

Australia 2008

MacDonnell Ranges

Leg details

Date May 9 - May 28, 2008

Leg Yulara - Boggy Hole - Palm Valley - Gosses Bluff - Ormiston Gorge - Redbank Gorge - Mt. Sonder - Roma Gorge - Glen Helen Gorge - Ochre Pits - Ellery Creek Big Hole - Simpsons Gap - Alice Springs - Cattlewater Pass - Ruby Gap Nature Reserve - Arltunga - Jessie Gap - Emily Gap - Rainbow Valley - Chambers Pillar - Alice Springs

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



After stocking up on fresh produce on Friday, May 9, we leave **Yulara** on the **Lasseter Highway**.



Shortly after passing the very impressive **Mt. Connor** we turn into **Luritja Road** towards Kings Canyon. We head north until we reach **Ernest Giles Road** where we stay for the night. During the night the Dingoes haul again ...

On Saturday morning we wake up to a cool 6.9°C. According to the weather-forecast this will stay like this for a while, cool nights with temperatures between 6 - 9°C and day-temperatures in the mid twenties. Soon we are on the way on the Ernest Giles Road heading east.



The road is pretty badly corrugated and we don't mind when we can turn away into the Boggy Hole track. It is a perfect day, with blue skies, temperatures around the 25°C and a bit of wind.

The track has not been driven much lately and in some sections is starting to over grow.



The passage through the **Palmer River** even has a bit of soft sand to navigate.



Slowly we make our way through the dunes, up the creeks, around the rocks. Some washouts are not bad, but we hope that later on the track will be a bit rougher.



At the waterholes close to **Running Waters** we stop for lunch.



After Running Waters the track basically leads through the river bed, sandy at times, rocky in other sections ...



We reach **Boggy Hole** in the afternoon and decide to stay for the night.



Peter gets his binoculars out and searches the rock wall for a while. He claims that he has seen rock wallabies

On Sunday, May 11, we have a bit of a sleep-in, then a relaxed long breakfast and hefty discussions over photography, wide-angle / macro, exposure -times, etc. Then its time to get ready for a walk. As we are packing the gear the ranger's ute drives onto the camping site. Quickly we head over and find Leanne on the steering wheel, one of the rangers at Palm Valley where we will have a volunteer job in July. After a bit of a talk we agree to visit tomorrow to discuss the details of our stay and what we should bring along.



Then we head down to the old police station. Some of the text on the table gets Susi in a thoughtful mood.

No doubt these ... [Aborigines] were dreadfully annoyed to find their little reservoirs discovered by such water-swallowing wretches as they doubtless thought white men and horses [not to mention cattle] to be.

Ernest Giles, one of the first white explorers in this area.
It is not difficult to realise that it must appear exceedingly strange to the blacks that whilst the white man can shoot down the emus and kangaroos he, the back fellow, is not allowed to spear the cattle.
Baldwin Spencer, biologist. Report of the Horn Scientific Expedition, 1894.

The police camp is on the Finke River.
Its occupants are the police patrol party, whose duties are to visit the various stations, and to see that the wild natives do not interfere with the white settlers or their stock. Mounted Constable Willshire. 1891



But then reality kicks in again, we have to climb on top of the hill.



From above one can see that the location for the police station was picked perfectly: the views cover almost the whole valley.



We continue on up the hill, the views just get better and better. It is very dry and there are no clouds in the sky.



Compared with the water levels we had two years ago, today the level of the waterhole is down by almost 1 meter. Instead of the clean fresh water we saw last time it is a green not very inviting looking sorrow puddle of water. The ranger had said that it is the deepest on record since 1922, they are afraid that it might even dry up if it does not rain soon. The bad quality of water also has diminished the amount of fishes, which is the reason for the lack of pelicans.



Then canyon at the other side looks very pretty too.



The climb down is a bit of a challenge too but we all manage.



Then we head back to the camp and spend the afternoon working on the vehicles, pictures and diaries.



