WESTERN 4W DRIVER SPOTLIGHT:

MARTIN & SHEREE HAYES

BY GRANT & LINDA HANAN

Meeting people like Martin & Sheree Hayes with their infectious passion for remote exploration, you quickly gather they're the type that could easily tell a story, or two. When a mutual friend (retired long-time *Western 4W Driver* contributor, Ian Elliot) introduced us to this intrepid Kalgoorlie couple a few years ago, we were keen to hear their story and how their explorations over the years have been full on, to say the least.

Their adventures have been widespread, from pushing tracks into the Canning Stock Route wells during the 1980s and retracing desert rockholes, wells and inscriptions that quenched the thirsts of 19th-century explorers like Carnegie, through to retracing the Elder and Calvert expeditions of a similar era. They even share our interests for explorer Frank Hann, who spent nearly a quarter of a century roaming the remote areas of the Kimberley, WA deserts and goldfields.

Closer to home, the Hayes have uncovered historical woodlines, resulting in a private collection of artefacts that would rival some city museums. They also share a passion to preserve and restore equipment once used on the woodlines for future generations to learn about.

Along the journey, they've mixed with some prestigious names in the exploring circle as well; they've travelled with the iconic Doctor Bill Peasley—explorer, historian, author, and general practitioner—and led him to significant desert finds. They've spent many a trip travelling with close friend and fellow adventurer, Peter Vernon, and entertained the legendary Len Beadell, just to name a few.

We sat down with Martin and Sheree while visiting Kalgoorlie recently, where we found out more about their decades of adventurous remote travel and how it all started.

EARLY DAYS

Martin, when did your passion for remote off-track travel begin?

Martin: *It was back in 1976 on a trip to the centre in an Austin Champ with my brother, Malcolm. He had some mates that had an FC Holden, and we left from Ferntree Gully in Victoria. I was 14 then and had never seen a dirt road, let alone been on one. Back then, the Stuart Highway was a dirt road, and we stopped for a break to talk to a truckie who was hauling fuel. The road wasn't the best…I got out of the Austin and the corrugations were a pace in length by six inches deep! Anyway, I remember saying to myself, "That's me…I want to do what that truckie's doing."*

Martin didn't go on to haul fuel, but he did set up a very successful crane business in Kalgoorlie that made a great base for fulfilling his passion of remote desert exploring.

Sheree, we know you have an important accolade of being the first registered female horse trainer in Australia at just 22. That's an incredible achievement. Tell us about your recollections of where your remote travel passion came from.

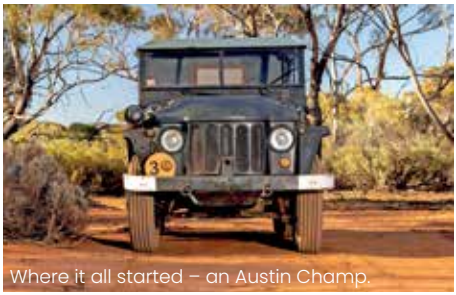
Sheree: *I used to camp a lot with my family around the Coorong in South Australia when I was little. My dad was a horse trainer, and he introduced me to the industry in 1983 when I was 15. I met Martin some years later when I had moved to Kalgoorlie, and he asked me to join in on an outback adventure. It turned out to be a wild one! I think Martin figured there would be no one else crazy enough to explore the bush with him, and he proposed one night around the campfire. The rest, they say, is history.*

Martin, what was your first car?

Martin: *I bought my first car when I was 16. It was a 4WD Austin Champ, which was originally built for the British army. I tested it on trips to places like Birdsville, Cooper Creek and the Dig Tree. It's one of only a few vehicles that can be driven with the engine fully submerged, not that I recommend doing that these days. But when I was a lot younger, it was underwater more than once.*

Sheree: *That car can go just as fast in reverse as it can going forward. We've actually still got it today and drive it from time to time, and it's undergone more than one restoration.*

On the first trip with brother, Malcolm.


Where it all started – an Austin Champ.

DESERT DISCOVERIES

So where did the passion for chasing explorers come from?

