

# **SIMPSON '86**

The Simpson Desert via the French Line in 1986



**Terry Bibo**

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# SIMPSON '86

Terry Bibb

Simpson '86

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Compiled and edited by Terry Bibo from material provided by trip participants, whose rights as contributors are recognised.

This e-book has been prepared by Robert Bibo.

Dedicated To  
Des Butler  
The (4W) Driving Force Behind It All.

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NATMAP

N.R.M.A.

## The Aim

With the number of 4WD vehicles crossing the Simpson Desert these days, it is no longer out of the ordinary to do so. Nevertheless it remains one of the great 4WD adventures, and opens up a part of Australia not seen at close hand by very many of us. Our aim was a relatively leisurely, informative, safe and sociable group crossing of the Simpson during the August/September school break in 1986.

Despite the popularity of the Simpson crossing, it is not comparable to the average weekend or even extended regular 4WD excursion and requires a responsible degree of planning. From Oodnadatta to Birdsville is over 800 kilometres, across some of the most isolated country in Australia. For that distance it is necessary to be totally self-sufficient. There is no food or fuel available, and no servicing facilities in the event of a breakdown. And there are over 1100 sand dunes ranging from a few metres to over 30 metres high. Depending on the route taken, there is water available at Dalhousie Springs or Purni Bore. But even from there it is around 600 kilometres to Birdsville the way we went.

The dunes are steeper on the eastern face than on the western, so it is easier to do the crossing from west to east than vice versa, and less fuel is required. It was our intention to cross from west to east via Dalhousie Springs, taking six days in all. There is not much point in doing a trip like this in record time. It is far more worthwhile to spend time on the way seeing what nature has to offer, and enjoying the countryside. The time criterion in our case was that the total trip had to be completed in the sixteen days of the school holidays.

There were seven vehicles involved, all members of the Land Rover Club of the A.C.T. Five would depart Canberra in their own time to rendezvous at Broken Hill on the Saturday night, and meet up at Dalhousie with two others already on tour in the Alice Springs area. Two nights were planned for Dalhousie Springs, then four and a half days of leisurely desert crossing to Poeppel Corner and Birdsville, and five days from there back to Canberra via Coongie Lakes, Innamincka and the Burke and Wills area, and Cameron Corner and the Tibooburra area. This covered the junctions of Queensland/Northern Territory/South Australia, and Queensland/New South Wales/South Australia. So we covered every State or Territory in mainland Australia except Western Australia and Victoria.



We met our aim, and traversed over 5000 kilometres on the return trip from Canberra. There were no major mishaps, and the trip was an unqualified success enjoyed by all.

## The Characters

Warren BUTLER, trip leader and organizer — Toyota LWB wagon

Des BUTLER, trip planner and organizer

Terry BIBO — Nissan SWB Patrol

Robert BIBO

Tony COOK — Toyota LWB wagon

Barbara COOK

Karen COOK (16 years)

Wayne COOK (15 years)

Garry JOHNSON — Holden SWB Jackaroo

Sheri JOHNSON

Phillip KIRK — Toyota LWB wagon

Mary KIRK

David MITCHELL — Toyota LWB wagon

Sylvia MITCHELL

Aaron MITCHELL (14 months)

Phil TOMLIN — Land Rover V8 wagon

Kathy TOMLIN

## Itinerary

Day 0, Canberra — Broken Hill

Day 1, Broken Hill — Yunta — Copley

Day 2, Copley — Marree — Oodnadatta

Day 3, Oodnadatta — Pedirka — Dalhousie Springs

Day 4, Dalhousie Springs

Day 5, Dalhousie Springs — Purni Bore — Desert

Day 6, Desert — Approdimna Attora Knolls

Day 7, Knolls — Poeppel Corner - Desert

Day 8, Desert — Annandale Station

Day 9, Annandale Station — Birdsville

Day 10, Birdsville — Coongie

Day 10, Coongie — Innamincka

Day 12, Innamincka — Tibooburra

Day 13, Tibooburra — White Cliffs / Cobar

Day 14, White Cliffs / Cobar — Canberra

## Thumbnail Sketches

Menindee Lakes are situated in the Kinchega National Park, about 110 km southeast of Broken Hill on the Darling River. The park also contains the Kinchega Woolshed, built in the 1880s from Murray River red gum and last used in 1967. It is a fine example of its class. Birdlife is prolific, as are kangaroos, emus and other fauna. The country is rugged and the flora hardy. Scenery includes the shifting white sand dunes called lunettes.

Broken Hill is a splendid modern city best known for its mines, but this group for its Pussycat restaurant will remember it best. Apparently its food and clientele are both very real and down to earth, and the apple pie better than what mother used to make. And the prices are right. Not to be missed by visitors wanting a good meal in Broken Hill.

Copley was developed along with Leigh Creek for its coal, worked from shallow basins by walking draglines. Open cut with a difference.

Marree is the end of the Birdsville track, and just about the end of the earth. It is also the other end of the Oodnadatta track, which parallels the old Ghan Railway line. The line was abandoned in 1982 and has largely been removed, with hundreds of sleepers now stacked beside the track for disposal. Ruins and remains of old settlements that used to service the railway are found along the track, and these include Curdimurka which is being restored as part of Australia's heritage, Coward Springs and Beresford Springs. Also there is Strangways Repeater Station, in a sad state of disrepair. This was in use on the Overland Telegraph Line. Now it is a collection of fine old stone ruins of fences and buildings, including one that looks like a church without doors or windows but was the water tank.

Lake Eyre South is independent of Lake Eyre, though they were probably part of the same body of water ages ago. Generally just an expanse of salt, it had water in it from the recent abundant rains in the area. Apparently the channel connecting it to Lake Eyre rarely, if ever, flows

Nearby are Blanche Cup and The Bubbler Springs, outlets in the tops of hills for the artesian basin and veritable oases in the parched and salty landscape.

Oodnadatta is the last source of food and fuel before crossing the desert. Some of the inhabitants can be volatile and vociferous, and a night in the caravan park can be an interesting experience.

Pedirka was once the most remote manned railhead in Australia, servicing the Ghan Railway. It is now only ruins; with the railway line just a knife-edge scar on the landscape.

Dalhousie ruins, once a thriving cattle station, is now slowly becoming debris on a date palm oasis. Some very fine timber working is evident in the old stockyard fences. Nearby are Dalhousie Springs, a natural outlet for the Great Artesian Basin, and consisting of 62 springs in all. They provide permanent water for the local wildlife, and support some delicate and unique forms of aquatic life. One spring has been designated a swimming hole by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and is the temperature of a hot bat; a very pleasant spot. The springs were discovered in 1870 by Knuckey [Richard Randall Knuckey], a surveyor for the Overland Telegraph. Originally named Edith Springs for the wife of the Governor of South Australia, they were later given their present name at her request to honour her father the Marquis of Dalhousie.

Purni Bore has scalding water issuing from its source. It is drinkable.

The Simpson Desert covers 170,000 square kilometres, mostly sand dunes ranging in height from 10 metres in the west to over 30 metres in the east. As they get higher so they get further apart, and the inter dune corridors can range from 200 metres wide in the west to over a kilometre in the east. Vegetation also varies noticeably from west to east. Originally the bed of an ancient sea, the sand is up to 120 metres deep in the centre and is shallower on the edges, like a giant saucer. The characteristic red colour is caused by the iron oxide content. Situated in the low rainfall belt of around 130 mm annually, the desert is normally very barren but, as now, it can be a blaze of colour after a decent rainy season. Wild flowers were prolific.

Approdimna Attora Knolls, south west of Poeppel Corner, are two isolated hills with a top crust of silcrete or similar material. This has prevented their being eroded while the surrounding countryside has been blown or washed away from around them, leaving them a prominent feature of the landscape.

Poeppel Corner is the meeting place of Queensland, The Northern Territory and South Australia. It was named after Augustus Poeppel who surveyed the South Australia/Queensland border in 1880.

Annandale station was once a thriving supplier of cattle for the journey down the Birdsville Track and on to Melbourne. Now abandoned.

Birdsville, long past its heyday in the Kidman era, is a little thriving community catering to the outback and tourists.

Coongie Lakes, off the beaten track, was a large sheep station in the 1880s.

Innamincka was established in the 1880s to cater for the sheep and wool trade in the area. It is on Cooper Creek, near the site on the famous Dig Tree of Burke's camp LXV where he and Wills perished in June 1861 after their eventful trek to the Gulf of Carpentaria. In the 1920s Innamincka became the site for an Australian Inland Mission hostel and a Flying Doctor Radio base. The ruins of the A.I.M. hostel are still there. The early 1950s saw the A.I.M. and the Flying Doctor base closed down, and the town gradually faded away. It is now marked abandoned on some maps, though it boasts a general store and hotel of some consequence. It exists now for the tourist trade.

Cameron Corner, the junction of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia is reached from Innamincka via the Strzelecki Track down through the Moomba Gas Fields. The dog fence is best observed here.

Tibooburra was famous for its gold in the late 19th century, when dry blowing was used to extract the metal when water was not available. The increased effort required produced considerably less gold, and the gold trade petered out after about 20 years. The town now services outback properties and tourists, and boasts some famous Australian paintings by Russell Drysdale, Clifton Pugh, Erik Minchen and Frank Hodgkinson on the walls of The Family Hotel.

