

Australia 2006

Testing in Kalbarri

Leg details

Date May 20 - May 28, 2006

Leg Perth - around Kalbarri - [Hut Lagoon](#) - Eneaba - Perth

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



May 20, 2006

Perth -Kalbarri

This week we take our OKA for its first trip.

As the OKA is still not licensed for the road (even though all the ADR tests have been passed) we have to drive it using the dealer plate. This is not a problem as Ruedi has been made an OKA employee in the meantime.

The goal of the week is to test the OKA and the camper backsection under various conditions, on- and off-road. For that reason we drive to Kalbarri as off-road tests can easily be done in the nearby riverbed of the Murchison River. This is area flooded every year so we do not have to worry a lot about making new tracks or damaging existing ones.

Saturday afternoon all is packed and we head north. It is already pitch dark when we reach Kalbarri, so after diner we go straight to bed.

May 21, 2006

Kalbarri: Red Bluff, 1st visit

Soon we recognise we first have to learn to live with the limited space we have in our new home.

At the beginning we constantly disrupting each other, but soon we learn to share the available workspace, or simply to sit down and wait until there is room.

Oh by the way - waiting is something we most definitely have to learn first as we still have not peace at all. Everything must be done chop-chop ...



We visit Red Bluff outside of Kalbarri and for the first time in the last few months we are able to relax a bit. The last months have been quite demanding and our "batteries" are flat.

May 22, 2006

Kalbarri National Park



Today we are already in the mood to see something new. We drive to some of the recommended spots within the Kalbarri National Park.

The reason we don't show photos of the visited places is not due to their missing beauty, but the quality of the pictures was not to our satisfaction. Something went wrong today.

May 23, 2006

Kalbarri: Testing on the beach



We drive to the beach to test our recovery gear in the sand.

Ade, our friend from OKA (he has actually built major parts of the truck), is our instructor (he runs 4WD driver- and recovery-trainings).

Ruedi has to bog the OKA in the soft sand, which is not a big deal with this heavy weight truck.

Then we gain our first experience with the sand boards. It is amazing to see how the boards just disappear in the sand as the OKA digs itself out of the sand on them.

If one doesn't know exactly where they were it is very hard to locate them afterwards. In the future we will attach some rope to them for easier retrieval.

Next we try our hydraulic winch and the sand anchor.

The anchor disappears completely in the sand, but it gets the OKA out of its bog.

Only shovelling must still be done by (Susi's) hand :-)

Since we still do not have our own, wider tires with the bead-locks fitted, we do not let the tire pressure down as one would normally do for sandy conditions. We are scared of rolling a tire from the rim. Due to this reason the OKA digs itself into the sand instead of rolling over it.

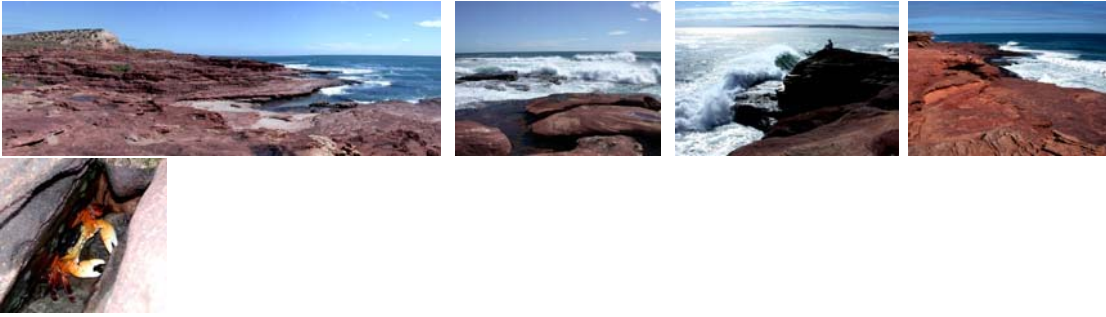
Conclusion:

Our OKA with its camper backsection is too heavy and we will always encounter problems in deep sand.

The situation will for sure improve as soon as we have our own tires fitted, but by how much we will only know once we have tested them.

May 24, 2006

Kalbarri: Red Bluff - Mushroom Rock



We really like Red Bluff, especially today as there are some nice waves. Of course we leave this beautiful crab alive and eat its friend in the restaurant in the evening ...



At the mushroom rock we see some very special limestone formations.

The vertical tube-like structures are remnants of burrows of an ancient worm. Skolithos (Silurian worm) lived in the Silurian waters of 400 million years ago, and dug vertical burrows similar to those made by today's sand-worms. As the sediments rose the worm would build its burrow upward, filling in behind with sand. The compacted sand which filled the old tube was more resistant to weathering. As the soft rock eroded away, the tubes were left standing.

May 25, 2006

Kalbarri: Bluff Point and testing in the riverbed of the Murchison River



In the morning we visit Bluff Point. There are a few nice lookouts along the coast south of Kalbarri.

In the afternoon we are quite brave and head off to the dry riverbed of the **Murchison River**.

