

## Australia 2007

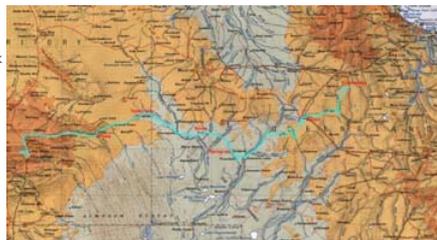
### Kooroorinya - Winton - Boulia - Alice Springs

#### Leg details

**Date** May 13 - 21, 2007

**Leg** Kooroorinya - Winton - [Lark Quarry Conservation Park](#) - Diamantina National Park - Boulia - Donohue Highway - Plenty Highway - Alice Springs

**Leg map** (click to enlarge in separate window)



On Sunday May 13th 2007 we leave **Kooroorinya** hitting the dirt again.



We travel south-west towards Winton, all on small tracks across stations. After a while the hills disappear and the country gets flat ... and we mean flat. It is flat as far as the eye can see; the view is not obstructed by many trees.



Ruedi notices that the front right break does not break correctly. The OKA pulls to the left side making breaking quite difficult. The risk of overturning the vehicle has to be taken into consideration when applying the breaks. This will have to be checked in Alice Springs.

We see many young calves; the Brahman must be having their young. We pass a cow where the calf must be just a few minutes old, just trying to get up the first time. The ground is still wet from the birth. There are also many lambs around. This is the first time we see sheep and cattle in the same paddock.

We camp a bit outside of **Winton**. We are pleased to find Internet access with our NextG modem.



As we have been on the road already for so many days without having had a chance to stock up on fresh produce we run out of Ruedi's favourite drink: fresh milk! But he has become a master in preparing "fresh" milk from powder milk. Actually we like the milk from powder milk better than the long-life milk.

On Monday morning we head into town to do the washing. As the machine only takes one-dollar coins we run out of coins halfway through drying the clothes. The post office has no one-dollar coins to spare, the bank has already closed so we have no other choice than to take the wet clothes along, drive out of town and set up the clothes line along the OKA.



With an outside temperature of close to 34°C, only 40% humidity and a light breeze Mother Nature takes care of it in no time.

After lunch we head off into the **Bladensburg National Park** and stop at the old homestead to get information. The ranger explains that this park is special because it is at the border between the flat Mitchell grass plains and the mountains. It is the home of the endangered Julia Creek Dunnart, a mouse-like marsupial.



The ranger also gives us the tip to visit the **Scrammy Lookout**.

The story goes that boundary riders sometimes became hermits, known as "hatters". One of these hatters was Scrammy Jack, so named after his right hand was crushed by a wagon wheel. "Scrammy" in an old English term means "left-handed". We leave the park and camp outside in a quarry.

After a warm night with 20.6°C we have a busy Tuesday morning, Susi working on the pictures, Ruedi fighting with the grease gun ... #!&?\*%\$



After lunch we continue through the Bladensburg NP and stop at the **Logan Falls**.

With water they must be quite a sight, but in the drought it is all left up to our imagination.  
Well, the dragon doesn't seem to mind the dry weather ...

We turn right after the park onto the Nareen - Jump-up Road only to find a gate with some very clear signs that this is a private road. Strange.  
We have been told that all roads in the Hema maps that are not explicitly marked with "private road" are maintained by the council and therefore are accessible to the public.  
The road through Colston Station is in the Hema Road Atlas and not marked.  
But as we don't want to be involved in nasty arguments we turn around and continue travelling south on our track.  
(Note: on the "Great Desert Tracks" map we later on see that the road really is marked as "private" ... ah well, sometimes we should change to the more detailed maps a bit earlier ...)



Leaving the **Allen Range** behind us the county again is flat, endlessly flat; it just disappears into the heat reflecting from the ground.  
Only some trees, some cattle and every so often a gate or grid change the scenery.

We see some Wedge-tail Eagles flying in circles.  
There are not too many eagles left in this section of Queensland, as they used to be hunted. At times there had even a bounty been placed on their claws.  
The farmers told us that the eagles actually steal lambs.  
They take the lambs up in the air and drop them to the ground to kill them. As the lambs bounce off the ground the eagles pick them up again in flight and take them to their nest.  
They need 2 lambs a day to raise their young ... some farmers say they have even seen eagles taking freshly born calves away ... we doubt a bit.

