

Australia 2006

Perth - Nullarbor - Alice Springs

Leg details

Date July 4 - 18, 2006

Leg Perth - Hyden - Norseman - Nullarbor - Ceduna - Wirrulla - Kingoonya - Coober Pedy - Alice Springs

Leg map



Perth - Alice Springs

As feared the plate for our OKA does not arrive in time from Canberra. This means that our OKA cannot be registered.

Since Ruedi is still employed as test driver at OKA we are allowed to drive the OKA with dealer plates for test purposes. But dealer plates are only valid within Western Australia and we cannot leave the state with them.

As we have to be in Alice Springs with some gear for our friends by July 15th and want to travel the Red Centre with them, OKA supplies us with an old Toyota 75-Series Bushcamper with approx. 380'000 km on the clock.

We are free to do with it what ever we want, no restrictions on tracks like one has with rental cars.

We install the GPS and UHF / CB radio.

Susi saws seat-covers from Ninja Turtle towels. As "Dude" is written in bright yellow letters on them we decide to call the Toyota "Dude".



We pack all our gear into "Dude".

The car is packed chock-a-block and we already know now that we will hate ourselves every evening when we have to repack all to be able to go to bed But we will have to live with it until we reach Alice Springs.

We leave Perth on Tuesday, July 4, 2006. Due to recent rainfalls we cannot take the Great Central Road, which connects Kalgoorlie with the Ayers Rock. We will have to go the long way round over the bitumen of the Nullarbor and the Stuart Highway.

So we leave the area of Perth on the **Brookton Highway** and soon reach the wheat belt. The draught is very severe.

Some farmers have not even tended to their fields this year.



Some farmers still haven't lost their good sense of humour

On the way in the middle of a field we see some kind of a memorial of a ute with a dog in the back.



The memorial is in memory of the "Cobber Dog in a ute queue" world record broken on October 10th, 1998.

On that day 699 registered utes with dogs on their trays drove into **Corrigin** bumper to bumper forming a 7 km long convoy.

They broke Victoria's record of 325 utes.

This event raised 220'000 AUD for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Victoria got the crown back in the year 2000 getting 797 utes with dogs together and raising 560'000 AUD.

But in 2002 Corrigin beat the Victorians with 1'527 utes.

The **Corrigin dog cemetery** is also very special.



It was created when Paddy Wrights best friend "Strike" died. Paddy asked for a place to bury his dog and got this site allocated for it.

Alan Henderson then buried his dog alongside and added a tombstone.

Alan cared for the graves and all other that followed there after.





We take the time to have a closer look at some of the graves for dogs ...



... and cats.



In **Kondinin** we meet some special members of the community ...

The first night in "Dude" is a real challenge.

We have no experience on what is where and have to pack gear around over and over again.

Have you ever slept in the top section of a bushcamper?

The space is approx. 60 cm high and 130 cm wide.

To reach it one has to climb on top of the kitchen bench and then crawl into the "box".

There is a big difference to the OKA with its bed of 140 cm width, much head space so one can easily sit up on the mattress and where one can go to bed even without any mountaineering experience.

Susi gets really frustrated.

During the night the temperature drops to below 10°C and the humidity condensates in the top section of "Dude".

Susi's sleeping bag gets wet and she gets really cold.

So the next morning she is ready to go home ... but where please is that?

Ruedi manages to calm Susi down and promises that with the fleece blankets it will be much warmer the next night.



In **Hyden** with relief we find that the **Hyden - Norseman Road** has not been closed because of the rain.

It is a bitumen road more or less until Wave Rock, then it turns to gravel.

Wave Rock is a rock face that has been eroded by the wind over time and now looks like a giant wave.

During our first visit in 1995 we were not impressed by it all so we don't have an urge to revisit it right now.

Not yet knowing how "Dude" behaves on dirt roads we are a bit careful and hope that we don't have to reduce the tire pressure (and how much would we have to reduce anyway??? No clue ...).

But the worries are in vain.

The road is maintained by the mines and is more like a highway than anything else.

We see many tables and signs referring to the local tourist attractions.

The Holland Track, one of our "musts", also ends at the Hyden - Norseman Road.

The last 100 km before reaching Norseman we travel through a beautiful forests of Salmon gums.

There are some great salt lakes with good camp sites.

We will come back and spend more time here to explore all this. Now we are in a kind of a rush ...

We spend the night at the **Norseman** Caravan Park and set up our new tent for shelter against the cold wind.

During the night the temperature drops to 4°C. Susi wraps herself in fleece socks and fleece blankets.

