

Simpson Desert Crossing East to West – Birdsville to Alice Springs

9th to 19th August 2023

Participants: Rob and Robyn, Doug and Bill, David and Sue, Paul and Tineke

The Big Red Challenge was our first bit of fun:

David – 3 attempts – up on the 3rd

Sue – 1 attempt – up 1st time

Doug – 5 attempts – up on the 5th

Paul – 1 attempt – up 1st time

Tineke – 2 attempts – no go

Rob – 3 attempts – up 3 times

Robyn and Bill – observers!



Will we continue on the trip now that Big Red is conquered? Of course, since the track had only been opened 3 weeks earlier because Eyre Creek was flooded. It still required a detour of 30km north where the crossing was half a metre deep with a rocky bottom. Our first camp was here alongside Eyre Creek with plenty of birds to see.



Dawn the next morning showed Eyre Creek in a beautiful light.



The first swale was full of gidgee trees and we stopped to let 16 motorbikes pass with their three support vehicles.



We found emu tracks here and not long after we passed three large emus. There was evidence of camel culling on the return bypass leg back to the QAA line. We investigated the possibility of looking at the Eyre Creek from the western side but the track was far too wet and muddy, so we stopped for lunch with some shade and grassy ground. Turning west after lunch we began to traverse ridges and swales of the Simpson Desert National Park. Oncoming traffic was sparse, only passing three small convoys throughout the day. Tracks were becoming a little more scalloped on the ascent as we went further west, with most swales still very green in vegetation. We saw two large bearded dragon lizards on lookout duty (sunning themselves) in dead trees trackside and evidence of feral cats. We found a large well cleared campsite around 3:30 and spend time relaxing over afternoon tea chatting and reading. For those who wanted Wi-Fi, Rob set up his Starlink. Our dinner was enjoyed as the sun set, revealing a canopy of stars and several satellites and shooting stars.

We started seeing camel and dingo tracks in the red sand, along with wild parsnip, parrot bush and mauve flowers. We crossed several salt pans and met a group travelling east which had stopped because of a fuel leak. One of that group was a member of Bill's extended family! On our way south on Lake Poeppe, another salt pan, we were passed by two police vehicles which were looking for a lone walker who we heard later had successfully walked across the Simpson Desert! We also heard about a solo motorbike rider who had run out of petrol and was stranded for two days, but was helped by the support vehicles of the 16 riders ahead of us. Poeppe Corner marks the NT, Qld and SA borders. We detoured down the Knolls Track to the Approdinna Attora Knolls which are twin rock formations composed of material called gypcrete - a good spot to view the

surrounding landscape. Back to the French Line for a two-night camp as we chose to have a rest day in the middle of the desert. It was an ideal place to watch the Matildas game against France which they won 7-6 on a penalty shootout.

What do you do while waiting for everyone to pack up camp? Well, pop the bonnet to check the liquids of course. What Paul found was a heater hose had been chewed through by a rodent with an appetite for rubber. Rob and David came to the rescue with self-fusing silicone tape. The repairs lasted the 800km to Alice Springs where a replacement hose was purchased. A day of continuous sand dunes and varying vegetation. Another camp on the French Line.

An early morning rise discovered a dingo in the camp digging up and playing with old refuse. We scared him off but not very successfully as he later returned to observe us. People must be feeding them as we had not previously seen them so unafraid to approach humans. The sand dunes are becoming less challenging as they reduced in height. The spinifex was about a meter high and more prevalent than has been seen on previous trips. The bearded dragons were more prolific, with most of them sunning themselves in the dead trees. Pairs of red chats and three flocks of budgies were spotted. Wild flowers were becoming more prolific as well.



Again, there was not much traffic but we were passed by three vehicles, one towing a trailer. A little later we caught up with the three vehicles on a steeper sand dune but the vehicle towing the trailer had jack-knifed as he attempted to back down the track. A little later we came across another vehicle heading east towing a caravan and his radio had failed, so we had no warning that he was coming. It is concerning that people ignore good advice and are not properly prepared. It was an early camp at Purni Bore which gave us time to explore the wetlands around the hot water outlet. Bird life and interesting multi-coloured mineral deposits from the bore water were a feature of Purni Bore.

