



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### Among the Sand Dunes of Port Stephens!

by Amaru & Suzanne, April 12th 2009

After a few months of staying at home it was now finally time to head off again, even if it was only for a long weekend!

We decided to make our way to Port Stephens during the Easter long weekend, and to try and avoid traffic we started driving on Friday morning at 6am. Our plan worked nicely as we managed to make it out of the city in no time...

Just a few hours later we arrived at Nelsons Bay, the main town in the area of Port Stephens. For those of you that don't know the area, Port Stephens is a peninsula located north of Sydney containing a few small coastal towns, some nice beaches and also the largest continuous coastal sand mass in the Southern Hemisphere, the Stockton Bight.

These Sand Dunes start in Stockton and finish 32 kilometres later at Anna Bay with a width of 1km at some points so that you really get a feeling of being in a very large desert.



**We've arrived in Nelsons Bay**  
...and it's beautiful!



**Corella birds**  
Plenty of them around here...

More on that later though.... as we had arrived fairly early in Nelsons Bay there weren't that many people around yet so we pretty much had the area to ourselves. After a quick exploration of the centre of town (planning where to eat later etc.) we headed off towards Shoal Bay, just a few kilometres down the road.

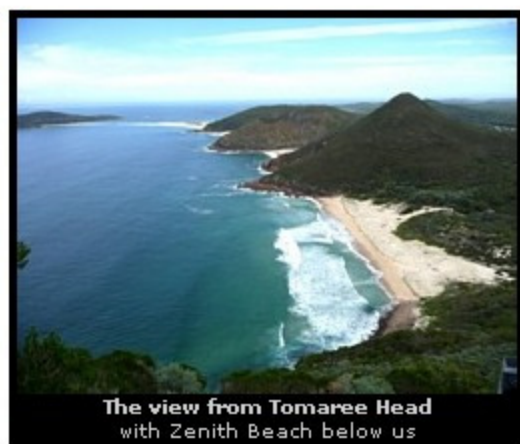
Shoal Bay is actually much nicer than Nelsons Bay, which could have something to do with the fact that it's a lot smaller. Here we found a hill (or Mountain as Suz would call it) named Tomaree Head and once I discovered that there was an easy track to the top we just had to do it.

Said and done... in no time we were at the top of the hill (Mountain) and enjoyed some great views over the area...

Following Shoal Bay we discovered the beautiful beach of Fingal Bay, and had a walk in the water before we made it back to Nelsons Bay for lunch.

As we already knew where we were going it was easy, we headed off to Red Neds straight away for some meat pies. We had read about them online and also in the Lonely Planet, but seeing the different varieties of pies was still great!

These were by far, the best meat pies we've ever had (not only was the pastry great but the flavours....YUM!).... During the next two days we tried such concoctions as "Smoked Chicken and Camembert", "Butter Chicken", "Kangaroo Teriyaki", "Thai Green Curry" etc. In total there are around 70 different types of pies at Red Neds so you wont get through them in a hurry...



As the day passed we decided to go have a first look at Stockton Bight... after a nice cool beer (you need cold drinks before visiting a desert yeah?).

The sand dunes are awesome, you actually get the feeling that you're wandering around in the middle of a large desert (seeing camels doesn't really spoil the effect either), the good thing here is that once you've had enough you're not more than 10min to the beach =)

We only walked around the dunes for a short while as we had a larger trip planned for the next day and Suz had suggested something else that we should try while in the area... we were off to some Tobogganing!

So what is Tobogganing? Imagine building a U-shaped windy track down a hill, then put a pod in it, then you just sit on the pod (Toboggan) and head downhill while trying not to fly outside of the track... it's hilariously funny and both Suz and I did a few runs each!!

Once we were done acting like small kids we headed back to Shoal Bay for dinner - some great Fish & Chips!

As we'd done so much the day before, we could relax the next day, the only thing we had planned was for a Stockton Bight tour... it was time to head off to the sand dunes again! When we reached the location where we were to meet our guide we were certain that we would get stuck on one of those large buses riding in the sand.... luckily, only us and a family of 4 had booked the tour so we got our own vehicle (with a/c...nice!).



Our tour among the sand dunes lasted around 3 hours, in that time we were shown how to locate "pipis" on the beach, we were given time to do some sandboarding which was great going down (not so much fun climbing up the dunes again). Our guide also took us to a few houses in the middle of the dunes called "Tin City" which actually has residents and has featured in a few different movies (Mad Max is one of them).

The last stop of the tour was at the shipwreck Signa, which ran aground here in the 70's. Here we stopped for a snack and a rest (it's a bumpy ride inside the jeep) before heading back to where we started.

Anyway, the tour was great and our tour guide (Swampy) was hilarious, definitely a tour to recommend....

