

Wave Rock and Stirling Ranges

by Howard Watts and Sharon Munnelly

Both Sharon and I were able to take the 4 days after Easter off work, so it was, "Where should we go?"

It was decided to accept the offer of visiting a property almost touching Hyden oval in the Wheatbelt for Easter, followed by a trip down to the Stirling Ranges.

We were made more than welcome at Keith and Betty Early's place. They were hosting a gathering/fly-in at their Hyden home. Keith runs a crop spraying business and has a main 36-18 runway with a 20-02 running off about halfway down.

We got to the Hyden petrol station about 4:00 PM and, as there was an 4WD off-road event that weekend, there were plenty of people around looking skyward at a circling trike. I joined the throng, pointing skywards, exclaiming things like, "They must be mad!" and "You wouldn't get me up in one of those things!" I could not wait.

The tent and the trike were set up late Friday afternoon and rather than rush skywards for the last 20 minutes of light, it was decided to be sensible and have a drink instead. The whole week lay ahead for flying!

The airstrip shed had been set up



Over the Hyden area

for any gastronomic adventure with the usual BBQ, urn, slow cooker, tables, fridge etc. The crowning piece was a self-standing four-burner oven (full kitchen type) that ran on a 9Kg gas bottle, brought down on the back of a wagon from Northam — a brilliant idea.

Saturday morning brought a light breeze so it was off to explore the surrounds, the obvious being Wave

Rock. After circling the rock and making sure everybody was awake in the campsite (well it is the best time of the day, isn't it?), it was off to Hippo's Yawn and all points north. The area is very flat with the occasional granite outcrop and salt-pan breaking up the vista. The afternoon session consisted of much the same with some low level flying, skimming mud flats and paddocks around the airstrip.

As well as the three Airborne trikes there was an Aquilla trike, a yarpie machine. The Aquilla trike is a variation on a theme but I liked the extra room offered to the passenger by the 'bent' mast. But then I don't fly in the back, so who cares?

There was a varied assortment of planes and ultralights present, I do not pretend to know the makes, but I do know that Keith was enjoying his new Jabiru so much, and giving most people joyrides, that I think he got in about 10 hours in one day.

The weather was pretty kind, apart from one afternoon, which stayed windy. The mornings were chilly with the trike positioned in the sun to melt the ice on the wing. Sharon's hands were too cold to hold

Preparing for take-off at Peter and Betty Early's strip



the camera for long, so we do not have many shots while flying.

Although the nights were cold, we were kept entertained by a variety of methods including accordions, guitars, tap dancing, singing, hula-hoops, harmonicas, stories and jokes — the beer, wine and port had nothing to do with it!

We had an enjoyable, relaxing Easter and we wish to thank those present, and of course the hosts, for their hospitality.

We packed up on Easter Monday and headed down to the Stirling Ranges. The target was the Stirling Range Retreat, which we found in the country airstrip guide, and arrived there late afternoon. We set up camp at the edge of the campsite, adjacent to the paddocks, which contain an 18-36 and an 11-29 strip. The 'windsock' was missing and replaced by a strip of plastic but you can't have everything. The trike was just about rigged at last light so it was decided to be sensible again and have a drink. Wednesday's forecast was for south-west winds and as the strip is on the north side and only 5nm away from Bluff Knoll (at 3700 ft) my plan was to fly high over the range and explore the south side.

The wind was indeed south-west but there was full cloud cover at about 4,000 ft. Still, we tried to fly along and around the range but the turbulence was fairly bad, and as we neared the 'edge' of the range, we experienced some interesting turbulence and decided to head back. The cloud dispersed during the day and left us with clear blue skies by mid-



Over the top of Wave Rock

afternoon. As we got ready for the evening flight I noticed a haze appearing over the range. They were having a large burn-off to the south of the range but I still thought I could exercise my morning plan. After take-off the combination of the smoke haze and the setting sun did not do wonders for the visibility but Bluff Knoll itself seemed to be clearer. However, on reaching a decent altitude I could see over Bluff Knoll and saw that the ridge was holding a huge angry cumulus (caused by the hot burn-off air I presume) with an angry black underside. Foiled again. With the worsening visibility and cloud we decided to return yet again to terra firma.

Wednesday produced a day of high southerly winds and we lost the whole day. A trip to Mt Barker was

convened and a least we had a scenic trip through the range, albeit by car. We were told that conditions had to be good to enjoy the flying here, and they were correct. Still, the forecast on Thursday was for a 10 knot north-easterly, which would be perfect.

We checked the 'Area 63 forecast' at 05:30 AM (we were not going to miss this) and yes, the forecast was correct. Off we went. As the winds were non-existent, I even took the early opportunity of exploring the southern side (at a respectable height) while we could. Then it was over the top of Bluff Knoll and coasting up and down the north side of the range, beautiful. This made the wait worthwhile.

That completed it was off to "the Lily", which is an authentic Dutch

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The Aquilla taxis at Hyden



Howard lines up for take-off