We turn right into an official Stock Route and head north-west.  
The country changes to red soil and a good growth of various sorts of trees.



It looks like some of the creeks have caused trouble to passers-by previously during the wet season.  
This creek passage has a "flood-bypass" made of logs.



Every so often we pass areas where nothing seems to grow; even the trees are dead and dry.  
Here we find a cow that did not make it.  
This happens when cattle are shifted to another paddock and the gates closed behind them.  
If not all make it through the gate on time the ones left behind will die of thirst.  
The cow has not even decomposed, just dried out in the scorching sun ...



We also learn that on dusty roads, if the wind comes from behind you (and even if it is just a soft breeze ...) when you approach a closed gate you better wind up the windows and wait inside the cabin until the dust cloud has passed you.  
Otherwise you and the interior of the cabin will be dusted with very fine red sand...

Reaching the **Winton - Jundah Road** we head south towards the Tully Range, the home of the Lark Quarry Conservation Park, where we want to visit the famous dinosaur stampede.  
We camp just round the corner of the turn-off.

Ruedi is busy modifying the battery caps. The caps have to pass on the battery gas to poly-pipes so the gas can be brought outside of the dust tight battery compartment.  
Aluminium has not proven to be a good material as it corrugates with the acidic fumes. Some kind of a sublimate is formed clogging up the tubes forcing the gas to escape into the closed compartment.

In the worst case a spark could blow up the whole battery as there are fans running close by.  
So Ruedi is replacing them with brass fittings.

As the Sikka he is using to glue them in has to dry he leaves the hatch open over night.

The clouds still hang around and it is a warm and muggy night, still 29°C at 9 PM.

As it has to come (else we would not have written the whole story), in the middle of the night we wake up to rain-drops falling onto the roof of the camper ...  
Ruedi rushes out into the light rain and mounts all the fittings back onto the batteries so he can close the hatch door.

A few more drops fall and that's it with rain for the night ...

In the morning we continue to **Lark Quarry Conservation Park** . [return to top](#) ▲



We get greeted by "Mozzie" and Margaret, our guides through the park.

The explanation we get is that around 95 million years ago, a large herd of small two-legged dinosaurs gathered on the banks of a forest lake to drink.  
The herd was stalked by a large theropod - 4 tonnes of sharp-clawed, toothy, meat-eating dinosaur - panicked and stampeding across the muddy flats.  
The mud hardened preserving the tracks.

The lake slowly rose covering the tracks with the next flood. Thousands of years sediments laid down forming rock over millions of years.



And then the world changed, dinosaurs disappeared, the once lush lake now is a dry mountain range.  
Rain runoff stripped away the rocks forming gullies, mesas, hard topped escarpments.



In the 1960s Winton grazer Glen Seymour showed local expert Peter Knowles what he thought were fossilised bird tracks found at this site.

Glen thought Peter was "pulling his leg" when Peter told him they were dinosaur tracks.

In 1971 scientists from the Queensland Museum and British Museum of Natural History were in the region looking for Cretaceous mammals.

Knowing Peter's interest in fossils, they approached him.

He couldn't help them with mammals but showed them Lark Quarry and the dinosaur tracks.

At the quarry the scientists traced the sediment layer the tracks were found in across to a second hill farther west.

They predicted there would be more tracks at the same level and were right.

In 1976-77 a team of volunteers led by Queensland Museum and the University of Queensland's palaeontologists spent 18 months removing part of the hill to expose the trackways layer of the only known dinosaur stampede on earth.

The site was very remote, the road a mere track and camping conditions tough.

Vital statistics

Removed: 60 tonnes rock

Area: 210 sq m

Cleaned, photographed, moulds cast: 3'300 footprints

Heat, cold, water wildlife, careless visitors take their toll on fragile tracks ....

To prevent further erosion the tracks were covered with a roof resulting in wildlife moving under the roof into the shade during the day, damaging the tracks further by walking over them and leaving their excrements.