## Day by Day

### Canberra — Broken Hill

(Des and Warren Butler)

Five vehicles had left Canberra on the Friday morning, with the aim of rendezvousing at Broken Hill on Saturday night and meeting up with the Mitchells and Tomlins at Dalhousie Springs. Terry and Robert Bibo set out via Ivanhoe and Menindee Lakes; Garry and Sheri Johnson went via their parents/baby sitter at Young; the Butler and Cook families formed a two vehicle convoy via Wagga Wagga and Hay; Phil and Mary Kirk brought up the rear. The Bibos and Johnsons left early in the morning, the Butlers and Cooks at noon, and the Kirks about 1:30 p.m. The day's journey was without incident, and the Butler/Cook convoy reached the Hay caravan park at 7:00 p.m. The Bibos made the Ivanhoe area, and the Kirks Narrandera.

### DAY 0, Saturday 23 August

By coincidence, Garry and Sheri Johnson, who had left Young very early in the morning, drove by just as we were leaving the Hay caravan park at 8:00 a.m.

The drive to Wentworth was uneventful, apart from a brief session in the pits at Balranald where Tony Cook had a tube replaced and Garry Johnson contemplated an engine tune-up to improve his Jackaroo's fuel economy.

After checking that the road to Broken Hill via Menindee was open, we headed for Kinchega National Park. The idea was good, but the weather wasn't. When we reached Pooncarie the clouds rolled in and the local policeman said he was about to close the road from Pooncarie to Menindee. He warned that we would almost certainly be stuck just south of Menindee and we reluctantly backtracked to Wentworth, thence on to Broken Hill. Three hours were lost but at least Garry had a beer at the Pooncarie pub.

In the meantime Phil and Mary Kirk reached Broken Hill caravan park to find the Bibos well established, and were amazed to find that we had not yet arrived.

The Johnson Jackaroo stopped for 10 minutes with a fuel blockage (which cleared itself after a new filter was fitted) and we eventually arrived at Broken Hill at 8:00 p.m.

We rounded the day off with a great cheap meal at the (pink) Pussycat restaurant.

## Broken Hill — Lyndhurst — Oodnadatta

(The Cook Family)

### DAY 1, Sunday 24 August

6 °C at 6:00 a.m.

We left Broken Hill at 7:45 a.m. A few kilometres over the South Australian border, just out of Cockburn, we saw a goods train that had been derailed. Quite a mess! Being a Sunday, the petrol bowser at Cockburn didn't open until 10:00 a.m., and the generator had broken down at Olary thus putting the pump out of action, but we finally found petrol available at the Mannahill hotel.

We had intended to travel via Mulyungarie Station and Frome Downs, however the wet weather put paid to this, and our first stop was at Yunta for a comfort and morning tea stop, then we headed NNW to the Great Outback. We inspected the very interesting ruins of Waukaringa then had our first of many lunch stops just off the road part way between somewhere and nowhere.

We travelled via Frome Downs homestead, Arkaroola, and Balcanoona homestead to Leigh Creek, with a short afternoon tea stop in the beautiful Italowie Gorge. On to Copley for fuel, passed the end of the bitumen at Lyndhurst, and found a lovely campsite behind a clump of trees on a grassed clearing near the old Ghan railway line.



Picture: Seven vehicles line up for a desert crossing.



It was an early night for everyone, in anticipation of an early start the next day. Terry and Robert slept out, as they did each night thereafter, and assured us that the light shower of rain overnight didn't bother them at all.

## DAY 2, Monday 25 August

7 °C at 5:30 a.m.

The pre-dawn light was scattered by an early Yowie call at 5:30 a.m., but fortunately most people were already awake. A quick, light breakfast and we were away by 6:45 a.m. under an overcast sky that let fall a few drops of rain, the last for the entire trip thank goodness.

Marree was still asleep at 7:45 a.m. so we did our own quick sightseeing tour and headed off up the Oodnadatta track. Some minor entertainment was provided as we negotiated the slippery, wet and muddy track. We sighted Lake Eyre South in time to have morning tea by its shores, and marvel at our luck in seeing it when it contained quite an expanse of water.

A little further up the track we found a Levers Tour coach, taking a group of children from Canberra High School on a tour of the Centre, having a hard time of it with the mud. They had been bogged there for over 24 hours. We couldn't believe it when they told us a group of 4WDs had driven straight past without even asking if they could help in any way. Out came the snatch straps and everyone hooked up and soon had the coach on firm ground again.

We turned off the track a little further up to find Blanche Cup and Bubbler Springs and then drove up the dry Margaret River bed to emerge near Coward Springs. The ruins of the old railway camp were interesting, and the old stationmaster's house was still standing. From there we moved on to the ruins of the abandoned Strangways Repeater Station for lunch and some more exploring.

Our petrol stop at William Creek was notable for two things: the cost of the fuel, (diesel 67.7 c/L and petrol 67.9 c/L) and Robert's mishap when he managed to break the offside tail light of his father's Nissan on Garry's bull bar. All tanks, jerry cans, etc. were topped up at Oodnadatta and last minute purchases made at the store before heading a few kilometres out of town to camp. A clearing beside a dry creek bed that was hidden from the track by small hills and mullock heaps was our second bush camp. Here Tony managed to ruin his axe in one hit as the blade bounced back from the timber he was attempting to cut, with a thumbnail sized dent in the blade. That log defied all attempts to cut it, but it burned long and well.

## Oodnadatta — Dalhousie Springs

(Robert Bibo)

DAY 3, Tuesday 26 August

7 °C at 6:45 a.m.

Our camp outside Oodnadatta marked the end of the continuous driving from Canberra. We all looked forward to the rest day we were to have at Dalhousie Springs and the commencement of the desert crossing proper.

The break in driving was complemented by the completion of the convoy with all seven vehicles meeting at Dalhousie ruins. The Mitchells and the Tomlins coming from the north guided the five remaining vehicles to a chosen campsite by the main springs. Everybody availed himself or herself of the shower set up by Dave to wash off the grime of the previous four days travel.

Prior to making our way to the ruins we stopped at Pedirka, an old rail station. Two water towers stood rusted and empty near where the line used to be. Here some cattle were feeding, and we disturbed a dingo that wandered past some decrepit car bodies to the safety of the trees in the creek bed.



Picture: Ruined water towers at Perdika.

We were not the only people at the Dalhousie Springs. A number of groups came and went over the next day. The most persistent visitors were the dingoes that investigated the camp at night. Stories of their visits provided entertainment the following morning. At least one dingo tripped over a tent rope during the night. Others disturbed sleepers by playing with rubbish that had been left out in garbage, or lapping the water in wash-up buckets. A more

confident animal placed its forepaws on the open tailgate of one vehicle, perhaps looking for an easy meal. Though not easily scared, none of the dingoes caused us any concern.

#### DAY 4, Wednesday 27 August

8 °C at 7:00 a.m.

On this day most people spent time exploring the surrounding area and later repacking their vehicles. The terrain showed signs of recent rain – an erosion gully marked by pools of water and drying mud; small plants green against the otherwise brown and sandy earth. Around the springs grew trees and tall grasses. Palm trees surrounded one spring. The thickness of the vegetation near the springs contrasted with the barren surrounding area, and reflected the dominant effect water has on the environment. Everybody filled his or her water containers. As well as collecting water, most drivers transferred fuel from auxiliary tanks or jerry cans to main tanks.

The ground around the Kirk's vehicle became littered with the paraphernalia they carried as it was sorted and reloaded. The warning flag – one of those that bicycle riders use – was secured to the Butler's roof rack with a network of guy ropes. This was to prove useful in keeping track of the convoy in sand dune country. Throughout the camp rose clotheslines adorned with an assortment of socks, underpants and t-shirts. Dirty hair was attacked with shampoo under the shower.

The Dalhousie Springs are well used. The NPWS has fenced off some areas to stop drivers taking their vehicles off the main track. Much of the vegetation around the springs has been killed, and people have left rubbish lying about. A permit is required to camp at the Dalhousie Springs, but can only be obtained from Mt. Dare, the old homestead now used as a ranger's station, well to the north.

#### Dalhousie Springs — Approdinna Attora Knolls

(Phil Kirk)

#### DAY 5, Thursday August 28, 8 °C at 6.00 a.m.

8 °C at 6.00 a.m.

Dalhousie Springs, about 200k north of Oodnadatta, was the starting point of our west to east crossing of the Desert.

The isolation one would expect in such a vast area was not as strong as I had anticipated. The signs of man are everywhere. Abandoned fuel drums were common; road trains on the French Line in the desert, 20–30 vehicles at the Dalhousie Springs and in the desert soon destroyed the isolation experience.

The mornings in central Australia were quite brisk, and the morning of our departure was no different. The sun rose, bright and red over a still plain, with steam rising from a thermal pond in the distance creating a thin stream of mist 15 metres above the ground and drifting off across the horizon. It was a strange quiet, a bit like the quiet before a storm, an air of expectancy.

Activity was at first slow, with Phil Tomlin sitting on the bonnet of the Land Rover looking at the sunrise and contemplating our start into the desert and the days ahead. As the daylight arrived in full the activity increased. A nervous, quick breakfast was had, and then the packing, checking, and checking again, light hearted talk and laughter, but underlying the laughter a desire to get started and yet the worry of the uncertainty of the remote and unforgiving part of Australia we were about to enter.

On time, 8:00 a.m. and we were off, the convoy like a bunch of excited school children on an excursion. The excitement showed when we reached our first sand dune in the desert proper, barely 2 metres high, which called for a stop by all, and about a roll of film used on this historic event.

Our next stop of interest was Purni Bore, a bubbling thermal pool with a temperature of about 75 Celsius. A person from another trip was taken to hospital with severe burns to his legs after falling through the often soft, partially solidified minerals around the edge of the pool. Though it was interesting and worthy of the stop, photographs of the bore seen in magazines have been taken to best effect and can leave you with a slight feeling of anticlimax. The impact of man, I think, has been carefully edited from these photos and stories.

