

Great Central Road (NT to WA)

Stage 4 September 2018

This is a brief trip report similar to that of the Plenty Crossing as it only covers the part of our trip encompassing the crossing of the Great Central Road from Alice Springs NT to Laverton WA.



Leaving The Red Centre

Outback Camps

This stage started on 4 September.

The Great Central Road is another iconic trip which spans over 1200 kms from the NT to WA.

Now that there's reliable fuel at Warakurna Roadhouse and Tjukayirla Roadhouse the 1200-kilometre Tjukururu Road and Great Central Road route should become even more popular. Although the great Central Road is maintained it's no super-highway and should be attempted only by high ground clearance vehicles with a touring range of at least 600km.

The trek from Central Australia to WA starts at the Uluru/ Kata Tjuta resort township of Yulara, where it's possible to have your vehicle serviced, get the tyres checked over and top up fuel, water and food supply stocks.

The trek proper begins when you turn right out of the Kata Tjuta access road, rather than taking the bitumen run back to relative civilisation at Yulara. As with any Outback road, the conditions you'll find depend on how far you are behind the grader, but don't expect much in the way of smooth dirt sections in the first 200km of the Great Central Road and you won't be disappointed.

Day One

On the last crossing of the GCR in 2013 we found the road condition to be excellent most of the way. This time it was a little rough on the first day with corrugations and sandy swales in patches but nothing too demanding or difficult. Most of the day was driven at about 70 kms an hour but obviously there were times we had to slow right down for corrugations. The powered tyre pressures helped to prevent punctures and do soften the ride, especially for the van.

We made good time, leaving Alice Springs at 8.15am, and turning West at Eralunda at morning tea time. We fuelled up at

the turnoff and steadily drove until we reached Yulara community. (We stopped for two or three geocaches on the way, of course...). Arriving at Yulara at about lunchtime, we only stopped for fuel and headed straight out to the Uluru Pay Station (for entry to the National Park). Showing our permit passes we were waved through the entry station with no need to pay the entry fee.



Great Central Road

The tyres were let down just at the start of the gravel section, before we continued on. There was very little traffic on the road; in all we passed probably 12 or so vehicles between the gravel starting and our camp site.

We had an interesting thing happen about an hour into the gravel section. A voice came on the UHF radio asking "Kedron caravan do you copy?". I immediately answered yes, we could hear him, whoever it was. The voice said "You are trailing water, I think you have a water leak". This was pretty grim news! I thanked him, and we pulled up to check the situation. Immediately you start to think about how you will cope if your tanks lose water (we have three separate tanks so all would not be lost). No water leak was apparent and indeed there was no leak whatsoever. Our water tank gauges showed full tanks still. A mystery...but I think it was a prank from someone who probably does not like caravans.

We camped that night at the same spot we had camped on the previous trip, a place I call **Desert**

Oaks. (S25 06.693 E130 07.641). It wasn't deliberate that we stayed here, it simply happened to be there at the very time we decided to start looking for a camp site. And a lovely spot it is too.



It has a scattering of desert oaks around the camp site as well as the general area, and they make it very appealing. I think it was about 4.00pm when we arrived and we soon had a drink organised and sat outside appreciating the lovely bush and birdlife. We had a relatively early night and slept peacefully, undisturbed by any passing traffic (there was none) or dingoes.

Day two

So another early start the next day saw us heading off

again, keen to get to nearby Docker River for fuel before they closed for lunch. At the outskirts of the community we saw a camel which sauntered across the road in front of us!

I called in to the health clinic and as part of my professional duties and said hello to the staff there. And then we continued on.

The road looked quite scenic all day, as we were driving along the Petermann Ranges and there were many peaks and mountains off to the sides of the road. This is a very pretty part of the Great Central Road (GCR).



Although it was dry at this time of year, there was good ground cover and lots of flowering bushes and trees. The road was mostly in good condition and gave us no problems. There were a few corrugations but nothing major.

Gill Pinnacle (S24 55 22 E128 46 35)

To top it off, the camp site that night was spectacular. We had been told about Gill Pinnacle by another Kedron caravan owner and she said it was not signposted and 500 metres in off the road. As I had the co-ordinates we were set. We found the track, and by a very happy coincidence it

happened to be near the camp spot we stopped at on the last trip. Gill Pinnacle camp site overlooks a lovely valley and the Gill Pinnacle peak was before us at our camp. We were perched above a

valley looking down into the valley proper and as sunset approached the hills and skies changed colours a thousand times or more. This camp was one of the best we had been at for quite a while and we could have happily stayed for more than a night but we were on a schedule.



Just before dusk another caravan came in (a Lotus offroader) and we had a drink with them before retiring into the van to make

dinner and retire for the night. The moon was late coming up and the sky was ablaze with stars in the clearest sky you can imagine.

The day had been a tad warm (it reached 30 degrees) but the night was pleasantly cool, needing a blanket but not the doona.

Day three

Another start at 8.30am saw us on the road and heading toward Warakuna, an Aboriginal settlement which has a roadhouse with fuel, water and takeaway fuel.



As it happens, our arrival there was slightly delayed; we had a rock go through the car's back window, and shattered it. There was a 'whump' and the glass shattered. Val employed his usual

skills and put a tarpauline over the gaping hole and it held securely enough not to let in any dust.

