

Trip Report - South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia 2013

The main purpose of this trip was to travel across the Great Central Way from Uluru to Laverton in WA. Incorporated into the trip was the Flinders Ranges, Alice Springs, the West Macdonnell Ranges and regions of WA.

Special points of interest:

- Geocaching in the Flinders and Alice Springs
- Wet weather – and coping mechanisms
- The photo opportunities



Leaf in early morning at Trezona

Stage 1 - Flinders Ranges

Although we have been through the Flinders Ranges before, the scenery and lovely camping there always draws us back. So it was on a cold and blustery morning we left home in the Barossa Valley and headed North through Hawker and Wilpena Pound to the Flinders Ranges NP campground at Trezona. This campground is able to take large rigs and even large groups could easily be accommodated. The only facilities are the drop toilets and some small rainwater tanks. We spent a quiet three days here at a site overlooking the dry creek bed.

On our first night, to our dismay, a group of about 40 girls, year 10 from Seymour College, arrived with a trip leader as a part of a hiking excursion on the Heysen Trail. They set up tents in the adjoining camp sites and we braced ourselves for a night of giggling and high jinx. However, they were reasonably quiet and left no litter behind when they left the next morning. Apart from emptying the little water there was in the camp's water tanks, used to wash their dishes under running taps, they were well behaved. The ground all around the

water tank was soaked with the water they had used. I had a tactful chat with their trip leader about how precious that water is to bushwalkers on the trail and how in future they should learn how to wash up with more water-economy.

On our fourth day we headed to nearby Aroona Ruins. The camp we chose overlooked both the creek and the ABC Range in the distance. The major advantage of this campground, apart from its gorgeous backdrop of ranges, is the water taps dotted around the camp. I think they are fed by the nearby spring up in the nearby homestead ruins. Our time here was quiet and peaceful and we did some washing using the local water and spinning the clothes in our own washing machine and inverter. The dry air soon had the clothes dry.



Campsite at Aroona Ruins

While in the Flinders we managed to find some creatively hidden geocaches which were located in hills, under trees, along creek beds and even in a cave in one instance. Once again, searching for the caches led us to places we hadn't known existed!

It was cold at nights in the Flinders; most nights were about three or four degrees. When the sun emerged in the morning it soon warmed up however.

Stage 2 - Flinders Ranges to Dalhousie Springs on the Oodnadatta Track

It was a bright and sunny morning when we left Aroona Ruins campground, and plumes of dust were left in our wake as we drove out through Brachina Gorge to the highway heading north. An hour or so later we headed into Leigh Creek Township to fill up with diesel and visit the supermarket for last minute food supplies.

Despite the dust and the rough conditions in the gorge the inside of the van was dust-free and everything was still in order.

Leigh Creek is a mining community and has good supplies and a service station. We had coffee at the café, and checked the internet before heading the rig back onto the road heading north. The town in past days had an Information Centre but this has been closed and the service has been handed over to the café. I checked with the café about weather conditions, but the woman behind the counter wasn't really interested and had no information. She said she had heard on the radio that no rain was expected.... I suspect they are being paid to provide the Information Service but know little and certainly have no

interest in the issue. They were polite and pleasant folk, though. Given that this is a vital service to those travelling North on the Oodnadatta and Strzelecki Tracks, it is really not good enough.

We passed through Farina, but not until we had called into the temporary bakery which is set up each year at this time, to



service the restoration volunteers and to sell baked products to the passing traffic (presumably to raise



money for the restoration). The work there is coming on well and the volunteers, all camped at the nearby campground, are to be congratulated. We had considered staying at the campground (\$5 a person per night) but the area was dry and dusty and they had nothing there by way of facilities which we don't have onboard ourselves.

How quickly the weather can change! Although it was still dry and very dusty indeed as we headed up the track to our campsite for the night - Lake Eyre Lookout No 2, that night it rained, only lightly. Still, after a night of intermittent rain the road was heavy going and we could see that traffic would churn it up. So we headed north again and after a couple of hours travel turned into Coward Springs campground and found a nice spot to park the van.



Camped at Coward Springs

Oh the mud on our van! The step was caked in about thirty cms of mud, the tyres were covered in the stuff and great wads were all over the side of the van and windows. And all of this was merely from light rain on good clay surface roads.

Coward Springs

Later in the day the campground host appeared to drop off wood and

told us that the road was now officially closed (as well as in practical terms!) and so we settled in to wait out the rain. The hardest aspect was not knowing how long the rain would last and then how long it would take for the road to be open again. Then, to cap it off, the first night at Coward Springs, it dumped over 3ml of rain in 15 minutes. Just what we needed- more rain!!

A van that we had camped with the night before back at Eyre Lookout, came in just after us and said the road had already become slippery - and a Fusion offroader came in the next day, having spent the night stuck on the side of the road.

Back at Maree we had noticed a nice, clean New Age van and we commented to the owners how shiny white their van was. We met up with them again at Farina and then again on the road heading North. And at our camp site that night, they pulled in not long after us. So we had drinks together, as you do, at dusk and before going inside to cook dinner. Next morning they headed out just after us and then came into Coward Springs about an hour after us, and their shiny clean van was anything but nice and clean now - it also had mud and spatters all over its white surface. They said they had been so glad to make it that far, through the worsening conditions.



So for the next three days we read books, played cards and sat talking over numerous cups of coffee or tea. I was grateful we weren't in a tent.....

William Creek and beyond

Finally, we heard the road was open again and pulled out early on the Friday morning for William Creek. Once at the Hotel there we would find out more about the road conditions further North to Oodnadatta or across to Coober Pedy and make a decision there about the best way to go from there.

The road was a little rough with mud and ruts made by previous travellers but nothing too drastic and we made reasonable time. I stopped a few times to get some photos.





After lunch at the William Creek Hotel and armed with new advice about the road conditions, we decided Oodnadatta was the destination, but that we would camp at the back of the hotel overnight first. That would give

the roads a chance to dry out a bit more. Together with the New Age van we pulled our vans off to the back of a slab of wilderness behind the Hotel and spent a quiet night free-camped under the stars once more.

Dalhousie

We came into Dalhousie through the Pedirka Track, and found it in good shape due to its having been graded only a few weeks prior. This meant the gibbers we normally have to drive over had been scraped away. And no gates to open! They have put in grids which are much easier to cope with. Just as I mentally steeled myself for the many getting outs involved...

We spent the night before arriving at Dalhousie Springs at Pedirka Ruins under a full moon and with only the desert sounds to keep us company.

Previously when we have travelled this route, it was late in the afternoon, the track was poor and we were tired. What a difference it made being fresh in the morning and with the time and inclination to stop for photos. This is an interesting track and the lookout just before Dalhousie is spectacular. We parked at the top of the cliffs and wondered at how such a landscape had emerged.



Alice Springs

The drive from Dalhousie to Mount Dare was uneventful and we trailed clouds of dust as we steadily chewed up the kms. We chose the longer but quicker track out through Bloods Creek and it was a good decision, being the better road. Mount Dare was out of fuel but they kindly sold us one of their emergency 20 litre stock just to make sure we had enough to get into Kulgera on the Stuart Highway. Usually we are prepared with our jerry cans full but back at Oodnadatta we had decided there were two fuel stops before the Highway and we would be fine and only filled one. But both Mt Dare and possibly Finke community were doubtful for supplies. The moral of this story is fill up when you can.

It was a sunny and cool morning when we drove into Alice Springs, after a fortnight on the road. The night before was spent at a freecamp (Desert Oaks) on the Stuart Highway. It was quiet there and not too busy.