

The Simpson Bash

Days 10 to 20

Day 10 in the Kings Canyon Resort started with much excitement as Vicki discovered that a dingo had taken her ba.... I mean boot - from under her bed while she was asleep and after dragging it about 15m away had given the tongue a good chew!



Vicki was desperate to shout those immortal words "Please help, a dingo has my b..... but sense prevailed

After breakfast and a quick pack up we refuelled at the resort's Shell service station and found a neat note on all the pumps instructing resort "guests" to hand over their drivers licence before the attendants would unlock the relevant pump – I naturally wanted to argue the toss as having booked out I didn't consider myself a quest, rather a passing traveller! Despite this salient point Vicki sent me packing with licence in hand. Mind you at \$2.10 a litre it was our most expensive fuel to date. We had no sooner cleared the resort when we spotted a mob of camels beside the road. This was our second sitting of camels but I think these may have been domesticated as most wild camels like to keep out of gun range!



Quick, here come some tourists – look regal!

Back on the road we stopped at Kathleen Springs (2.6km return, 1.5hrs) and walked to the spring-fed waterhole which is at the head of the Kathleen Gorge. What was interesting about this spot was its connection to the cattle industry as the gap leading into the spring was able to be fenced off and the actual spring protected so the cattle didn't foul the water – and the stockman could easily muster (trap) the cattle as they came looking for water. We got the surprise of our lives when we got to the actual spring and there calmly sitting on the surface was an adult Little Grebe. I nearly did myself a mischief getting my

camera out and the right lens connected but the little fellow just sat there watching us. I just couldn't believe my luck as for years these elusive waterbirds have driven me mad trying to get a decent picture of them.



The Little (Australian) Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*

After having our body parts rumbled on the Loop track we were a tad uneasy about the dirt track to the craters but when we hit the intersection onto the Ernest Giles Road to the Henbury Meteorite Craters we found a first class dirt road all the way to the turn off to the craters. When we got to the turn off into the craters Greg and Tracy transferred our lunch and dinner stuff across and started their 141km dash to Alice Springs to sort out the tyre problem. No sooner had the Klaassen's departed when a flock of Major Mitchell cockatoos landed in the trees beside us. I jumped on the UHF but Greg must have missed the call so I grabbed my camera, hurriedly swapped lenses and headed off into the scrub trying to get the sun at my back and hoping the cockatoos wouldn't take flight.



The gusting wind hampered the birds ability to raise its crown



Still, they are very pretty looking cockatoos

During my flanking manoeuvre I discovered a rolled over car which still had plenty of replacement wheel stubs but

despite telling Greg all about it when he returned we forgot to salvage the parts on our way out. After the cockatoo pictures Vicki and I drove the 4km to the Henbury Meteorites Conservation Reserve, had lunch and set up camp. The reserve contains 12 craters which were formed when a meteor hit the earth's atmosphere about 4,700 years ago and broke into 12 pieces before hitting the surface. The available data suggests the metal meteor weighed several tons and was travelling at around 40,000kmh. Once we were fed we grabbed the chainsaw and drove out off the reserve to find and cut fire wood. Finding dead wood was easy, it was the cutting that was very exciting as the hard wood had the chainsaw blade smoking. I initially thought that the chainsaw lubricant wasn't coming through but no it was just the rock hard wood! Mind you it made excellent firewood and the coals lasted forever. Vicki, my designated firewood carrier got somewhat distracted from the task at hand when she found examples of proximal ejector breccia so the loading took a little longer than planned – but she did bring home some really good specimens to add to her collection.



Apparently the angular shape of the internal brachia excites geologists

We then did a walk around the craters but unlike most visitors we spent most of our time looking down as the busted pieces of rock had a more fascinating context than the actual holes.



Vicki working her way down into the largest crater

One of the craters was a tad more interesting than the others as it was called the Water Crater as it captured the drainage from a nearby stream that occasionally holds water. The end result was heavier timber and grasses inside the crater and hence the natural attraction for birds and other critters.