After meeting two road trains on the French Line we decided that this was no place for us. So with a little difficulty on my part we made our way past the trucks, and further along left the road for the tougher drive ahead where the French Line became a track.



Picture: The junction of the French Line and Rig Road.

Here was our first REAL sand dune, which proved to be more difficult than it should have for a number of reasons. Firstly, inexperience in sand – this was to change with time; secondly, and this we did not know about until a little later, was that 5 Army Reserve Unimogs, (one with about 4000 kilos of water on board), and four motor bikes (2 street and 2 trail) were preceding us. With their massive weight, wider track and high ground clearance (800 mm) they made the track a little different to its normal state. The style of driving required one wheel deep in a rut and the other higher up cutting a path along the track, while trying to maintain momentum to cross the dunes.

We eventually passed the Army as their water truck was having its share of difficulties negotiating the dunes. But with our photo, lunch and other stops we were to pass each other a couple more times during the following days.



Picture: An Army Unimog negotiates a sand dune.

Sand driving, contrary to what the photos show, can be an extremely difficult and dangerous activity. When approaching the dunes a considerable amount of speed is required, as it is momentum and not traction that gets you over. The use of first gear low range in sand is a sure way to dig a hole, making progress forwards or backwards very difficult. With the momentum required to traverse the dune, you arrive at the top at a relatively high speed with the bonnet pointing skyward. And, unlike the photos, the track does not always just drop straight over the other side. On many dunes the track swings left or right, or one-way and then back again right at the top of the dune. The situation does not foster confidence in attacking the dunes in the manner required, and with the knowledge that my truck was some 11 years old I was the first victim to require a tow. I was even towed the last 2 metres over a dune by a Jackaroo! I had decided that, considering the age of the truck, if anything was to go wrong it would probably be with the oldest vehicle. So I would give each difficult dune two or three goes then get towed the last car length or so. With this policy I think I was towed over three dunes and finished the crossing with one flat tyre. But that leads to another story, which I shall leave to another scribe.

Our crossing highlighted the competitive nature that can be experienced in groups, and the total fear of being seen to have failed or to have an inferior vehicle. This attitude can lead to a lot of tension on these longer trips, where you have to live with each other for longer than a weekend. The comparison of vehicle performance is a valuable exchange on these trips, so that as people change vehicles they can consider these. What should be remembered is that everyone, whether they buy diesel, petrol, station wagon, new or old, should buy the best vehicle for their particular requirements.

After about 150 km, at around 3:00 p.m., it was time to camp. And you should see how many experts could locate better campsites in a desert. Finally it was decided to set up camp in this unique inter-dune corridor a bit like all the others. I wanted to camp on top of the dune so I could have a view in the morning, but being the agreeable type of person I am I agreed to camp down on the lower side of town with the rest. Tony had no difficulty adjusting to the desert conditions, as much to our surprise, there was plenty of wood. In the interest of conservation, though, we kept our fires just big enough for the cooking. The best thing about deserts is that you don't have to make a fire break before Tony does his thing. Tony had a good time.

The Flying Doctor radio was put into service to listen to the outback happy hour, and it is amazing how much these people rely on this facility for their



normal day to day activities like ordering groceries, who is having a baby, etc. What we take for granted here in the cities are luxuries out there in the outback.

### DAY 6, Friday 29 August

14 °C at 6:30 a.m. and 24 °C at 12:30 p.m.

The wood in the desert is dense and a little tough on axes. Ask Tony. After breakfast and a little wait for Robert, our wandering bush walker who had left camp when it was still dark o'clock, we set off for another day of challenge and adventure following our numerous trip leaders.

[Editor's Note: Robert had gone to bed after the group decided to break camp at 8:30 a.m. and before the time was changed to 7:30 a.m. having planned to rise at 6:30 a.m. for a two hour morning walk.]

With each dune crossed the changing angle of the sun made every one of them so different, with the sea of wildflowers in full bloom. It truly was an inspiring experience. The day passed with few dramas with all our navigators, and with the salt lakes and clay pans being dry and causing no problems.

At the point now marked by Bench Mark 6864, where David Lindsay (20 June 1856 – 17 December 1922) passed on 11 January 1886 in his journey from Dalhousie Station to the Queensland border, which was the first crossing of the Simpson Desert by a white man, we turned south towards some knolls thought to be inactive thermal springs, for our evening campsite.

Again there was more wood than you could ever need, so an adequate campfire was established, tents pitched, and another relaxing night begun, except for the stink beetles. These horrible, green bugs about the size of a five cent piece caused no end of trouble that night and for the rest of the trip as far as Cobar, when they appeared in the Cook's vehicle and made their presence known. They would have to be the next worst thing in the world to a skunk and diesel fumes. Thus ended day two in the desert.

### Approdinna Attora Knolls — Poeppel Corner — Annandale

(Phil & Kathy Tomlin)

### DAY 7, Saturday 30 August

8 °C at 6:30 a.m. and 23 °C at 11:30 a.m.

After a pleasant night around the campfire, camped at the Approdimna Attora Knolls, we were woken by the sound of a sick chook, gorilla, or something equally as sick sounding. As was the case with most other mornings in the desert, the sun still hadn't poked its head over the horizon. However it did promise to be another enjoyable day in the heart of the Simpson Desert. Today's destination was to be Poeppel Corner by about late morning, and then on to another remote desert location for camp that night, somewhere along the QAA line.

Camp was broken at 8:10 a.m., with a couple of very confused vehicles (or drivers?) heading back to the French Track. Somehow, Warren had ended up in the lap of luxury, in the Landy with Kathy, While Phil (obviously still half asleep had 'wandered' into Des and Warren's FJ60 Cruiser. At least he had Des for company to compensate for his Japanese interlude.

With Phil and Des (or should that be Des and Phil?) in the lead, and Warren, Kathy and the Landy as number 2, the convoy headed east (roughly) along the French Track for Poeppel Corner, with many a sand hill and salt lake between the Knolls and there. Once again the drive was a very pleasant cruise through the desert, surrounded by a multitude of beautifully coloured wild flowers, broken only by the numerous salt lakes we were required to cross, fortunately all of which were dry.

As the wind had sprung up fairly well early on, many of the salt lakes took on an eerie appearance with white salt being stirred up and blown fiercely across the countryside. Most of the sand hills we encountered before Poeppel Corner were fairly mundane, although there were a couple of sand hills, which presented a small challenge.

Rumour has it that Warren had a couple of problems getting the Landy over one or two sand hills, and before you Landy Knockers start thinking typically, rumour also has it that Kathy managed to get the Landy over the problem sand hills with little or no fuss. Obviously the problem was driver inexperience in a real four-wheel drive. As mentioned, though, these were all rumours.

As for Phil's drive in the Butler-mobile, it was a pleasant interlude. The bonnet on the Cruiser is huge, you can't hear the motor, the pedals are small (compared to the Landy), and the "suspension" is not quite the same as the good old Landy. Power is hard to compare, as gearing is totally different. The Cruiser was in low range (3rd and 4th) while Warren had the Landy in high range (1st and 2nd) for all but the trickier sand dunes. Still, the Tomlins would own a Landcruiser station wagon if Land Rovers were no longer available.



Poeppel Corner was reached at about 11:00 a.m., and it looked like Civic [the main shopping precinct in Canberra] on a Public Service payday. People and vehicles were everywhere. Perhaps the comparison should have been to the Belconnen tip on a Saturday afternoon. Poeppel Corner was a mass of junk, from telephones to a black bra (yep, that's right, don't know who the unfortunate owner was though, unfortunately), dozens of different signs and stickers, a bed pan (compliments of the Land Rover Club of the A.C.T. and a local hospital which had better remain nameless), taps, weather vanes, and the list goes on and on. The area has to be seen to be believed.



Picture: The marker at Poeppel Corner.

After the bulk of the crowd left, we decided Poeppel Corner would be a reasonable morning tea come lunch spot, before heading into Joh country [Joh Bjelke-Peterson KCMG, Premier of Queensland 1968 to 1987]. You never know what you might find in there, so best to be prepared on a full tummy.

After a pleasant, but very windy break at Poeppel Corner we headed northeast into Queensland, this time with EVERYONE back in their rightful vehicles. Not far from Poeppel Corner the convoy came to a halt, admiring the antics of a lone dingo and what should have been a worried rabbit, although neither appeared to be aware of the other's presence. Shortly after this brief pause we turned east along the QAA line, now heading well into sunny Queensland. As is typical of most Queensland roads, this track was no exception in that it was generally rough as guts, although it wasn't overly noticeable in the Landy.

We soon settled back into the routine of crossing sand dunes, and all was progressing well until one particular sand hill presented some fun for some of the convoy. Robert and Terry started the ball rolling, and after two or three attempts at the hill gave up in disgust, and requested assistance from Dave in

his oil burner. On the third attempt Dave managed to snatch the baby Patrol over the hill.

Next up was the Landy. First attempt was unsuccessful, with the Landy trying to bury itself in the loose sand. The second attempt was a little better, but still not good enough to push us over the top. This time we allowed Robert to hook a snatch strap onto the front of the Landy, ready for the Nissan to pull us over the hill. Alas, the Nissan was outweighed, and was unable to budge us, so Dave had to come back up the dune with his Toyo. Unfortunately, all this managed to achieve for a while was to almost convert Terry's Nissan from a short wheelbase to a mid-wheelbase, and at one stage the Patrol was virtually suspended by snatch straps between the two big wagons. Another attempt finally saw the tail of the Landy disappear over the crest of the sand hill. It was satisfying to note, however, that it took TWO oil burners to move one petrol vehicle, even if it was a heavy Landy. Ironically, the next vehicle over was the little Jackaroo (Jack who?), and it was then" required to pull Phil Kirk's Landcruiser over the same hill. In all fairness to Phil though, Mary, (the driver at that stage), was all but over when she inadvertently selected reverse instead of first, and you can well imagine what that did to their forward momentum. Don't despair though Mary, we heard you weren't the only one in that Landcruiser to mix up first and reverse.

