

Pitlands

The crew arrived at Nullarbor Roadhouse on the evening of Saturday 15th August to find wind blowing so strongly that any thought of putting up tents was clearly an impossibility - fortunately we were all able to secure accommodation at the roadhouse for the night. It's certainly called 'nullarbor' for a reason!



The crew included folk from the Land Rover, Landcruiser and Wangaratta clubs. Our club members were Noel and Irene Ham, Craig Cheetham and his friend Greg Barass and Murray Chapman with his brother Andrew. All were fuelled up and assembled by the scheduled departure time of 8.30 am and after a quick briefing we headed off, taking the scenic route via a variety of caves including Murrawijinie and Knowles caves, before arriving at Cook for lunch. Everyone was keen to check the place out, and by the time the exploring was done, lunch consumed and the caretaker rounded up to open the souvenir shop, the arriving train was checked out and photographed and the rather obscure track north was detected amid the maze of local roads, we'd probably spent a little more time at Cook than might have been ideal!

The open treeless country continued for quite some distance and the track was quite good despite the fact that it wandered all over the place. Slowly the terrain began to change as shrubs and bushes started to appear, and the gravel began to give way to sand. The track also became more defined with a more 'Gunbarrel straight' tendency - it was starting to feel like Beadell country! The sudden appearance of some healthy specimens of Sturt's Desert Pea amid an area tinged with green prompted a smoko stop at a spot on the map called Batt Tanks, allowing the photographers the chance to perfect their macro skills. A little further on we stopped to check out the Muckera Rockholes, one of a number of native water supply points which Beadell sought out during his survey of the subsequent Cook to Vokes Hill Corner road.

The increasing number of trees heralded the first of the sand dunes and from here on we were travelling through some of the best country for the whole trip in my opinion. Signs of recent rain were apparent with scatterings of wildflowers, the track was firm and relatively untravelled and the varying density and variety of scrubland seemed to be influenced as well as punctuated by the increasing number and size of the sand dunes. Craig took the lead about this time and it will surprise no one to hear that he selected what was probably the best campsite for the trip at the base of a sheltering sand dune (it was still a bit breezy) amid a magnificent stand of Desert Oaks.

An early start was required next morning as we were a bit less than halfway to our scheduled rendezvous with Graeme (tripleader) and Frank (Traditional Owner) that evening, and there were a number of places to be checked out on the way, so we were away by about 8.00. As we travelled towards Vokes Hill Corner we visited the native wells - Bringyna, Churina and Waldana. Turning onto the Anne Beadell Highway we noted a significant increase in correlations, due to the higher volume of traffic, but these were compensated by the terrific spread of wildflowers. We arrived at Anne's Corner about 5pm and a sat phone conversation with Graeme confirmed that they were waiting for us further up this track so we decided to travel up this road a little way before settling on a nice camping spot.



Wildflowers along Anne Beadell Hwy



Mt Davies Rd



**Our Trip Leader Graeme,
and Traditional owner, Frank**

Another early start, with everyone excited to be travelling along the Mt. Davies Rd. The scenery was spectacular, changing after each sand dune we crossed. The cars received multiple scratches from the very overgrown condition of the tracks and our very recently powder coated canopy was looking decidedly secondhand in a very short time. Craig assured me that these were considered to be a badge of honour!



We finally met up with Graeme and Frank the next day as we travelled towards his homeland, Watarru, – finally due to a longer morning tea than usual as our vehicle was provided with some bush repairs). Frank was able to give us the aboriginal names and importance of landmarks along the way. The highlight of this day was visiting Mt Lindsay, just near Watarru, which is an important place for Frank and his community. We camped at the 'Beadell Camp,' right next to this mountain and Frank took us for a walk along its base and explained a great deal about his childhood, upbringing and all of this area. He told us that Len Beadell was the 2nd white man that he had ever met and when the bulldozer and grader came through, there was great consternation as to whether this

was the devil. A number of us took up the challenge to climb Mt Lindsay and enjoyed the panorama of the country that we were having the privilege to travel through.

The following day was led by Frank and he took us into some significant areas to him and we learnt a lot about the native plants and animals, the conservation work being carried out in this area under Frank's supervision and significant rockholes and watering points. It was an honour to also be shown both Frank's and his mother's birth place. Through his explanations of many of the customs and traditions associated with these places we developed a much greater understanding of the connection that his people have with the land.

We were able to spend some time digging out a waterhole that had been trampled by camels and were amazed how quickly the finches congregated in the bushes nearby, waiting to quench their thirst. As we left we just hoped that the smaller animals were able to get to the waterhole for a drink before the camels moved back in, as we could already see a herd on their way. We witnessed the damage camels can do at another watering hole which had been completely sealed off by their trampling. Quite a lot of work would be required to remove the boulders from the area. To this point, all that could be done was to attempt to fence the area off. Unfortunately the determination of these animals had made these attempts unsuccessful.



We said goodbye to Frank at Pipalyatjara the next day and continued west to Blackstone where some of the group were keen to purchase some Aboriginal artwork. Graeme had organised our visit in advance, and we were shown around the gallery and given a demonstration of Spinifex paper making. Not far from here was an incredible group of rocks called the 'singing' or 'bell' rocks. We all had an enjoyable time tapping the rocks to produce an amazing ringing sound with many different tones.

On the way towards Warburton we trekked to Fort Mueller. Ian, one of our group, has done a lot of study on the expeditions of Ernest Giles and with some GPS positions and Google maps he provided us we were able to locate the Fort where the exploring party spent some time as a base camp, due to the permanent water supply there. Not far from here we located the blazed Giles tree. A great day.

Warburton saw everyone fuelling up, enjoying a hot shower and renewing supplies before we headed along the abandoned section of the Gunbarrel highway, certainly a far more interesting way to get to Giles than travelling along the Great Central Rd. At Giles we saw the weather balloon launch at 8.30am and then visited Vladimir Pass before camping at Bungabiddy Rockhole, at the beginning of the Sandy Blight Junction Rd. It was here that we met Mike, a traditional owner of this area, who gave us permission to visit the Tjukurla community, where once again some of the crew were able to purchase some aboriginal art.



We took three easy days to travel Sandy Blight Junction Rd. and everyone particularly enjoyed the conquering of the Sir Frederick Range. This was a challenging track due to the loose rounded stones which made traction difficult. All were finally successful and we enjoyed a blustery morning tea at the Cairn at the top. Where Len Beadell suffered 'Sandy Blight' on this road, Murray and Andrew, after showing symptoms earlier in trip, developed an unusual condition which required them to spend a lot of time inspecting every abandoned car (and bus and truck and ...) along the side of the road!

After fueling up at Kintore we visited Ngaarkat rocks and then onto Willie rockhole along the Gary Junction. This was quite unspectacular, but this did not dampen our spirits after a week an half of tremendous scenery.



We arrived at Alice Springs the following day and Irene and I began the next part of our journey, which took in Palm Valley, Boggy Hole, Kings Canyon, and then down via the Mulga Park Rd to the Stuart Highway. A detour to Kingoonya and Tarcoola enabled us to travel down Googs track, to Ceduna. We enjoyed a couple of days on Eyre Peninsula Coast and finally travel towards home via the Gawler Ranges.