Despite the extreme drought conditions this patch had a fair number of a small ground bird called the Richard's Pipit

Greg and Tracy returned before last light with the good news that the tyre had been replaced under warranty. They regaled us with ten trip highlights which started with running into a cattle muster using helicopters and quad bikes, seeing a huge black Wedge-tailed Eagle surrounded by a multitude of kites (all at a safe distance); a very happy blonde traffic control lass; legally travelling at 130kmph and being politely waved at by a passing police car; meeting an over-aged transvestite in mini skirt and high heels; being impressed at the scene of a roll over by the coordination of police, ambulance and even traffic control folk; seeing the Cannon Ball memorial and being on time for a camp oven roast chicken dinner.

Day 11 and we had a dingo howling in the morning light and then were lucky enough to spot it as it worked its way around the camp site at a safe distance. We then packed up and headed east (failing to stop at the roll over car) to the Hugh River Stock Route turn off. Once again we found the 60km Stock Route better than average and were amazed to see a number of very fluffy cattle all in surprisingly good condition.



While we only saw a handful at anyone time (possibly due to destocking) all the cattle were in great nick (Tracy pic)

We then turned off the stock route and headed south on the Old Ghan Railway. Sadly for us the council were and had been grading the narrow track which now looked like any other dirt road. Gone were the old railway sleepers and fascinating bits of abandoned railway stuff but thankfully the millions of railway spikes were still to be seen and we had a good forage to give some to the more artistic family members.



Greg's up ahead waiting for Tracy who is scavenging off to the right of the track while Vicki scavenges on the left



Looking up at the pillar from the base – it's a bloody long way up!



Vicki's hoard, all set for some arty crafty ideas



Greg snapped this picture from the side of the pillar as it was the first time in days we had seen clouds (Greg pic)

Just before we reached Mary Vale Station we came across a bunch of Army engineer units on a four month civil construction task in the aboriginal community of Titjkala. We were told they were upgrading the sewage system, constructing an oval grandstand and offering the free desexing of cats! We also heard that the locals had all been invited to a community dinner of roast camel following the engineers success hunt. After enjoying an ice cream we drove into Chambers Pillar on a very ordinary dirt track, a real mix of soft sand, nasty corrugations and steep hills. The final steep hill does give you a great view of the surrounding countryside and the majestic Chambers Pillar which really stands out like the proverbial!

After a bit of exercise we sat back and watched the afternoon develop. We were visited by various folk on flying visits to the pillar, especially those day trippers from Alice Springs (bloody hell) and then the Park Rangers who were very methodical in cleaning just about everything in the campground. One highlight was watching a town 4WD arrive with a flat tyre and then marvelling at the driver who continued to drive it around the campground while looking for a camping spot. The silly bugger didn't even repair it until the following day – that's one way to kill a good tyre!



That's the pillar on the horizon with rolling sand dunes in the foreground



Wildflowers were a tad scarce so this Pink Mulla Mulla that was rooted in the side of the pillar stood out

It was a short drive from the top of the hill down and into the National Park. We set up camp in no time and then Greg, Vicki and I did the walk around and up onto the base of the pillar.

We also had our first experience of combating bush flies. We were sitting around swatting flies when Vicki appeared with the Bushman's insect spray in hand:

Greg: Bloody flies

Darlo: Here, use the Bushmans (Vicki passes Greg the can)

Greg: Ta (Then he wacks the flies with the can!)
Greg: It works!

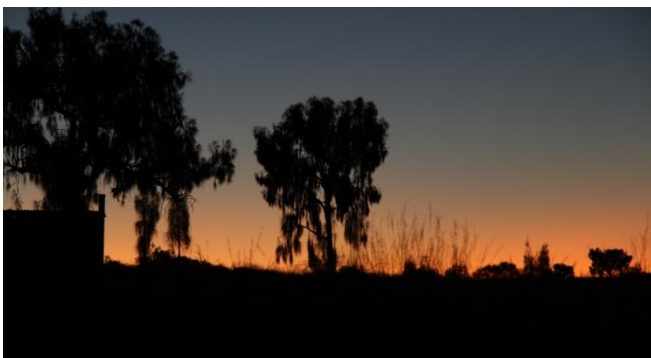
While the flies remained a problem for the remainder of the trip they all disappeared on dark which was a blessed relief.



