

Plenty Highway (QLD to NT)

Stage 3 August 2018

This is a brief trip report as it only covers the part of our trip encompassing the crossing of the O'Donohue and Plenty Highways from Boulia QLD to Alice Springs NT.



Border crossing QLD and NT

Outback Camps

This stage started on 27 August.

We set out from Boulia, in North Western Queensland, and then across the track known as 'The Plenty'. This trip report covers the stretch between Boulia township to Alice Springs NT, across to the West.

The Plenty is an iconic trip and is undertaken by outback travellers with a thirst for adventure as well as those who live on the lands out this way (communities and stations).

The Plenty Highway is a 498 kilometre outback mostly unsealed road in the Northern Territory between the Stuart Highway NT and Boulia in north-western Queensland.

The Plenty road begins at a turnoff from the Stuart Highway 68 kilometres north of Alice Springs, and finishes at Tobermory Homestead on the Northern Territory/Queensland border. It then continues for another 249 km to Boulia Queensland, **as the Donohue Highway**.

We obtained fuel at Tobermory and Jervois Stations, but understand it is also available to Harts Range (Atitjere).

From the Stuart Highway to Boulia is 747 kms.

Road condition

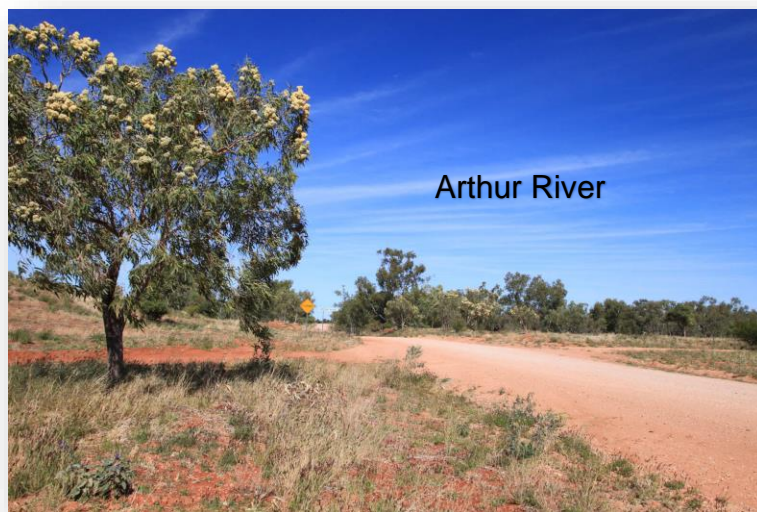
The first 100 kilometres from the Stuart Highway to Ongeva Creek is sealed. The remaining 178 km to Jervois Homestead is unsealed as is the rest of the track to Boulia. Information about its condition may be obtained from the Harts Range police station, 112 km from the Stuart Highway. East of Jervois Homestead, the road is formed earth, deteriorating to rocks and bulldust as it nears Tobermory, 213 km from Jervois Homestead. The road north to Urandangi and thence to Mount Isa bears left just before Tobermory. It is 249 km from Tobermory to Boulia.

At the Northern Territory / Queensland border crossing, and further east the road was badly deteriorated. We had to concentrate as there were deep potholes and bulldust for about 20 kms. All the gravel sections had corrugations to some degree although there were patches where it was minimal.

The crossing

We found the first hundred or so kms to be flat and featureless, and relatively boring. There was good grass covering the land and small trees and bushes, but it was dry and dusty.

There are plenty of spots to pull over and have a rest, and every now and then are to be found gravel scrapes which make good spots to rest for either a short time or overnight. We had morning tea at Arthur River, and thought it would make a good overnighter if we had arrived later in the day.



We made good time the first day and pulled into Tobermory about lunch time. We fuelled up and bought a hot pie which we ate at a table under the shade of trees and on nice green grass. We met a few other rigs there also enjoying a lunch break, including a bloke with a Kimberly Kamper caravan.

While you can camp there for a fee, we prefer to camp in quieter places and had a camp spot identified to head for. So we pressed on. The

Kimberley Karavan passed us at one point, with us pulling over and slowing down for it to go through safely.

