



From left: Winter, Danielle, Remi and Jason.

## DRILLING THEIR WAY TO SUCCESS

Words by Pipe Pro Directional Drilling.  
Pictures by William James.

**Husband-and-wife team, Danielle and Jason, are the driving force behind Pipe Pro Drilling, a local company that is doing some groundbreaking work – pardon the pun!**

**Tell us a little bit about yourselves. How did you get to where you are now?**

I am a Ballarat girl, and back then had a teaching position in North Melbourne and Jason was a baker in Korumburra, his home town.

When we met, Jason was working as a directional driller for a Melbourne-based company, and was working around the country on a roster of two weeks on then one week off.

In 2008 Jason was offered a job working as a directional driller in Port Hedland, Western Australia. It was a fly-in-fly-out job (FIFO), which meant he worked three weeks in Port Hedland and was then flown back to Perth for one week. I decided to go with him, and I got a teaching position in Perth. We left with everything we owned in the back of a two-door Mitsubishi Lancer and headed across the Nullarbor!

It took seven days of driving and we stopped at many amazing places along the way. When we arrived in Perth, Jason only had two days to settle in before he had to fly to Port Hedland and start his new job. When he left, it really hit me just how far away I was, and how isolated I was from family and friends. I started my new job teaching Year 10 History, which was so different to the previous school I was at in terms of all the behavioural problems and violence amongst the students.

After six months of living on my own in a city where I didn't know anyone for three out of every four weeks and working in an environment which I didn't enjoy, I knew I couldn't stay there any longer.

At that time, Jason was working on a mine site called Brockman, which was 500 km inland from Port Hedland, and discovered they were looking for a site administrator to run the office, so he told them about me. Within a week I had had a phone interview with the company and within a fortnight I had resigned and was on a 30-seat plane flying into Paraburdoo in the Pilbara. Looking back on that day, it really was a game-changing moment in our lives and led to the path we are on now.

In my time there I learnt so much about the mining industry – rail signalling (that was what my company specialised in), occupational health and safety and, of course, directional drilling. Noticeably, though, I was only one of about 10 women staying in the camp with approximately 200 men!

Even though Jason still had to work away from the site from time to time, the best part about this job was that we saw each other more and shared in this experience together, and we saw parts of Australia that so few get to see.

Over the next two years the company worked all over the Pilbara and we moved wherever the work was. Although this was one of the best times of our lives, it wasn't without its challenges.



As a woman working in such a male-dominated and competitive industry, I experienced bullying and sexual harassment, which made me question whether I wanted to be there anymore. We also missed out on many events with our family and friends back home (birthdays, weddings, births, etc). Despite the fact that being in the Pilbara was an amazing experience, we really did sacrifice our "social life" to stick it out and earn enough money so that we could move back home to buy a house and set ourselves up financially.

We were married in December 2010, and were back in Ballarat, where we purchased a "renovators delight", which was a very old house in Wendouree.

**How did Pipe Pro Drilling come about?**

After completing our property renovation, Jason went back to work in the drilling industry with a Ballarat-based company. It was during this time that we started to discuss the amount of directional drilling work around Ballarat and western Victoria, and how there were not many companies doing it.

**What were some of the obstacles you came across starting your own company?**

Jason was the driving force in researching the market and presented his findings to me to discuss how we could start up on our own. I was a little apprehensive at first but with his drilling knowledge and my organisation and knowledge of OH&S and accounting, I was confident we could make Pipe Pro Drilling a success.

Although neither of us had been involved in running a business before, we were fortunate to have had the support and guidance of our accountant, Chris Packer, who in the early days really taught us so much.

In the beginning, the bank was reluctant to lend us money to buy machinery and clients were unwilling to give us contracts when we hadn't actually purchased any equipment as yet. We had many meetings with the bank and eventually in July 2013 we bought our first drill rig, truck and excavator.

Jason resigned from his job at the drilling company when we won a contract to install gas piping in Huntly (just outside Bendigo).

At that time it was only Jason and one other employee drilling, and I was keeping track of finances whilst still teaching.

**How has Pipe Pro Drilling been going since its establishment?**

We had our daughter Remi in 2014. During that time, we had also started to win a few more small jobs and became a preferred contractor for ISGM/Telstra in the Ballarat/Bendigo/Geelong area. When it became apparent that I would not be able to return to teaching, I took on the role of managing Pipe Pro Drilling with a newborn baby whilst Jason worked in the field drilling in the pipe.