On Monday morning we continue north and enjoy the beauty of the **Finke Creek**, later on the **Ellery Creek**. Shortly after passing the boundary of the park the road gets badly corrugated again until we reach bitumen of the **Larapinta Drive**. After a short drive past **Hermannsburg** we turn off into the **Palm Valley Road**. As we drive up the creek bed we wonder how high the water might be here after a good rainfall ... The debris in the trees is fairly high up.



The valley gets narrower and narrower; the red rocky walls of the gorge start dominating the picture. Then we reach the ranger's office where we discuss the details of our volunteer stay and what we should bring regarding provisions. Then we spot a GIS-map on the wall that shows an aerial view of a river cutting through another river.



It is exactly the same view of a part of Australia, we had flown over in 1995 on our way from Perth to Alice Springs. We always had wondered, where this spot was Susi asks Leanne, what area is displayed on this map and is informed that is the Boggy Hole area. Fancy us having driven through the Boggy Hole (blue track on right hand picture) already twice and we never realised that it was what we had been looking for! Leanne offers us to stay at the station for the next two days. As she also mentions the pretty sunsets we decide to accept the offer for one night and then move down to the camp ground to be there for the rangers talk on Tuesday. Later on Andrew, the head-ranger, comes back from his holiday and we have a quick chat with him too.



For the sunset we decide to climb on top of one of the little hills.



The views are great.



Ruedi has to explore the next outcrops too. Funny how one can see "things" in rocks, like here this head of a turtle at least Susi sees one



Usually tourists drive the track to the Palm Valley and back and have a rather "worms-eye view" of its size; from up here we start to realise how large the valley really is!



The red of the rock walls gets really intense with the sunset. Then the stars appear and Ruedi trains his stargazer knowledge On Tuesday morning Heidi & Peter leave for the walk through the Palm Valley.



We move down to the camp ground for a bit of PC-work and also to reserve two good sites with good views of the rock walls. In the evening Andrew the ranger comes down for the talk around the camp-fire.

On Wednesday, May 14, after a rather cool night with 7.6°C we leave the campground and head down to the **Mpaara trail** for a bit of hiking.



On the red walls one can see the marks left by the water leaving mineral residues.

We stop at the old ranger station that was abandoned after the big flood in April 1988. Heavy rains falling over the Finke's catchment sent one of the two biggest floods in 800 years swirling past it and flooded the whole area. The ranger station still stands there with all its equipment, radio, etc. and it is interesting to peak through the windows.



Today animals have taken possession of it

Much of Palm Valley has a permanent shallow water table. According to the ranger's talk the water consumed by the palm today is thousands of years old. But the water table is falling and the palms are starting to suffer they have already lost of a few to them



Only a few palms grow in the river bed because their root system is unable to withstand the eroding power of its larger floods.



We leave the river bed and follow the track into the valley.



Pretty grevillias have started blooming.



A good example of how erosion works can be seen along the track.



For us Swiss this rock looks a bit like the Matterhorn, one of Switzerland most famous' mountains.



As the track heads up the views get better and better.



Then we reach the watershed and can enjoy the view into the large valley.



On the way down we see this very pretty coloured part of the ground.



We also pass the boards displaying the Mpaara Story, a story about the Torny Frogmouth man

Then we leave the Palm Valley in direction of Ormiston Gorge on the **Namatjira Drive**.



The track is still mostly dirt but large trucks use it. Some parts are already covered with bitumen and the rest including the Mereenie Loop will be done until the end of 2009 ... all in the name of tourism ...



We stop at **Gosses Bluff** (Tnorala) for a bit of a walk.



Of course we have to climb the little hill to the lookout from where one can get a good impression of the size of the crater.



The information tables on the formation of the bluff are very good. For some [more details please click here](#).