The fun and games over with, once more we completed the rest of the afternoon uneventfully, stopping at another pleasant desert campsite at about 4:00 p.m. After the initial flurry of activity, erecting mini tent-city, we all settled down to a cozy evening around the campfire, before retiring to bed at a reasonable hour of the night.

### **DAY 8, Sunday 31 August**

1 °C at 6:00 a.m. and 23 °C at 1:00 p.m.

Today saw yet another fairly early departure from camp, and by 8:05 a.m. we were on the road again (would probably make a good title for a song). Again, it was a relatively easy, relaxed drive along the QAA track, with our first object being to find the Rabbit Fence, and hopefully the track to Annandale homestead. As luck would have it, we found the fence without any problems, however the track was not as easy to find. The convoy continued on to Eyre Creek, with the hope that on the way we would pass the Annandale track. We did pass it, however we did not see it.

The Bibos and the Butlers both set off up Eyre Creek on a recce to determine if we could reach Annandale via that route, but that proved fruitless, so the Cooks and the Mitchells headed back to the rabbit fence in another bid to find the mystery track. Meanwhile, with the Butlers and the Bibos now back with the remainder of the convoy, a morning tea stop was called. And a most pleasant spot it was. In Eyre Creek (dry creek bed) surrounded by masses of gum trees, full of bird life. We were entertained the whole time by corellas and their raucous calls, cockatiels, kingfishers, galahs and a variety of finches to mention just a few.

It was during this time that we also met up with two Pajero wagons, heading towards Birdsville. It also became quickly apparent that the only map(s) they were in possession of was a Road Atlas, and both vehicles carried virtually no spare fuel, food or water. It transpired that their trip was a spur of the moment decision to go. It could well have been their last decision had luck not been on their side. I hope they bought a lottery ticket when they arrived back in civilisation (if they did, that is).

After an extended morning tea, our fearless scouts radioed back to say they had stumbled across the Annandale track, a couple of sand hills to the east of the bunny fence. The remainder of the convoy duly set off west again to meet up with the other two vehicles.

The track to Annandale was a very interesting track, heading in a roughly northerly direction, running pretty well parallel with the dunes. The track had obviously not been used for quite a while as it was virtually overgrown with wildflowers, so there was definitely no disgrace in missing it first time round. Most of the track followed a dune corridor, but occasionally it sat atop a dune with some really good views to the east and the west. Eventually the Annandale track crossed the QAH line, which we were to follow the next day on our way back from Annandale to Birdsville.

Lunch was taken about 1:30 p.m., and it was another uneventful afternoon drive to the Annandale ruins. After crossing the QAH line the track to Annandale became far more distinguishable, and it was a relatively easy drive. The first signs of the ruins were some old cattle yards, and an abandoned tractor and trailer. Surprisingly, the trailer had two perfectly good Land Rover rims on it, however we had no room for extra spare rims. Some ten minutes later we arrived at the homestead ruins proper, and after setting up camp beside a large beautiful waterhole we took off on foot for some exploring around Annandale. Not much remains of Annandale unfortunately, but what is

left gives testimony to the harshness of the area, although it was difficult to appreciate the harshness of this area at the time owing to the abundance of wildflowers and water, which we, the entire group, were extremely fortunate to have experienced. From all accounts, such proliferation of plant life is fairly rare at that time of the year in the Simpson, as were the winter rains they received during July/early August. Still, as we had arrived at camp about 4:00 p.m., we had quite a bit of time to savour the area as it was.

## Annandale — Birdsville — Coongie Lakes.

(Garry & Sheri Johnson)

### DAY 9, Monday 1 September

3 °C at 5:45 a.m.

Another superb morning started the last leg of our journey across the Simpson. A shout went out for a morning dip in the Cudrivers waterhole, but there were no takers. We hit the track at 7:45 a.m. to try to find our way to Birdsville, and it wasn't long before the cameras were clicking again as we came across a very rare sight, two bustards, (no I m not being rude), two large but rare birds feeding contentedly but watching us warily. Some good photos were taken.

Back to the fence line, and the right track was found which led us south then east where, for a while, we all shared the lead by taking turns in blazing the dunes. But alas, a distance reading was taken and we had gone too far and missed the turnoff we needed to keep us on the carefully planned route. Our tail end Charlie at the time, Phil and Kathy, found a track and, after some good trail blazing, eventually found the main track heading for Birdsville. The desert had changed so much, now showing off its beautiful gum trees in full blossom and its abundance of budgies and other colourful birds.

The dune corridors were now very wide, and we followed this main track for quite some distance hoping that we had not missed Big Red, the most infamous of the dunes and some 30 metres high. However, after passing a very large dune on our right, meeting up with the WAA line again, and a consultation on the CB radio with another 4WD convoy that had just done battle with Big Red, we realised that we had missed it. So it was about face, as no Simpson crossing is complete without an attempt at Big Red. Dave was first on the scene and had first attempt, then second attempt, and also third attempt, but had to be content with taking the "chicken track", a less

intimidating diversionary track to the north. The Jackaroo had handled the dunes so far with surprising ease, and the eastern side of Big Red was scaled easily. Tony's Land Cruiser also clawed its way over the top. Warren and Robert made some valiant but unsuccessful attempts. The western side proved to be a far greater obstacle though, with Tony's two attempts stopping half way and his having to admit defeat. The Jackaroo's first two attempts got within 7 metres of the top and, after some serious thought and an extra-long run up, the third attempt landed me on top but not over, and I too had to admit defeat.

The thrills of Big Red behind us, we casually made our way towards Birdsville, meeting up with the convoy we had spoken to earlier, and were amazed to meet Joy Witt of the infamous Joy Witt hill at Newnes. After a yarn and changing Phil Kirk's flat tyre, which proved costly the next day, we headed for town. Our first stop was the Birdsville Hotel. After a refreshing celebration drink, and a feed of his pies and pasties that seemingly changed in price after every stubby, we headed for the showers at the caravan park to try to remove that crust of desert sand from our bodies.

A beautiful campsite was chosen on the bank of the Diamantina River where, at dusk, we were treated to the sight of thousands of hawks slowly winging their way above us to roost in the trees across the river. Fresh provisions were bought in town, so the canned stuff stayed canned. But the corks were popped on the celebration bottles of champagne and port, which were drunk around the campfire as we talked and laughed about the day's events and thrills. Bottles empty, and the nightly rubbish burning ritual over, some sozzled four-wheel drivers hit the sack.

## Day 10, Tuesday 2 September

4 °C at 7:00 a.m. and 24 °C at 1:00 p.m.

The next day saw yet another adventure in itself, as we set out to find Coongie Lakes by following some 4WD magazine trip notes and a mud map. Turning off the Birdsville Track 120 km down we followed a track that led us by the biggest dune we'd ever seen, so we all had a romp on it. Phil Kirk also found out that his rear left wheel trying to fall off, snapping off two wheel studs and damaging the other four and the rim. But with a couple of high tensile steel bolts, some five-minute araldite, and Tony Cook expertise, we had him back on the road again. The track had many detours and sidetracks due to the

[illegible]

As we were skirting a shallow lake that was inhabited by hundreds of seagulls, an interesting show was put on by a couple of plovers on the track in front of Warren and Des' vehicle when a baby plover just dropped and stayed motionless in the middle of the track. It wouldn't move even after some gentle prodding and being swarmed on by ants. The parents weren't too happy about this so we backed off, and it quickly ceased playing dead and rejoined them. On we went, and the mud map proved correct and we set up camp among the trees on the edge of the lake. There was an abundance of corellas, and some pelicans drifted aimlessly on the water in the afternoon sun. Another beautiful day came to a close around the campfire as one by one we drifted off to bed.

(David Mitchell)

5 °C at 6:15 a.m. and 28 °C at 1:00 p.m.



The camp awoke to the sound of waterfowl and corellas moving about the foreshore of the beautiful lake.