We still think that SA has the best ever designed fire pits



Not a bad backdrop at the end of the day (Greg pic)



It got even better as the sun went down

Day 12 started with a sleep in while the overnight tourist mob departed. Greg, Vicki and I planned on going for a walk but Greg spotted a “dodgy” looking character walking through the campground so decided to stay and keep an eye on things. We later found out it was one of the Rangers! Vicki and I walked the northern side of the park and on the way chatted to Alec the Ranger who was looking for cattle in the park. On the way back we ran into Alec again so we told him about finding a dead cow and some fencing gear. I will admit to embarrassing myself when I first identified the cow as a interestingly looking large brown rock – then had to admit it was a dead cow. Alec was

appreciative and told us about the Red Kangaroo and dingo sightings in the southern part of the park.



These are the very distinct Mulga Ant nests – Vicki thought they were very neat



.... And this is why the nests are very distinct – they should be called “Happy Ants”

The northern part of the park contains some neat sand dunes so we went looking for wildflowers and critter tracks. The critter tracks were everywhere but we must have hit the back end of the wildflower season as there weren’t too many about.



The Parrot Pea shrub (*crotalaria cunninghamii*)



The flowers do look like a parrots head – depending on how much you have drunk!



Tracy had her on technique to survive the flies

After lunch Vicki and I walked the southern part of the park on the lookout for the roos. We found the Rangers hiding hole where they camp to get away from the paying guests and then the Rangers themselves who had found the cattle and where herding them out of the park. They were using two 4WD utes with a young female Ranger on foot all linked by UHF radios. The cars kept them moving while the lass had the job of chasing the reluctant ones out of any dense bush – lucky her!



The Rangers mustering five of the most stropy beasts ever

All didn't go to plan as we found Alec who had bogged his ute on top of a sand dune. We watched him for a bit but when it became a bit obvious that he didn't know how to use his winch I offered to give him a hand. He then told me that he had never winched before nor had he done a course! I then gave him a quick soldiers five and we set about extracting the car. Meanwhile the other car and the lass on foot were still pushing the cattle towards the park gate, about 4km away! Alec explained that they have to get

the cattle out as the park does not have a water source and while there may be a bit of grass around, the silly buggers would die of thirst.



Alec was initially stumped when he couldn't find a tree to connect the winch too. I suggested the closer bloody big rock. I didn't want to even think about using the earth anchor technique! (Vicki pic)



Here I'm telling him that gunning the motor will not pull the winch cable in and that the remote winch control should do a better job! (Vicki pic)



One of the prettiest birds in the desert would have to be the Mulga Parrot but by crikey it's incredibly hard to get a clear shot of them.

That was enough exercise for one day so we headed back to camp and enjoyed a late afternoon drink and then another perfect starry night

Day 13 saw us packed up and driving out to of the park on our way to Mary Vale Station. Surprisingly we found the park gate open and further down the track the same mob of cattle heading towards it. We also came across a mob of wild camels heading in the opposite direction so we called Greg and Tracy up on the UHF and put them in the lead and the camels obliged by running up the road just in front of them for a goodly distance.



There was about ten in the mob and after a while they spit into two groups, one group double back around behind us

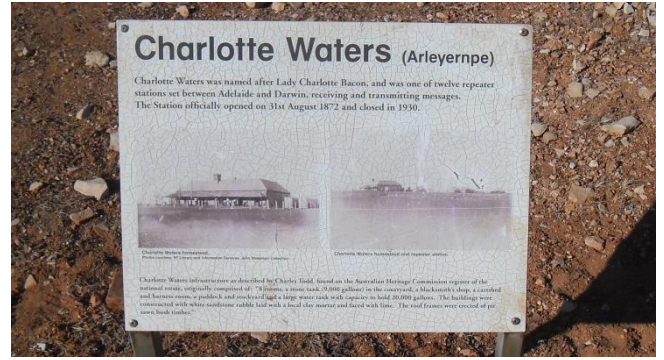
We refuelled at Mary Vale (and had another ice cream and bought a nice painting) and then headed south on the Old Ghan Highway which is on the old railway line all the way to the aboriginal community at Finke (Apatula). The first leg was both brilliant and disappointing as the dirt road had been graded and rolled so it was better than driving on a sealed road but the cost was that the old railway line had been ripped up and lost forever. The new work ran out after about 10-15km then it turned into an old somewhat graded track but again any sign of the old rail line was gone. We also had to put up with piles of rubbish from the annual Alice Springs to Finke Off Road Race. In past years the track had been littered with abandoned town cars that had been trashed and abandoned on the road on the way to Finke but someone had taken all the bodies away.