Susi also likes the legend:



In the Dreamtime, a large group of women danced across the sky, as the Milky Way. They were stars taking the form of women. During this ceremonial dance of the Milky Way Women, a mother put her baby aside, resting in his turna, a wooden baby carrier. The turna toppled over the edge of the dancing area and fell to the earth. The baby fell down into the ground and his turna fell hard on top of him. At the place where it crashed into the ground, rocks were forced up from underneath, forming the circular walls of Tnorala. The Milky Way Baby was covered with sand and hidden from view. The mother, as the Evening Star, and the father, as the Morning Star, are still looking for their missing baby.



On the way to Ormiston Gorge we past Mt. Sonder, which we plan to hike later this week.

Then we reach the **Ormiston Gorge** Campground and catch the second last space ... This place is packet, which is not to our liking ... and the showers only have cold water!!!! Ah well, we will survive for one night.

In the evening there is a slide show at the amphitheatre, where we learn a lot. Also the Ormiston Pound Walk is mentioned and that it should be done counter-clockwise. Good to know.

On Thursday after a warm night with 12.6°C and we can expect some warmer temperatures for the day.



We leave for the **Ormiston Pound Walk**. It is another beautiful day, not too cold, no clouds, just right for a walk.



The walking track takes us into the valley and up a ridge.



The views are splendid.



Then we head back towards the gorge.



It is just a bit after midday and the rock walls shine deeply red.



Here again we can observe the trees and how they hang on to the sheer rock walls. We wonder what they live off and how they hold on to the rocks ...



We also find proof of that it a long time ago had been covered with water and the waves left their marks in the soft sediment before they fossilized.



The water table in the gorge is usually higher. Now we can just look at the marks left on the rocks. But they are very pretty and worth having a look at.



There are also many different rocks here.



Some of them look like as if a liquid has penetrated them and thus changed the rock or at least changed the colour of it.



When looking at the remains of this tree again we wonder how this is possible. The dead tree seems to be "talking" at us shame we cannot understand it



A bit further down in the gorge there is still some water left. Again we are fascinated by the reflection of the gorge's walls.



After lunch we head up to the Ghost Gum Lookout.



The Ormiston Pound and Ghost Gum walks are of the nicer walks we have done in the area and we highly recommend them.

After a refreshing cold shower (there was still no warm water) we leave Ormiston Gorge Camping and head down towards Glen Helen to look for the entry to the 2 Mile Creek 4WD camping.

This camping was mentioned on the map in the park but somehow none of us remembers seeing any sign pointing to its entry.

We reach the Namatjira Drive again without having found the entrance so we head to the **Mt. Sonder Lookout** to have a look at the surrounding area from there.

From there we recognise the waterhole just below us as being the one shown on a picture in last night's presentation ... and now we also see the small entry track!

The **2 Mile Creek 4WD Camping** information table is only displayed on the track a few hundred meters away from the Larapinta Drive ... maybe because of the entry to Glen Helen Gorge commercial campground right opposite ... ?



Anyway, we find ourselves a nice spot and have a peaceful rest of the day.

Susi goes nature watching ... birds, plants ... and the flowers are tiny!

Later on in the afternoon we notice that the wind is changing its direction.

Within minutes the temperature rises from 29°C to 32°C.

Amazing!

So far we had only experienced this phenomenon along the coast.



The evening is warm and we can for once sit outside and enjoy nature at its best.

On Friday, May 17, we have an easy morning.

After lunch we "move house" to **Redbank Gorge**.



The road to the gorge is very badly corrugated.

We set up camp at the **Ridges Camp**, as it is closer to the departure point for the walk.

The toilet has to be shared with a little gecko ...



We head down to the Redbank Gorge Carpark and the day-use -area for a walk.



The waterhole still has water all at the end.

Ruedi is the only brave one that dares putting his feet into the cold water.



In the light of the late afternoon the walls of the gorge shine in an intensive orange.

It is very pretty.
We also spot some rock wallabies.



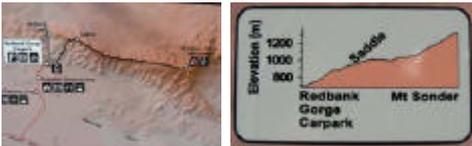
We can also get some glimpses of Mt. Sonder.



