

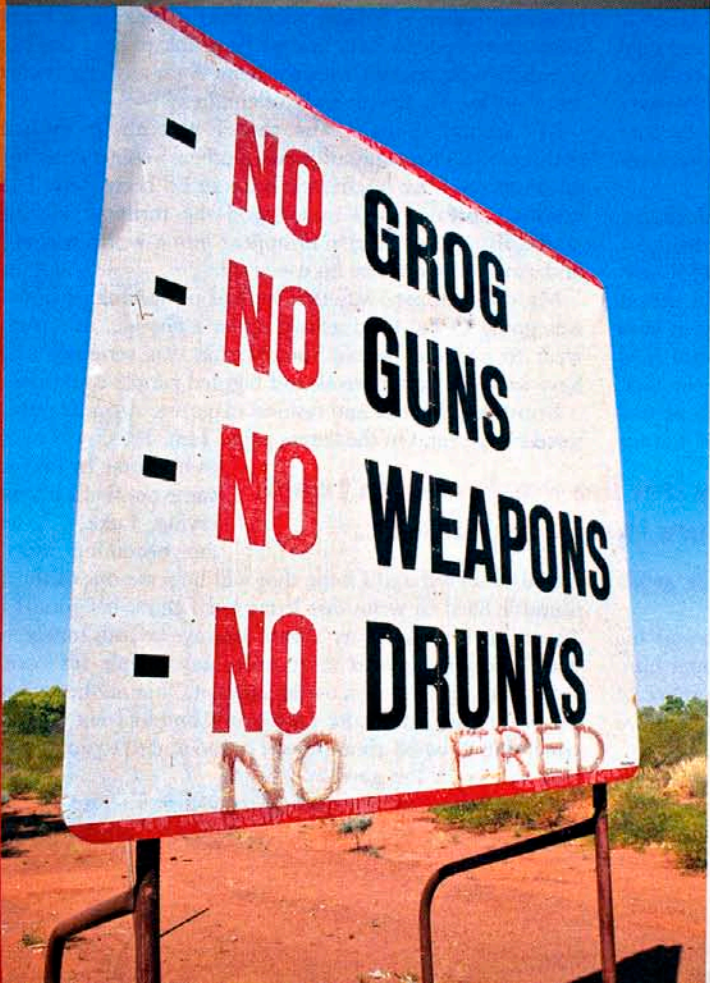
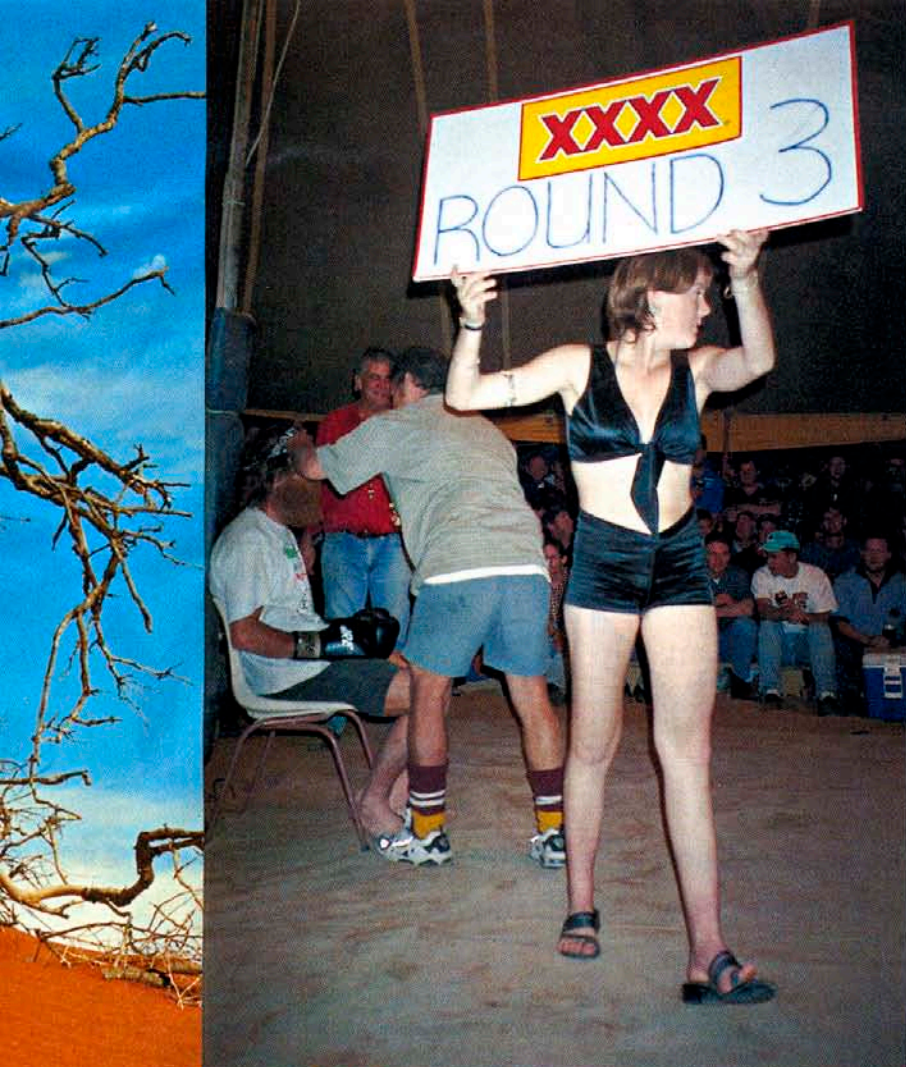