So they covered the tracks with hay and plastic foil. The hay got humid, self-ignited and damaged some of the tracks.



They applied for a grant and since 2002 a new building powered by solar cells conserves the panic and pandemonium of one ordinary day at a lake 95 million ago. A record of those few terrifying minutes is cast in more than 3300 fossilised footprints conserved in the Trackways building.

It tells us much about that cooler, wetter world, when dinosaurs were still in charge and the mammals' time was yet to come.



There are still many footprints hidden under the original rock.

They left it that way on purpose just in case and for what ever reason the already exposed footprints should get damaged further.

The sandstone is so fragile that the temperature and humidity in the Trackways building is kept at the same levels all year round.



Over the next few years, back in Queensland Museum's labs, each print was measured and described.

Where individual trackways could be followed, pace length, stride length and pace angulation were measured.

All up, 150 individual dinosaur trackways were mapped.

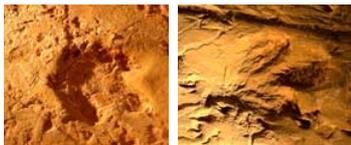
Dinosaur skeletons from all over the world with feet roughly matching the Lark Quarry tracks were examined to identify the trackmakers.

The dinosaurs' running speeds were then worked out using equations based on locomotion of living animals, incorporating size, weight and flexibility differences.

Once the scientists knew dinosaurs made the tracks, how many there were and how fast they moving, they were able to figure out what actually happened here.



How do they know it was a stampede?



The big theropod's tracks initially show it walking across the mudflat with slow, measured steps.

Suddenly it turns and charges towards the shore.

This suggests it saw the herd of smaller dinosaurs by the water's edge and tried to head them off.



The little dinosaurs all ran in the same direction at the same time, 55 degrees east-north-east back across the mudflat, their tracks crossing those left early by the theropod.

It is a good guess that they stampeded to get away.

Was one caught in the lake shallows?

We can't tell because the lake edge has eroded away. But we do know the others kept running for dear life.



We continue travelling westwards and take the **Cork - Jundah Road** towards the Diamantina.

The view of the **Tully Range** is beautiful.



Then the country gets flat again.  
There is no feed left on the paddocks, all grass has been eaten down to the ground by cattle and sheep ...  
The **Muellers Ranges** shows well, how the area gets eroded.

Shortly before **Old Cork** we sight the first sand dunes.  
The river bed of the **Diamantina River** is wide.  
We try to imagine how it must look when there is water flowing here ... impressive would be the right word for it.



The **Nisbet Range** is eye-catching with the red and white flanks of the hills.  
The **Mayne Range** has some interesting formations, real mesas (mesa in Spanish means table).

We find our selves a quiet little corner just outside the Diamantina National Park and stay over night.  
There are zillions of extremely friendly flies ....  
The breeze dies down and making the night a muggy one (22.6°C before sunrise).

On Thursday morning some rain clouds are hanging around; they forecast scattered showers for the area ....  
We drive through the Mayne range into the **Diamantina National Park**.



The hills of the range soon give way to flat, sandy and dry planes.  
We see some emus.

Wild animals have a bad habit of trying to cut across a moving vehicle in front of it.  
This emu also wants to do that and runs along the OKA. Increasing our speed would increase the risk of having the emu go for a mad dash across the truck and us hitting it.  
So we reduce the speed and drive behind it for a fair while until it makes up its mind and as predicted crosses the road.  
You can't rush wildlife ...



We follow the signs to **Janet's Leap Lookout**.  
The valley below (**Hunters Gorge, Diamantina Gates**) is covered with green trees and fresh grass.  
The marks on the river bank clearly show how the water level is falling.



But there is still a fair bit of water left in this area of the **Diamantina River**.



On the way back to the OKA we find this little critter .... do you see it?  
Click on the picture to enlarge it as usual or [Click here](#) to see the exact position of the animal.



We continue on to the **Green Tank Waterhole**, a man-made dam, built in 1960.  
There are flocks of ducks and also pelicans having a bit of a "chat" to each other.



Also the next waterhole, the **Warracoota Waterhole**, still has lots of water. Noisy white Cockatoos mark their presence.