The hike on top to Mt. Sonder is the last part of the **Larapinta Trail**.
The Larapinta Trail into the West MacDonnell Ranges is divided into 13 sections of varying length and covers a total of 250 km.
As walkers can join or leave the Trail at regular intervals along its route the trail can be enjoyed as a connected series of overnight walks, or a challenging, two week adventure.
Maybe one day we will also do parts of it ...?

When returning to the car park after the walk we find a couple there that has just returned from the hike to Mt. Sonder. They had left at 8 am and had been in the hike for 8 hours.
OK, this for us means that we have to get up early ...

On Saturday morning at 5:30 AM the alarm gets us out of the warm bed.
Luckily the night has not been a cold one with 12.6°C and we pack the winter woollies into the backpacks.



In Heidi & Peter's vehicle we ride down to the Redbank Gorge Carpark and have one last look at the map.



We start the hike just as the day dawns and quickly gain height.



Every kilometre there is a marker so we can keep track where we are and how much more we have ahead of us.



Then we reach the end of the Mt. Sonder Lookout walk.
The sign says: "Experienced and well prepared walkers can continue onto the southern summit"
We begin to wonder, what lays ahead of us ...



The higher we hike the prettier the views get.

Soon a wind starts blowing and gets stronger and stronger.
It is pretty cold and we regret not having taken gloves along (when we come back to the camp and check the thermometer we find that the temperature had dropped by 2°C after we had left).



The wind gets very annoying when crossing ridges.
By now it must be blowing with at least 40 Km/h, the gusts are even higher!



We have almost reached the top.



And then we are rewarded with stunning views.



Of course we have to fill in the visitor book. We also find the entry of friends of ours, Judith & Guido, who had been here almost two years ago.



As it is too cold and windy to have lunch at the top we head down and find ourselves a spot that is a bit more protected.



We head down and after approx 7.5 hours reach the day-use-area again. With sore feet but happy we get into Peter & Heidi's vehicle and drive back to the camp for a hot shower. After some well deserved spaghetti we have an early night. Sunday morning starts with a long breakfast with hot chocolate, fruit loaf, bread and three different jams. Then we head west to Roma Gorge turn-off. The track is marked for high clearance vehicles only.



It basically goes up the creek bed and in some parts is a bit rough. The OKA has no issues with the roughness but we have to deviate a few times because of the low tree branches. One time we hit a branch and Peter reports that it might have caused some damage ... Peter & Heidi have some issues with the Toyotas departure angle but also manage.



We find some dead cattle along the track and wonder what went wrong here ...



Then we reach **Roma Gorge**, an ancient sacred site with petroglyphs, carvings made into stone by the Aborigines a long time ago. Roma Gorge was traditionally a special men's ceremony place. Women did not visit it. The custodians say that the meaning of many of the petroglyphs is "men's business": It is sacred and cannot be revealed to people not initiated in Aboriginal Law.



Some symbols custodians can talk about. This figure represents Itaya, the Moon Man. The rays show that he is shining magically "like a diamond". The boomerangs, shaped like the number seven, are the killer boomerangs that Arrernte men always travelled with. The Arrernte used boomerangs for fighting, not spears. As one Aboriginal custodian put it: "If anyone bin standing he'd throw and kill 'em!"



Concentric circles usually indicate a waterhole. Here they also mark an important boundary between different groups of Western Arrernte people. This boundary, set down by events in the Tnengkarre, separates the Perte Tyurretye, MacDonnell Range, people from another group whose country is south of here. In the past, people on either side of this boundary would trade for access to and hunting rights on each other's land. Today, the custodians from each side of the boundary recognise that they are responsible for and can speak for only their end of the gorge.



Western Arrernte custodians say that some of the petroglyphs were made by their human ancestors, and some by spirits as they travelled through in the Dreamtime.