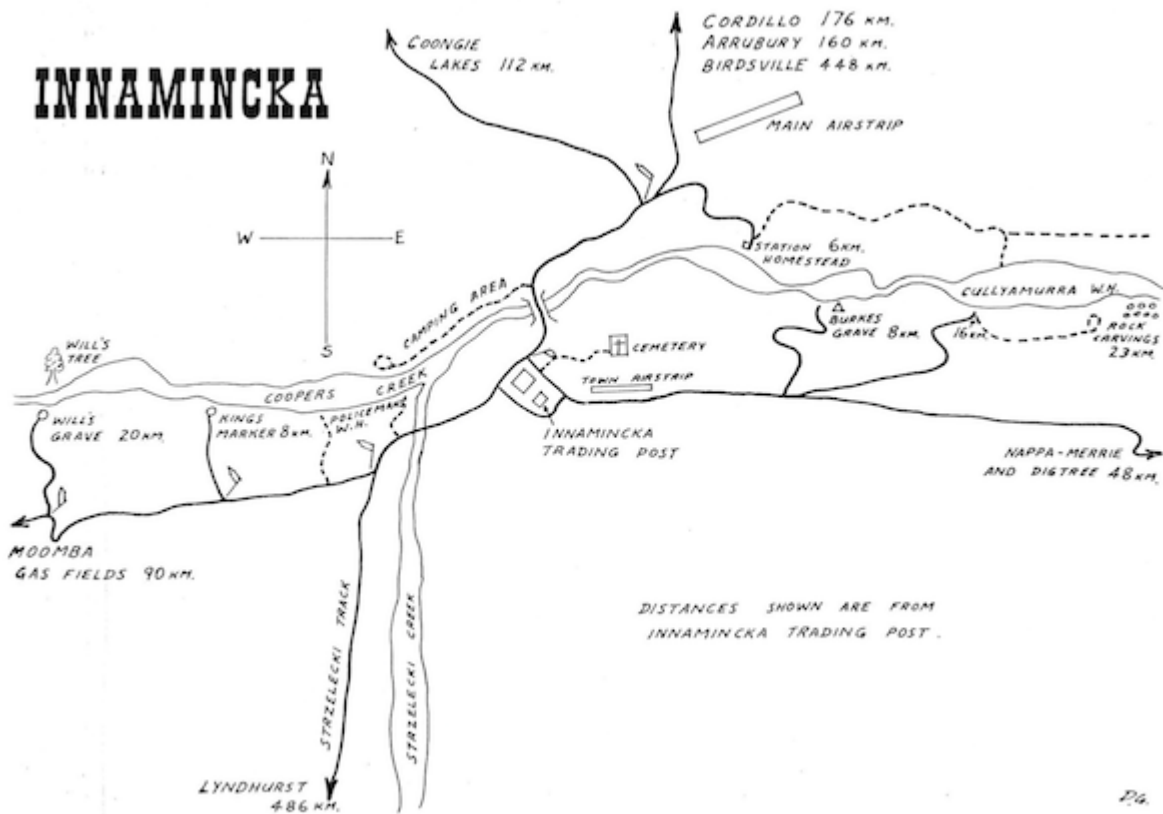
After taking some photographs along the South West Branch of the Cooper Creek (which flows out of the Coongie Lakes down to Cooper Creek) we headed off towards Lake Massacre, where Charlie Gray had died in 1861. Gray was a member of the Burke and Wills expedition to the Gulf, and had been caught stealing flour on their return to Cooper Creek. King had reported that Burke as punishment had flogged Gray, however it is said that when Gray's body was recovered the skull had two sabre cuts.

The tracks in this area are not marked on any maps, and navigation was by trip notes and a mud map, which weren't too accurate. Consequently there was some confusion about a particular shot line, which was to be followed west to Lake Massacre. [A shot line is a straight line driven across the desert by oil and mineral explorers, and planted at intervals with explosive charges. These are then set off to produce a seismic map of the ground in that area.]

After some lengthy deliberation it was decided to follow the main track down to Kudriemitchie and go to the lake via another route. Unfortunately we missed the turnoff and found ourselves in the middle of the Tirrawarra oil and gas fields. It was here that we came across a convoy of new and shiny Landcruisers belonging to the Santos Oil Company. The company was apparently helping the ABC to produce a documentary on the Overflow country and its wildlife, and also to discourage four-wheel drivers from using certain shot lines, which were in stages of re-vegetation. It was unfortunate to see the misuse of these areas by four-wheel drivers, and even more distressing to find several dingoes and an emu shot along the way – obviously only the night before.

After obtaining some directions from the Santos guys we carried on through the desolate oil and gas fields until we came upon the Strzelecki Track Mark II. Once upon the 'track' it was a matter of dodging numerous rally cars all making their way to Innamincka in the S.A. State Bank rally.

On the way to Innamincka we called in at all the memorials associated with the Burke and Wills expedition, which included Wills' grave and King's marker, King being the only survivor. The Cooper creek is a magnificent sight. Bordered by giant red river gums with an abundance of birdlife, it was hard to believe that it could, in other seasons, be so harsh that men were unable to survive.



Map: The Area Around Innamincka.

After selection of a campsite on Cooper Creek just north of Innamincka we ventured into the 'town?!' for showers, goodies, fuel and for some, to restock their stomachs. Unbeknown to the Mitchells and the Bibos, the rest of the group stayed in Innamincka for dinner and a beer or two, and eventually got back to camp about 10:00 p.m. Apparently for a number of the group (who shall remain nameless), they realised they had not yet had 'enough' after all and took off back to the pub in a Jackaroo. All apparently had a good nights sleep.

#### DAY 12, Thursday 4 September

10 °C at 5:45 a.m.

The Mitchells, Bibos and Butlers had a very early breakfast and left the snoring masses by 6:30 a.m. We headed off to see the Dig Tree and Burke's grave some 50 km east along the Cooper.

The track goes through very open gibber country with the occasional red sand dune intersecting the vast openness. The whole of the Cooper Basin supports an extremely wide variety of birds of prey, which are relatively unafraid of humans, as was evident on our way to the Dig Tree. We came upon this



massive wedge-tail eagle eating on the side of the track. It was assumed that he would take off but he proved us wrong and allowed us to get out of our vehicles and photograph him.

Cooper Creek at the Dig Tree was really beautiful, with many pelicans and ducks gliding across the deep waterholes, which apparently abound with fish. The air was filled with the screech and chatter of thousands of budgerigars busy gathering food for their young. The Burke and Wills expedition (upon the advice of Sturt) could not have chosen a more appropriate site for their depot.

During our return to Innamincka the aluminium roof rack on our Landcruiser collapsed due to metal fatigue. Luckily the roof sustained no damage. Warren tried to convince me that it was due to the vibration of the diesel engine.

Once all the gear was distributed among the other two vehicles (I am, by the way, very grateful to the Butlers and the Bibos for their help in my hour of need), we visited Burke's grave which is located some 40 km downstream from the Dig Tree, and 20–25km upstream from Wills' grave and where King was found. The whole of the Cooper Creek is magnificent, and a visit to the area is highly recommended.

We all regrouped in Innamincka at about 10:00 a.m. and headed off along the 'original' Strzelecki Track towards Murti Murti. It was interesting to note that the Strzelecki Track signs along the way were spelt incorrectly, or is 'Strezleki' an Australianised version? [Sir Paul Edmund de Strzelecki (1797-1873) was the first explorer to ascend the highest peak in the Australian Alps, which he named after the Polish democratic leader, Tadeusz Kosciuszko.]

At Murti Murti we headed east towards Cameron Corner via Bollards Lagoon. The road is in excellent condition and traverses the Strzelecki Desert like a roller coaster as it crosses the many dunes. I think everyone had their vehicles airborne as they dropped off the eastern sides of dunes.

## Cameron Corner — Tibooburra

(David Mitchell)

We arrived at Cameron Corner at about 3:00 p.m., only to find the area looked like Civic carpark with about 100 various vehicles, trailers etc. As it was getting late and Aaron had to be fed in about an hour's time, the Bibos and we advised the rest of the group we would meet them in Tibooburra. We headed off through the dingo fence behind the Range Rover Club of Victoria convoy for a very slow and dusty trip to Fort Grey where they stopped. We continued on through Sturt National Park, which abounds with emus and kangaroos, the first we had seen in weeks.



Picture: Cameron Corner.

Along the way we endeavoured to maintain radio contact with the rest of the group, with increasing difficulty. Once in Tibooburra I called Tony on sideband to find that they had followed the dingo fence along the Queensland/N.S.W. border, and would not make Tibooburra that night. As Sylvia, Aaron and I had been away for five weeks I convinced Robert and Terry that we should all spend the night in the new Tibooburra Motel. We all agreed. Aaah that shower and bed felt great.....

(Des Butler)

The Bibos and Mitchells left Cameron Corner ahead of the rest of the convoy and travelled to Tibooburra via Fort Grey. Cameron Corner didn't have the same atmosphere as Poeppel Corner did – probably because it's more accessible. There wasn't the same amusing collection of memorabilia (junk?) as at Poeppel.

After the usual photographic session and signing of the Visitor Book we headed for Tibooburra. As planned, we took the track, which follows the Dog Fence along the Queensland/N.S.W border. An easy drive, and many kangaroos were seen.

At Warri Warri Gate we turned south on the Silver City Highway, and after some searching found a good campsite beside a dry creek bed. This was to be our last bush camp, and a spectacular sunset made it memorable.

### Tibooburra — Canberra.

(Karen Cook)

#### DAY 13, Friday 5 September

16 °C at 6:45 a.m.

After the usual morning call (I think it was supposed to be a kookaburra) we had breakfast and packed up camp. The jump-ups in the morning were a lovely sight against the pink glow of the sunrise. We left camp about 8:00 a.m. and got back onto the Silver City Highway (dirt track of course), travelling towards Tibooburra. On the way we saw lots of kangaroos, many of them at least 6 foot high, a few emus, and two large wedge-tailed eagles. Near the loop road turn off some very pretty purple flowers were found, and dutifully photographed.

We arrived in Tibooburra at 8:50 a.m. where Dave and Terry were waiting for us, having spent a night at the Tibooburra Motel. We explored the town for about an hour, which I found very interesting. Phil Kirk, showing his usual initiative, chatted up the lady who owned a garden full of Sturt desert peas, subsequently getting not only pictures of the pretty flowers, but seeds given to him as well.

We left Tibooburra at 9:50 a.m., Dave and Terry having left half an hour earlier heading for White Cliffs. Ten minutes down the track we had to stop and put new rubbers on Garry's roof bars. The convoy turned off to Milparinka at 10:40 a.m. where we spent nearly an hour exploring the ruins and having lunch at the pub, which had been beautifully restored. After leaving Milparinka we headed to the White Cliffs turnoff, where Warren and Tony filled up with petrol from their auxilliary tanks while the others continued on. The road was very rough and dusty, and there were innumerable gates to open and close.