Efforts to arrange a new windscreen by phone in Kalgoorlie were fruitless, as the woman who answered the Windscreens O'Brien 1800 phone service couldn't seem to speak English and had no idea where Kalgoorlie was. Val tried spelling it for her but in the end gave up. He decided to try something else when we next had phone reception. I reckon she was in the Philippines.

After a hamburger for lunch at the roadhouse and another visit to the health clinic for work purposes, we were off again. The road continued to be in fair condition as far as our next camp, at **Yarla Katjura (S25 36 37 E127 13 24)**. Again, this was where we camped last time.... There is a drop toilet there and a mural and signage with local information provided in graphic form by the local community, and not much else. But it is a pleasant spot to stop and recover from broken back windows... This is where Val removed all the remaining broken glass from the back of the car and vacuumed bits of glass out of the car.

Day four

Due to the change of time zone and the fact we had gained 1.5 hours when we crossed the border, we had a leisurely start to the day, breaking camp and leaving about 9am. When we pulled in to Warburton, about 100 kms further West, it was 10.30. We filled up at the infamous bowsers which are housed in cages for security, and nipped down to the Health Clinic to meet up with the staff. I had a good long session with folk there and then we were off again. We stopped for lunch at a gravel scrape on the side of the road, and then continued on. The road was wonderful all day, and a welcome stretch of 20 kms of bitumen just after Warburton was very nice indeed.



Again I saw a camel on the side of the road as well as lovely yellow and purple flowering bushes.

And the day was delightfully cool and dry. Given this was September it was a nice surprise to find it so cool. Warm days are OK to deal with as you are in an airconditioned car all day, but warm nights make it hard to sleep. Every night had been cool so far although there was no need for the heater.

Day five

Desert Surf Central

S26 50 12 E125 39 28

It has been a total coincidence that each day's travel on this road had seen us stop each night at the very same spots (or near the same spots) as on the last trip this way. In 2013 we had also stopped here but we called it by a different name I think. Anyway, it was a nice spot near some breakaways and among low mulga trees and shrubs, and it proved to be a quiet and comfortable place to spend a night. There is a geocache here too which we nabbed last time but failed to log online. So we found it again and logged it this time!

Day six

On again early the next morning, and heading toward Tjukayirla (pronounced Chuck-a-rilla) Roadhouse, where we arrived just before 9am. They do not open before 9am, and right on the dot of the hour, the door opened and a staff member appeared. The waiting police vehicle and female officer was unimpressed, saying it was beyond belief that they will not be flexible even if a pile of vehicles were waiting. No doubt there is good reason... The hours here are Mon to Friday 9 am to 4pm and on weekends 10am to 3pm. I think Sunday afternoons are shut too....

Of note is how all the fuel bowsers in these remote areas are locked inside metal cages for security. It is the same across the Gary Junction Road too and in many other indigenous communities.



This Roadhouse is one of the best on the whole route and had clean tables and chairs inside as well as on the verandah, and potplants and gardens making it a welcoming oasis. There are new people who have joined the old staff and they provided helpful service - including a nice toasted cheese sandwich!

But we needed to get on , and so fuelled up and with our toasted sangas, we drove on, reaching our next camp nice and early. The camp at Giles Breakaway is regarded as probably the best on the track (although I personally think

Gill Pinnacle is pretty good too) and it has the added advantage of being close to the end of the Great Central Road at Laverton.

Giles Breakaway (S28 16 46 E122 42 8)

This is such a nice place, overlooking a valley and with magic colours of reds, creams and yellows. A breakaway is a plateau formed by erosion. Years of erosion and weathering have removed the sands and revealed the underlying rocks which are much more resistant to this weathering.

We found a nice spot overlooking the rim of the valley and made ourselves comfortable. All the jolting and corrugations of the past five days had ensured there was a little dust on the floor so that was swept out and we were set up. Our chairs were in a ring seat position for sunset and we made the most of it. Realising there was no reason to hurry we decided to stay another day here, making it two lovely days at this special place. A Kimberley Karavan camped just around the corner decided to do the same and they joined us for drinks the second night. The weather was nice and we enjoyed perfect sunny and cool days, but there was a hint of warmth telling us Summer was coming...

Day seven

So on the next day, the seventh since setting out from Alice Springs, we headed on and pushed through the final 50 kms to Laverton. Just out of Laverton the bitumen started and we gave heartfelt thanks for it. On this last day I was starting to feel a bit sick of corrugations...

Since our last trip through Laverton, the town has been spruced up amazingly. It looked neat and clean and there appeared to be a functioning supermarket and caravan park. We had planned to get fuel here but had half a tank still. But we did visit the new dump point and used the tap there (with potable water) to fill our water tanks. The dump point and water tap are located at a nice new RV parking area just behind the Information Centre, with a toilet block. We had a coffee at the Info Centre which is pretty spiffy and then headed on to Malcolm Dam.

Malcolm Dam (S28 52 41 E121 26 37)

This camp site is 10 kms before you get to the town of Leonora, and quite lovely. There is a huge area with lots of space for large and small groups to camp together or in isolation in the vegetation. We found a nice spot behind some medium sized shrubs. There was a number of other vans through the area and I was interested to see so many others travelling here at this time of year. So not everyone has gone back to their Southern homes just yet....

As our back windscreen was to be fixed in Kalgoorlie on the third day we packed up reluctantly as we had a nice spot at Malcom Dam, and moved down to Kalgoorlie, where we stayed at the overnight RV camp site in town. It was nothing flash but it was comfortable and felt secure enough, with about eight or nine other vans there for the night.

And thus ended our crossing of the GCR.

