

Australia 2006

Perth - Gibb River Road - Kununurra

Leg details

Date August 18 - September 5, 2006

Leg Perth via Great Northern Hwy - Nallan Lake - Meekatharra - Gascoyne River - Newman - Mt. Robinson - Hamersley Ranges - Port Hedland - Broome - Derby - Gibb River Road - Windjana Gorge NP - Tunnel Creek NP - Silent Grove Cons. Park - Bell Gorge - Adcock Gorge - Galvans Gorge - Mt Barnett Roadhouse - Manning Falls - Gibb River Crossing - Mitchell Falls - Drysdale River Station - Pentecost River - Kununurra

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



Perth - Broome

Perth - Great Northern Hwy - Nallan Lake - Meekatharra - Gascoyne River - Newman - Mt. Robinson - Hamersley Ranges - Port Hedland - Broome

The weather in Perth is not very inspiring with heavy rains and over night temperatures close to freezing.

This gives us an incentive to unpack the bush-camper, clean it, toss all gear into the OKA and be ready for take-off in record time.



After some more heavy rains over night and cold morning temperatures of only 4° C we leave **Perth** towards the north (and hopefully better weather!) in the afternoon of Friday, August 18, 2006.

We get as far as Bindon where we search for a bush camp but we search in vain. The area is all farmland and every little road ends in front of a house. So we have to stay on the side of the road. That road is busy, truck after truck, all night long.

Then it starts raining again.

Ruedi has seen that the hinges on the side doors are leaking. Rain runs towards the lowest corner of the roof and there runs down on the side walls. Due to a construction mistake the rain then leaks into the hatch. There the rubber seal will allow the water into the truck but not out anymore.

The tape that had been stuck on in Perth did not last long, new tape will currently not hold because the track is wet.

But at the end Ruedi gets it more or less watertight with BluTack what would the world do without BluTack? (for the ones that don't know BluTack => www.blutack.com)

Saturday morning we wake up to sun and 13° C. We continue travelling north on the **Great Northern Hwy.**

With the aim to reach Broome by Tuesday evening we drive with approx. 90 kmh.

Soon we realise that in hilly country the OKA is very thirsty with that speed, the Diesel consumption being close to 26 lt / 100 km.

So we drop the speed to 70 kmh and the consumption drops to approx. 20 lt / 100 km.

We don't have time to stop for all the attractions along the way but will be back to the **Nallan Lake** area and also to **Meekatharra** some other time.

An hour before stopping for the night we open the valve that connects the boiler / floor-heating cycle in the back-section with the cooling cycle of the motor to generate hot water for a shower. It works perfectly and we take note that it only requires some 15 - 20 minutes of connection to warm up the boiler.

On Sunday, August 20, after a warm night with 17° C, we reach the **Gascoyne River** and have lunch at the Rest Area. The river still has water and there are many birds to be seen and heard.

But that idyllic picture is brutally destroyed when we enter the cabin to have lunch and find some 30° C inside-temperature and water on the floor.

After a bit of searching Ruedi finds that the warm-water hose has detached itself on one side allowing hot water to spill on to the floor.

Last night we had forgotten to close the valve connecting the two cycles and so the motor had heated the floor and all pipes of the back-section to 85° C. That again had softened the hose allowing the pressure to detach one side of the hose. Luckily only part of the content of the boiler had spilled, because the waterpump had been switched off.

Ruedi fixes it, tightens the hose clamp and we make a note that the other side of the hose needs repairing too.

When driving through **Newman** we cannot resist and take a tourist picture of the OKA and the iron ore truck.



Note to the reader:

The OKA already has a height of 3,1 m



One other thing that we notice is that we are now greeted by the truckies and not by the campers and cars anymore.

Hmmm ... so we now belong to the big ones.

Note to the reader:

In Australia's countryside drivers great each other. Usually the "small" one e.g. cars, campers, bikes, etc. great each other and trucks great trucks.



We decide to stay at the **Mt. Robinson** Rest Area (S 23 02.570 E 118 50.934) over-night.

During a beautiful sunset the second hose pops off and leaves us without water.

Luckily dinner is a Swiss dish called "Gschwiltli" (cooked potatoes and lots of cheeses to go with them) and there are only 2 plates to be washed which can be done tomorrow.