Hundreds or perhaps thousands of years ago, men made engravings by patiently pecking the sandstone surface, using a hammerstone and a sharp, pointed stone or bone chisel. Comparisons with engravings dated elsewhere suggest some of them are as old as 6'000 to 8'000 years. Excavations of ancient campsites in central Australia show that Aboriginal people have lived in the region for at least 10'000 years and possibly much longer.



In the red rock walls we can again spot fossilized ripples and also some Rock-wallabies. It's a shame that the wallabies are so shy.



Next stop is **Glen Helen Gorge**. A short walk takes us to the permanent waterhole.

The Glen Helen Gorge waterhole, like also the Ormiston Gorge waterhole, is part of the Finke River System. When the Finke River floods the water from here flows south to Palm Valley and the Boggy Hole waterhole and after a long trip they will eventually end up in the western Simpson Desert!



During drought, the Glen Helen waterhole is a refuge for the nine species of fish known to inhabit the Finke River system. Waterbirds such as ducks, herons and waders live here permanently, while pelicans and black swans appear from time to time. Thanks to its chain of waterholes, the Finke is like a highway for migratory waterbirds.

The Finke is often described as the world's oldest river. It has been following the same general course for about 100 million years. Originally the land surface was a lot higher than today and the river flowed along a shallow valley above Glen Helen Gorge. Then, about 15 million years ago, earth movements caused the landscape to tilt downwards to the south. This increased the river's erosive power, enabling it to lower the land surface and so carve out the present gorge.



Some interesting gum trees can be seen in Glen Helen. They have seen rough times but they have recovered, leaving some colourful marks on the bark lots of space for the imagination Then we head across the road to the 2 Mile 4WD Camping, find ourselves a nice spot on top of a small hill and have an easy afternoon.



The views are nice: Mt. Sonder looks impressive from here too.



Ruedi inspects the roof and finds slight damages to one of the solar panels. Bad news is the antenna of the Iridium Sat-phone: the cable has been ripped out of the antenna. Luckily Peter has a spare one and Ruedi manages to get all fixed before nightfall.



We also find a real-life example on how the mistletoe is spread. Some of the ripe berries have fallen down on the twig below and we can look how they stick on and if not disturbed will eventually "tap" into the host -plant and become a new mistletoe.

On Monday, May 19, we continue on the Namatjira Drive in direction of Alice Springs.



We stop at the **Ochre Pits**. The formation of the different colours and their traditional uses are quite interesting. [Click here to read more about it.](#)

Next stop is **Ellery Creek Big Hole**. There are quite a few vehicles there already.



We head to the waterhole and take in the nice setting.

Lots of finches sit in the trees and have their say about the people walking around their waterhole. Some people just cannot shut up and the birds are scared away over and over again. The group of quiet people waiting for the noisy ones to go away grows slowly but surely. They just sit and wait quietly
Then the tour-bus of the noisy buggers finally leaves and peace and quiet sets in.



Soon the birds start coming down from the trees to have a drink of water, first the finches, then the Spinifex pigeons. It is such a peaceful moment and we all just watch and enjoy.



On the way back we see some pretty rocks. At the information shelter we find some interesting details on the formation of the MacDonnell Ranges and Ellery Creek. [For some details please click here.](#)



We also find bags around a tree. We find out that this is done when areas need to be reafforested. Seeds from local trees are collected, seedlings cultivated from them and then planted in the areas. Ruedi remembers a lookout on the right side of the road from our visit in 1995.



We find it to be **Point Howard Lookout** and stop for lunch. Here the MacDonnell Ranges and their erosion can be seen very nicely. Then we reach **Standley Chasm**. They want 8\$ entry fee per person As we are too late for the special light that illuminates the chasm at approx. 11 AM we decide to skip it and continue on to **Simpsons Gap**.



We are lucky and a Euro (or Wallaroo) is coming down for a drink. [Click here for a movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 613 KB).

Then we head into **Alice Springs** and after a bit of shopping take a site at the Big4 Camping.



The Big4 has an excellent selection of gums and plants that attract lots of insects and birds. There is always something singing or hopping around in the trees.



