

# The Lake Eyre Trip.

14<sup>th</sup> April, 2009.

By Sandy Dickson



On the Monday morning following Blinman, and amazingly, within 15 minutes of the proposed departure time, the convoy, led by Dave Read, left Blinman bound for Lake Eyre. Thick dust rose from the Parachilna Gorge road allowing only fleeting glimpses of on-coming traffic (including three OKAs) until we hit the bitumen and headed north. The fuel stop at Leigh Creek caused minor chaos as vehicles jostled into position from all directions to fill up at the single diesel pump. Some of us went shopping instead to avoid the mayhem. Finally, with the convoy reassembled, we headed off the huge distance to Copley. The Leigh Creek shoppers filled up

their tanks, and we all filled our stomachs with coffee, savouries and quandong pies. Well, it was nearly lunch time after all!

We stopped for a brief visit and car line-up at the Leigh Creek coalfields and then it was on up to Lyndhurst. The road was in excellent condition, presumably graded in anticipation of the large amount of traffic heading up to view a lake with water. A short stop at the Ochre Pits was followed by a stop at Farina to see the remaining ruins. As it was still too early in the day to set up camp we carried on to Marree in time for yet another snack break. It was then only another 54 km of driving to Muloorina, during which time we watched the

clouds building up on both sides of us and dumping rain, and wondered if we were going to be caught in any of it. We arrived still dry at Muloorina, circled the campground and selected our campsite area for the night. It was a fairly quiet evening and we all headed off to bed early in preparation for a 9 am getaway the following day.

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The next morning saw a flurry of activity as tents and campers were packed up and trailers chained together in a circle by 8.30 am. The birdwatchers hurried to pack, having been caught short by this unexpectedly efficient break of camp. The day was clear and bright with no threatening rain, the land flat and the lake dry. Having wandered about on the salty crust for a while we headed back to camp, retrieved the trailers and drove back to Marree. After discussions with Sylvia and Kev we decided to investigate the possibility of taking a flight over the lake and found that we could book one for 4:30 pm that afternoon. As a result, we waved off the rest of the convoy as they headed for William Creek while we settled ourselves into the Marree caravan park to have showers and await our flight. During that time we actually got rained upon, but it cleared up and at 4:15 pm with great excitement and anticipation we headed over to the airport. Once there, we stood with the pilot and watched the approaching dust storm (coming

from the direction of the others i.e. William Creek). Needless to say, for our safety, the flight was postponed and was rearranged for 7:30 am the following day. We had dinner in the park kitchen that evening and all hoped for a clear fine morning.

The following morning we were up early, packed and were off for our flight which took 1.5 hr. We flew over Lake Eyre South, past Madigan Gulf, Jackboot Bay, Halligan Bay, over Marree Man and back to Marree. It was great to see it all from the air and the cameras were clicking madly.

One of the interesting things that we noticed was the red colour of the water in the lake. This is due to the salt reacting with the iron in the soil and basically rusting into the water. No wonder there are no remains of the plane that crashed on the lake some years ago. It had all rusted away! We failed to see any waterbirds on the lake as they are all still up in Longreach breeding. And no flies either: The pilot told us that the last time water was in the lake

there was a thick band of flies at the water's edge that was visible from the plane. That must have been an awful lot of flies! It's also amazing that however small the road trains look from the air, they still produce a huge plume of dust out behind them.

Once back on the ground we collected Sylvia and Kev's camper and headed up the Birdsville Track to see the water flowing down the Warburton River. There were the remnants of rain from the previous few days and the first large puddle that we tried to negotiate saw Kev bogged at the side of the track. Having required a pull out from behind after that it was straight through the middle of the rest of them until we reached Mungarannie where we stopped for a look around, a well-earned beer and a steak sandwich. When we enquired we found out that it cost just as much to go and view the river as it did to camp at Cowarie Station, so we went off there for the night. There were more puddles along the way and another large one had us scratching our heads trying to decide what to do. There were great deliberations about going through the middle of it until I suddenly discovered a chicken track just off on my side which stopped all the worry and we were off again. Following the chicken tracks we got to the river to find a number of campers already set up and we also found ourselves a spot near to the rapidly flowing river. As soon as we were out of the cars the flies were upon us and it was a race for the nets to try and keep them

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at bay! We pitched camp and then left Sylvia and Kev behind to go in search of the black and white bird tail which had flitted out in front of our car as we neared the camping area.

Unfortunately we failed to find out what it was (another suspected but unconfirmed "rarie"! ) and the only thing we did discover was a flat tyre when we went to return to camp. Hence, it was a while later when we got back to find the others nearly driven spare by the flies! Regardless of that the sunset was pretty spectacular. However, the mossies or midges replaced the flies after dusk, and so the discussions turned to what the time in the morning would we have to be up to beat the bugs.

The following morning we were up at first light, but it still wasn't early enough to beat the flies, and so it was a rapid pack up before driving back into Mungarannie for a tyre repair and breakfast.

From there it was back down the track to Marree (again) and over to Roxby Downs. By then the car was getting thirsty, and in the end Andrew and Kev had to push the last five metres to the diesel pump. We were carrying spare fuel but we (well, Andrew)

thought there wasn't any problem with getting to Roxby so we hadn't filled up earlier. It turns out that there's an unreachable 5L in the bottom of a Disco fuel tank. All was OK though, after the performance of turning the ignition on and off repeatedly to prime the fuel lines. As we were signing into the caravan park, Dave appeared having just decided upon his camping spot. We were allocated an area near to them, on the grass with the BBQ. Meanwhile Kevin Long was introducing himself to Kevin Short, the man behind the counter! After a trip to town we returned to cook our BBQ and chat the evening away. The following day we departed, leaving Dave and Chris behind to continue on their peripatetic way, and headed straight for home. At Port Augusta we split from Kev and Sylvia and stopped for lunch and a quick bird-watch at the Arid Lands Botanic Garden before getting home mid-afternoon. Of course, the

following day included several hours of washing mud off the car, something we had not expected to have to do when heading north! Mind you, we heard that the others had more of a mud-bath than we did so I suppose we got off lightly. All in all, it was a good trip and we await the next one.

*Sandy Dickson*