We became so busy that by the end of 2015, Jason and I had four full-time employees and two drill rigs and were running two crews installing telecommunications, water, power, and gas pipelines. It was at this time I became pregnant with our second daughter, Winter.

At the beginning of 2016, the state government announced a rollout of 10 towns that were to be part of a project to have infrastructure installed for distribution of natural gas. This was a big project, which would run for several months, for each town. We did a small amount of work in Terang with another drilling company, but it was in July 2016 that we got our biggest break and were selected as the sole drilling contractor to Comdain Infrastructure to complete the gas pipe installation in Swan Hill (32 km).

After being selected for this contract, we purchased our third and biggest drilling rig and truck, which meant that we could run two crews in Swan Hill and one crew in Ballarat.

**What sets Pipe Pro Drilling apart from its competitors?**

We are a local Ballarat business that is run by a husband-and-wife team. Our experience in the mining industry has led us to be vigilant with extensive experience developing policies and procedures in line with stringent OH&S regulations.

We have both worked in environments where staff morale has been very low and leadership has been poor. We want our workers to be happy and proud to be working for Pipe Pro Drilling and to also have a voice within our company to be able to confidently express their concerns as well as ideas for PPD's future progress and success.





### What are some of the challenges working as a husband-and-wife team? And, in turn, what are some of the benefits?

Personally, as a woman running a business in a predominantly male environment, I have struggled with people's perception of me. I often get asked to pass on messages to "my husband" or I'm told "I'm lucky to just be able to do the books for my husband's business and stay at home". It's frustrating that people don't recognise how much I have put into Pipe Pro Drilling alongside Jason. We have a 50/50 partnership and both of us bring individual qualities and assets to Pipe Pro Drilling to make it the success it is today.

However, having now worked in the drilling business for a few years, I do miss the social aspect of teaching and interacting with students. Working for yourself from an office on our property with two young children can be quite isolating and difficult at times. Although I am lucky to have the flexibility of working for myself and raising my girls, my days are busy and I have little time to fit in anything else.

The stress of running our own business has meant long nights, and even sleepless nights, trying to figure out how I can get everything done and spend time with our daughters. There are never enough hours in the day. I am very lucky to have the help and support of my family.



### How do you find the work/family life balance?

The major issue now that we are more established is finding that work/life balance. As Pipe Pro Drilling is still growing, we are struggling to achieve this! We do try to leave work at the office at the end of the day and just focus on being Mum and Dad to our daughters. We do this quite well, but at times after the girls have gone to bed, we end up working again!

We also love travelling, and we want our girls to be able to travel and see the world as well. We are off to Thailand in 2017. Other hobbies we have are fishing, exercise and basketball (Jason's passion), and we love entertaining at our house.

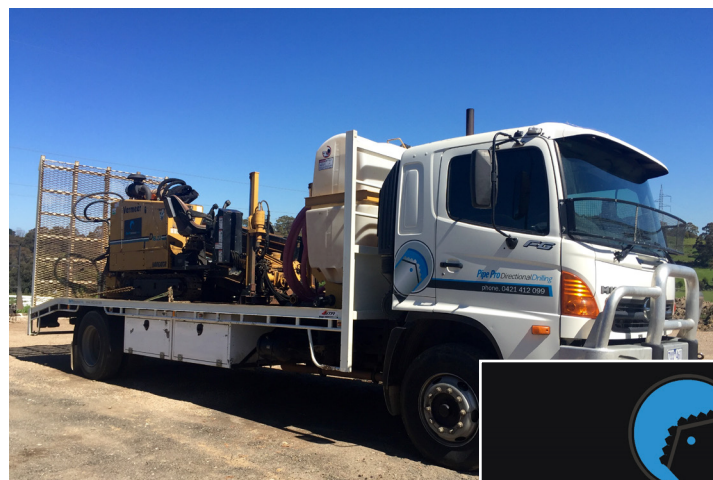
### What's next for PPD?

Keep running three rigs and crews and winning work to install pipelines.

We both love what we do so we will see where the work takes us!

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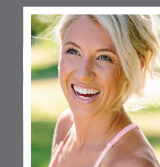
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