

Bound for Birdsville

13 September – 3 October 2009

Why a trip to Birdsville?

Early in 2008 when Sydney was announced as the venue for the 2009 World Masters Games (including orienteering), Jack and Sue immediately decided to go. Next they had to decide how to get there. We thought for all of 2 microseconds before saying, "Across the Anne Beadell Highway to Coober Pedy, then up to Dalhousie and across the Simpson Desert to Birdsville. Then we'll work our way down to Sydney. Is there any other way?" So 'Bound for Birdsville' appeared on the trips table at the next meeting.

Getting ready

Long trips need lots of organisation! You need food, booze, maps, booze, spare parts, fuel, more food, permits (we needed 5 of these), music on the iPod, waypoints, accommodation, and just a little more booze. Thanks to Whiskers for the extensive list of waypoints and their tips on what to see, do and watch out for.

The trip!

At last, on 13 September 3 well-loaded 4WDs and 4 TLCC members set off from the Roleystone Shopping Centre. We traveled via Brookton, Corrigin, Bruce Rock and Southern Cross to our first campsite, Karalee Rock, a few kilometres off the highway. It's a stopping place on the Golden Pipeline Heritage Trail. There is a great campsite here.

The next day, after getting last minute supplies in Kalgoorlie, we muddled and U-turned our way to Kanowna and Yarri Road and camped just out of Laverton. The next day, we reached Laverton, topped up water and fuel, and settled down to wait for Pete and Lou. Lou is a friend from his and Pete's school days but hadn't done a trip like this before: we hoped he wouldn't regret his decision to come! Then at last we set off on the Anne Beadell and made it to Yeo to camp. There's now a hand pump on the well and also a ladder for snakes to climb out if they fall in! Some of us even had showers in the 'bathroom'.

The next day our first stop was at Bishop Riley's Pulpit, a group of rock pillars surrounded by a steep slope. Our last stop for the day was Neale Junction. The campsite just west of the Junction is well set up now thanks to Track Care. We signed the visitors' book at the junction, noting the number of previous members that had done the same.



Our first stop the next day was at the abandoned airstrip east of the Junction. Here we took the path to the rock art. It would be good to know the origin and history of this spot. Once you see a pattern you start to see them everywhere. Further on and many corrugations later we turned off to the site of the crashed plane. This gave us the chance to relive the excitement of the Canning Stock Route as we went up, over and down many sand dunes (the Anne Beadell runs mostly parallel to the dunes so most of the up and down is via the corrugations). Pete worked hard to initiate Lou into the joys of sand dune driving (good practice for the Simpson), but Lou declined the offer. Ilkurlka Roadhouse was our next camp site, and also a refuelling stop. Some of us just had to buy some of the art works on sale. These are made by the Spinifex people at a community not far away. The campsite has lots of water and even hot showers so we washed (ourselves, our clothes).



The next day we detoured to the Djindagarra Rockhole – it did have water but it was a bit 'camel poo-ey'. Len Beadell had recommended that his grandson Mitchell be baptised here - hope the water was a little cleaner back then! However, the everlastings (pink and white, yellow and white) around the rock hole looked great. A lone camel stood on a hill glaring at us for a while until he stomped off, grumbling loudly. Then it was back on the Anne Beadell, and some sand dunes for a change. Lunch stop was the WA-SA border at the entrance to the now-named Unnamed (now Mamungarri) Conservation Park (CP). We crossed the border – didn't make any difference to the corrugations! - and continued on to our campsite just before the no camping zone. Pete had the first flat of the trip.

The following day we stopped at Vokes Corner for photos, the Len Beadell plaque and the visitors' book. We saw lots of wildflowers and plenty of birds, especially the pink and grey galahs. We also saw lots of black oaks (similar to desert oaks). Morning tea was at Anne's Corner and lunch was at Emu Junction near the airstrip that was part of the atomic bomb testing program. We went to the Observation Site, and then to Australia's version of Ground Zero (Totem I and Totem II), the sites of the British atomic bomb tests. There are signs around warning that the animals are not to be eaten. Can kangaroos read the signs warning of residual radiation? Having had our dose of radiation for the day, we carried on and found a sheltered campsite for the night. There was a lot of discussion on the radio during the day about tonight's dinner – John and Pete had decided that tonight was Fray Bentos night – and after much preparation and fanfare, the piping hot pies appeared. (Memo to self: must bring Fray Bentos on next trip).