During the night the temperature drops to only 15°C, no more warm socks required over night!
The beautiful morning reveals the great views.

In the morning Ruedi fixes the hose. While doing this the waste-water connection breaks!
It seems that stuff breaks faster than Ruedi can fix it.
He is slightly p... o... to call it mildly.

During the day it gets humid and the temperature climbs up to 30°C.
We drive through the **Hammersley Ranges** and are impressed to see so many hills. We definitely have to come back here and do some hiking.
After a rather boring flat stretch towards Port Hedland some bush-land starts appearing, so we cannot see the ocean.

We camp approx. 1 km away from the Borderline Rd (S 19 58.541 E 120 13.219) and enjoy a humid but balmy night with 16°C.
It is amazing how many animals live in this bush-land. The whole night we have a concert of insects and towards the morning the birds also join in. We are amazed at such multitude of songs.

We decide to drive to **Broome** and surprise our friends Judith and Guido at the Cable Beach Caravan Park. They had reserved a site for the 22nd and we hope to get a site too, even though we have not been able to make a reservation.
During the check-in Susi sees, that they have just checked in a car ahead of us. As we drive towards our site we see them coming against us. Quickly we put the hats on to disguise. They look up because they hear a truck and when Ruedi blinks with the headlights they recognise us. They had not been able to read our mail so they had no clue that we were coming with the OKA and not with "Dude", the rental Toyota. They also did not know about the problems with the delivery of the OKA to Alice and our ordeal to Perth.

On Wednesday we wake up to a foggy day. The humidity in the air is so high that the water condensates on the mozzie-screens. Even though it is only 20°C because of this extreme high humidity it feels really muggy. After the fog dissolves around 9.30 the temperature rises to 30°C in no time and thank God the humidity drops to 40 %.
So we take the bicycles and explore Broome.

Later on we receive mail from Peter and Margaret Wright from OKA 196 and find out that they have returned from the Kimberleys and happen to just be leaving Broome!



They drop in and after all this mailing each other we finally get to meet each other.
We instantly like each other and pass a great afternoon together.
We decide to stay in contact and see if we can meet up in Perth later on in the year.
Their OKA is an older model than ours but the "content" is amazingly close to what we carry along (<http://carsbyweb.com.au/photos/main.php/v/OKA196+conversion/slideshow.html>) .
Thursday is so muggy that the towels start to stink.
We don't like this humidity and decide to leave Broome the next day in direction of the Kimberleys.

Gibb River Road (Broome to Kununurra) [back to top](#)

Broome - Derby - Windjana Gorge NP - Tunnel Creek NP - Silent Grove Cons. Park - Bell Gorge - Adcock - Gorge - Galvans Gorge - Mt Barnett Roadhouse - Manning Falls - Gibb River Crossing - Mitchell Falls - Drysdale River Station - Pentecost River - Kununurra - Ivanhoe Crossing

On Friday, August 25, we leave Broome in direction of Derby.
We find **Derby** to be a sleepy little town with a well stocked Woolworth.
Shame we did not know about the restaurant at the end of the pier ... but there will be a next visit here and we will include a sunset with a good dinner in our planning.
We hit the **Gibb River Road** in direction of the Windjana Gorge and soon the road gets narrower and some great examples of bottle or boab trees (*Adansonia gregorii*) appear.
Because of the dry season the trees have dropped their leaves.



The boab tree is known as baobab in Africa.
The tree can be found all over the Kimberleys.

Funny enough they tell the same story about the tree in Africa as the Aborigines tell in Australia:
The boab was a very proud and arrogant tree.
He kept telling everybody that he was the most beautiful tree on earth.
The Gods got so upset about this behaviour that they pulled the tree out of the ground and stuck it back in upside down.
What you see are roots and not branches looks a bit like that, doesn't it?



Some boabs have an amazing diameter.



The fruit pods contain cotton-like fluffy material and some pits.
According to the Bush Tucker Man Les Hiddings the pits are edible, taste like powder-milk and are very nutritious.
Some Aborigines engrave the pods and sell them as souvenirs.



We also see trees with bright red bean-shaped fruits on them.



The Native Kapok Bush (*Cochlospermum fraseri*) is spread all over the Kimberleys and we find many trees still covered in flowers. The green fruit capsules will eventually dry and pop open to release a fluffy cotton-like material. We saw such capsules in November 1995 when visiting the Kimberleys the first time.



