband) like the pied-piper into the river for a swim and some fun. Thankfully PJ was sporting a 'Faff' South African Speedo whilst the rest of his miniature troupes were frolicking naked with not a care in the world! We also got to meet little Lily, who belongs to Barry and Michelle – Annie's son and daughter-in-law. What a pretty little girl and so good. They were staying in the cottage for the weekend – lucky them.



Although it rained on and off on Friday, we had no wind to speak of which was something to be thankful for. Our gazebo came in handy once again as we ended up braai'ing under it whilst Theo and Libby entertained some of the other campers under their shelter. Despite the weather, we had a great evening with lots of laughs and plenty of food and drinks to keep us going into the wee hours. Finishing off with some amarula shots from the Biggses and caramel shots from Craig, we all decided to call it a night and retired to our nice warm beds. Surprisingly enough for January and supposedly still summer, it was quite chilly so the jackets and boots we keep permanently in the caravan came in handy. Looking at all of us, anyone would have thought it was winter except for Craig who dons T Shirts, shorts and slops in summer AND winter.



Saturday morning woke up to the sound of rain on the caravan roof and the realization that some of the weather reports were incorrect in saying that the rain would clear up on Saturday during the day. Craig woke up to a huge puddle of water under his car and the large mud pool that the kids had fun in on the Friday was definitely creeping closer and closer to Annie's spot. The main topic of discussion before any breakfasts were started therefore was should we pack up and leave or wait it out? Some of the campers were quite keen to take their chances whilst others were adamant that they were going to pack up and leave. In the end, everyone decided to pack up (reluctantly I might add) and depart and what a good decision that was looking at the photographs that Nadia took on Sunday morning (she, Frank and a friend from Germany were staying in the cottage for the weekend). It would have been disastrous to stay as the water from the river rose right up to and covered the first two rungs of the stairs to the ablution block.



BEFORE THE EVACUATION

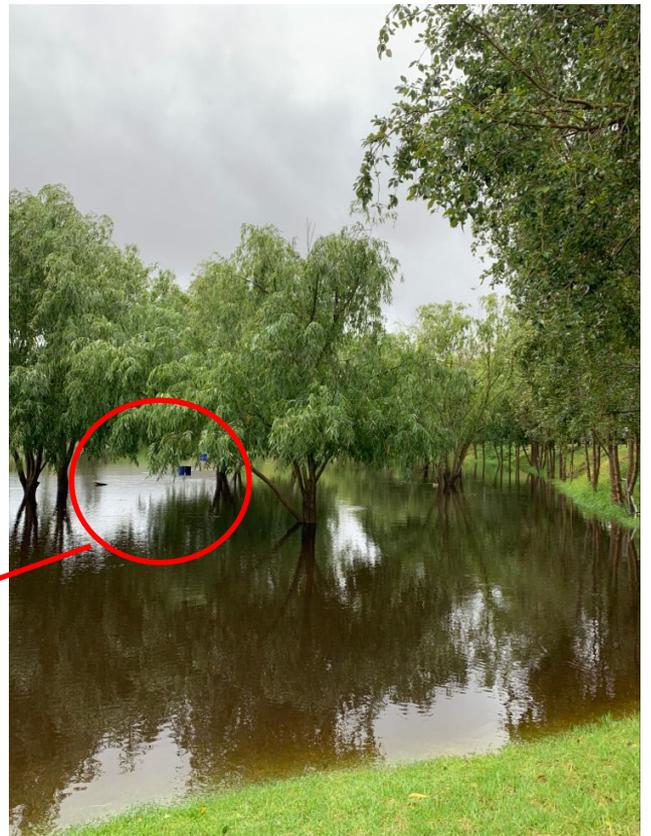


DURING THE EVACUATION



DURING THE EVACUATION

Note the height of the bins above the water!!



Campsite the next day !!!

Some campers we met on Friday who had an Invader, were camping on the other side (the 'newer' campsite) on higher ground (not high enough it seems) but even they were not spared when they woke up at 3 am Sunday morning to knee deep water surrounding their rig. I was rather pleased that we had made the decision to leave Saturday morning as even though it was still raining on and off and the mud patch was spreading wider and wider, we were at least able to pack up at a relatively sedate pace (even though everything was wet) and Johnny even had time to make everyone some bacon and egg sarmies.

And then it was time to get the caravans out of the campsite and on to the road above out of harm's way – talk about a traffic jam. Those with 4x4 vehicles had it easy although some who didn't have 4x4 vehicles opted to get Theo to drive their vehicles out, being an experienced



driver. Greg N. also came to the rescue with his 4x4 vehicle and pulled out a number of caravans, ours included. (I was thankful that Johnny opted not to try and drive our caravan out with our 2x4 bakkie although he probably could have made it but if he had got stuck in the mud, it would have caused even more problems.) And there we were in a long convoy on the road out – all safe from the rising waters of the Zonderend River. Nadia very kindly invited everyone to their cottage for coffee so we all crammed into their kitchen/lounge area and took it in turns to have cups of coffee and tea as there weren't enough cups for everyone. Eventually it was time to leave with the front vehicle in the convoy leaving first, followed by the next and next until we had all departed for home.

Unbelievable photographs of the flooded campsite circulating on Sunday showed just how lucky we all were for deciding to pack up and leave when we did. There's no point in being a hero when nature is involved. Except for some very wet tents, that was our only concern if you can call it a concern because on the other side of Sir Lowries Pass the sun was shining and the wind was howling – perfect weather to get canvas dry and the bonus was with the continuing water restrictions, our caravan got a lovely wash in the rain - Happy Days!

P.S. Despite the unexpected evacuation from the campsite, we still received the Chairman's Chat sent via the Camp *Whatsapp Group* Saturday evening (thanks Trevor) and a bonus, everyone escaped the Fines Master this time around 😊

Final note from the Chairman: This is what camping in the Club is all about, not only the fun and laughter but all spanning together to help each other pack up and safely move caravans and rigs to higher ground. Thanks again to the 4x4 fundies for helping the less experienced and getting us all high and dry. 😊