About 60 or so kms from Tobermorey we came around a corner and up ahead was the Kimberley Kamper, on its side and skewed across the road. It had rolled. While the van was upended onto its

side the
towing



vehicle was still on its wheels and none the worse for the accident. We drove ahead and put our rig on the side of the road with our hazard lights on, and ran back to see if the occupant was OK.

He was fine physically and seemed not to be suffering any shock. He was able to unhitch, separate the van from the vehicle, winch the van back onto its wheels and then re-hitch the whole rig.

During this exercise a couple of other travellers stopped and assisted, but the truth is this bloke was totally organised and competent. After he had hitched up, the van was towable and he headed back to Tobermorey where he said he would assess the whole rig and make a decision about where to go from there. We were so glad the situation had not involved loss of life or limb.

It was pleasing to see that every single person who passed us stopped and helped out. But that has always been my experience in the outback; people always offer help to stranded travellers.

A bit later than we had planned, we pulled in to our camp spot of Limestone Ridge (S22 26 034. E137 25 827), a bit further to the West, and pulled onto a nice clean and pebbly area to camp for the night. There was evidence of others camping here in the form of fireplaces. There was even a nice formed ring of stones and a pile of firewood piled up...but we left it for a future traveller who may appreciate fires more than we do. This spot is quite lovely and overlooks a couple of small valleys, so at sunset it is a pleasant place to sit outside and have a drink. It was a full moon that night and cool rather than cold. In fact it had been a couple of weeks since we had last used the diesel heater...



Limestone Ridge camp

The next day we had a fairly early start to the day and pressed on to the West. The worst patches of bulldust and potholes were still ahead!



The Plenty

While travelling through from Winton to Boulia, then on to Alice Springs, I had been preparing possible earthcaches for publication as a series to include the whole Outback Way from Winton QLD to Laverton WA. This meant fairly regular stops to capture co-ordinates and take photos of interesting geological features along the way. We stopped for one such break and found one of our tyres was flat! It must have only just happened and so we prevented expensive damage to the tyre, which is what happened last year on the

Gary Junction Road. We have gone years with no flat tyres and now there have been two in two years. Sigh.

The countryside was certainly dry but there continued to be good grass and fat cattle so all was clearly OK out here.

Some areas were dusty and dry and others had good grass cover. An interesting feature is always the giant termite hills and there are a few beauties on this track!

This section of the track had more potholes and bulldust with a good measure of corrugations just to ensure we knew we were in the outback! But no more flat tyres, thank goodness.



After another full day of travel we pulled into a gravel scrape which had been found by using the WikiCamps search function, and as overnight spots go it was great. A large flat area is available with several patches of gravel (which are nice and clean to pull up and camp on) or areas away down the back in among the trees and shrubs.

Gravel Scrape S23 1 44 E134 33 15

As we had arrived reasonably early (about 3pm) we relaxed outside with a cup of coffee and then later had a cold drink sitting in the late afternoon sun. It was beautiful weather and another nice cool night allowed us to get a good night's sleep. This camp is only 30 kms from Gem Tree, a station a bit to the West and where we planned to spend a couple of days before going on into Alice Springs. Camping here allowed us to get a nice early start in the morning and arrive at Gem Tree at a good time to find a good site. As it happens the campground was very busy and we could not get the site we had last year but we found another spot which suited us just nicely.

While Gem Tree is a great campground, on this occasion the second day was so windy and dusty that it was impossible to venture outside the van. And the day was warm, so it was not pleasant at all. I was so sorry for the campervan across from us who had gone out fossicking for the day and left their main door open (with the screen door locked). When they got back I waited for the scream of anguish from the occupants when they found what would have been a mound of red dust

over everything. We had even brought our shoes inside, as they were filling with red dust outside the van.

And the next day dawned bright and calm and as lovely as ever... Whereupon we scampered for Alice Springs and the end of the Plenty Highway adventure. Alice was to be our base for four days while we replenished foodstuffs and fixed the flat tyre, before heading on West over the Great Central Road.