We find a camp spot some 100 km from Derby and decide to stay for the night. After a dusty day with temperatures around 30°C and a humidity of 22 % we absolutely enjoy our hot shower in the evening. The night is cool with only 18°C.

The next morning is a bit foggy and does not start that well. While going through his checklist Ruedi finds that the engine needs oil. As we had left Perth in a mad rush we had forgotten to buy some oil. This means returning to Derby The manual says that we needed a particular oil from Valvoline which neither of the service stations in Derby has on stock. Because we are doing the first 10'000 km on a new engine Ruedi wants to use an oil with the same specifications as the one described in the manual. We decide to call OKA and get some more details off them. Being Saturday nobody answers the phone at OKA. So we call Arthur and ask him the specifics of the Valvoline oil so we can buy the same quality oil from another brand. He does not know either but will find out. After a while Linden, the developer from OKA, calls back. Cummings is closed on Saturdays and he cannot get any other details. So we agreed to buy the oil with the closest Cummings specifications. A whole litre of oil goes into the engine. But guess what, we never needed a drop of oil after that for the next 10'000 kms.

We take off again and this time make it to **Windjana Gorge NP**. The temperature climbs to 42°C and the heat is reflected from the ground. We have to get used to this temperatures first but it feels great.

In the evening the corellas come back to the gorge. We are disappointed about the numbers. When we were here in November 1995 there must have been hundreds if not thousands of them flying back. We had watched the birds for close to 1/4 of an hour flying in large flocks.

Then the flying foxes leave the gorge. Again we are disappointed about the numbers. According to the guide book they only are present in large numbers when all other waterholes have dried up. It looks like there is still too much water around and we have to come back another time in a November to experience this phenomena again.

After a comfortable night with 20°C the birds start singing at 5 AM in the morning. Shortly after the corellas leave the gorge and scream their heads off. What a great way of being woken up on a Sunday morning.

We expect another hot day and start the day early. We have to repack most of the cabinets and also the hatches.



Ruedi has to finish some of the electrical work too.



We are surprised how cool the cabin stays even with this hot temperatures outside. As most of the campers move on we shift to a site with trees and reserve a space for Judith and Guido who will be joining us later on today. Judith and Guido bring some impressive photos from their trip from Derby to the horizontal waterfalls. They also bring some surprises. We have told them in Broome that we want to give the OKA a proper name in Windjana Gorge. So they have done some shopping and sent us away for at least 45 minutes to prepare all.



We enjoy a stunning sunset at the gorges entry.



On returning we find the table set with candles and the OKA decorated.

After an impressive dinner with entree, main-course and desert the OKA is "christened" with some sparkling wine to the name of "Villa Compactus". Judith and Guido, thanks again for this nice surprise!

The cool Monday morning with only 19°C is perfect for a bit of hiking in the gorge.



As we walk towards the gorge we hear a hissing sound from one of the close trees, like a cat-fight. We see a large bird flying into a tree. Our bird book later on tells us that it most probably a Pheasant Coucal or a long-tailed Koel.



The gorge presents itself from the best side.



Soon we sight the first crocodile tracks. They sleep on the embankments of the river and stay in the water only during the day. Then we also see the crocodiles in the water.



The crocodiles at Windjana Gorge are freshwater crocodiles or freshies (*Crocodylus johnstoni*). They have a smaller body than the saltwater crocodiles and their snout is narrower and longer. They are shy but they will attack if they feel threatened or cornered.



We find some beautiful flowers, some we know like the wild passion fruit, other we don't



We find a nice bunch of Cluster Fig (*Ficus racemosa*). What a shame that they are not ripe yet. Apparently they taste similar to cultivated figs.



We also see a large spider dragging along a wasp. We follow them for a while. Suddenly we notice that it is the other way round: it is the wasp dragging the spider to its nest!



We also see many birds like a Sacred Ibis, a Royal Spoonbill and of course lots of noisy Little Corellas.



The flying foxes are cute and not shy at all. Judith and Guido also enjoy how close on one can get to these animals.