Martin: *It was 1985 when I first met Peter Vernon. I'd just finished my apprenticeship, and Peter was putting a three-month trip together. I wanted in, so we all quit our jobs to do this trip. Although I needed a different car. So I bought a secondhand 70 series with a tray. We all met up in Halls Creek because the trip was all about retracing the Canning. Using hand-drawn maps, our aim was to find every well. It turned out we were pushing tracks into every well and recording their state. Things like whether there was water or vegetation, and in some cases needing to update the position of some wells on maps.*

It was a fantastic trip using none of today's modern-day GPS stuff. This was using maps, a compass and a slide rule. We repaired heaps of punctures, the old Dunlop Major tyres keeping the vehicles going. In fact, Peter's vehicle was an HT panel van converted to four-wheel drive using Jeep diffs for the front and rear, with a 253 V8 in it. It was a real weapon and fun to travel with. This trip was real adrenaline stuff, and I was hooked. It was during this Canning trip that I learnt about another explorer named Carnegie.

Dr Bill Peasley unveiled the plaque at Patience Well.

Lids made and installed at Carnegie's Deep Rockholes.

Alongside a Carnegie rockhole with Dr Bill Peasley (centre).

Cleaning out Carnegie's 8 Mile Rockhole.

Tell us more about the passion for Carnegie...

Martin: *During that Canning trip in '85, we pushed a track out to a place called Helena Spring in the Great Sandy Desert. It was here the name Carnegie popped up, and I was keen to learn more. After that Canning trip, Peter and I took it upon ourselves to start retracing Carnegie.*

Sheree: *That trip was hard country with big sand dunes. We were in search of a place Carnegie called Deep Rockhole. While Martin was fixing tyres, Peter taught me how to use a paper map, a compass and a ruler. I found it very interesting, and the desert has this way of luring you in. I too was now hooked. So the scene was set... With the Carnegie map in hand, we proceeded to retrace his footsteps.*

What has been your greatest find while exploring?

Martin: *Clearly the standout is Carnegie's Patience Well along with his Family Well.*

Background of this story: Martin & Sheree had contacted Dr Bill Peasley many years ago. You may know him as one of the Royal Flying Doctors, but he was also part of the crew searching for the last Aboriginal nomads in the desert during the 1970s. Through a mutual friend, they were given Dr Bill's address, and they started exchanging letters. Things soon escalated, and a lifelong friendship with Dr Bill and an interest in Carnegie were formed.

Dr Bill and many others had been trying for years to relocate Patience Well and Deep Rockhole that Carnegie had visited in 1896, but they remained elusive. Some had claimed they'd been found, but Martin and Sheree doubted those findings. Using their old maps and rereading Carnegie's notes about an ancient watercourse plus notes of others, they headed off in 2014 and went cross-country in the desert, climbed rocks and sand dunes, to take sights and verify the location of these landmarks. After much deliberation on that trip, they agreed they'd finally located them.

Martin: *We couldn't believe it... We were quickly on the sat phone to Dr Bill to let him know the news. Later that year we organised a trip to take Dr Bill and a few others to show them Patience Well.*

Martin showed us some of the correspondence from Dr Bill, including thank you letters for not giving up and finding what had been a lifelong search for him. Martin and Sheree agree that finding Patience Well remains one of their top three finds to this day.

THE WOODLINES

We mentioned earlier that we first met Martin and Sheree through a mutual friend after learning about the Woodlines outside Kalgoorlie. While at Martin & Sheree's place, they keenly walked us around their incredible collection of bottles, axe heads, dog spikes, and parts of old wooden carts which they've been collecting for decades.

Martin has slowly been restoring some items over time, with the aim of keeping them as original as possible. His workmanship is very impressive. A real highlight was the beautifully restored handcarts that were used to collect wood from the cutters and deliver it trackside. Locomotives would collect the wood and return to Kalgoorlie, where the wood was used in some of

A selection of the Hayes' bottle collection.

Martin's daughters, Sheldon and Melissa, with one of the first restored Woodline carts.

the mines' steam-driven boilers. Martin and Sheree have mapped their exploits of the Woodlines extensively, and their collection awaits a museum to showcase the pieces.