Diesel and dust

Jason Kimberley started out on a “journey of discovery” and returned with a collection of photographs that capture the Australian outback’s harsh beauty. By **Paul Connolly**.



Clockwise from top left: *Tree*, Cameron Corner, NSW; *Round 3*, Birdsville, Qld; *No Fred*, Tanami Track, NT; photographer Jason Kimberley; *Seven Singlets*, Lombadina, WA.



IF YOU'RE INTO RASH, SIMPLISTIC JUDGEMENTS, Jason Kimberley has the potential to be a Fancy Dan. Raised in the well-heeled Melbourne suburb of Brighton, son of Just Jeans founder Craig and co-owner of too-cool-for-school St Kilda eatery Veludo, the credentials are there. But the moment I arrive at his St Kilda home, my fears are allayed. Wearing an old short-sleeved shirt, faded black jeans and rubber thongs, Kimberley projects an unpretentious nature that is borne out by the contents of his pantry. "Can I get you a tea or coffee?" he asks. "I've only got instant – that OK?"

On closer inspection, Kimberley, 36, appears to be a man for all seasons. After all, his self-published photographic book, *Australia Exposed*, is the result of the year he and his wife, Caroline, spent delving into Australia's harshest, most remote and dusty reaches.

The year 2000 was, he explains, "a journey of discovery". Apart from unearthing a deep love for his roof-rack (his 4WD was meticulously kitted out) and seeing his marriage survive the test of proximity ("We only had one blue," he says), he saw his interest in photography become a passion.

When he and Caroline set off, Kimberley had no idea his passion would result in a book. "I'd put in a bunch of films for development in Port Lincoln [in South Australia] but it wasn't until I got them back that I saw the potential in them and made the decision to stick with it," he explains.

From that moment, Kimberley's mind and camera – a 35mm SLR he had "borrowed" from his mother, Connie, 18 years earlier – began to linger over "the beauty and intrigue in everyday things".

Though "mindful of giving Caroline the shits", he inspected eye-catching vistas from Broome to Mallacoota and outback detritus such as the rusted skeletons of vehicles or the rigid frames of animals long since keeled over. "I was interested in how objects became part of the landscape," he says. "Things like oil drums which, in detail, looked like Aboriginal dot paintings or how the carcass of a dead cow sinks into and becomes part of the earth."

Getting by in the harsh interior of Australia – where, Kimberley points out, many of his Veludo regulars wouldn't last half an hour – is all about assimilating with the locals: "They're tough, dry and honest. I have nothing but admiration for them." But since they have a natural antipathy for "Victorians", he laughs, he had to earn their respect. Having a good vehicle and crossing the Simpson Desert helped, as did putting his hand up at the Birdsville Races when Fred Brophy's Travelling Boxing Troupe was in town. (He gained bruises as well as respect: Kimberley, given Dutch courage by a rum and coke, had his eye socket fractured by a boxer called The Duke of Earl.) "Otherwise," he advises, "it's best to just quietly sit at the bar and have a few beers and try to meld into the life."

The same breezy self-confidence that got him into trouble in the ring saw him put up \$120,000 to publish *Australia Exposed*. "In the end I'd done so much work getting the ball rolling that I just wanted to keep my autonomy. I was fortunate enough to be in a financial position to do it."

What he didn't think about until too late was that, in retrospect, the whole trip became something of a work-related expense. "If I'd known what I was going to do," he laughs, "I would have kept all my receipts." □

An exhibition of Jason Kimberley's work can be seen at The ArtHouse Hotel in Sydney until January 3. *Australia Exposed* is published by Sunburnt Country Photos, \$49.95.