We find this beautiful example of a Bowerbird avenue bower.
According to the bird book the male Bowerbird builds and maintains this nest purely to attract females.
The bower consists of two parallel rows of grass stuck into a platform of twigs.
The male decorates the bower with shells, flowers, blue feathers, bones, etc. that he might pinch from another Bowerbirds bower.
If the female finds the bower attractive they mate in there.
She then goes off and builds her own nest where she has the young ones on her own.
He stays with his bower and continues courting and mating with other females.
What a life!

In the afternoon we return to the camper and receive a visit from neighbour Vanessa.
When she finds out that Ruedi plays the guitar she invites us over after dinner for a jam-session with her husband Bruce.
We have a great time with the two guitarist entertaining their audience until late.
Thanks Bruce!
It was fun hear you singing and playing with you.

Tuesday morning is rather fresh with only 17°C but the clouds look stunning.



We head off to **Tunnel Creek NP**.

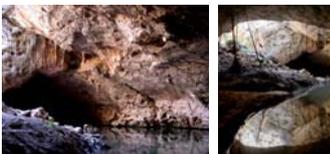


Finding the entry into the tunnel is not that easy. One has to climb over some solid rocks.
The rocks display some impressive colours and pattern.

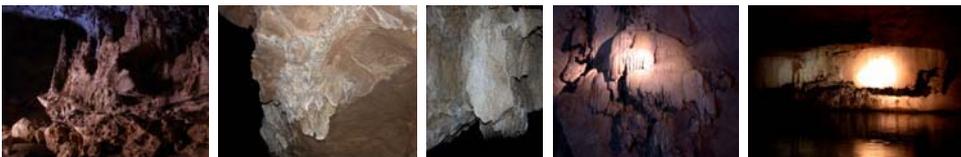
The way through the tunnel leads through water, at times up to the knees.
It takes a bit of courage to go through this dark tunnel with just a small flashlight in ones hand it but it is worth it.



In the tunnel it is interesting to see the roots of the trees standing on the surface tunnelling their way towards the water.
First they come as very fine roots. Once they find the water they get thicker and thicker and end up splitting the rocks.



The roof of the cave then collapses.



Tunnel Creek is best appreciated with a strong torch displaying all the different rock formations, enclosures, stalagmites and stalactites.

Lizard fishes, various sort of bats and flying foxes can be found in the tunnel.
Careful! There is also at least one freshwater crocodile living in the tunnel.
We almost stepped on it!



Reaching the other end of the tunnel we realise how hot it had already become outside.
There is no other way back than again through the tunnel.
The freshie is still laying there, not being bothered at all by the tourist passing it.
Coming out of the cool tunnel the hot cars feel even hotter!



We drive further into the Kimberleys and see some interesting rock formations.
See the head with the pointy nose?



There are some good lookouts giving a fine view into the mountains.
We are impressed to find them so rugged and wild.



There are some excellent little crossings to be found even at this time of the year and we have some fun.
Thanks to Judith for taking this great picture of the OKA. You had your finger on the trigger in the right split second!

We reach **Silent Grove Cons. Park** shortly after 2 pm and learn that the last badge for a camping site at Bell Gorge had just been taken a short while ago.
The ranger will distribute the free ones next morning at 7 am.

So we decide to stay at Silent Grove Cons. Park (S 17 04.023 E 125 14.873) for the night and enjoy the toilets with water, long showers and the good quality water.
The temperature over night drops only to 20°C. But with day temperatures in the mid 30s, 20°C feels fresh if one is waiting for a badge early in the morning.
We get a nice site right beside the little creek.



But we head straight up to **Bell Gorge** and hike up to the waterfall where we stay all day.



It is a very hot day with temperatures close to 38°C. The water in the gorge is rather fresh.
For the brave ones there is a nice swim down the gorge with some climbing sections over a few small falls.



Nature in Bell Gorge is very interesting too. The Pandanus with their spiral fashion of arranging their leaves impressed us.
But be careful, the leaves have very sharp teeth and cut like knives!



Above are some fine specimen of the Kimberley Rose or Red Kurrajong (*Brachychiton paradoxum*) and their seed pods.



We start learning the difference between the various sorts of lizards.
Many dragons have long hind limbs and when running they do this in an upright position.
This *Diporiphora albilabris* (sorry, no easier name) is kind enough to stand still until Susi has taken the photo.