Tuesday is our shopping and relaxing day. We have to stock up for the next trip: 7 days of off-roading around Alice Springs. On Wednesday, May 21, we leave Alice Springs in northerly direction on the **Stuart Highway**.



Then we turn east into the **Arltunga Tourist Drive** and then north onto the **Pinnacle Road**.



As we stop for lunch we find these plants and find out that these are wild passions fruit (*Capparis spinosa* var. *nummularia*). The fruits will be yellow when ripe and usually split open revealing their bitter black seeds and edible yellow pulp.



When we reach the Aboriginal Community we are pleased to see that the rubbish that was there two years ago has been removed. It looks well kept, even the fence and gate have been replaced. Good to see that things are moving in a good direction.



Then we reach the bitumen of the **Plenty Highway** and head east on it for a short distance. Soon we reach the sign for the **East MacDonnell 4x4 Route** heading south and turn into the track.



The track leads us over the **Cattlewater Pass Track**. We find that it has deteriorated quite a bit since we came through here in 2006. There must have been a bit of rain too; the track has nasty wash-outs. But besides the tilting sections that generate a bit of adrenalin all goes well. The OKA handles it beautifully, actually much better than expected. We find ourselves a nice spot at the Cattlewater Pass and stay for the night.



On Thursday morning, after a cold night with only 4.4°C, we continue our way over the Cattlewater Pass. Not much after we leave Heidi is on the radio and warns us of a nasty washout. We must have taken a better line than they have and don't find it that bad, but we encounter some low-lying trees which cause us a bit of trouble.



Shortly before we reach **Ambalindum** we have to cross a creek bed and Peter has to raise his rear bumper. Even so he just barely avoids hitting the ground with it. Here the better clearance of the OKA comes into play, we just drive through the bed, no worries.

Then we turn towards **Claraville** and pass a stretch of deep bull dust. It looks like the OKA is driving through brown water.



After Claraville we find another stretch of bull dust. When Susi tries to get up on the embankment she sinks knee-deep into bull dust. Fascinating!

[Click here for a movie on the bull dust](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 4'381 KB).



Then we reach **Arltunga** and visit the interesting Visitors Centre. The exhibition and the old photos give a good insight into the harsh conditions these people had to live with. [For more details please click here.](#)



Peter tries his luck with crushing some ore-bearing rocks but does not find any gold in it ...



During lunch we also have some time to observe the birds. The colours are just amazing.

As we want to reach Ruby Gap today we decide that we will visit the mines on the way back.

The track up to Ruby Gap is marked as 4 - 5 (Cattlewater Pass was 2 - 3).

We wonder what lays ahead of us



The only "problem" we encounter in the section up to the last station is corrugation ... Then the track gets narrower, partially passes through the river bed, but still not really the 4-5 marked.

We arrive at the park's entrance and study the plan.

As it is already 4:30 PM we decide to tackle the rough section tomorrow.

Right after the park entrance the track leads down into the river bed over a rocky and steep section.

Aha, we have reached level 4!

Then there is a long section of soft sand to the gate.

The sand is soft and deep but we manage well.

After the gate the sand continues.

Then we reach the other side of the river bed and head up the bank over another rough and rocky section.

This is more to our OKA's liking, this is what it was built for!



The track over the next sand section has some soft edges and it does not take long until the OKA's back gets a bit of the track and we are bogged well, not really bogged After we have lowered the tyres to sand-pressure and Peter has removed a bit of sand around the OKA's wheels we are off again.

Well, the weight again



Soon after we pass a nice spot for the night and decide to call it a day.



On Friday, May 23, after another cold night we start the drive up through the gorge.

The track continues through the river bed, over boulders, some sections with nasty rock -bands (feels almost like driving up an escalator ...) but the OKA handles all very nicely.



We also see this Puffball (*Pisolithus tinctorius*).

For Aboriginal people this was bush tucker, they eat it while young and soft, either raw or cooked.

Had it looked a bit fresher we might have given it a go and made a mushroom dish with it.



Then we reach sign "Vehicles not recommended past this point".