Noella Palmer painted these native foods in 2001.

Top Left: Bush Potato (yam); Wild Passionfruit (Arrutnenge); Wild Berrys (Angkwerrpne); Bush Banana (Alangkwe) and Wild Fig (Utyerrke)

During one of our breaks I found a nice piece of rectangular steel plate as I had left my jack plate at home. I wasn't too worried about getting a flat tyre as this leg of the trip should be reasonably worry free but for whatever reason I decided to toss it into the back of the car – I'm glad I did as I would need it later! We stopped for a break at the very sparse Charlotte Waters ruins. In its heyday it would have been an impressive group of structures out in the middle of nowhere, put there as a repeater station for the overland telegraph.



The station was in operation from 1872 until 1930



All that is really left is the underground cellar and the odd section of flooring.

Next break came at the old railway siding at Bundooma which still has an impressive water tower but sadly even that has been disfigured by graffiti gits. As the track was now becoming very sandy we dropped our tyre pressures to 20psi.



I'm getting good at giving helpful advice (Vicki pic)



This was the old water tank back in 2010

Around about 1500h we came across an amazing sight – pools of water and green vegetation so we decided to stop for lunch. For whatever reason we had come across a large patch of ground that was being fed by some underground source. It must have been happening for some time as some wit had put a “Swamp” sign up on a tree. The greenery had attracted all manner of birds and we could have stayed there for a couple of days just enjoying this amazing change in the landscape.



The aptly name “swamp”



The “swamp” had a decent collection of wildflowers as well

I disgraced myself when I saw Tracy wandering off and it looked as though she was sneaking up on a reasonably large bird that was sitting in a tree so I followed on behind her snapping pictures as we got closer to what turned out to be a Brown Falcon. Eventually Tracy turned and asked me what I was doing and then we both realised she was looking for a discrete tree and a I the bird. Meanwhile the falcon just watched this strange goings on so I was at least able to get some reasonable pictures of it.



The Brown Falcon just watched from the safety of the small tree



The Brown Falcon became bored and departed

Unfortunately Greg discovered that the top tank in the “turtle” had a crack in it and he was losing water and to make matters worse the fridge mount had also come loose. We plugged the crack as best we could but until we could stop moving the goop we were using to plug the crack couldn’t cure properly. The mount was an easy fix except that Greg had to climb into the cavity to tighten the securing bolts which left him expose to all manner of suggestive comments.



I’m also pretty good at providing encouragement when folk are in a tight spot (Tracy pic)

Time and space meant we weren’t going to make Dalhousie that night and even though we picked up our speed we decided to spend the night in the bush – mind you the decision was made easier when through haste I missed a spike and scored a flat tyre – our first flat in six years! And thank heavens I had picked up that bit of steel plate as the sandy soil needed it!



The well oiled wheel changing team in action spurred along by heartfelt encouragement (Tracy pic)

After that little incident we decided to look for a bed. We soon came to a cattle gate that had a track sparring off

along the fence line so we followed it for a couple of hundred meters to a nice flat spot with plenty of fire wood and set up camp. Before I got too relaxed we tried to plug the hole in the tyre but after putting in two plugs with little effect we decided that it was a major repair job. The next task was the first operational deployment of the Super Loo and it worked a treat.



Build it and they will come! The design incorporated a proper toilet roll holder and a magazine rack. Vicki vetoed the drink holder for some unknown reason (Tracy pic).

The night was just picture perfect and the only excitement was watching a couple of cars coming out of Finke at speed obviously doing a last minute dash to the Mt Dare pub. I was very impressed with the speed in which the passengers leapt out of the car, got the gate open and then closed within the blink of an eye and back into the car! Mind you both times there was much shouting by the driver and other passengers to encourage the gate opener to greater efforts.

Day 14 and we crossed the border into SA and as tradition dictates we had to have the boarder crossing picture.



Pole dancers?