The sleeping bags stay dry but in the morning the surface of the fleece blankets are covered with condensation.



In the morning we see that "Dude's" radiator is losing water. The gravel road has already claimed its first victim ...

Luckily in the garage they find that only the clamps have to be tightened.

As "Dude" is a rental car, we don't want to touch it as long as possible.

They also find that the bash plate is missing.

As they don't have a spare we will have to have it repaired at the Toyota garage in Alice Springs.

The garage mainly repairs vehicles for the local mines. We see a couple of good examples of what damage salt water can cause to a car



We visit the lookout and find Norseman to be a quite interesting little town with its surrounding lakes.

But it's all salt water meaning that the water for the mines has to be brought in by pipeline.

We also read the story of how the horse "Norseman" found the first gold nugget which created the gold rush.

The mines are still producing gold. But the miners don't live in town anymore, they are flown in and out by the mines.

Norseman is the gateway to the Nullarbor (= Latin for no trees).



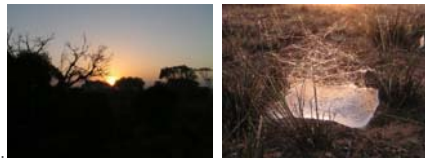
Being good tourist we also have to take the famous picture of the road signs.
 In Western Australia the animals on the warning signs are kangaroo, camel and emu, in South Australia they are kangaroo, camel and wombat.



We also drive Australia's longest stretch of straight road.
 Due to the little hills that have to be passed it is not really that obvious.
 Also many other parts of that road are not much different and contain only a slight little corner every few kilometres.



We reach **Caiguna** where we camp in the bush.
 As soon as the sun sets the temperature drops rapidly.
 Ruedi plays the guitar but soon it gets to cold even for that



After a cold night with 9°C inside the camper and 4°C outside we wake up to another sunny day.



The humidity in the air is so high that rainbows can be seen.
 We continue travelling on the Nullarbor and are surprised to see many Wedge Tailed Eagles.
 Because the trucks continue driving through most of the night there is a lot of road kill which attracts the birds of prey.
 The large birds only abandon their food in the last seconds before we drive past them giving us the chance to have a close look at these beautiful creatures.
 Some of them have a huge wing-span.



We stop at the **Madura Pass** and enjoy the views.



We also find a few flowers. Susi's flower book helps to identify the Desert hopbush (*Dodonaea viscosa* ssp. *angustissima* female flowers).
 The other two let us know if you got the names for it.
 We wonder how they survive in such a hostile environment.
 It looks like the dew they get is enough for them to reproduce.



We find the Royal Flying Doctor landing strips intriguing.
 The road is turned into a landing strip allowing the Pilatus planes to land and pick up patients.
 We cross the border into South Australia and see Western Australia's quarantine station.
 As we still have some fruits and veggies we stop at the next parking place, peel all, chop them up and get rid of the peel in local bins.
 According to the tourist information in Norseman this is all they ask for.
 With a good conscience we drive on.
 We also have to advance our watches by 1 1/2 hours.
 South Australia and the Northern Territory both have a time difference to Perth of 1 1/2 hours, not full hours.



At the first road sign we have to stop and check the animals. They really are different than the ones on the WA signs. Let's hope that never a wombat crosses over to WA!



We reach the **Nullarbor Roadhouse** shortly before 5 PM and continue on to the **"Head of Bight"**, where we want to have a look at the whales. But they close at 5 PM so we decide to stay at the Nullarbor Roadhouse over night. Water is so scarce out here that you have to pay an extra 3 AU\$ for the showers on the campground



On Saturday, July 8, we go over to the "Head of Bight" to have a look at the whales. We are informed by the rangers that there is a group of approx. 50 whales present, 20 of them calves.

Before **Ceduna** we come across South Australia's quarantine station. We are OK except the Orange-salad which we would have to leave at the station. No way!

We turn round, drive back 1 km, scoff it all up and return to the quarantine station - now we are all clear.



We roll-on through the endless Nullarbor plains.

In **Wirrulla** by chance we see a small sign to Coober Pedy. At the local pup we ask for the road condition of the track. They tell us that the road has been recently graded and they predict we will use approximately 4 hours to the train station of the Pacific Railway in Kingoonya.



The dirt road takes us into a valley with lots of Wombats (we first thought we spotted a calf) It's a shame that it gets dark and we cannot continue watching the nocturnal animals.



After a cold night the sun drives us out of the sleeping bags on Sunday, July 9th, 2007.

