



A right time

The Clarence
Town clearwater
survival.

I don't think we've ever had one of those weekends before where everything goes wrong, but you know the old saying, the worst day camping is better than the best day at work.

It was full of promise when we arrived on the Thursday morning at the Williams River Caravan Park in Clarence Town for the Australian CamperTrailers Groups get together we were hosting. The sun was shining and despite the cool start to the day and the forecast of rain over the weekend, it was t-shirt weather, and after setting up camp we even put the solar panels out.

Carol and I had made a preliminary booking on the river flat in the name of the CamperTrailers Group with 20-odd camper trailers expected to arrive between Thursday and Saturday, staying on until the Tuesday. With plenty of notice, events like these can provide a fantastic

opportunity for a relaxed break.

Colin was enjoying setting up his new camper trailer for the fourth time and was very excited to be attending his first CamperTrailers Group weekend. Richard and Robyn were leaving their Goldstream Crown at the caravan park and heading to Coffs Harbour for Richard's father's birthday, returning Saturday morning.

Just before they left, Diane, the caravan park manager, came down and said it would be a good idea if they left the camper keys with us just in case the river flooded and we had to move. What in this sunny weather? Hardly seems likely, but okay. I got Richard to give me his DO35 coupling on his tow hitch, too, as I have a Treg.

Jason rang from Sydney to see what the weather was like and to see if it was worth coming for the weekend.

"Mate, the sun's out, I got the panel out

and we are sitting around in t-shirts."

Jason couldn't believe it: Sydney was cold, windy and wet, wet, wet.

About an hour before dark just as we were thinking about getting a campfire going it started raining. Dave and Joy arrived after dark between showers, and we gave them a hand to pick a spot and start setting up camp. It wasn't long after they had most of the canvas erected when it started getting heavier. After tea, Dave, Joy, and Colin gathered under our awning for a chat. By this time there was a river running off the awning.

As we were having breakfast on Friday morning, Diane came down and asked if we wanted the good or bad news first. Okay, let's have it, the bad news first.

"Barrington Tops had a heap of rain overnight and the SES has predicted the river flat you're camped on could flood," she said.



Thankfully, Diane had somewhere else in mind. Around this time, Dave, Alison and the kids arrived with their camper trailer.

So away we went to inspect the new site, but it was ankle deep in slush and on a hill top exposed to the icy wind. There were 10 to 12 sites in the caravan park proper we could also move to, but not enough for all attending...oh well, looks like we'll have to cancel the weekend.

A get together host always sends out an ice breaker e-mail to find out the contact details of everyone who is attending, so it was simply a case of ringing around and letting everyone know it was off. Norm, Chris, Chloe and Mitch were only a half hour away when they got the call. When they arrived they decided to head over to Nelson Bay for the weekend instead. Dave had to work afternoon shift and

as Dave and Joy had packed up, Dave learned he had a flat battery from leaving the lights on for 20 minutes while they set up the camper in the dark. Col gave him a jumpstart with his fridge battery and they headed off.

First thing Saturday morning, I poured the radiator stop leak in and found the green fluid had stopped flowing. The sun was out so we decided to stay. It wasn't long after that when Richard and Robyn arrived back. We were sitting in the sun having a chat when Allan and Maryanne arrived. "Where is everyone? What ice breaker e-mail?"

Allan and Maryanne had been preparing for their Cape York adventure, and this was their first night away from home. As it turned out, we had a great night sitting around the campfire with stars twinkling in the sky.

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come back each morning, so instead of setting the camper up in the rain, they got a cabin for the night so the kids wouldn't be disappointed.

Before we started to pack up and head home, we thought it would be a good idea to take Richard's Goldstream to the caravan park on higher ground. As I was backing the camper into a spot, steam started coming from under my bonnet. At the time I thought it was a Welsh plug. Our daughter was bringing our grand daughter up for the weekend so I got her to get a bottle of radiator stop leak to see if that would do a temporary fix. Meanwhile, just

We packed up on Sunday morning and headed for home, watching the temperature gauge all the way. Everything was holding together nicely, until we got the roundabout at Heatherbrae. I changed gear and the clutch pedal hit the floor. I could not believe it. I managed to get home in forth gauging the roundabouts for traffic, shifting down to second around the corner from home and backed the camper in, using the downhill slope in neutral. Looking back, I could see a large puddle of green radiator coolant in the lane. The stop leak had just lasted.

After I removed the air cleaner housing I found a split hose hidden under the inlet manifold I didn't even know existed. To reach the hose I had to remove the alternator. New hose \$10.

I rang the local clutch business and explained what had happened and he recommended a new master and slave cylinder.

"300,000 kilometres on the original clutch? What were you thinking?"

Steady on...at least I carry spares!

If I was in the bush, I would've taken the air cleaner housing off to see what was causing the leak. The 12mm radiator hose between the water pump on the Glind heat exchanger would've done the trick, for the leak at least, and the 60L of water in the tank would've got me to the nearest town.

Of course, it didn't come to that: we had only travelled an hour from home. ■

When the weather goes wild, things can quickly go from good times (above) to the muddy mess the SES promised this river flat campsite would become.

