

23-26 December 2012

Sutton/Canberra



During our time in Canberra we stayed at the Sutton Caravan Park just across the ACT border in New South Wales. We would normally stay at the Exhibition Grounds but they were closed to camping and caravans for the duration of Summernats. Every day we drove to our daughter's house in Canberra for the family Christmas celebrations we had come to Canberra to attend.

Traffic levels on Canberra roads were remarkably low; we must assume from this that the general statement that Canberra residents leave the city at Christmas is true (the hundreds of vehicles we had seen leaving Canberra on the day we arrived certainly supports that statement). Although traffic on the roads was very light at all times of the week we noted that the Belconnen Mall car park was pretty full by most afternoons. This car park has a light above each parking site coloured red when the site is occupied and green when it is vacant (except for very small vehicles which do not trigger the overhead sensor so the light stays green in an occupied site). In the afternoon we looked along rows of continuous red lights. Yet the shopping mall was not particularly crowded once we got inside.

Weather was variable. Some days were hot enough to turn on the van air-conditioner when we were there. Other days were cool and comfortable. We had one or two days of fairly heavy rain.

We knew from a previous visit that television reception at the Sutton caravan park is poor; we knew from experience that our Wineguard aerial, with vertical polarity addition, did not provide good reception here. If the television was tuned to the ABC frequency and the vertical polarity part pointed at the transmitter on Black Mountain then a reasonable picture was received some of the time; but only some of the time, mostly there was no picture. We had bought along a Saturn aerial to compare with the Wineguard. The Saturn aerial was mounted on the roof of the caravan (through the hatch above the bed) and the television tuned. Many more channels were detected with the Saturn aerial than the Wineguard had picked up (the Saturn is designed to detect horizontal and vertical polarisation without difference and not to be directional so it doesn't matter how the aerial is oriented. However, once the television set had been tuned, the Wineguard provided a slightly better picture after the aerial was rotated to point towards the transmitter. In Canberra, SBS transmits horizontal polarity (at 200 Kw) from Black Mountain and the Wineguard detected that signal without difficulty and without needing to be aligned to the transmitter. Other channels (Ten, ABC, NBN and Prime) use vertical polarity at lower power (50 Kw) from Black Mountain; the Wineguard aerial provided a better quality picture after the television had been tuned and the aerial aligned so it could detect the signal, while the Saturn aerial produced a marginally inferior quality picture but could detect the signal without needing to be carefully tuned and pointed. On balance, the Saturn aerial appeared more practical.



One of several White-Winged Coughs prowling the caravan park at Sutton near Canberra. This fairly common bird is often seen along country roads but easily confused with crows or ravens, especially when the white patch on the wing is usually out of sight. But overall body shape, as well as the beak size and shape, are usually sufficient to identify this bird. The red eye is an identification characteristic but usually needs the sun to be at the right angle and the bird to be fairly close. The white wing patches are prominent when the wings are spread.