

Simpson Desert to Uluru September 09

We were going to cross the Simpson Desert! I had heard tales about the crossing but didn't really have any idea what to expect.

We woke up early on Friday morning to rain! Heavy rain! It had rained all night and it didn't look like it was going to stop anytime soon.

We met at Roseworthy at 10am. Dave and Maureen Price and their grandson Matthew, Adrian Beech, Jim Bowering, Brian Johnson, Gerald and myself. All ready for the first leg of our trip. Dave and Maureen were the trip leaders.

It rained steadily as we headed north but it didn't dampen our spirits. At lunchtime we stopped at Jamestown and had to run to the bakery in driving rain. Pies and hot drinks seemed to be the order of the day and it was standing room only with other travelers having the same idea as us.

After lunch we hit the road and at Hawker we stopped for fuel and the weather was at last looking as though it may clear up. By the time we reached Parachilna strong winds and heavy dust had replaced the rain and at times visibility was down to one hundred meters. We arrived at Angorichina Village and with great difficulty and help from Brian we erected our tent. (Dave and Maureen had a Roof Top sleeper which just wound up and down. Jim had a Roof Top Tent , Brian had his Camper Body on the back of his Defender and Adrian had a tent.) We all had our dinner cooked on the BBQ in the Camp kitchen before turning in very cold. Gerald and I had so much equipment and I thought that we would never be ready in time to pull out when everyone else was but we managed and we were on the road at 9am.

Once we passed the turn off to Arkaroola I started to feel as though we were heading into “the outback”. We had a break at Chambers Gorge where we went for a walk and had lunch. Whenever a group of people spend any length of time together they seem to share a joke that seem to lose something in the telling but have a common thread that lasts through the holiday. This is what happened with us and in the days to follow we had many laughs. Or first nights bush camp was at Montecollina Bore.

We were up bright and early with blues skies and a really cold wind. Again Gerald and I had a bit of a scrabble to pack up and be ready when everyone else was but we managed and thought things would become easier as the days wore on and we developed a routine.

The track wasn't in too a bad condition but with some corrugations but seeing that it was the end of the season and it had seen a lot of traffic due to the Birdsville Races three weeks before we were all pretty happy with it.

As we passed Moomba we stopped at the viewing platform and read the tourist information and with the knowledge that Jim shared it was most interesting.

We arrived in Innaminka at lunch time and after our break we went out to Burke's grave and on to the Dig Tree. We drove back to Innaminka driving into the sun on a rather rough track and were all glad to have Sunday Roast at the pub for dinner instead of having to worry about cooking meals at that late hour. We still had to erect our tents and fix our sleeping arrangements

which we did in the dark on the Town Common on the bank of Cooper Creek and another late night to bed 8.45pm. We all had showers in the morning. Luxury! And with a big day ahead of us we were on the road at 9am and heading for Birdsville, a great steak in the pub and the start of the Simpson Desert.

We were up early and off to the Birdsville Bakery to fortify ourselves with pies and an extra squeeze of Big Red sauce in readiness for BIG RED. While Dave and Brian played on B R Adrian did some running repairs to his bull bar because a bracket had snapped off. Gerald and Jim decided to leave it for another time. With Adrian's repairs done he also conquered B R. As the morning wore on the temperature rose and it was time to discard our jeans and pull on some shorts. As we set off across the desert we found some of those dunes testers and with some quickly gained experience and help from the others we soon found it easier to tackle them. We bush camped again that night.

Morning six was very windy and we were on our way at 8am. It looked like a day full of adventures. The heat rose quickly and by the time we reached Poeppel Corner it had reached 42 degrees with very strong hot winds and lots of dust. At one time we thought we had lost the track but we found it and off we went again. Lots of ups and downs. Dave and Adrian said that the track had changed out of sight since they had last traveled it. On one of the dunes we all had quite a few attempts and decided to take a different approach. With Dave, Jim and Adrian already over Gerald and I set off with Gerald giving it all we had. As we arrived at the top Gerald took a different route and almost collected Dave on his way. Boy! didn't Dave move. He said he hadn't run that fast for years and Maureen came close to collecting his Life Insurance.

We didn't see any traffic going our way but came across quite a bit of oncoming traffic. Courtesy was in short supply with some of these drivers. At one stage a Ford F250 almost ran Dave off the track and then within twenty minutes the same driver was calling for assistance needing transmission fluid. Fortunately Adrian was able to assist. We made camp at 6pm that night very tired but satisfied with a good days drive. Dinner and a chat around the camp fire and an early night finished off our day.

Whoever said that the dunes would get smaller as you traveled west hasn't traveled this way lately and we all got hung up in some very loose sand on one dune or another so we made very slow progress. After a particularly tough one we had a call for help from a fellow traveler and Dave and Brian went back to assist him while Adrian, Jim, Gerald and I had lunch and waited for them. An hour and a half later we were all together again and ready to carry on. I'm glad to report the day was much cooler at 31 degrees and we were feeling more comfortable than the day before.

