

## Stage 2 Gary Junction Road June 2015



Page | 1

After a trip up to Alice Springs on the Oodnadatta Track, we camped out in the West MacDonnell Ranges for a few days and got ready for the next stage of the trip, travelling North West on the Gary Junction Road. This is a track of about 900 kms from the junction of the Mereenie Loop to Gary Junction in WA. Our intent was to travel further North up to Marble Bar, with a stay in Carrawine Gorge and a side trip to Nullagine. This report details the travel on the Gary Junction Road as well as the additional WAPET Road to the

junction of the Ripon Hills Road to Marble Bar and the Skull Springs Road to Nullagine.

There were three vans in the convoy; a Kedron (our van), a DRV (Lesley and Erich's van) and a Coromal (Bruce and Kay's van). All were very capable offroad vans with strong suspensions and height clearances.

Overall, the Gary Junction Road (GJR) was good, with short patches of sand or corrugations.

There was water for topping up tanks etc at Jupiter Well and Well 33, as well as at various towns along the way if needed.

Each of the communities at Papunyah, Kiwikurra, Kunawarritji and Punmu had small general stores with not only fuel (diesel and opal fuel) and also a fair range of groceries and fresh produce. Prices varied but were not as dear as I expected.

On this stage of the trip we had one small technical disaster after another; I started to wonder what could happen next!



**The First Day on the Gary Junction Road**

### Special points of interest:

- Bush camping
- Technical glitches
- The towns on the Track

## From Redbank Gorge to Bush Camp near Mt Liebig

It was just after 8.30am when we pushed out of our lovely camp site at Redbank Gorge, and turned onto the Mereenie Loop. After 16 kms we turned right (and Northward) into the relatively smaller track heading up to Papunyah, about 80 kms away. The views were nothing short of amazing in places, with hills and a range accompanying us most of the way. We were heading toward the impressive Bell Range, which is dominated by Mount Edward and Mount William. The road was in very good condition, with a few sandy stretches in creeks and the odd patch of corrugations.

We bypassed Haasts Bluff and kept heading toward the Aboriginal community of Papunyah until mid morning when we arrived at this reasonably large community. We found the General Store fairly quickly and fuelled up with diesel. The store had a fair range of groceries although the prices were understandably expensive. Fuel here was \$2.00 a litre.

We discovered at Papunyah that our freezer door had come undone (again!) and some of the food was lying on the floor. We clearly needed to organise a new freezer door latch. On a trip as long as this we could not afford to waste any food so this was an issue which we needed to address. Well, when we got back to civilisation, that was.

The countryside was looking good, with a good cover of grass, flowering bushes and trees. They have apparently had good rains here earlier this year.

Mid afternoon we found a telecom tower and pulled in for the night at the small cleared area nearby.

The next day we left camp at about 8.30am and headed for the community of Kintore, to fuel up. Although we have plenty of diesel on board (both in jerry cans as well as in the tanks) we like to fuel up wherever possible. This is isolated country....

The fuel bowser at Kintore was in a small hut, painted with Aboriginal murals, and with a polite and friendly attendant to put the fuel in the vehicle. We paid at the store which had a fair range of groceries etc. Diesel was again \$2.00 a litre.

After a short break here for lunch (in the vans) we



continued on to our campsite for the night, chosen from Wiki Camps, at Bucks Hill, about 50 kms West of Kintore. Just to the West of the hills was a nice site, although it was a bit tricky finding a level spot. This was a very scenic spot and worth aiming for as an overnight camp.

Our fridge decided here to have a little hissy fit and stop working. As we had had it serviced/fixed in Adelaide before this trip I was not impressed. Val "fiddled" with its inner workings and got it going again. (For the technical among you, he discovered it was not the fan or the compressor which had a problem but the electronic gizmo which regulates its on-off cycle. He simply changed its cycle and it worked perfectly again).

Just before we reached the camp site we passed over the NT/WA border, which was marked by both a Len Beadell plaque (set there in 1960) and a welcoming to WA sign.



The weather was becoming warmer each day, although we understand cooler nights were coming in a few days.