While there was not a tree to be seen, at least there was a flash sign (Vicki pic)

We drove onto Mt Dare and refuelled at \$2.35 a litre and had a bite to eat while a chap undertook the tyre repair. I wasn't surprised when he called me into the shed to show me the massive and jagged hole. He then plugged it the best he could but it was too damaged to be relied upon. That why we carry two spare tyres! Vicki bought herself a flash looking and very practical woolly fleeced jumper and I picked up a Simpson numberplate and a beer! I will also add that while we were chatting to the manager at the bar Vicki was absentmindedly undoing all the pubs brain teaser toys – the manager was most impressed. Back on the road we were soon driving through large expanses of gibber rock during which Tracy called for a "Gibber hunt". Our resident geologist informed us that gibber rock is formed as a result of mechanical weathering of chalcedonised sandstone transformed over time by a harsh environment. The gibbers become polished with a coating of silica, iron and manganese. While Greg and I found all this very fascinating I told him how they make really good shangia (sling shots) rocks! Once Tracy filled a container with all manner of different coloured gibbers we were on our way again.



The last leg into Dalhousie (Tracy pic)

We eventually arrived at Dalhousie Springs and after a very fast set up we leapt into our togs and headed off for a wonderfully calming soak. The spring is a mound spring and pumps out water at 160 litres a second at a comfortable temperature of between 34 to 38 degrees and is 14m deep at its deepest part but the most surprising things is that the spring contains three species of fish! There was only one other couple in the spring when we walked in and they told us that they had been camping there for two days already and the fish had disappeared. I was a little taken back at this news as the water temperature hadn't changed but the water was much clearer and with the water level under my chin I could see my toes – and then the fish nibbling my skin! Soon everyone could feel the little fish nibbling feet and ankles! Obviously all you need is a Darlington to bring the fish on!



The only thing that stopped Vicki's headlong rush to the water was the need for her apple cider!

After our well earned soak we headed back to our digs and discovered a local visitor, a beautifully marked Central Dragon, also known as a Bearded Dragon who we christened as "Frank" as he stayed in our patch throughout our stay. Frank was around 45cm long and came out in the afternoon chasing the last rays of sunshine.



Frank, the Central Bearded Dragon *Pogona vitticeps*



Frank posed many times

I had assured Greg that we could do a last minute top up of our water tanks with sweet rainwater from the parks water tanks before heading into the desert but when we arrived we found the tanks had a notice from the Ranger saying both were empty but we could get water some 3km away! Vicki observed that the same notice had very old weather information on it so we checked and found that one of the tanks was about half full – problem solved! Another highlight was finding that we shared the spring with a mob of shovel nosed Pink-eared Ducks and even a Little Grebe.



How better to spend a winter by sitting in hot water!

After a couple of hours the birdlife had become used to us and we had constant visits by a mob of Crested Pigeons and a very fearless Singing Honeyeater. We also had fleeting visits by what we hoped was a native mouse who would scamper across the bare earth at tremendous speeds and would only stop for the fleetest of moments – obviously it was on the bottom of the food chain! We put a huge biscuit under the table in the hope it was pause long enough for us to get a look at it but when we saw it coming, by the time we looked under the table the mouse and the entire biscuit were gone!



Having checked out our bar snacks (and sampled a few) this Singing Honeyeater pulled up a camp chair to become better acquainted

Just before the sun started to go down Greg and I grabbed the cameras and went for a walk. The low light made long distance shots a bit tricky but when we pushed our way into the thick scrub at the back of the spring we discovered zillions of huge and ravenous mosquitoes! We gave up and made quick time back to the safety of the bar snacks.



Once again we approach a sign from the wrong direction (Greg pic)

Day 15 and we were woken at some ungodly hour by a chortling Magpie - well before dawn. Once the sun had actually started to rise and the other birds woke up we had

some dingo's howling close by which was very nice. What was even nicer was setting off on a morning swim before breakfast. After brekkie all four of us set off on the 6.5km (return) amble out over dry saltpan type country to Kingfisher Spring which is another very impressive mound spring.



Vicki at the Kingfisher Spring. At another time we would have gone for a swim.

The countryside to the springs had plenty of fresh rabbit signs and accompanying dingo tracks. The Park folk had also been cutting out all the date palms that the afghan camel drivers had planted many years ago which is a shame.



Vicki and I coming down from one of the mound springs (Greg pic)

While the daylight wildlife was very scarce so were the wildflowers possibly due to a combination of salt and drought. We did come across a very hardy plant that looked like a cross between a succulent and a cow pat. It was very low to the ground and firm to the touch, hence the nickname of "Cow Pat" plants that we gave them. We must have walked past hundreds of them, none were any wider than 40-50cm but we did find one that had the most delicate flowers around it fringe.