Aha, looks like we have reached the section with difficulty -grade 5.



The river bed is very pretty with its reeds and water holes.



But it also has a rough track in it. Ruedi gets a bit bogged between some rocks. Once afloat again Peter guides him through the rock labyrinth.



The track is a challenge to the vehicles and the drivers. Luckily we have old tyres on that will be replaced once we are back in Alice Springs!



The track leads down to the river bed and soon after we hit a nasty spot with big boulders that have to be navigated. Peter guides Ruedi through it, the OKA performs beautifully again.

Heidi & Peter decide to perform a bit of "road-building" before getting their Landcruiser through. We sure are kept busy today - good exercise!



Then the track gets a bit easier and we make a bit more progress.



Then we reach the end of the track, a sign with "No vehicles beyond this point - walkers only". We get the hats and cameras and walk the 300m into **Glen Annie Gorge**.



The variety of blooming flowers is unexpected.



Again some of the flowers are tiny, this one maybe 2 mm large ...



We also find some wild tobacco.



We pass many waterholes on the way. We are also surprised how much water there is still available.



The finches noisily fly around one and get a drink from it.



But it is obvious that the water is getting less and less, some of the water in the waterholes is not looking too healthy anymore. Obviously the animals rather dig a bit and get fresh water than drinking from the spoiled one.



The walls of the gorge are very pretty, the colours very vivid.



Then Heidi finds the first "ruby". Soon fossicking has become the most important thing. Heidi finds a spot where the sand is red with small garnets. We all get very busy but after a while it is already time to return to the vehicles as we have a fair way to drive back.



As we walk through the gorge Ruedi finds a spot with larger garnets. We cannot resist and get busy once more After a while we can tear ourselves away, but only just. It is really hard not to look for those silly stones, it's like a fever!



On the way back to the vehicles we have a bit of time to study nature. The tree is a great example of survival and adjusting to the circumstances.



The reflections in the water keep Susi busy



Then we reach the vehicles and head back, allowing the vehicles to slowly "walk" over the rocks.



At the tricky sections, especially where large solid rocks are present on the left and right a bit of guidance helps a lot.



Some areas seem to have become soooo much rougher during the day ... even Ruedi decides to do join the road -construction crew



Then it gets a bit easier and soon we reach our camping spot and settle for the night.
 Saturday is like all the other days in the last few weeks, bright and sunny.
 But winter has definitely set in, the night temperatures now seem to stay around the 4°C mark each night.



We leave Ruby Gap Nature Reserve towards Arltunga.
 Today we take our time and visit the mine sites.



At our first stop only a few walls are left of the buildings that were used by the miners.
 As there was no building material available they mostly used tents or wooden huts.
 It takes a bit of imagination to visualize the "life style" they had had.
 The area where all the different mines sites had been is quite large.
 There is actually still one mine active but even with binoculars we cannot see much action there.



We crawl all over the place and have a look for rocks that might contain gold but have no luck, all we find is this white "thing", probably some kind of a spider nest.



Of course we have to climb down into the old mine shaft.



Imagine working down here!
 One cannot stand up upright, has to crawl around here you don't need too much imagination to figure out that it must have been a tough job!



We also visit the old Police station.
 If you are interested in more details and you have not yet read the Arltunga sheet [please click here for more details](#).
 Then we head east to **Trephina Gorge** where we choose the 4WD track up to the **John Hayes Rockhole**, where we stay for the night.
 On Sunday, May 25, we leave Trephina Gorge and drive west.



Corroboree Rock is the first stop.
 Only when walking around it one can see the different shapes the rock offers.



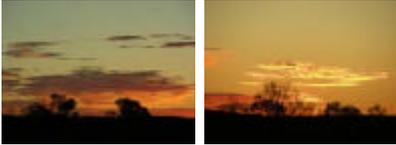
Next are stops at **Jessie & Emily Gap**.
 The rock art is a bit special as it depicts caterpillars.
 After a short stop in Alice Springs we head south on the Stuart Highway and turn east towards **Rainbow Valley** where we want to stay for the night.
 The dirt track is badly corrugated and even we in the Oka have to reduce the speed as all rattles and shakes.