Their bottle collection is just as impressive, with Sheree proudly sharing the details of any bottle we pick up. She tells us, "Some may say it's just a bottle, but to us, it's so much more. It's all about the bottle—why was it there, and who used it? It's the romance of it all if you allow your mind to think what life was like some 100 years ago when camping in one of those Woodline camps."

The Hayes have a whole shed devoted to Woodlines restoration, whether they're washing bottles or making cart spoke wheels from timber they've found. They're truly devoted and passionate about the history and how that era has shaped Kalgoorlie.

A BUSH & DESERT PASSION

Martin, you mentioned earlier that Len Beadell was a character. What can you share about Len Beadell?

Martin: *We haven't driven every road completely that the Gunbarrel road gang has made, but we have used parts of some tracks to assist us in getting to where we need to go. The first time I met Len, our group had been in the bush for about three months. We arrived in Adelaide, and Peter made a quick call. Before we knew it, we were rolling our swags out on Len and Anne Beadell's piano room floor (laughing). We were still dusty and pretty smelly from being out bush, but it didn't bother Lenny. In fact, Len commented, "It brings back great bush memories," and he went on to reminisce and share some of his own trip highlights.*

A couple of years later, Len was visiting Kal. So I used a few contacts to get Lenny into the gold pour room at one of the local mines. Here he is holding a warm gold bar in his hands... I still recall Len's beaming smile; you know, it was his trademark for those that knew him.

Having a book signed by Len Beadell.

My only regret is no one had a camera at the time to capture it. It was way before mobile phones with cameras."

VEHICLE LINE-UP

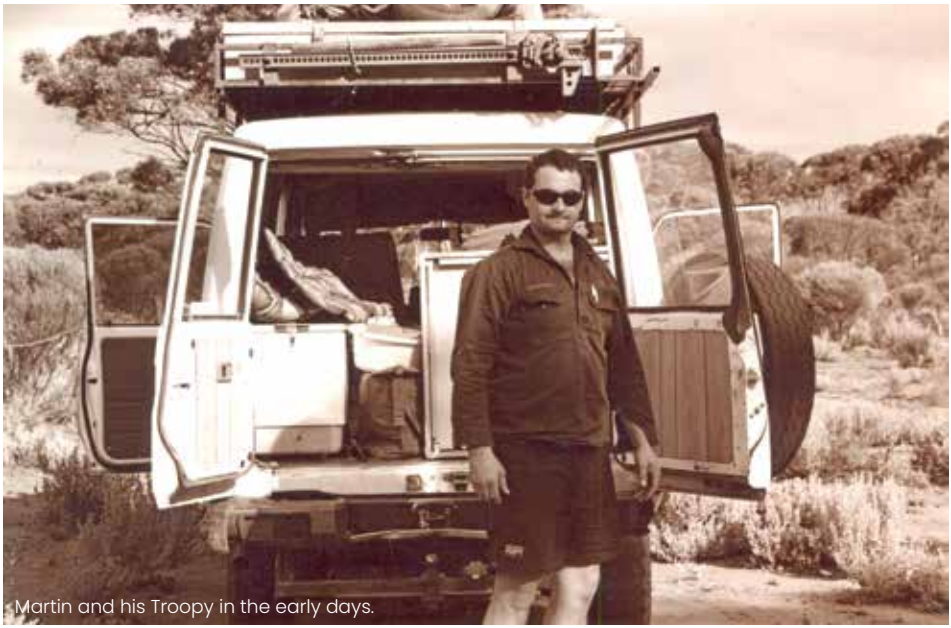
With Martin and Sheree in the lead, we headed outside to take a closer look at their touring vehicles, including the Austin Champ and what they use today. We find their vehicles could be a feature in itself when asking them to explain their choice for an off-track touring vehicle. Clearly the answer was a Troopcarrier given there were five of them in the yard!