The ground gives you some idea of where this hardy plant grows



The flowers were so small that we nearly missed seeing them

Back at the camp site we then had to sort out Greg's water leaking tank problem as there was a second crack on the other side of the top tank. The plan was to transfer water from the top tank into the bottom tank but that wasn't going to work so we had to fill the bottom tank using the jerry can. Just to make matters worse the only way you can fill the bottom tank is by attaching a garden hose to the outlet right on the bottom and rely on water pressure to fill it – not a smart design for a camping unit. Greg overcame the problem by putting the jerry can (and himself) on the roof of the car and with a short length of hose filled the tank via its breather port which was behind the cab. We put in 60ltrs of water and together with the 30ltrs in the slowly leaking top tank plus the 20ltr on the Patrol we felt we had more than enough for the desert crossing.

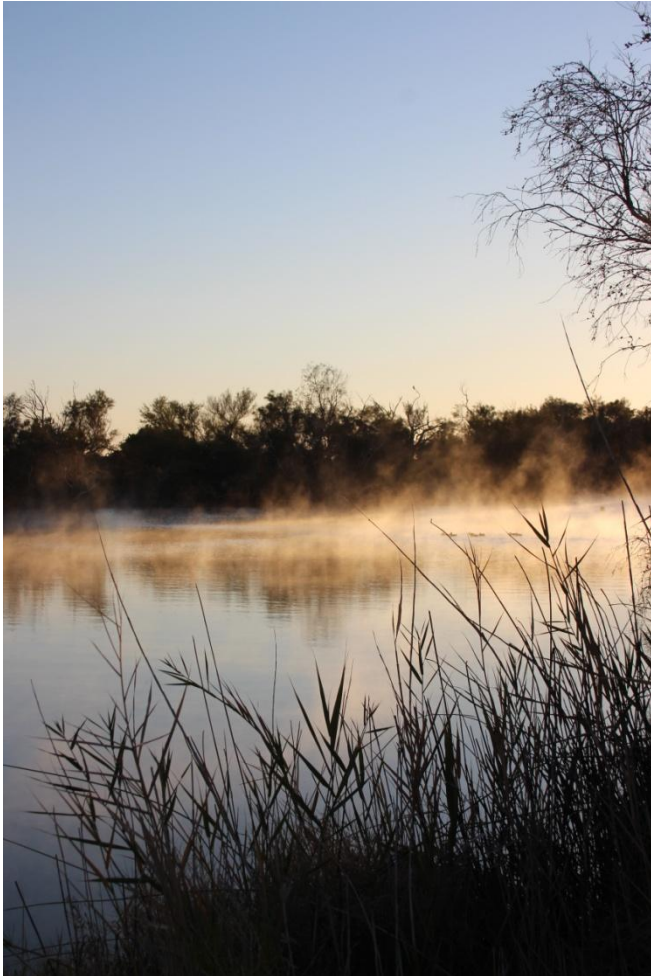


Our campsite was a tad bare and dusty but that's the desert for you

Day 16 was our last day at Dalhousie Springs so I nipped down to the spring nice and early to get some morning shots of the steam coming off the water which I hoped the sunrise would extenuate – and it did! When we reviewed the shots on the computer we could even see the ducks making their way out of the reeds towards the centre of the spring.



A very special place



I think we will get one of these pictures blown up and hung – but do we go with the landscape or portrait?

It was now time to commit ourselves to the Simpson Desert so we hoisted our mandatory desert flags, put our UHF radios onto the desert channel, told the world that we were leaving Dalhousie on the French Line and away we went on our way to the Puni Bore. Unfortunately Tracy had left all their maps back in Townsville so Vicki had the job of navigating and making the frequent radio calls for the entire crossing. Greg and I soon got into the dune crossing technique of employing a short run up, keeping our momentum going until just short of the top of the dune, propping just over the top for a quick scan of the country ahead before sailing down the face of the dune – great fun all round. Eventually we pulled into Puni Bore in time for a cuppa. In the past the Parks hierarchy had decided to cap all the artesian bores to counter the falling water levels in

the artesian basin but thankfully due to the remote nature of this bore and the wildlife that now depended on it they had decided to just moderate its flow. What this meant to us is that the birdlife was just amazing and you could spend a number of days there just enjoying that one aspect. The place was full of swirling clouds of Zebra Finches, Galahs, Hawks, Purple Swamphens, Doves, Pigeons and Ducks.