The next day started with a light sprinkle of rain. The track became easier and the flowers more predominant with poached egg daisies being the dominant ones. The dense blue/green/grey foliage thinned out as we approached the oddly named "Alka Seltzer RFDS" air strip. We stopped at Spring Creek and enjoyed the corellas, ducks, blue martins, hawks and zebra finches. We enjoyed dipping in the warm water at Dalhousie Springs which also was our lunch stop. A young couple on Yamaha dirt bikes also had a fully clothed dip as they were travelling very lightly for their 9 day round trip across the desert and back to Brisbane! The 9km side trip to the Dalhousie ruins was followed by an easy drive along the gibber plains to Mt. Dare. Diesel was \$3.25/litre. A pub meal for a change.



The drive to Old Andado was our first real encounter with bull dust, but it was not excessive. The dry Finke River was well timbered before we entered dune country again and the colours changed as the red sand showed through. Water holes had not yet dried up and camel and emu footprints were visible around the weedy edges. The only flat tyre was caught by tyre pressure monitors before any damage was incurred. We had time to explore some aspects of Old Andado, but first of all we needed some water as the tank was empty. There were no caretakers on site. David emptied a jerry can of diesel into the generator and after finding the isolation switch water was soon flowing into the tank. It was quite a pleasant temperature so it wasn't necessary to fire up the donkey boiler for a welcome shower.



Our second rest day was slightly cooler with some nice sunrise colours. The morning activity was to walk to a nearby sand dune ridge with many colourful plants, views and sand patterns of interest. Molly Clark's grave was visited on the way back. A couple of groups passed through Old Andado but were gone before lunch so we had it to ourselves. Tineke cooked some date scones in the camp oven and in true Old Andado tradition we sat around the kitchen table and shared stories while we enjoyed the tea and scones.



David produced a bottle of bubbly to celebrate Doug's birthday in a few days' time. David discovered that the telephone was still connected and free. He managed to call past caretakers who were keen to know what condition things were in. They also told us about another building 5km away built by some North Americans as a secluded get-away. We visited it on our way the next morning – the termites were doing their best to destroy it.

The road to Santa Teresa was in good condition along the north/south swales. Sue discovered that her treasured hat was missing so the troopy returned to Old Andado to recover it. The rest of us enjoyed a longer lunch at the scenic Arookara Ranges before they rejoined us.



The aboriginal community of Santa Teresa has a large cross on the hill overlooking the village. Horses roamed freely. Paul had earlier identified a possible camping spot 18km west of Santa Teresa and it provided sufficient cover so that we couldn't be seen from the road. No lights after dark, so we enjoyed a beautiful night sky and a new moon.

Our last day of the planned trip was a short drive into Alice Springs where we scattered to do our individual shopping before meeting in the evening for the end of trip dinner at the pub next door to the G'Day Mate camp site.

Birdsville to Alice Springs via the Simpson Desert							
Date	Day	From	To	Distance	MOV AV SPEED	ELEVATION	Hours
9/08/2023	Wed	Birdsville	Eyre Creek Bypass	89.1	35	50	2.55
10/08/2023	Thu	Eyre Creek Bypass	QAA Line Camp	92.2	24	42	3.83
11/08/2023	Fri	QAA Line Camp	First French Line camp	100.4	20	27	5.00
12/08/2023	Sat	First French Line camp	Rest day				0.00
13/08/2023	Sun	Rest day	Second French Line camp	100.4	18	71	5.05
14/08/2023	Mon	Second French Line camp	Purni Bore	53.7	18	93	2.92
15/08/2023	Tue	Purni Bore	Mount Dare	156	37	164	4.23
16/08/2023	Wed	Mount Dare	Old Andado	111.9	42	158	2.68
17/08/2023	Thu	Old Andado	Old Andado				0.00
18/08/2023	Fri	Old Andado	Santa Teresa + 18km	264.4	54	500	4.92
19/08/2023	Sat	Santa Teresa + 18km	Alice Springs	88.5	52	576	1.70
			TOTAL DISTANCE	1056.6			32.88