The wind picked up the next day and was becoming quite unpleasant while the dust haze was getting thicker. By this stage of the trip the c-c-c-corrug-g-g-g-gations were definitely up to Gunbarrel Highway standard – we'd been warned about them and they lived up to expectations.

We stopped at the Tallaringa Native Well – lined with metal drums and with some water in it. At the eastern end of the Tallaringa CP we reached the Dog Fence. Here we had to take a 6km round trip to the gate and back to the Anne Beadell but it was smooth so no one complained. The wind was stronger and someone suggested that we take a spinnaker on future trips – when there's a strong tail wind we can put up the sail, switch off the engine, and rely on wind power. We blew into Coober Pedy and checked into the Stuart Range Caravan Park. The showers were bliss! We made the unanimous decision to go out to the pub for dinner.

The next morning the wind picked up again and we could barely see the sun through the dust haze. Some felt unsafe in their rooftop campers so they folded up their tents (it took four of us to do each one) and checked into a motel unit at the Park for the night. The men took shelter in the laundry to do the washing. We spent the rest of the day shopping, sightseeing, and topping up water and fuel supplies.

Dreamweaver woke the next morning to discover a flat. Much cursing, but at least the wind had dropped, so changing the tyre and packing up was a bit easier. Fortunately the tyre place (found by Pete the day before) was open and able to fix the tyre. The culprit turned out to be a small splinter of wood. The tyre man showed Jack his collection of tyre piercers – everything from large bolts to pieces of wood (various sizes) and even an ancient chop bone. It was good to be back on the road. We admired the views from the Breakaways, then continued on to the Dog Fence and back to the Oodnadatta-Coober Pedy road. We drove across the barren plains glistening with piece and chips of silica, then detoured to the Painted Desert and did the various walks there. One of Whiskers' waypoints took us to our campsite, a clearing on the bank of the Neales River. Tonight was rissole night for Pete, Lou and John, bread night for Edmund, and ham steak night for Dreamweaver. There was a lot of talk on VKS about the dust storm – it had overrun Canberra and Sydney and was last seen heading across the Tasman to New Zealand. Bet the Kiwis were pleased (not).

We woke to the sound of birds – lots of them. They obviously liked the water in the river. We topped up our fuel at the Pink Roadhouse and then went on to Hamilton, Pedirka, and the Dalhousie Ruins. Some of the stone walls at Dalhousie have been restored so some of the buildings are in good shape. However, the date palms and the bamboos are not going away – they've taken a strong foothold. From here it was a short trip to Dalhousie Springs to set up camp for the next two nights. No campfire as they are strongly discouraged, but we coped. No worries for the rest of us about what to have for dinner – Edmund had been promising to treat us to a curry night and he delivered, big time – yum! We thought (briefly) of the club meeting about to start – sure we won't be missed!

Next day was catchup time – repacking our vehicles, washing, sleeping, and still time for swimming and walking. Jack did a circuit of the campsite talking to fellow campers just off the Simpson. He heard some horror stories of how the wind had blown sand into ridges up to a metre high on top of the dunes. Just a few days previously a westward traveler had managed to flip his 4WD right over when trying to get up and over one of these ridges. Most drivers had taken 3 or more days to

do the crossing, but late in the afternoon two motor bike riders came in, climbed off their bikes (very stiffly) and said they'd done the entire trip in one day (!).