One of the many flocks of Galahs that were in no hurry to take flight



The bores edge was choked in most parts by thick bulrushes and the water level could not be more than 40-50cm deep



Like Dalhousie there was a small flock of Pink-eared Ducks in residence



While we were walking around the waters edge we were getting glimpses of two very fast moving birds and eventually I was able to snap a decent shot of them which helped us identify them as Bronze-winged Pigeons



With so many Zebra Finches about I started to look for that unusual shot.



So how many finches can a grass stalk support?



The "tumbled weeds" grow pretty big around water (Vicki pic)

We then continued on our way over the dunes keeping a sharp eye out for the many small lizards that were on the track. As we approached they would lift their tails up and dash for the side of the track at tremendous speeds. When

it came time to find a bed we just picked a nice flat spot between the dunes and drove in for about 500m and set up camp.



Home for the night between two sand dunes

Day 17 saw us driving into the salt lake part of the countryside. Thankfully the lakes were very dry and hard but they glistened when the sun hit the salt. You could see where folk had decided to leave the track and drive across the salt – and at times where they had broken through the crust and got themselves well and truly bogged in salty mud – bloody fools!



The Patrol coming out of the sand dunes and onto a salt lake (Greg pic)



.... And that's how it is done bloke! (Greg pic)

This was to be our last night in the desert so we pushed on a bit until we got close to the magical drinks –o'clock time and then found a bush camp on the edge of a salt flat.



I get to light the last campfire for the trip (Tracy pic)

Day 18 kicked off with a freezing cold morning and I was very glad that I slept in a beanie! We packed up and then had breakfast while watching the rising sun slowly illuminate a red sand dune then the sparkling salt flat at its base. As we got on the track we heard a delightful ladies voice come over the UHF cheerfully giving everyone a good morning then the a date, time and temperature report to all within range – it was a great way to start the last day of desert driving. Around midday we had a bit of a surprise when we rolled over a sand dune to face ten 4WD from the Sydney Nissan Club just about to start up the same dune. They had just finished lunch and were in the process of giving a call when we surprised them! Next on the agenda was a stop at Poeppel’s Corner. This is the intersection of NT, QLD and SA borders so we had to stop and do the “standing in three states” thing. In 1879 Augustas Poeppel was given the task of surveying the QLD to SA boarder and so he started at Haddons Corner using pegs and mile posts to mark every 400m. He reached the three state intersections in 1880 and drove in the last peg – but it was later found to be in the wrong spot as when he returned to civilisation he found that his survey chain had stretched 2.5cm from the heat and wear. In 1983 the line was re-surveyed and the new peg established not that far from the original marker.



The original peg location with the new peg behind it



Vicki the navigator celebrates being in both NT and QLD. The star pickets on the left mark a drill hole from the French oil exploration team – cheeky sods!

We were now travelling through the QLD National Parks part of the desert and the first thing we noticed was the fields of wildflowers. There were masses of white flowers with the odd yellow bloom and then masses of yellow flowers with the odd white bloom – just brilliant!



This was the first time we saw fields of wildflower



White may have been boring but set against the red of the sand dunes they were just pretty



The yellow flowers were twice as large as the white flowers but just as pretty

Very soon though we came to the official desert boundary being our finish line and to mark the occasion Tracy asked me to present Greg with a Simpson Desert plate. With handshakes all round we celebrated the end of the trip – now all we had to do was cross Eyre Creek and climb the largest sand dune in Australia!



We dun it!

The last time Vicki and I had a crack at the Eyre Creek crossing was in 2010 and it was in flood which resulted in a horrific 85km bypass which cost an extra days travelling and a cracked radiator on the horrendous bypass. With the drought in full swing we were hoping that the creek was passable but couldn't believe our eyes when we pulled up in the middle of the very, very dry creek bed. I just had to jump out and take some comparison pictures!