Due to the looming rain we decide to take the same way back to the **Springvale Road** and not continue any further into the sand-dunes.

We have already found out that this sandy track gets very sticky with just a bit of water .....

We continue to **Boulia** and are surprised to see green grass. They seem to be luckier with the amount of rain they got out here.

In Boulia we fill up fuel and food for the crossing over to Alice Springs on the Donohue Highway (on the Queensland side) and the Plenty Highway (on the Northern Territory side). It's the same road, it just has different names in the two states, but don't ask us why .....

We find ourselves a spot for the night just outside of Boulia at the **Bengeacca Creek**. We even have Internet access out here. The spot is just a bit densely populated by flies.

Light drizzle sets in...



With the increasing humidity the flies get very "attached"; the string hanging on the window's shutters is quite a sight .... Once again we appreciate our fly-screens.

It rains a bit more during the night.

In the morning ABC Radio reports that the area around Burke had the best rainfall in 7 years.

We also receive an email from Marc and Teri Mendelson (Fellow travellers we made while travelling through Alice Springs and had met again in Perth last year) that the roads around Alice Springs are boggy and they had just made it back to Alice on time before the roads were closed.

The road condition sign at the beginning of the Donohue Highway last night had said "High clearance vehicles only".

We decide to check with the local police if this is still the case.

Well, it is not.

The Donohue & Plenty Highways have been closed and will stay closed until further notice.

So we move to the local caravan park, connect to power and start working on our web sites.

Even so we have a very powerful solar-system, it can not cope with fridge, lights and 2 laptops operated for several days.

The day stays cool and windy with a max. temperature of only 22°C, but at least there is no further rain and the humidity drops to 45% again.

On Saturday morning it is rather fresh with 15.4 °C but the sun is breaking through the clouds.

Ruedi checks the road report posted at the local Boulia Police station and is informed that the Donohue & Plenty Highways will reopen at 8 AM.



We leave but find the road sign at the turnoff onto the highway still saying "closed".

Hmmm ... what now?

If you get caught driving on a closed road and have caused damage to the road you can be charged with the cost of having the road repaired, which can end up in thousands of dollars.

Road Trains are normally fined with at least 1000 AUD per wheel (= 12 to 17 axles x 2 wheels x 1000 AUD).

Thanks to the Sat-Phone we can call the Boulia Police Stations (most Police phone number are listed on the Hema maps) and double-check.

The officer is a bit surprised. She tries to call "Main Roads". Since they don't work on weekends, she cannot reach them. So she checks with the road-house at the QLD/NT boarder.

When we call back a few minutes later she tells us that she has not been able to contact the council, who is responsible for openings, closings and road signs, but has spoken to

Tobermorey Station, the first station in the Northern Territory.

The Donohue Highway is open at least to the NT border, but they don't know about the Plenty Highway as nobody has come through from Alice Spring yet.

The worst that could happen is that they stop us at the border and we would have to wait at Tobermorey Station until the roads are opened on the Northern Territory side.

So we leave.



The country has changes its colours from the dry yellow to a light green.

Some of the plants have already started opening their flowers. In a day or so some bushes will be covered in bright yellow flowers.



Judging by the lush green grass the **Georgina River** area must have received a fair bit of rain in the last few days.



At one grid we find this mob of young cattle wanting to cross over into this paddock but not daring to step on the grid.

On our side of the fence there is an enclosure with larger cattle in it. There is lots of mooing going back and forth.

Looks like the youngsters have just been separated from their mothers recently and are not impressed of being deprived of their constant source of milk (Ruedi can fully understand them, as he also would winch should missing out on his daily milk).

It takes a bit of gentle persuasion from the OKA's bull-bar to get them to free the road and let us through. Even though we have a horn on our truck we are better of not using it, as the "biests" would die of laughter.

Coming from the other side of the grid would have generated a bit more effort. We should not approach cattle standing in front of a grid with the OKA as they would probably try to flee across the grid thus breaking their legs.

We fill Diesel at **Tobermorey Station** located shortly after the Queensland border.

They did not get any of the rain out.

But as till now no vehicle has come through from Alice Springs they can't tell us anything new about the road conditions.

They have heard that there is still water left on the roads and not always a way around the puddles.