We arrived in White Cliffs at 2:30 p.m. where we met up with the others and discovered that Phil Tomlin had a flat tyre. While Phil had the tyre fixed, Mary Kirk and Wayne amused themselves by talking to a tame galah that was in an old telephone box that had been made into a cage outside the post office. Garry rang up Cobar from White Cliffs and made bookings in a motel for himself and Sheri, Phil and Mary Kirk, and the Cook family. Warren also used the phone and booked rooms in Wilcannia for himself and Des and Phil and Kathy Tomlin, as they didn't have to be back at work until Tuesday and were in no hurry. After doing a short tour of the town we joined Garry and Phil Kirk on the road to Cobar, leaving the Butlers and the Tomlins still exploring White Cliffs. After stopping in Wilcannia for petrol, and at a rest stop for a cup of coffee and to stretch our legs, we eventually arrived in Cobar at 8:00 p.m.

We checked into the motel and spent the next half hour exploring the rooms and making such comments as "Hey, that's this funny box, there are people trapped inside?" or "Where are we going to build the fire?"

After thoroughly exploring the motel we all went out and got takeaway for tea. Sadly the motel would not let us burn our rubbish in our rooms, so half the night's entertainment was missing. After everyone had taken as long as possible in the luxury of a shower we eventually went to bed and drifted off to sleep.

#### **DAY 14, Saturday 6 September**

After leaving the motel we travelled down the Cobb Highway, pausing at Nyngan to fill up with petrol and do a little shopping. We had an uneventful trip via Narromine and Peak Hill to Parkes where we treated ourselves to a counter lunch. After lunch Garry and Sheri headed off via Forbes for the long-awaited reunion with their little girl.

Phil had been unable to buy any wheel studs at any of the towns we passed through, but the trusty bolts and araldite held, and the Cooks and Kirks travelled home via Canowindra, Cowra and Yass with no problems. We arrived home tired but safely at teatime. Thanks Des and Warren for an absolutely fantastic trip.

## Campsites

(Barbara Cook)

### Day, Date, Place and Comments

Day 0, Saturday 23 August, Broken Hill

Broken Hill Caravan Park – good amenities and pleasant, but the van was not clean.

Day 1, Sunday 24 August, Lyndhurst

50 km north of Copley – a few hundred metres in from the road and beside railway line on flat, grassed clearing with some trees.

Day 2, Monday 25 August, Oodnadatta

10 km north, then turned right along creek line and behind small rise – very hard and long-burning wood.

Days 3 and 4, Tuesday 26 and Wednesday 27 August, Dalhousie Springs

In the NPWS designated area beside the swimming hole – lovely spot beside trees with warm water available. Swimming hole great, temperature of hot bath.

Day 5, Thursday 28 August, 128 km east of Dalhousie Springs

Sandy plain between dunes with acacia, occasional spinifex and tussock grasses, and with masses of plants in flower on the sides of the dunes.

Day 6, Friday 29 August, Approdimna Attora Knolls

Between salt lake and Knolls – on fairly sandy ground, with plants in flower and gidgee trees.

Day 7, Saturday 30 August, 62 km north of Poeppel Corner

A few hundred metres off the QAA line – on small sandy plain between dunes with gidgee trees and sparse vegetation. We also found centipedes about 15 cm long and a small bird's nest on ground with an egg inside.

Day 8, Sunday 31 August, Cudrivera Waterhole

Beside Annandale ruins – on the banks of the Waterhole; white sand under large gums, moderate amount of plants in flower, water was milky

but fresh.

Day 9, Monday 1 September, 6 km east of Birdsville

On grassy banks on branch of the Diamantina River – under big gums on broad plain covered in vegetation (few flowers), lots of birds, particularly hawks and budgerigars, hot showers available (\$1 each) at Birdsville caravan park.

Day 10, Tuesday 2 September, Coongie Lakes

Beautiful level site on white sand, by the water, and under large river gums – an abundance of bird life and rabbits, verges of the lake were covered in moss-like water weeds, so access to the water wasn't possible.

Day 11, Wednesday 3 September, Innamincka

Beside Cooper Creek – north bank, just over the crossing, not much firewood.

Day 12, Thursday 4 September, 40 km north of Tibooburra

Off the road on flat ground – behind a rise and on the banks of a dry tributary of the Warri-Warri creek, sparse vegetation, few low mound type shrubs and shrubby gums.

(The Bibos and Mitchells became separated from the main party at Cameron's Corner, and spent the night in a motel in town.)

Day 13, Friday 5 September

The convoy broke up officially in Tibooburra, with the Bibos and Mitchells heading home through the Willandra National Park. The remainder of the convoy broke up in White Cliffs, to allow those who had more time at their disposal to travel home at a slower pace. The Cooks, Johnsons and Kirks stayed in a motel in Cobar, and travelled home via Narromine. The Tomlins and the Butlers stayed in a motel in Wilcannia, and travelled home via the Cobb Highway.

## Roads and Tracks

(Des Butler)

### Recommended maps:

NATMAP 1:1,000,000 series; Oodnadatta, Cooper Creek, Tarcoola, Broken Hill.

NATMAP 1:250,000 series; Oodnadatta, Dalhousie, Poolowanna, Birdsville, Pandie Pandie, Simpson Desert South, Cordillo, Innamincka.

Oil companies doing seismic surveys have laid down a number of tracks in the Simpson Desert over the years. Many of these carry three letter designators such as QAA or QAJ. Probably the best known though is the French Track, put down in 1964 by the French Petroleum Company and running from Dalhousie to Poeppel Corner. These tracks, and numbered survey markers on them known as Bench Marks, are shown on the 1:250,000 series maps.

### Oodnadatta Track (Maree to Oodnadatta)

Fair condition, muddy and eroded in parts after recent rain.

### Dalhousie via Mt Sarah, Hamilton and Pedirka

Surface varied from good graded gravel to sand to small rocks.

### Dalhousie to Mokari turnoff/French Track

Good clayed road, some washouts near Dalhousie, dunes graded. This road turns south to Mokari airstrip. Bench Marks easy to find, usually two star pickets painted blue with the Bench Mark between them at ground level.

### French Track to Poeppel Corner

Sandy track. No real problem getting over the dunes. An east to west crossing could be more difficult. Many dunes had a sharp right or left turn just over the crest, but steering into these was not a problem. The wheel ruts in the sand carried the vehicle around. Very interesting driving when all you can see over the bonnet is sky.

### Approdinna Attora Knolls

This track turns south at BM 6864, 4 km to the Knolls. We then returned to the French Track. Salt lakes west of Poeppel Corner had been soft until

recently, but were now firm. We kept to the wheel tracks of other vehicles.

### Poeppel Corner to QAA Line

This well-defined track heads north beside a salt lake for 17 km. We then turned east onto the QAA Line. Bench Marks here on star pickets.

### QAA Line to old rabbit fence

A sandy track, bigger dunes, inter-dune corridors wider.

### QAJ Line

We intended to follow the QAJ Line north to the QAH Line, then east to Eyre Creek, then north again to Annandale Homestead ruins. The QAJ Line was very difficult to find. We drove all the way to Eyre Creek then had to backtrack. Tony Cook and David Mitchell eventually found the QAJ Line. It led off north in the second dune corridor east of the rabbit fence and was heavily overgrown. QAJ Bench Marks on star pickets.

### QAH Line

Overgrown and not well used. This track heads east, crossing the rabbit fence and Eyre Creek.

### Annandale

After crossing Eyre Creek on the QAH Line we turned north. The track was difficult to find but we eventually arrived at Annandale.

### Annandale to Birdsville

A reasonably easy trip to Birdsville. Many tracks in this area not marked on the map.

### Birdsville to Coongie Lakes

A very interesting drive. No tracks marked on MATMAP maps. We used trip notes from 4x4 magazine, and a mud map obtained from a group of 4WD vehicles we met at Dalhousie.

### Coongie Lakes to Innamincka

Cooper Creek was too deep to cross at Coongie so we travelled south through the Tirrawarra Oil & Gas Field to Innamincka. The roads through this area have been built up above the flood level.



### **Innamincka to Dig Tree**

Some sections of this track are very rough. The 48 km to the Dig Tree are a one-hour drive.

### **Innamincka to Cameron Corner**

South on the old Strzelecki Track then east near Murti Murti to Bollard's Lagoon and Cameron Corner. Graded track all the way - like a roller coaster - over large dunes. It's easy to become airborne (and airsick) if driving too fast.

### **Cameron Corner to Tibooburra**

We followed the Dog Fence to Warri Warri Gate - graded track in fair condition - then south to Tibooburra on the Silver City Highway, a good formed gravel road.

### **Tibooburra to Cobham**

Good gravel road.

### **Cobham to White Cliffs**

Road in very bad condition after rain. Numerous washouts. Many gates to be opened and closed.

### **White Cliffs to Wilcannia**

Gravel road in fair condition.

## Spares and Recovery Gear Carried

To avoid placing an unnecessary burden on any one vehicle, and avoid duplication, it was decided to split the spares and recovery gear over all vehicles. So the following list represents the combined contributions of all members of the party. Unless annotated to the contrary the spares and recovery gear were NOT used.

Some of the spares listed here as used were not used in the actual desert crossing, but by the two wagons on their trip to the Centre before joining the main party at Dalhousie. They are included here on the assumption that they would probably still have been needed if the Simpson crossing had preceded the Centre trip instead of vice-versa.