I took this picture of the crossing from our old campsite



The same location back in 2010

I'm glad we didn't try to cross the creek back in 2010 as while the bottom may have been solid enough the other creeks on the other side had the signs of multiple horrific mud traps! With such an easy crossing we got to "Big Red" as the locals call it with ease. It certainly is the largest sand dune in Australia and there are two ways to cross it being straight ahead and over the top or for those that cant get over a more gentler track around the side. We of course had to go the direct route! We both had two attempts,

falling just short of the top on each of our first runs. Then it was a case of more grunt, keeping up the momentum and trying to keep the front wheels straight in the very soft and deep sand. Keep in mind our tyre pressures were still at 20psi!



The top is a great spot for spectators to cheer on those trying to get to the top



Vicki and I got to the top first then took pictures of Greg's second and successful climb. He is about 50m into the climb.



Vicki on top of Big Red



Greg purchased a sticker each for us to celebrate the crossing

It had already been decided that the final part of the plan was for the Klaassen car to refuel when it reached Birdsville and head for Townsville while the Darlington car drove straight to the Birdsville Hotel where its occupants would shoot into the bar whereupon I would order drinks while

Vicki went in search of a bed. All went to plan and I certainly needed the first beer as the bed cost us \$170 – but I would have given \$270! Once we had washed away the desert dust we had a lovely hot and very long shower before heading back into the bar to sort out dinner.



The one and only Birdsville Hotel

Day 19 started with a glorious sleep in and another long shower after which we wandered around Birdsville eventually ending up at the Bakery where we had a great breakfast. We also met a young lass who was mothering an orphaned Red Kangaroo joey and by crickey didn't it know it had fallen into the lap of luxury!



It's more than just a Bakery – it's a pub as well!



Vicki having breakfast amongst the artwork after the morning exodus of early travellers.

After a leisurely breakfast we checked out the lake and the new pontoon. We also spent some time in the flash Information Centre checking out all the historic displays and indigenous artwork. You could spend a good four days getting to know Birdsville.



Birdsville has always had a lagoon out behind the town where the hot artesian water can mix with any floodwater and so provide a reasonable water supply so it was only natural for the locals to start enjoying it.



This is how the locals used to cross the flooded Eyre Creek. The strapped a couple of the steel hulls together and loaded them with either cars, cattle, horses or folk

Having sorted ourselves out and regained our calm we booked out of the pub, drove across the road to the service station, reinflated the tyres and refuelled for only \$1.64 a litre - or so I thought as when I went to pay they were actually charging \$1.70 a litre – the cheeky bastards! Our plan now was to do a slow trip back to Townsville and with some spare days up our sleeves it was going to be jolly entertaining – we were going on a pub crawl!



On the way we stopped at the Carcory homestead ruins. The homestead was built in 1877 from local limestone and abandoned in 1906 after years of drought.

We headed north to Bedourie for lunch but the old 1887 pub I was keen to investigate didn't serve meals – go figger! So we drove to the other end of town which has a big servo and had hamburgers and a milk shake – well Vicki had the milkshake as the servo is also a pub!



Lunchtime beer – XXXX Gold of course!

We then drove onto Boulia and while I was keen to head for the pub we decided to book into a motel which was just down the road from the Australian Hotel. We had a quick stroll around town (it's not that big) and checked out the mighty Bourke River – which was reduced to a single puddle. We dropped into the Information Centre and enjoyed there Min Min Light display.



This was not part of the official Min Min Light story but it made sense to me

The Australia Hotel was quite large and well looked after but lacked something – like customers and character! We chatted to the staff for a bit while waiting for the cook to get himself sorted, then after dinner we headed back to our bed for an early night.



Two rowdy Australian Hotel customers

Day 20 started badly for me as Vicki had a phone call from Katharine just as we were planning the days pub crawl to say that Guntha and Cocoa had escaped but she had recaptured them after much effort. Guntha had thankfully

stayed close to home but Cocoa had gone wandering and as it so happened had been picked up by a nice lady on her way to work at JCU. Thankfully she deposited Cocoa at the JCU Veterinary Clinic as a stray where Katharine was able to reclaim her due to the pups microchip data. Meanwhile Jono had repaired the fence where the dogs had made their escape. It looked as though Cocoa had wiggled through a worn palling into next door and Guntha had just bulldozed through the opening in hot pursuit. We decided to drive straight home.

All in all we drove some 5,118km, took in excess of 2,300 pictures and sucked up some 728 litres of diesel with gave us a fuel economy of around 7 km/ltr – not bad given the weight we were carrying and the amount and type of 4WD undertaken.