As no rain is expected in the next days we decide to continue and see how far we can get.



The country gets greener and greener.

Sometimes it doesn't look like the outback at all, more like a well irrigated park.

It is amazing.



But the road gets rougher too.

We see brolgas and other water birds indicating that there must be larger puddles of water in the area.

A car comes towards us but does not stop as it passes us.

Did it come from Alice Springs or did it turn around we wonder ...

Again we drive through vast flat plains; the **Toko Range** is a welcome change in scenery.

The area around **Mt. Guide** must have received a fair bit of rain.

The road is still very soft and many puddle of water are still on the road; driving around them is like driving slalom.

The **Algamba Creek** crossing would have been closed yesterday... water lays on the side of the road, the drains on the side of the road are filled with water.

Even the **Tarilton Range** seems to have a green cover.

We decide to camp near the **Arthur Creek**.

The Sunday morning is a cold morning with only 8°C outside.

Its a fair change from the 22.6°C before sunrise we had at the Diamantina just a few days ago, if one considers that it is only 500 km away in easterly direction ....

But we have cosy 16.8°C inside the cabin and the sun warms through the large windows.

Still, for Susi it is time to exchange the shorts for long trousers, winter is coming.



We hit the dirt gain and soon after stop to have a look at the large Spinifex termite mounts on the side of the road.

If you think that this one is big, then [click here](#) ...



We are impressed about the workmanship the termites show.

For such small animals it must be a huge task to complete mounts like these.



Also some bird species have found it to be a reliable source of food, pecking holes into the mount to access the seeds.

It is also a very practical place to nest and lay eggs as the temperature is kept stable by the termites.



It looks like the black ants steal the Spinifex seeds from the termites.

Some of them have actually moved right into the termite mount or very close by ...

Today the Plenty Highway must have officially been opened again.

In less than 30 minutes we are passed by 2 cars and crossed by one.



We pass **Boundary Hill**, **Mount Cornish** and the **Jervois Range**, some red hills that look very nice with their yellow Spinifex grass covering.



Here there is a different sort of soil, more like red sand and we encounter some badly corrugated stretches of road. The OKA masters the corrugation smooth as ever due to the large wheels, the reduced tyre pressure and the soft suspension. Like a desert-ship (camel).

Ruedi has to really concentrate on where to drive.

Some more cars cross us, some driven in a real rush. We normally reduce our speed close to zero, to avoid the hail of stones this idiots generate.

It really looks like they had kept the Plenty Hwy closed on the Northern Territory side yesterday.



The **Plenty River Mica Mining Area** is the ending of the flat and open plane.

After all these flat stretches the **Harts Range** is impressive.



We find this nest.  
The animal living in it closes the entry of the nest with a white net during night.  
We had seen it previously in Kalgoorly. To our disgrace we must admit that we still don't know what animal it is ...



We pass more and more hills; many "waves" have to be crossed.



The Harts Range area must have received rain in the last few days.  
The road is pretty bad, even some puddles of water are left on it.

We get passed by some road trains.



We see them again when we reach the bitumen part of the Plenty Highway and they "dust" their tyres (= stopping and getting as much dust and sand off the tyres before they head into town. If they would not do that the first place where they stop would be marked with small sand piles ...)



Reached the bitumen again means that Ruedi has to pump the tires.  
Thanks to the OKA's compressed air it is done quickly.

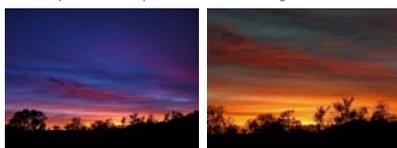


It is amazing how green the country has become. When we came through the **Strangways Range** last year it had all been yellow and burned.  
The cows for certain enjoy a good feed of lush green grass and a bit of a splashing around in the last few puddles on the side of the road.

As we turn into the **Stuart Highway** we see speed restriction signs for 130 km/h... ah yes, they only just recently implemented speed restrictions in the Northern Territory!  
We also hear on the radio that there is a white LandCruiser parked on the side of the road shortly after one of the new signs ...  
Well, no problem for us as we only drive with 90 km/h to keep the fuel consumption on a more or less acceptable level.