We have noticed that if we park "Dude" in such a way that the morning sun can shine through the back door it gets warmer quickly in the camper. But this also means that the sun wakes you up at the crack of dawn.

In return we are rewarded with the sight of the **Gawler Ranges** in the light of the morning sun.

We pack up and hit the road as soon as we can thus having a chance to see the one or the other wombat on the way home. They look like large guinea pigs and we take an immediate liking to them. We will definitely come back to this valley another time and have a closer look at these cute animals.



The road along **Lake Everard** and also the ford through the lake are dry and cause no problems. But we can imagine that after rain the situation could be completely different ...



Lake Harris and the sand dunes are beautiful.



The road gets corrugated but is still good to be driven on.

On the side of the road we see some kind of nests in the bushes.

We guess that it is some kind of a caterpillar ... we have so many questions but our books only supply very little corresponding information



At the railroad crossing at **Kingoonya** we follow the road sign to Coober Pedy.

Attention:

For the shorter road to the Stuart Highway follow the road that turn left right after the crossing, then the road turns to the right.

Then you reach a Y-junction, where you have to stay right and not follow the road to North Well.



Before we reach the Stuart Highway we pass the **Woomera Prohibited Area** at Mulga Well.

This is an area of approx. 500 x 400 km, in which in the early days of nuclear power some atomic bomb tests were executed.

Several roads including the Stuart Highway and some station tracks go through this area but it is prohibited to leave them.



In the afternoon we reach **Coober Pedy**, a mining town. All around the town prospectors mine Opals in underground mines.

A speciality of this town is its underground living. Due to the extreme heat during the summer months the inhabitants have created a while town in unused tunnels.

This has become a tourist magnet. Some modern hotels are built underground but we are not sure if it is not just dirt that has been piled up on top of the hotels once it was finished

To alleviate Susi's frustration we allow ourselves to stay in one of these hotels for one night.

We go to the Greek restaurant "Paul & Mary's Tavern" and find the food very good.

After that we cuddle up in the wide, dry and warm bed and peacefully fall asleep.

During the night some neighbours come home in a rather noisy way but we just turn around and fall asleep again.

Early in the morning the noise starts again. Equipment is carried to a car, doors opened and banged closed, opened again and banged closed again. over and over again ...

Then the engine is started and let idle. The vehicle must have been parked with the exhaust towards the hotel and soon our room fills with stinking exhaust fumes.

Ruedi has had it and gets up to have a look.

That was a mistake because he finds himself in front of the fist of a pretty angry person that starts yelling at him.

Susi hears the noise, runs out and can just prevent a fight.

The guy had thought that we had been the noisy neighbours of last night and wanted to get even his way ... well, you can't win all the time ...

We have somehow lost our good mood and decide to get ready and hit the road again.

But "Dude" has no intentions of starting even though its battery and its starter motor are fine.



After a bit of searching we find a mechanic that has some time to have a look "Dude".

After the mechanic has sprayed a bit of "Wonderspray" into the air-intake the engine starts instantly. The first few seconds the engine runs a bit rough but then all is fine.

We can even stop the engine after a few minutes and it has no problems starting again.

Good, so we also by some "Wonderspray" and leave Coober Pedy.

We will try to have this repaired in Alice Springs. Ruedi suspects that it has to do with the spark plugs.

A bit later than planned we leave in direction of Alice Springs on July 10th.



On the way we decide to look for the not yet visited Confluence Point S 28 E 134 just a bit off the Stuart Highway.

Confluence Points are points where longitudes and latitudes cross.

There is a project that aims to have all of these points visited. On their (www.confluence.org) one can record first visits and also check out, which point have not been visited yet.

We try to reach that Confluence Point but have to give up some 3 km away from it as there is a fence and we would have to walk to it.

At this moment we just don't have the time do this, but next time ...

We camp 22 km south of Kulgera on the Mulga Park Road, right after the crossing into the Northern Territory.



The next day we have only 300 km left to Alice Springs, so we take it a bit easier.

We find ourselves a good road-train-watching-spot to shoot some photos and wait. But somehow they seem to know that we are waiting here none appear

In the afternoon of July 11th we arrive in Alice Springs and check in at the MacDonnell Ranges Holiday Park.

It is the same caravan park we were in [1995 on our first visit to Alice Springs](#).

It is funny to drive through the city and to look what has changed and what not and what we (think) we recognise ...

Soon again we feel at home in Alice Springs, or "The Alice" as the city is called affectionately by its inhabitants.

We both like the city and feel comfortable in it even through somehow neither of us can find the way around in it.