In the evening we enjoy the privacy of our campsite.
Even though we have our own access to the water somehow nobody dares to go for a swim.
We rather watch the little turtles paddling around at the creek.

Bell Gorge camping is a very romantic little place but one has to stay for a bit longer to really appreciate it.
From our point of view if one is here to just visit Bell Gorge it is not worth waiting for a badge to be able to camp at the Bell Gorge camping because one has to take the car to reach Bell Gorge anyway.

It is more convenient to stay at Silent Grove with the amenity of showers and drive to Bell Gorge and back from there.

We feel that we are in the Kimberleys now.
The overnight temperature drops down to 13°C

On Thursday, August 31, we leave Bell Gorge and head north to visit the other gorges that make the Kimberley such an interesting place. The first one we visit is **Adcock Gorge**.



The last section of the way is very rough. We take the OKA for a ride but do not dare to force the HiLux over the rocks.



There is plenty of water in the gorge.



Interesting plants grow in the water. Also many fruits and flowers can be found but we just can't find all their names in the books.



A Mertens' Water Monitor (*Varanus mertensi*) lays in the sunshine and enjoys the hot 38°C.



The gorge gets its water from the surrounding rocks. During the rain season the water penetrates the rock that act like sponges. During the dry season the water dribbles out of the rocks along the walls watering some fern gardens. The water is surprisingly cold.



Due to the floods in the river bed there is not much material left for the trees to hold on to. They cling on to every stone with their roots.



We proceed towards **Galvans Gorge**.



Again we find a small paradise with many different water lilies and other flowers.



It seems that each gorge has at least one large Mertens' Water Monitor.



On the right hand side of the water hole the rock painting of a Wandjina can be found. Wandjinas represent ancestral beings, spirits of the clouds and the makers of land, sea and humans. The figures have very large eyes, a nose but no mouth. They have some kind of a halo or hair-style. The Aboriginals believe that these figures or the spirits they represent control the fertility and regeneration of life, they control the storms and cyclones. Each Wandjina is guarded by an Aboriginal family. It is repainted regularly and ceremonies are held to keep the spirits happy.

We reach **Mt. Barnett Roadhouse** and find a nice site close to the pool. Swimming after this hot day feels just great.

In the evening Ruedi gets a fever, we don't know what it is.

After a rather cold night with only 12°C we get ready for a hike to the **Manning Falls**. As Ruedi still has a fever he decides to stay in bed.

It is a beautiful day and we enjoy the many flowers and animal we encounter on the way up.



The Native Rosella (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) can be eaten or used to make jam. We have to try that out next time we find some.



The Desert Fringe Myrtle (*Calytrix longiflora*) and Firebush or Chocolate Cassia or Native Senna (*Cassia pleurocarpa*) could easily be identified.



There are wattles with round leaves, triangular leaves, with and without spikes There are so many different wattles that they don't even have pictures for all of them in the flower book!



And would you have recognised this one as wattle? According to our flower book it is a Curry Wattle, Spineleaf Wattle (*Acacia spondyophylla*).



The Manning Falls are just stunning.



Mt. Barnett Roadhouse owns a very old OKA that was used for tours. It has a split front window, very unusual for OKAs. Today we know that this truck is a pre-production model, which makes it approx. 25 years old.

As Ruedi's feels a bit better we decide to head off towards Drysdale River Station but Susi has to drive. At the Gibb River Road junction (approx. 410 km from Derby and 280 km from Kununurra) we turn into Kalumburu Road.



Right after the **Gibb River Crossing** the HiLux has a flat tyre.
We decide to set up camp at the beautiful crossing and fix the tyre.



Suddenly there is a big hello. Vanessa, Bruce and their group have set up camp on the other side of the river and come over for a swim. Ruedi is invited to pop over for another jam-session but because of his fever we decide to decline the offer.

We will decide tomorrow if we can continue towards the Mitchell Falls or if we return to the Gibb River Road and head to Kununurra to a hospital to have Ruedi checked up. After a cold night with only 10°C Ruedi's fever is almost gone so we decide to continue in direction of the Mitchell Falls.



First stop is at **Drysdale River Station** to pop up fuel. Boy, they have stiff prices but we have no choice, the HiLux needs fuel. We are a bit disappointed about the shop. Compared with Mt. Barnett Station it has a rather poor selection.