Since Ruedi is not yet used to the 2.1 m width of the new truck, Susi screams every so often (followed by a tirade of not liking to drive at such angles ...) and also some trees loose a few branches. Soon after the white paint work has received its first severe scratches, but the truck is built to be used hard and we will get used to it. The so called off-road patina!



The trip up the river isn't difficult and we encounter no problems, but on the way back Ruedi misses the track once more Susi screams once more and we are bogged in the sand (Ruedi doesn't scream because he is too busy driving ...)

Susi gives it another go with the shovel. This is what we mean with fairly shared responsibilities: Ruedi bogs the truck and Susi digs it out

Getting the OKA back to the track is no big deal this time and we are very proud (and relieved).

In the evening during diner we tell Ade of our adventure.

He is not impressed about today's journey at all, because we didn't inform him in advance. We could have been stuck there without anybody knowing where we are ...

When asked if he would like to come along with us into the riverbed again tomorrow of course he agrees.

Being the actual builder of the OKA he is interested in knowing its limitations.

And besides that, testing is fun!

May 26, 2006

Kalbarri: Testing in the riverbed of the Murchison River

The next morning everything goes well at the beginning. A few branches and some sandy patches later Ruedi once more misses the track on the left side and we are bogged again.

And the ground beside the track hadn't looked soft at all



This time we stick in stinking, black, wet, sandy soil.

And this time the ladies let the men do the work. They step back and shoot pictures.

Even after clearing the mud in front of the wheels, using sand boards, low gears and diff locks the men have no success in freeing the OKA.

Then we notice that the front diff-lock doesn't engage. This way the front axle is not locked i.e. instead of all 4 wheels turning at the same speed, only the back axle and the front wheel with no traction turn. The left front wheel doesn't move.

All of a sudden the system alarm comes on and we hear a hissing sound.

Ade notices that the compressed air on the front diff leaks. Since he fitted that part himself he instantly knows how to fix it.

But even after the successful repair the front diff does not lock and with only one locked axle and one spinning front wheel the chances to get the OKA unstuck are pretty dim, especially since it is bogged down to the axle.



Ade tries to free the OKA out of its bog with a snatch-strap.

It doesn't work, even after Ruedi finally releases the handbrake Ade once more is not very impressed about his trainee :-)



Next the men try freeing the OKA using the sand anchor.

The sand at the possible anchor point is too soft and the anchor is just pulled underground towards the OKA. So this doesn't work either.



Out goes the rope of the winch again, but this time they use Ade's Patrol as anchor point.

But the same happens again. Even though the wheels of the Patrol stand still the car is dragged along the sand by the OKAs winch power.... hmmm, so this doesn't work either.



Next Ade decides to place one front wheel of his Patrol over Ruedi's sand anchor to increase the resistance of the anchor and at the same time pull with the Patrol's winch. Slowly the wheel sinks into the sand as the OKA starts pulling the Patrol, but all of a sudden the OKA starts moving out of its bog and shortly after is back on the track.

Jupee - afloat!

These were a few hours of hard work.

[Here the movie ...](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 8'092 KB).

We all agree that this was a severe bog and once more because of the weight of the OKA.

On the other hand, the recovery gear we have is of good quality, is strong enough and we now know (more or less) how to use it. After the diff will be fixed by OK we will be able to start travelling with great confidence.

May 27, 2006

Kalbarri - Hut Lagoon - Greenough-on-Sea

It is already time to head back to Perth.



On our way we pass the **Hutt Lagoon**. The lagoon looks strange with its unusual colour.

The pink colour is due to the microscopic algae *Dunaliella Salina*, which lives in very salty waters.

The algae is farmed in shallow ponds and harvested. The orange pigment Beta-Carotene is extracted and exported to Europe, Asia and the USA. It is used in vitamin capsules, as food colouring and as animal feed supplement.

We find ourselves a spot for the night in a new developed area near Greenough-on-Sea, south of Geraldton.

May 28, 2006

Greenough-on-Sea - Perth



On our way to Perth we stop at **Eneaba**, a National Park famous for its wildflowers.

The season is just beginning

We reach Perth in the afternoon.

It's a pity we have to give our new home back to OKA again.

Conclusion:

- We are ready for our journey!
- The truck is too heavy, but we will have to live with that.
- The truck is clumsy and we have to get used driving a truck. It will never feel like an ordinary 4WD like a Land Rover or a Toyota.
- Because the OKA is a military spec vehicle it has no anti sway bars which results in scary sways. We have to get used to this first.
- There is still a lot to be done and implemented, but most of the things are not important, so we can also do it in November, when we return from our first trip.
- Most of the things we built work fine. Specially the solar system which is able to recharge the batteries even in winter when the sun's power is lower and when the sky is partially clouded.

We expect to get at least get a temporary licence within the next few weeks and so we should be ready for our first trip in July.

We will travel for 2 months with our friends Guido and Judith and cruise from Alice Springs via Gibb River Road to Darwin.

Since a few tracks could be quite demanding (small Simpson Desert Loop, Kimberlys and parts of the Tanami Track) we will most likely get the chance to recover there car as well as our truck at some time.

But this is part of the adventure - or isn't it?