In Alice we go to the local Toyota garage (Kittel) and make an appointment for a Service, to fix the starting problem and a few more small things.

The LandCruiser still requires its "Wonderspray" to get started and now there is also some oil dripping out of the dash board, probably from the power steering.

On Wednesday we stay put at the caravan park and work on our web page and photos.

Our tent is worth every dollar we paid for it because as soon as the sun sets the temperature drops quickly making it very uncomfortable.

We take the Cobb Grill into the tent using it as heater and appreciate the cosy warmth.

On Thursday July 13th we have to drop the Toyota already at 7.30 AM. As we have to leave it at the garage all day we have no other choice than to hit into town and play tourists.

Alice is known for its dry weather but it is logical that the day we are in town with no "house" it rains and we mean RAIN! We would have expected rain like that in Queensland but never in Alice.

So we visit the base of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the Reptile Centre, where Sandra, a keeper, has a very amusing show where she presents her "endearing" animals.

The performance of the local Toyota dealer, Kittel, is lousy.

Most of the work was not done, the problem with starting not solved but it cost a lot of money. We are not impressed.

On Friday Ruedi tries to start "Dude" by connecting the conductor rail of the glow plugs directly with the battery by using the jumper leads.

It works!

Shortly after he also finds out what the cause of the problem is.

Directly at the battery the cable that is also connected to the glow plugs has broken.

With every attempt to start the engine the cable glows and slowly burning a hole into the battery casing.

Soon the gas in the battery would have exploded which could have had some nasty consequences on "Dude" and its passengers.

Ruedi make an appointment at Repco to have the vehicle repaired.

Susi stays in the tent at the camp ground, washes clothes and works on the computer.

There are many photos to be processed, web-pages to be generated and mails to be read and answered.

Sadly there is no mail from OKA ...

On Saturday July 15th Guido and Judith arrive. We pick them up at the airport.

To accommodate 4 passengers and all their gear we have to almost empty "Dude".

Guido has a good laugh as he hears the story of the OKA and sees what we have as a replacement vehicle.

We hope that OKA will manage to get the vehicle ready in time for Guido to have a good look at it.

While we are carrying the luggage into their hotel room Susi's phone rings.

It is Fredy and Monika, two Swiss travellers we have met in Perth and have passed a good time with, calling us from their Satellite-phone.

They are on the Tanami Road, a more than 1'000 km long dirt track through the Tanami desert, on their way to Alice Springs. Because of the recent rainfall they are delayed by at least one day.

Also Fredy has had some issues with his vehicle and had to pull into one of the mines on the way to have it temporarily fixed.

It is good that they inform us about their delay because we had expected them today. Had they not arrived we would have become worried about their well being.

Often if somebody travels a lonely route and fails to get in contact at an agreed day or time it is bad news

As Guido and Judith have flown in from Singapore the time difference is very small and we can go out for a comfy dinner without having to worry about them falling asleep because of a jet lag.

Sunday morning is rather fresh with only 13°C.

We bring the material for their camper to Guido and Judith.

Now we have a bit more space in "Dude" for our own stuff, but it is still cramped.

Fredy and Monika announce their arrival for the evening.

As the camp ground is solidly booked they will stay on our site.

As "Keller's" is closed we go to the "Al Fresco" Pizzeria close by.

The pizzas are still as good as we remember them from our visit with René and Marianna in 1995.

The following day Guido and Judith fetch their Apollo camper.

As the weather is still bad they decide to stay an extra night in the hotel and organise their equipment there.

The camper will be their home for the next two months so they want to take their time and have it all set up comfortable and cosy.

Fredy is busy at the local Iveco Garage where they fix his broken Diesel pipe and we have to bring "Dude" to Repco to have the cabling fixed.



As we hang around in town once again we have to laugh at the excellent humour Australians have.



It looks like Australian animals also ignore restraining orders

Today it is July the 18th and it still is raining on and off. The temperature is not too warm with only 13°C.



We spend a lazy day in our Oztent.

Guido and Judith move into the caravan park and continue organising things.

As we know now that takes a long time and one keeps changing thing around over and over again.

We were able to reserve a site for them right beside our site.

So we now have all three Swiss vehicles on one spot.



In the evening all six eat dinner in Fredy and Monika's camper.

Their vehicle is equipped with floor heating.

We appreciate the cosy heat and have quite a party in there.

Tomorrow we will leave.

We will travel around Alice Springs with Guido and Judith, Fredy and Monika will continue their tour of Australia.

It was nice seeing you again and who knows, maybe we will meet each other again on the road?