We like this public phone



The landing strip at Drysdale River Station is also used for tourist flights to the Mitchell Falls.



At Miner's Pool we are surprised how much water still runs in the Drysdale River.

The road up north is in pretty good condition, almost like it was recently graded.

After we pass the border into Theda Station the road gets a bit bumpier.

Some 160 km after the Gibb River Road junction we turn left into the **Mitchell Plateau Track**.



The warning sign on the Mitchell Plateau Track looks a bit strange as the road is freshly graded.



At the first crossing some German tourists with a Britz Bushcamper cross us. They tell us that the road gets really horrible, they had to crawl along at 5 kmh which made them decide to turn around.

We get curious.

What is awaiting us?

Will it really be that big adventure that can be described in so many books?



The landscape changes from very hot and dry to small fan palms (*Livistona inermis*) and later on to a forest of *Livistona* palms (*Livistona eastonii*).

These palms can only be found on the **Mitchell Plateau**.

We pass the grader and the road gets quiet corrugated.



The Mitchell Plateau is the wettest area of Western Australia.
The puddles of water get deeper and muddier.



Then we reach a ditch of approx. 80 m that is filled with brown water. We check it out and find it to be approx. 70 cm deep. A small creek is constantly feeding water and washes away the soil that gets loosened by the cars driving through the ditch. The OKA has no problems and just wades through.

[Link to AUS_060903_OKA_Mitchell_Plateau_Track.wmv](#) (size 5'256 KB).
Note: Format is .wmv, Windows Media Player required to play it.

The HiLux could reach its limits. We are in doubt if we should risk it and drive through or turn around and go back. But after a group of 5 4WD vehicles passes the section without major problems the HiLux also makes it through. The only problem encountered is the muddy water that has entered into the back-section of the camper and requires a bit of a clean-out.

After this exciting passage we soon reach the camping area at the Mitchell Falls and set up for the night. We still see some 38°C on the thermometer and are a bit disappointed that the river is so far away.

On Sunday early in the morning Judith and Guido leave for a hike to the Mitchell Falls. They want to visit the Bradshaw paintings, rock art that the local Aboriginals call "rubbish paintings". The paintings display skinny figures with African-style hair-styles and arm rings, not Aboriginal style at all. The local Aboriginals say that none of their ancestors has created these paintings. Amazingly the boab tree can be found almost in the same locations as the Bradshaw pictures can be found ...

We decide to stay in the camp.
This is a wise decision as later on Ruedi's temperature starts to rise again and he even gets blood clots in his urine. Susi decides to give him the antibiotics she usually gets when she has a bladder infection. Also the camper is made ready for departure. We want to drive to Kununurra to the hospital as soon as Judith and Guido come back. As the temperature in the shade reaches 40°C Judith and Guido decide to come along and stay at Drysdale River Station for the night.



On the way back we meet the grader at the large ditch. He cannot continue his work. The driver recons he will need two truck of rocks first to fill the whole before he can start doing his work.



The grader has cleaned up most of the other puddles and muddy sections but it still is slippery.

We reach **Drysdale River Station** and check in. It has many rules on has to stick to but the toilet block is great, all individual little bathrooms. What a treat after this hot and sticky day.

After a comfortable night with 14°C Ruedi feels much better but we decide to press on to Kununurra and have him examined at the hospital.



We still find time to stop and enjoy the country. The temperature has topped 40°C again and many bush fires can be seen.



At the **Pentecost River** Judith and Guido decide to take the old road to Wyndham while we continue on the Gibb River Road in direction of Kununurra.

We find a sandy little road just outside of Kununurra and decide to stay over night. Soon after we learn that things are not always what they seem As we set up camp a ute comes along on the other side of the fence. A young chap jumps out and asks how we are doing. Thinking that he is going to send us away Susi replies that it depends on what he is going to tell us. He looks a bit puzzled and replies that they had seen us from the station's window and just wanted to check that we had not gotten stuck in the sand. Relieved and at the same time embarrassed Susi explains to the young man that we had expected to be scared away. He seems amused about this not understanding how we could think something like this. He even goes to the extend of telling us all the good things to visit around Kununurra and also where the nice camping spots are. Well, I guess we still have a long way to go to learn what hospitality means in this large and friendly country.