As we want to watch the sunset the photographers get into position.



Pretty, isn't it?



And look at the very colourful sunset on the other side!



On Monday after a very pretty sunrise we leave rather early as we have quite a distance ahead of us.



We head south on the Stuart Highway and turn east onto **Hugh River Stock Route**. The track is in good condition but one still has to watch out for odd washouts every so often.



The track leads through a country of Gibber Plains and sand dunes ...



... dotted with "things" so Susi & Heidi always have a reason to stop and take pictures



We cross the railroad track of "The Ghan", drive through the river bed of the Hugh River (looks like it can get pretty whet here when it really rains ..) and there are a few gates to be opened and closed, just to keep the co-driver busy. The new rules are also made very clear ...

Then we reach the **Old Ghan Road** and turn south.



In two weeks time the Finke Desert Race will be held in this area. Most of track is through the dunes but some stretches will be held on the road. They expect contestants to reach speed of up to 180 km/h on this dirt road!



The track in this area leads through a lot of dips and creek beds. It seems to generate casualties every so often; crosses and car-wrecks at the side of the road remind of this.

At **Maryvale** we turn off towards Chambers Pillar.



The road gets very badly corrugated.

As fireplaces are provided at Chambers Pillar we collect some firewood.



The first spot we pick has lots of wood lying on the ground but all is completely hollow, all eaten by termites. Soon after we reach a riverbed and collect some driftwood there.



Then we reach the passage over the hills that leads into the sand dunes. The track is steep and rather rough, even though it has been graded since we were here in 2006.



The view from the ridge of the Charlotte Range is pretty. One can see the track over the sand dunes into Chambers Pillar.



When we reach the gate we switch to UHF 10 and hear a vehicle announcing its way outbound. We call them and let them know that and let them know where we are. When they reach them a bit later on it turns out that is Leigh, a Tour-operator from Alice, who also owns an OKA.



After a quick chat we continue on and reach **Chambers Pillar**.



We set up camp and put up the tent as we intend to stay tomorrow too. On Tuesday we have a quiet day and work on our PCs.



In the afternoon we walk to the Chambers Pillar and check on the engravings.



The most famous ones must be Alfred Giles, but many more have left their names here. To read more about them [please click here](#).



Then it's time to get the fire going. We want to try to cook on the open fire, a first for all four of us.

Menu is potatoes, tomatoes, onions and chicken, all cooked on the hot plate - the standard Aussie camping feed.

First task is to get the firewood into pieces that will fit into the provided fireplace.



Ruedi decides to get the chainsaw out.

The wood seems to be incredibly hard.

Maybe it is that famous Ironwood that makes axes go blunt in not time?



Then Ruedi has a good look at the chain of the saw and finds that he mounted it the wrong way round.

Once that is fixed the wood is cut down in no time



Ruedi takes the word "hot plate" very serious and gets a fire going that REALLY heats the plate.

When Susi places oil on the plate to get it ready for the potatoes the oil goes up in smoke and catches fire! Dummies go camping :-)

The spuds turn black but can be rescued and still taste fine.

The rest of the cooking works pretty well and the first outback BBQ is a success.

On Wednesday, May 28, we head back to the Old Ghan Road and stop in Maryvale to visit the Titjikala Community Art & Craft Centre.

Susi sees a painting with honey ants and would like to buy it.

But it is framed and we cannot have it in the OKA for the next year or until we go to Perth the next time ... so she refrains from buying it.

Later on she gets the idea that she could ship it to Queensland to her brother's place.

So we decide to get the picture next week, when we head down to Finke for the Desert Race.

On the way back to Alice Springs we get passed by a few motorcycles training for the race.

The speeds they use on this corrugated road are just crazy!

Then we reach **Alice Springs**, check in at the caravan park and this is the end of this journey.

No liability for timeliness, integrity and correctness of this document is taken.
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