By the time we stopped for the day it was 35 degrees and the winds were howling, dust was blowing every where and it looked like we were in for a nasty night. We pitched our tent in the lee of the Defender and tied our guy ropes to it so that it wouldn't blow away. Maureen asked if they could eat their dinner in our tent because the wind was so bad but once it started to rain they decided to eat in the car. We had all seasons in one day and it looked like we were in for a sleepless night.

We awoke to a cloudy morning but the wind had dropped slightly and the dust had cleared so we were hopeful of a good days driving. The dunes became smaller and were replaced by some long stretches of bad corrugations where we all agreed driving on sand was preferable.

We arrived at Dalhousie Springs mid afternoon and all felt as though we deserved some time for R & R. The water was very refreshing and eased away our travel weariness. As soon as the sun went down we had a dingo visitor who was very curious. He could smell our dinner cooking. The mosquitos were out in force so it was early to bed for a well earned sleep.

After a great nights sleep we were up before the sun the sky was clear and there was no wind so we were all ready for another day. Matthew had another dip while others chose to have a nice COLD shower before we set off for Mt Dare.

Jim commented on his great fuel consumption. 80 litres Birdsville to Mt Dare.

Leaving Mt Dare we pressed on to Finke where Gerald and Brian were going to fill up at the service station only to find it had shut at 1pm being Saturday afternoon. Luckily they both had some in reserve so we kept on going and had lunch in the Finke River bed before traveling along the Ghan Heritage Trail following the track that the Alice Springs/ Finke Race takes before turning off at Maryvale and on to Chambers Pillar.

We arrived at Chambers Pillar in time for sunset and a good photo opportunity. Being Saturday night we were lucky enough to be there for a talk by the Park Ranger about Chambers Pillar and the surrounds. After the talk we had dinner around the campfire which was once again tended by Matthew very well. We chatted to some fellow travelers and then off to bed. Our latest night 9.40pm.

We had taken photos of Chambers Pillar at sunset and were up to snap it again at sunrise then off for our next destination.

Jim and Brian had some tyre problems and both needed to put some green slime in their tyres which held us up a bit.

When things are going too smoothly some thing always comes up to give us a reality check. We had intended to spend the night at Boggy Hole only to find that after driving thirty Kms we were unable to drive through some Aboriginal Freehold Land so we had to back track and find a bush camp for the night. Around the fire before dinner that night we were entertained by Gerald giving us his version of "Donald Where's Your Troosers." We had had another good day.

Day eleven and we were at Hermannsberg and Palm Valley. We pressed on to Kings Canyon. Driving after dark for two hours on a badly corrugated road . We were all glad to see the lights of Kings Canyon Resort where we checked in at 8pm and went into the Outback BBQ for a well earned meal and a beer.

On day twelve we had the luxury of showers and a later start. Adrian, Gerald and I went off to walk the rim of the canyon and we met back in the car park at 12 o'clock before we traveled on to Uluru. On arrival we set up our tents and were just in time to drive out to 'the rock' for sunset photos with the hordes. Then back to cook our dinner on the park BBQ. A most unfriendly piece of equipment that was very difficult to light, I almost lost my eyebrows while attempting to light it.

We decided to spend an extra day at Uluru so we just spent the day being tourists. We drove out to Kata Tjuta and did the Walpa Gorge walk. After our smoke-O Jim said good bye to us all and

started his journey home, hoping to be there by Thursday. We then went on to Uluru where we visited the Cultural Centre and walked to Mutitjula Waterhole and then back to the camp for an easy evening in preparation for a big haul the next day.

Gerald and I now had packing down to a fine art and were glad that no-one had to wait for us in the mornings. We turned off on to the Mulga Park road and drove to the bottom end of The Gun Barrell Hwy. It was a good road and we made good time arriving at Cadney Park in time for a beer during Happy Hour before we set up our sleeping arrangements and back to the pub in time for dinner.

We were now back on SA time and on the road nice and early. We made good time and were in Coober Pedy in time for a look around and lunch before setting off with Woomera as our goal.

After booking into the caravan park we went for a walk around Woomera. It was interesting to see that part of SA's history and to imagine what a busy little town it must have been in its Hey Day. We were all beginning to talk about home which is a sure sign that the holiday was almost over and after dinner we all had an early night.

Saturday morning found us all ready to start the long journey home and we made good time arriving back in Two Wells at about 5pm where we all said farewell to one another and set of for our homes.

What a wonderful trip we had. Gerald and I met a couple of new members and through this time became better acquainted with Adrian, Dave and Maureen. I think I can say with-out reservation that we all had a great time and I am sure I speak for Adrian, Brian, Jim and Gerald when I say "Thank you Dave and Maureen for a great adventure". They were terrific trip leaders and I look forward to another trip at some other time with them.