1. 5 minute araldite, (used)
2. 12v soldering iron, (used)
3. brake fluid
4. chain (drag chain)
5. condenser
6. contact cement
7. emery cloth
8. electrical connectors, assorted, (used)
9. electrical wire, assorted, (used)
10. epoxy putty, (used)
11. extra steel cable
12. filters - air, oil, fuel, (used)
13. fan belts
14. files, (used)
15. fuses, (used)
16. grease gun
17. high lift jack and base plate, (base plate used)
18. hack saw and blades, (used)
19. hose clamps
20. oil – engine, gearbox, (engine oil used)
21. pinion seal, (used)
22. plastic hose, assorted brake/fuel/general purpose
23. plastic (emergency) windscreen, (used)
24. points & extra points screw
25. radiator hoses

26. radiator stop leak
27. silicone sealant
28. shovels / spades, (used mainly for creating fire pits and burying fires)
29. spare wheels/tubes/cases, (used)
30. snatch blocks, (used for camp shower)
31. snatch straps, (used and essential on any trip)
32. spring centre bolt
33. spring main leaf
34. shackle rubbers
35. sheet of aluminium, (used)
36. shock absorber rubbers, (used)
37. spark plugs / leads
38. screws, nuts, bolts, assorted (including high tensile), (used)
39. thread of Teflon tape, (used)
40. tin snips, (used)
41. Tirfor winch
42. tyre and tube repair kits, (used)
43. tyre pumps/gauge, (used)
44. tyre levers, (used)
45. hand drill, (used)
46. U bolts
47. vice, (used)
48. water pump (12v used for filling containers)
49. wheel bearing
50. wheel nuts, (used)

Each vehicle also carried a tool kit appropriate for the vehicle.

## Maintenance

(Wayne Cook)

### Date, Who, Problem, Place, & Remedy

23/08, T. Cook, puncture, Balranald, tube replaced.

23/08, G. Johnson, blocked fuel filter, replaced with new one.

27/08, G. Johnson, legs of roof bars broke, Dalhousie Springs, strengthened with steel found at the ruins.

27/08, P. Kirk, preventative maintenance, Dalhousie Springs, new fuel filter and 2 litres of engine oil added.

27/08, T. Cook slow leak in tyre, Dalhousie Springs, tube patched.

28/08, P. Kirk, rear door opener broke, 156 km east of Dalhousie, leave door shut.

28/08, T. Cook, bottom front right shock rubber worn, Purni Bore, replaced with new one.

29/08, W. Butler, dead spot in motor, 160 km east of Dalhousie Springs, carburetor cleaned out through back firing and new fuel filter fitted.

30/08, P. Kirk, maintenance, The Knolls, changed fuel filter, checked timing and oil.

30/08, P. Kirk, maintenance, 63 km east of Poeppel Corner, modified rear door to be able to be opened.

02/09, P. Kirk, flat tyre, Birdsville, tube replaced.

03/09, P. Kirk, loose wheel nuts caused 2 studs to shear off, 35 km south of Birdsville, replaced with high tensile bolts and nuts held in place with 5 minute araldite.

04/09, P. Kirk, Maintenance, 30 km north of Tibooburra, 2 litres of engine oil.

04/09, D. Mitchell, front legs of alloy roof rack broke, on road from Dig Tree to Innamincka, removed & load shared by Butlers and Bibos.

05/09, G. Johnson, worn rubbers on roof bars, South of Tibooburra, replaced.

05/09, P. Tomlin, flat tyre at White Cliffs, puncture repaired; one giant nail.

## Equipment, Food, Water and Utensils

Every vehicle carried a modern lightweight nylon tent and one or more tarpaulins, generally of the Polytarp variety. With the exception of the Bibos who chose to sleep under the stars, or at the most under a tarpaulin stretched between the car and a tree, everybody erected their tents nightly. Mattresses were airbeds, foam rubber, standard backpack type and the latest self-inflating rubber mattress. Sleeping bags seemed to be universal bedding. David Mitchell provided a camp shower with adjustable shower rose, which proved popular at Dalhousie springs where we were able to fill it with hot water. Everybody had a foldup chair, considered an absolute MUST on any camping trip. Lighting was mostly fluorescent off the car batteries, or torches. Gas lanterns were not used as the mantles prove too fragile.

A Flying Doctor radio was carried for use in an emergency. Occasional broadcasts were monitored in the mornings and evenings, but otherwise the radio was not used. It was still cheap insurance for the trip. This radio was hired from CODAN PTY. LTD., 8 Help Street Chatswood. N.S.W. Phone (02)4192397. [Editor's Note: this information is no longer valid, however is include for historical purposes.] It comes in a carry bag, complete with clip leads to attach to a vehicle's 12v battery, and 14 metres of antenna wire, which could be elevated by stringing from a tree or a rope between two vehicles. Also, it was fitted with Emergency Call Decoder to enable contact with RFDS Base Stations during their unmanned hours.

The cost of hiring this radio was \$250, made up of: hire of HF SSB Transceiver (2 weeks @ \$45 = \$90) plus 4 fitted frequencies (Broken Hill, Alice Springs, Cloncurry, Chatter Channel, each \$10 = \$40) plus freight (Ansett Air between Adelaide and Canberra and return = \$95) plus NRMA Insurance (\$13) plus D.O.C Licence (\$12).

Every vehicle was fitted with a CB radio, almost all of them with SSB capability. There is no doubt that CB radios are essential to the safety and sociability of a trip of this nature. Range was excellent, up to about a maximum of 20 kilometres in good conditions. On SSB we were able to communicate clearly over 50 kilometres between Pedirka and Dalhousie on ground wave. Generally we used channel 5, but where this was in use by other groups we used 6.

Each vehicle also carried a refrigerator of some kind. The most popular, and probably the best, is the Engel. But this is also the most expensive. Electric refrigerators require dual batteries for safe operation, and most cars had these fitted. The Finch gas/electric refrigerator overcomes the dual battery need and, like the Engel, can freeze food. The other type of refrigerator used was the Koolatron, solid-state type. This worked well for most of the trip, but the fan became clogged with dust and was dismantled and cleaned twice before the trip was over.

Gas stoves, single and two-burner, were standard equipment. These were excellent for short lunch stops, but were also used as the main cooking source at night by some. Most of the cooking, however, was done on campfires, using a large steel mesh grill mounted on four short star picket legs and provided by Warren Butler. Disposable plates were tried out, to cut down on washing up. General agreement seemed to be that they were not justified, and plastic or enamel plates would have been no extra bother in the long run.

Cooking utensils varied from blackened billies and saucepans which more than proved their worth, through frying pans, camp ovens and kettles to the positively promiscuous jaffle iron. Camp ovens produced everything from fresh bread to full roast dinners and, in the right hands, are marvelous utensils. Jaffle irons, under whatever name they are sold, must surely rate as the most useful of camp cooking tools. Stainless steel thermos flasks proved popular and useful for providing hot water at morning and afternoon tea stops.

Burnable rubbish was disposed of nightly in the campfire. All other rubbish was saved in garbage bags for proper disposal in designated bins in the next town.

There seemed to be no restriction on the types of foodstuffs carried. The full range of fresh, dried, frozen, long-life and tinned food was evident throughout the trip. Beer, wine, port, rum, fruit juices and even champagne were never totally absent from the camp scene. Bread bought in Oodnadatta was still quite eatable in Birdsville six days later. Everybody had more than adequately catered for the duration of the trip, with provisions for any emergency that may have arisen through rain or accident.

At the planning stage it was decided that a minimum of 4 litres of water per person per day would be carried for the Oodnadatta – Birdsville section. This was based on supplementary reading of other crossings and, in our case, would cover eight days. Six days were allowed for the actual crossing, and two more for unforeseen circumstances. In fact, water was never critical. We were able to

fill up at Dalhousie Springs with excellent drinking water with only four and a half days of desert ahead of us, and we camped on the edge of a massive waterhole at Annandale station three days later. The water here was very milky and not used for drinking, but it sufficed for washing clothes and bodies. The consumption of water carried in the vehicles was less than 3 litres per person per day between Dalhousie Springs and Birdsville.

In summary, it would appear that personal preference, tempered by common sense, dictates the type of food and equipment to take.

## Vehicle Setup and Fuel Used

The seven vehicles had very different setups and fuel consumption.

Toyota Landcruiser, LWB FJ60 station wagon, petrol

Tyres: 7.50x16 Road Gripper, 1 spare wheel, 1 spare case, 2 spare tubes, 30 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 90 L main tank, 160 L auxiliary tank, 2 jerry cans, 95 L water.

Extras: roof rack and false floor.

Modifications: Gabriel rear springs, Koni spring dampers, Unifilter.

Toyota Landcruiser, LWB FJ62 station wagon, petrol.

Tyres: Toyo LR78, 1 spare wheel, 1 spare case, 2 spare tubes, 45 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 90 L main tank, 110 L auxiliary tank, 3 jerry cans, 80 L water.

Extras: roof rack and false floor.

Modifications: Ultimate suspension, Unifilter.

Toyota Landcruiser, LWB HJ60 station wagon, diesel

Tyres: 7.50x16 Road Gripper, 1 spare wheel, 1 spare case, 2 spare tubes, 25/30 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 90 L main tank, 5 jerry cans, 80 L water.

Extras: roof rack and false floor.

Modifications: Lovell springs, Koni adjustable spring dampers, Unifilter

Toyota Landcruiser, LWB FJ55 station wagon, petrol

Tyres: 10R15 Bandag recaps on Desert Dueler and Wrangler cases, 1 spare wheel, 1 spare case, 3 spare tubes, 35/44 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 80 L main tank, 180 L auxiliary tank, 44 L water.

Extras: roof bars.



Modifications: Forest springs, OME gas spring dampers (front), KYB gas spring dampers (rear).

Land Rover, LWB Series III V8 station wagon, petrol

Tyres: 10R15 Samyang (2), 10R15 Bushranger (2), 2 spare wheels, 1 spare case, 6 spare tubes, 37/42 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 68 L main tank, 203 L auxiliary tank, 1 jerry can, 91 L water.