Next day – at last, we're off to the Simpson! After getting John jump-started, that is. SuperTEC brought up the rear. We met a convoy of 4 vehicles headed by Wayne, the son of 'Mr Westprint Maps'. He commented that the dunes are now much steeper than they used to be! Should be interesting. We stopped early at Purni Bore as it was Grand Final Day and we couldn't miss The Game. We settled down at Chez Dreamweaver to listen via ABC Alice Springs. It was a tight game and we were all on the edges of our seats when a garrulous fellow traveller came over to talk – about anything but football. He had to be (politely) discouraged – you just don't interrupt when someone is listening to the Grand Final. The end result was Geelong by 2 goals – would have been good for St Kilda to have a turn, but it didn't happen in 2009. After that it was all an anticlimax – what to do for the rest of the day? We had to occupy ourselves with laundry, walks around the lake (lots of birds), and talking to other campers. Edmund met someone who was forward scout for a cycle race across the Simpson – what will people try next??? Late in the afternoon we were visited by some cattle – what are they doing in a Conservation Park??? We all enjoyed hot showers – once we'd worked out how to get the hot water.

The next morning Pete and Lou discovered that their water tank was empty – the hose had detached itself and all the water had drained away. When fixed we did a bucket relay to fill the water tank again. Then it was back on the Simpson again. Between Wonga Corner and Colson Junction Edmund noticed that Pete's vehicle was leaking so we pulled off, took everything out of the back, and collectively reoriented the tank while Lou and Sue supervised and documented the process with cameras. It was a change from HUB (heads under bonnet) – instead we had BIB (bodies in back). Back on the track, the dunes became more and more challenging – they were bigger, the drop-offs on the eastern side were higher and steeper, and the track kinked sharply at the top to the north and then back again. Looks like the tracks across the Simpson are reshaped more by the wind and



moving sand than by fallen trees and washouts. At Colson Corner we headed south for a welcome respite from the dunes and then turned onto the Rig Road. We camped beside a large dune.

A very hungry dingo visited early the next morning. He kindly cleaned up Pete's BBQ plate and had a good roll in the spot where we'd discarded the used washing-up water. We checked out the eagle's nest before turning up the Erabena Track. At the WAA Junction we turned onto the WAA Line and soon found out why it had been described by another 4WDer as the most challenging of the Simpson Desert tracks. Dreamweaver managed to get stuck (everyone else very kindly said it wasn't a bog) when he ended up resting against a bank as he tried to reverse down a dune. He had to be snatch-strapped out (using approved techniques of course) by John.



After a good night's sleep the dunes on the WAA Line were a bit easier to take but we weren't sorry to get to the WAA Corner to turn north. We thought Knolls Track would be a breeze by comparison, but not so. There were lots of wallows on one side or another where the wind had blown sand over the track and/or had scoured out the track. We missed Jack's Corner as we lost the Track completely and ended up on an unmapped track that someone had cut through the dunes and swales west of the Track. It was very rough – up, over and around the tussocks. We came back to the Track at Aprodinna Attora Knolls and stopped here for photos, smoko, and walks to take in the views. From here it was a short (up and down) trip to Lindsay Junction to turn east onto the French Line. There were still more ups and downs but the claypans provided some welcome flat smooth running. Dreamweaver even got up to 5th gear (low range, that is). Lake Poeppel was a welcome sight, and we took celebratory photos at Poeppel Corner. It's quite an achievement to visit 2 states (SA, Qld) and 1 territory (NT) in the space of a few minutes. We then

set up camp a short distance away. Tonight was curry night big-time – the camp oven came out, lots of chopped chicken went into it and was joined progressively by onions, potatoes, carrots, peas and assorted hot and spicy flavourings.

The next day, our last on the Simpson, we made our way east again with SuperTEC still in the rear. The first highlight came as we reached the Eyre Creek catchment – it was green and lush with masses of birds and butterflies. It was a welcome change from the sparse vegetation and red dirt of the Simpson. The next highlight was reaching Big Red. OK, it's not as big as the stories would have you believe, but it's symbolic – the most eastern dune on the Simpson. We all crossed with ease and stopped at the top for lots of photos and self-congratulation. We'd made it! And so we came to Birdsville and checked into the caravan park.

Birdsville is great! Apart from The Pub (we spent lots of time there out of the wind and the heat) there's a museum with an amazing amount of 'stuff', a great Visitor Centre, and the Bakery and attached café. And the facilities at the caravan park were very good – they have to be to cope with the 2,500 people staying there during the Birdsville Races.