On the third day we again got an early start after spending a night under a full moon and a

sky full of stars. The desert air was crisp and clean and the views of the hills we were travelling through were spectacular.

At the small community of Kiwikurra we again fuelled up with diesel (\$3.00 a litre here!) at a little shed near the general store. We paid for the fuel in the store but were impressed with the range of groceries here. Bruce and Kay managed to snaffle some hot pies - was I jealous!

By sheer luck we found Len Beadell's burnt out truck which is now in a caged enclosure to protect it from souvenir hunters.



Just out of the community the road continued Westward, and we passed Pollock Hills, a massive structure of undulating rock. The countryside is quite spectacular around the region. As Kay observed, it has become very Pilbara-like around here. After Pollock Hills we encountered bulldust in drifts, and soft sand on the desert dunes. There was nothing to trouble us though and we plowed steadily on to Jupiter Well for a few nights

camping.



This camp site is set around desert oaks and has a (bore?) pump in the clearing. Hand lever operated, it provided clean water for washing and cleaning up generally. This was the jewel of the campsites encountered so far. We had a fire on the first night and all cooked roasts with potatoes in the coals. Magic.

The well was established by a Geological Mapping Group in the 1960's

The spot was so nice we stayed for three nights. Other groups joined us, usually only for one night.

It was on the evening of the third night we discovered that the car batteries were comprehensively dead. It turned out the brake controller software had a glitch and had left the car brake lights on for who knows how long. Out came the 40 amp battery charger and generator and all was well again. Given the batteries are 6 years old, they are doing OK. They were checked by our trusty service technician before we left (thank you Ben!) and were said to be OK. This gave us the assurance that the batteries were alright. The episode gave us both a few bad moments.

On the Sunday morning we again headed West toward the community of Kunawarritji, which is at the junction of the Gary Junction Road and the Gary Highway. We had morning tea at the junction (which has a camp site set off the road a bit) and headed on until we reached our night's camp site, Well 33 (on the Canning



Stock Route, 4 kms up the road from the community). This was another lovely spot and has a well with a holding tank and water.

On arrival we found the microwave in the van had pulled free of a few rivets which hold it in; sigh. Val wielded his trusty drill and all was well again.

At a point a day or so earlier the GPSr stopped working, and could not be turned on. As we had loaded all the geocaches on it for this area before leaving home, this was bad news. When we get into mobile phone and internet reception range we will try to clear it and see if that helps.

At this point I was wondering what else could go wrong. The reality was that none of these things had the potential to stop us (although the car batteries temporarily giving up the ghost certainly did have serious ramifications had we not sorted the problem out).

The final community along the route was at Punmu, a small place with a scattering of houses, a school with an enormous covered basketball court, a general store and a fuel depot. We paid \$3.00 a litre here and had a chat with a friendly and helpful bloke who spends quite a bit of time working in Punmu then travels home every six months for a month break.

Our next night's camp was at Lake Dora, a salt lake which no doubt fills up when there are heavy rains. For all the world it looked like an inland sea...except you could walk on it!



The camp site was quite close to the road and as conditions were slightly dusty, it was not an ideal spot for more than a night, but it was certainly suitable for an overnighter and we were glad of such a scenic spot to stay for a night.

The next day saw us heading through some scenic hilly country and we noticed that it was classic Pilbara territory now. The sand was red, and there were white gums and small gorges along the way.

The desert had given way to hills.

At the highest point on the road that final day, overlooking the Telfer Mine, we knew there would be phone (and internet) reception and we started looking out for it as the road wound higher. And lo and behold, there was a spot where we received three bars of reception! All of pulled over at different places, and downloaded emails and checked for messages. I think we all had withdrawal symptoms from the lack of internet for so long...Thank you Telfer Mine!

As we approached the junction of the Ripon Hills Road to Marble Bar and the road South to Nullagine, we met more traffic than previously, and knew our period in a remote area was coming to an end. The road south is a mining road leading down to Woodie Woodie Mine and so there was

heavy usage from mining trucks.

Although the Gary Junction Road properly ended some two days ago at the Gary Junction, it felt as though this was the end of the trip across the desert. We had survived another remote area journey.