Extras: roof rack and false floor.

Modifications: Poly air bags on rear springs, Unifilter.

Holden Jackaroo, SWB, petrol

Tyres: 15-inch Super Digger, 3 spare wheels, 26/29 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 83 L main tank, 6 jerry cans, 48 L water.

Extras: roof bars and false floor.

Modifications: standard suspension.

Nissan Patrol, SWB MQ, diesel

Tyres: 7.50x16 SP44, 2 spare wheels, 30/35 psi front/rear.

Fuel & Water: 160 L main tank, 2 jerry cans, 75 L water.

Extras: roof rack and false floor.

Modifications: standard suspension.

Distances covered by individual vehicles over the route Oodnadatta – Birdsville and New Crown – Birdsville would have varied slightly, but not by a great percentage of the 800 plus kilometres. Fuel used by each of the vehicles was:

- Bibbo, MQ Nissan Patrol (diesel) — 116 litres
- Mitchell, HJ60 Toyota (diesel) — 130 litres
- Johnson, SWB Jackaroo — 135 litres
- Cook, FJ62 Toyota — 198 litres
- Butler, FJ60 Toyota — 204 litres
- Tomlin, Series III Land Rover — 208 litres
- Kirk, FJ55 Toyota — 215 litres

## First Aid Kit

Individual vehicles carried personal first aid kits, and the Land Rover Club official first aid kit was taken with extra-added items as suggested by a club member who is also a medical practitioner.

Aspro Clear tabs  
Disprin tabs  
Panadol tabs  
Panadeine tabs  
Digesic tabs  
Dolobed tabs  
Alka Seltzer tabs  
Aspalgin tabs  
Sudafed tabs  
Polaramine tabs. 2mg  
Zadine tabs. 1mg  
Migral tabs  
Valium tabs. 5mg  
Gastrogel tabs  
Moxacin caps. 250mg  
Bactrim DS tabs  
Lomotil tabs  
Stemetil tabs. 5mg  
Palfium tabs  
Ural sachets  
Canesten Vaginal Cream  
Optazine Eye Drops  
Cerumol Ear Drops  
Soframycin Ear Drops  
Stoxil Cold Sore Cream  
Diprosone Cream  
Betnovate 1/2 Gel  
Savlon Cream  
Eurax Cream  
Calamine Lotion  
Animine Cream  
Paxyl Cream  
Souls Burn Cream

Butesin Picrate Ointment  
Denco-rub  
Ung-vita Ointment  
Zinc Cream  
Dettol  
Betadine Paint  
Hibitane Concentrate Disinfectant Solution  
Stingose  
Benadryl Expectorant Mixture  
Paracodin Linctus  
Milton Sterilizing Tablets  
Puritabs  
Eye Bath  
Rubber Ear Syringe  
Triangular Bandages  
Safety Pins  
Cotton Wool  
Tweezers  
Scissors  
Splinter remover  
Scalpel Blades  
Plastic Eye Shield  
Inflatable Arm Splint  
Inflatable Leg Splint  
Tube Gauze for finger  
First Aid Manual  
Band Aids  
Dressing Strips  
Melolin Wound Dressings \*  
Gauze Bandages \*  
Adhesive Tape \*  
Elastic Bandages \*

The party included a pharmacist and two nursing sisters, so we were in good hands.

Fortunately none of this equipment was needed. We had no health or injury problems at all.

## In Retrospect

(Terry Bibbo)

In retrospect I don't think I would have planned the trip any differently, had I been responsible for the planning. Having seen Annandale, people were saying it would have been nicer to spend more time here than at Dalhousie Springs. I think the time at Dalhousie Springs was well spent. The trip should have been longer to accommodate more time at Annandale. But time was our constraint, and there was so much to see without rushing any part of the trip too much. So we didn't have all the time at Annandale we would have liked.

Next time.....

In retrospect I would not have bothered carrying spare main leaves for front and rear springs, which I did this time after some persuasion. With over 20 years of four wheel driving, I have never known a trip where a main leaf was broken, and I do not regard main leaves as being a weak part of a vehicle's anatomy. Prudence and common sense, tempered by experience, should determine what spares to carry. In the extreme we could end up towing an identical vehicle just in case.

(Phil Tomlin)

As far as we are concerned, we would not have done anything differently. The long planning period was a necessity, as it allowed vehicle modifications/preparation to be spaced out over many months, thus allowing time to budget for items such as extra fuel tanks, water container, spare parts etc., and to test any items before hitting the desert (e.g. fuel tanks). We would once again carry the same quantities of food, water, and at least the same quantity of fuel.

The trip was exceptionally well planned and led by Warren and Des, and this had a major bearing on the success and trouble free nature of the trip. If, however, bad weather or breakdown had struck, Kathy and I could have survived another two or three weeks with our well stocked provisions.

We bought a Land Rover to be able to travel the outback safely and comfortably with plenty of provisions, and the vehicle did not let us down. With all the extra weight we were carrying, the ONLY mod required to the truck was the fitment of a relatively inexpensive (less than \$200) pair of Polyair

bags to the rear, to assist the standard Land Rover springs, with no apparent loss in ride quality.

(Phil Kirk)

What would I suggest you do differently if you went on a trip like this?

Probably not decide six weeks before the trip that you are going, especially if you own an older vehicle. The preparations of the vehicle, menus and storage are enormous.

Use 7.50x16 wheels and tyres. Wide wheels are of limited or no benefit in the desert, and when you consider that the desert was about 600 km out of 5500 km there are a lot of other kilometres where standard wheels and tyres are an advantage.

Regardless of the social consequences, the owner of the vehicle tighten the wheel studs after a flat, and check them again 10–20k further on, and again at the next meal stop. If you don't you could have MAJOR mechanical problems.

Take a great cook like I did. It makes such a difference to know that at the end of the day you are going to have a first class meal.

Lastly and most importantly, have a good time.

(The Cooks)

In retrospect there is very little we would have done differently. Our vehicle performed well, our packing arrangements worked out to be practical and “usable”, and our stores and spare parts more than adequate.

Had it been possible we would have liked to have more time at our disposal. By taking more fuel we could then have done more exploring of the sidetracks, inter dune corridors and watercourses.

The detailed planning and preparation that went on before the trip paid dividends in the lack of problems or regrets.

(The Butlers)

The trip was as enjoyable as we had hoped it would be. The only problem encountered was a lack of reliable information on some tracks, but we managed to get where we wanted to go without too many delays and backtracking. (This was only a “recce”, - the next trip will be much easier).

Our only regret was lack of time and fuel, which prevented more exploration in the Simpson.

(The Mitchells)

Prior to the Simpson Desert crossing we had been travelling in the Central Australia region for three and a half weeks. In order to economise on space for the whole of the five-week period, careful consideration was given to every item of equipment carried. Consequently we were able to leave the rear seat intact and efficiently utilise the false floor and one metre roof rack in which for most of the time we carried empty jerry cans and a spare tyre.

In retrospect I would:

- 1.) Not change the false floor arrangement which was never loaded higher than halfway up the vehicle windows.
- 2.) Not take a roof rack just to carry jerry cans and a spare case. Instead I would use an 80 L auxiliary fuel tank, which would bolt down on the floor between the front and rear seats. This could then easily be removed when the vehicle was being used for local trips. The spare tyre would either be secured to the bull bar or a rear wheel carrier.

The roof rack surprisingly affected my fuel consumption on the highway by over 100km per tank.

- 3.) Take less fuel. We had 60 litres left after the 850 km from New Crown to Birdsville. As about 80 km of that was done on recces and backtracking I could have safely taken 201 less fuel.
- 4.) Take less water. Consumption from Dalhousie to Birdsville was only 40 litres including a bath every night for Aaron and a bucket-bath occasionally for Sylvia and me, and washing our hair once.

There is nothing else we can think of except that I would take an example from Tony Cook and make sure I took a pair of thongs. They are much cooler, and they let the sand out.

Oh, there is one thing that should have been taken, a better crowing rooster for morning wakeups. The one we had sounded as though he had crowed one too many times!

## Simpson Desert via the French Line

David Mitchell prepared this itinerary for a crossing of the Simpson Desert via the French Line over 21 days in September/October 1998.

Day	Transit From – To	Comment	km
1 – Sat	Canberra – Mildura	Motel	815
2 – Sun	– Roxby Downs	C/van park	829
3 – Mon	– Oodnadatta		462
4 – Tue	– Mt Dare – Dalhousie Springs		316
5 – Wed	Dalhousie Springs & ruins	Rest	12
6 – Thu	Dalhousie Springs & ruins	Rest	12
7 – Fri	Dalhousie Springs –		na
8 – Sat	– Desert –		na
9 – Sun	– Approdimna Attora Knolls		234
10 – Mon	Approdimna Attora Knolls	Rest	*
11 – Tue	– Eyre Creek		161
12 – Wed	– Annandale HS		84
13 – Thu	Annandale HS	Rest	*
14 – Fri	– Birdsville		141
15 – Sat	– Koonchera Sandhill – Coongie Lake		242
16 – Sun	Coongie Lake	Rest	*
17 – Mon	– Lake Massacre – Innamincka		159
18 – Tue	Cooper Creek	Rest	*
19 – Wed	Innamincka – Currawinya NP		494
20 – Thu	– Bourke		231
21 – Fri	– Canberra		770
Total			4,822

Petrol	Petrol for 800 km of desert (L/100 km)	(27)	220 L
Diesel	Diesel for 800 km of desert (L/100 km)	(17)	140 L
Water	Approximately 3 L per person per day		60