Well, that's about it, we had a great weekend in Port Stephens, there is a lot of activities to do, lots of beautiful beaches and some great sand dunes to play around in.... The next morning we started heading back home to Sydney with a detour through the Hunter Valley for some cheese and wine tasting =)

On another note, we figured we might include it here even though we did it back in February.... We finally got around to do the Seafood Cooking School at the Sydney Fish Market. We were given some vouchers for our wedding and decided to use them during a Seafood BBQ School and it was great. First we were shown how to cook the food and then we got to cook it ourselves... but the best part was when we got to eat it with some nice wine ;)



**Suz and I**  
at Tomaree Head



**Fingal Bay Beach**  
Absolutely stunning!



**Our new car (the one on the right)**  
In front of Fingal Bay Beach



**We've arrived to Pie Heaven**  
So many different flavours...



**The Pie Shop is Red Ned's**  
Best Pies Ever!!



**Relaxing with a nice cold beer**  
... before we visit the Sand Dunes!



**It really feels like**  
I'm in the middle of nowhere!



**The Sand Dunes of**  
Stockton Bight



**Suz**  
with miles of desert behind her...



**Quite impressive these Sand Dunes...**  
Aren't they?



**We even found some Camels**  
in the distance...



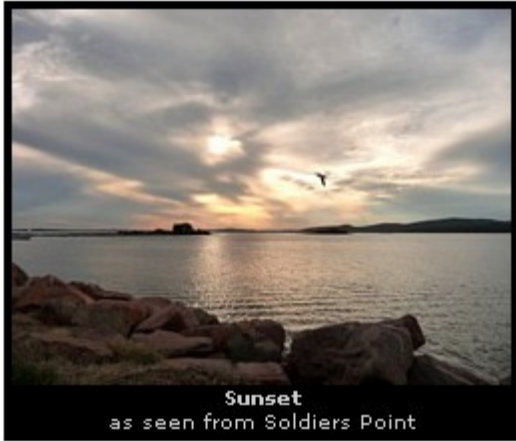
**It's time to go**  
Tobogganing!!



**Suz riding the Toboggan**  
Great fun...



**Full Speed Ahead!**  
I feel like a child again...



**Sunset**  
as seen from Soldiers Point



**We're back in Shoal Bay**  
Where Fish & Chips was on the menu



**Back on the beach playing some local**  
"Pipi Catch and Release"



**You can see them as they**  
try to dig themselves back into the sand



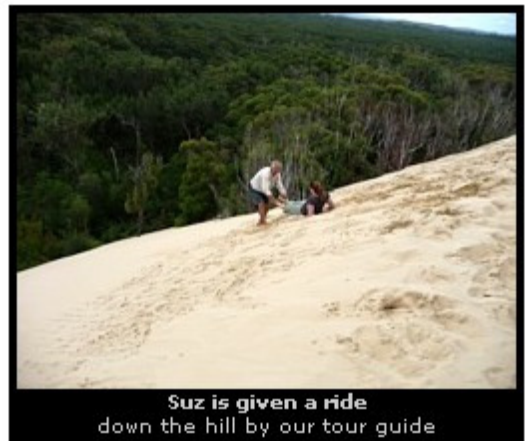
**A nice beach...**  
Nice and smooth to drive on!



**The Dunes are slowly**  
but surely taking over the forest



**Suz and I**  
On top of one of the sand dunes



**Suz is given a ride**  
down the hill by our tour guide



**Time to ride the dunes...**  
Suz is up first



**The walk uphill...**  
Not nearly as fun as going downhill!!



**My board and I**  
Time for another go



**Very silly**  
... but lots of fun!!



**If you're not careful**  
you will get bogged in!



**Tin City**  
A shantytown in the middle of the dunes



**I found a new friend**  
One of the two dogs in Tin City



**Tank traps**  
Old remnants from WWII



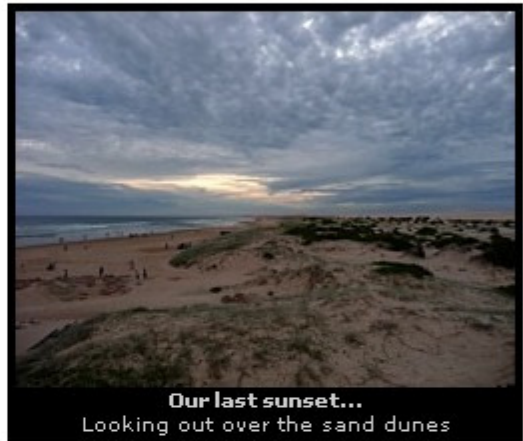
**Suz and I**  
In a very tacky photo ;)



**The Signa**  
A boat that ran aground years ago



**Tea-Time**  
With the Signa in the background



**Our last sunset...**  
Looking out over the sand dunes



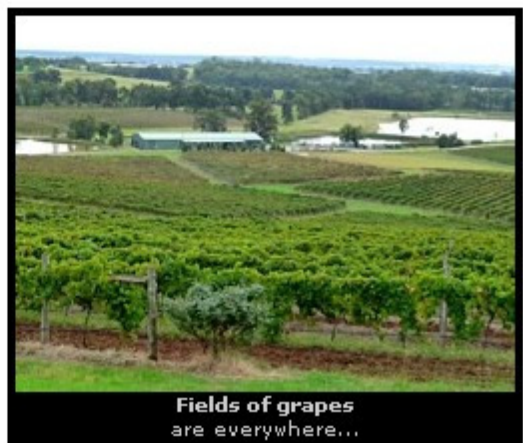
**We've moved on to some wine sampling**  
Visiting the Hunter Valley



**Brokenwood Cellar Door**  
Just one of the places we visited



**Suz**  
Sampling some Sauvignon blancs



**Fields of grapes**  
are everywhere...



**The weather is changing**  
And a storm is on its way



**At the Sydney Fish Market**  
For our Seafood BBQ cooking school



**The mirror makes it easy**  
to follow the instructions



**Suz prepping...**  
Working on the fish



**Five of us**  
shared a workbench



**The final result!**  
It was really tasty!

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