Martin stated, "Simply put, you fit up a good set of springs and shockers and keep it stock, as Toyota have done a lot of testing." He adds, "Fit it out so you can sleep inside, and everything you carry, like food, drinks, water, tools, spare parts and clothes, all remains inside the vehicle, safe and sound, away from the elements."

We did say there were five Troopies. Martin is of the belief, "You have to be totally self-sufficient and able to self-recover... And you have to be able to fix things yourself if something goes wrong. So you won't find a modern electronic V8 Troopie in this yard."

We take a closer look at their current off-track Troopie. We can't help but notice it's had a hard life, with every panel wearing a battle scar, or three. Actually, we quietly think one side looks a little caved in! Martin explains, "That's from when we put it on its side....that was a tough day at the office, but we self-recovered it with a couple of high lift jacks we carry and some steel winch cable." Fair enough!

This vehicle also has some serious brush bars used to deflect branches up and over the highly modified roof rack that has reinforcement through all the pillars from the A through to the rear doors. The under-bonnet area is



Martin and his Troopy in the early days.

Their well-travelled expedition-style Troopy.

clean as a whistle, thanks to the well-maintained 1HZ. We find a lot of work has been done to protect the radiator from spinifex seeds, twigs and branches that might fly up. Although we do note the floor area has been left clean.

"Bash plates collect spinifex, and that's how you start a fire," Martin said. The vehicle has Detroit lockers front and rear, is shod with split rims, and has really thick ply tyres with tubes. That's not necessarily good for when you want to air down due to corrugations, but remember, this vehicle is out front making new tracks. So it's low-speed, low-range style driving when climbing over rocks and through armour-like mulga, with all its puncture-making stakes.

We see these guys also carry every spare part imaginable. From their many years of travelling, they've got to know what spares to take, but also what else you need to make a bush fix. Martin tells us he's replaced a dodgy fuel tank with a rooftop jerry can that's gravity-fed into the fuel system. "It's not perfect, but it will get you home," he says.

CURRENT FOCUS

We ask them what's grabbing their attention at the moment and what they're looking for.

Martin: *In the 90s, we were introduced to the explorer, Frank Hann, thanks to Ian Elliot. We had just completed the Calvert and Elder expedition retracement, and a mutual friend suggested we might be able to help Ian Elliot out with some information he was researching. This then started another great long-term friendship with multiple trips with Ian.*

Right now, we're trying to find one of Frank's rockholes. It's Ian's and our nemesis that has escaped us all for over a decade of searching. This year alone we have visited the search area three times, but we believe we're close. Our concern is the escarpment range that we're climbing over perhaps has broken off and filled in the rockhole...but until we can prove that, we will keep on searching."

On the search for one of Frank Hann's rockholes.

LEGACY

With everything that you've achieved so far, what legacy would you like to leave?

Martin: *We are very passionate about the Woodlines and Kalgoorlie, and just what it all means…its history has played a very big part in what is Kalgoorlie today. Some might say we shouldn't have collected all the stuff we have, but if we didn't, then would it still be there, and where would it be today?" Our wish is to hopefully one day have a museum devoted to the Woodlines that we can donate to, and for it to have all the stories and pieces of history available for future generations to see and learn from … because Kalgoorlie is more than just the Superpit.*

As we come towards the end of our chat, we just have one more question. We heard some time ago that up off the Great Central Road at Empress Springs, you guys are responsible for installing that fabulous steel ladder for visitors to climb down. Is that true?

Martin: *Yes, that was us. We visited Empress Springs many years ago, and the original piece of rope that was there at the time, as good as it was, we thought was too dangerous for getting down into the cave. So I made up a steel ladder replacement, and we installed it ourselves. The same goes for some rockholes that you may have visited. We made some metal lids and installed them around the place during our travels to protect the environment by keeping the camels out.*

SUMMING UP

If you're ever in Kalgoorlie and happen to see a Troopie that looks as if it's had a hard life, rest assured it's a well-maintained, well-travelled exploration machine. Be sure to give Martin and Sheree a wave and a toot, as it will probably be them heading out on another adventure into the desert.

The ladder installed at Empress Springs by Martin and Sheree.