We turn into the **Tanami Road** in search of the **Painter Springs**.  
We find them but the water has ceased to flow. All that is left are two palms and the clogged up pipe of the bore.  
We decide to stay there for the night.  
The temperature drops to 12.6°C over night.



It is Monday, May 21, 2007, and the shops will be open in Alice Springs, so we pack up and leave towards Alice Springs.

But first we have to find our way back to the Tanami Road.

The track we have been following gets fainter and fainter, not too many cars have driven it lately, roads shown on the maps do not exist anymore ...

And suddenly we stand in front of a fence. We see the track on the other side and after some searching also finds a gate.

Getting through it is another story as the trees are too narrow for the OKA to get through, the track is badly washed out or goes across the soft sand of the creek bed.

To assist Susi indicates the best way through, runs ahead and doesn't watch where she steps.

Sure enough she stumbles.

To avoid falling into thorns with her hands she turn the body ... with the result that now her bum is sitting in the thorns!

The worse is that she need Ruedi's help to fix it ... sorry, but somehow we missed it to catch it all on camera ...

After shopping in Alice Springs we check in at the Big4 Caravan Park where Marc and Teri Mendelson are waiting for us. We discuss further travel plans but decide to give ourselves some time to get this web update done.

The next morning we head into town and arrange for a tire to be fixed.

The tire got damaged on the side wall.

As it is not deep we want to try out a technique, where a rubber patch to the damage on the side wall and baked it in at approx. 80°C for a few hours so the rubber combines with the tire's rubber.

It only costs 40 AU\$. The only other alternative is to throw away a 700 AU\$ tire and buy a new one ....

Ruedi exchanges the wheel with the spare wheel, but he misses to correctly tighten the wheel nuts with the torque spanner. Instead he does it by gut feeling, knowing that he will do it the correct way anyway roughly 10 kilometres later.

This sloppiness proves to be fatal as a few kilometres later while driving at 80 kmh, all the nuts loosen and we almost lose the wheel. This is our first, really dangerous incident.



All the threads are damaged but since the nuts are harder than the studs, Ruedi can rethread them with grease and lots of muscle power.

We find ourselves a little spot just within reach of the Alice Springs Internet reception and will stay here until the work is done ....



... we are converting slides into jpegs .....



Amazing how fast little critters make themselves at home once you stand still for a few days.

The nest of a mud-wasp on our front tyre even survived a trip into Alice Springs at 80 kmh.

The mud-wasp must feel as much at home on our OKA as we do in it!

For the weekend we decide to stay at the Big4 and discuss the travel plans in detail with Marc and Teri.

When walking through the park to see what kind of rigs have checked in we see this one ....



This must be one of the smallest set-ups we have seen so far.

It brings memories of the photos we have seen of our friends Peter and Margaret (owners of OKA 196) when they travelled the Outback Australia (including the Simpson Desert) with their Mini Cooper in the 70s ....

On Saturday evening we head into town have a jolly good time.



Marc suggest going to the Overlanders Steakhouse, famous for its steaks ..... and he wants to teach us what a "wobble board" is and how to use it ....

[Click here](#) for details (file type: .wmv, size: 287 KB).



On Sunday morning it is pancake time at the Big4.

The Caravan Park offers a free pancake breakfast with all the trimmings for the tenants.

You just get your plate and queue up as many times as you want (they cook up to 600 Pancakes.)

It is a good occasion to exchange route details with other people and the pancakes are really yummy!

On Monday we pick up the tire. Because of the beadlocks and the bolt-together rims Ruedi decides to assemble the tire on his own.



It is tedious work and has to be done with great care as otherwise the tire will leak.

The tire is placed over the bottom part of the rim.

The tubeless valve is fitted.

The tube for the beadlock is inserted, the Kevlar beadlock placed around it and the beadlock tube pumped a bit.

Then a large O-ring is fitted in the bottom part of the rim and the top part of the rim carefully placed on it. This part is the tricky one as the O-ring is the seal between the two metal rims. If this is not done well the tire will leak.

By tightening the bolts of the rim slowly and regularly the O-ring is pressed into its place thus sealing the rims.

Sounds easy but it is some 4 hours of work ....