

Desert Trek 2009 - Birdsville to Isisford

Graham and Chris on tour - 2009 Part 2

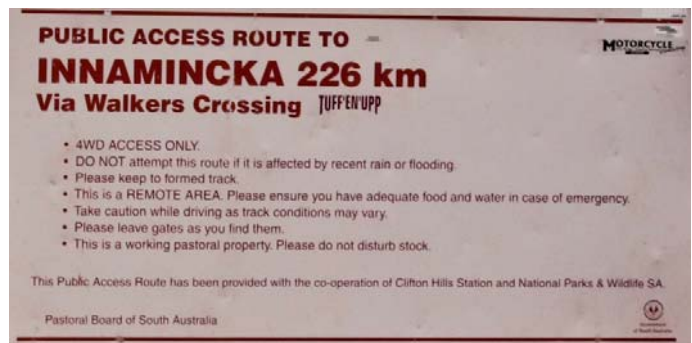
Heading West

After a most enjoyable time in Birdsville and the immediate area we headed west via Walkers Crossing to Innamincka. The sign at the start of this road is self explanatory. In retrospect I am disappointed we did not stop and take a few more pictures along this route as it was a wonderful drive with a mixture of sand hills and gibbers and



Setting out for Innamincka via Walkers Crossing—Turn off the Birdsville Track about 100km south of Birdsville

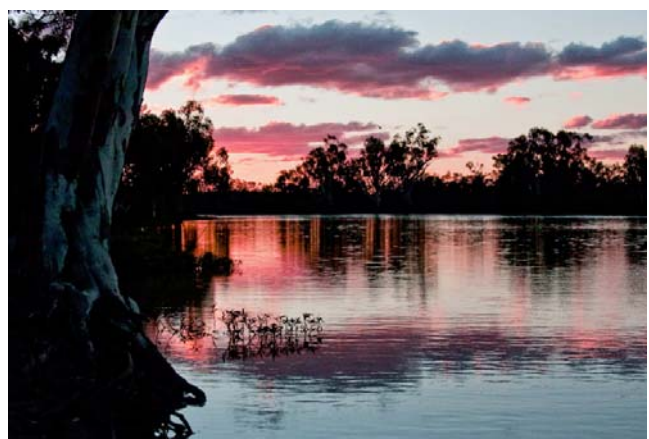
old dry lakes. We arrived in Innamincka about 30min before sunset so had little opportunity to head out to one of the many camp sites on Coopers Creek so camped on the town common for the night. The following day we headed straight out to Cullyamurra Waterhole and set up camp. This is a waterhole that is very dear to us from our trek last year. Our camp spot from last year was already occupied so we set out to find an alternate and happened upon a couple who were just packing up in a very secluded spot -



Camp Site Cullyamurra Waterhole



Cullyamurra Waterhole



Dusk from our campsite - Cullyamurra



Fewer birds this year but still a majestic Pelican or two



Incongruous sign departing Innamincka

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what luck! We pride ourselves in scoring very good camp sites and this one was an absolute ripper. The downside was that there were far less birds around than last year. When we came across a couple of local rangers and mentioned the reduction in birds they suggested that it was due to the increase in water in the desert regions and so the birds have far more choices than in normal years. Despite the lack of birds it was still a very enjoyable stay. After 4 days we headed into Innamincka for a shower and supplies, plus coffee (Espresso Machine is a recent addition in Innamincka and much appreciated), before heading out to Coongie Lake. Now don't get me wrong, we do have our daily shower when camped in the bush with a solar heated shower or gas heated portable shower, but it is hard to beat the full blast of a regular shower which the Innamincka Progress Association Provides at a very cheap rate (\$2). Pretty good when I think the total population of Innamincka is around 50. On leaving Innamincka you are confronted by this sign - "Floodway, Next 47 Km" and when you look at the surrounding country side it really beggars belief. It's almost as if someone had put the sign up as a joke. Excitedly we headed for Coongie Lake and after the wonderful experience of last year we hoped that this

year would not be a disappointment. Again we were very fortunate in finding what must be the best camp spot on the lake. At Coongie you can either camp on Coopers Creek or camp lakeside on Coongie Lake. However



Our Camp on Coongie Lake



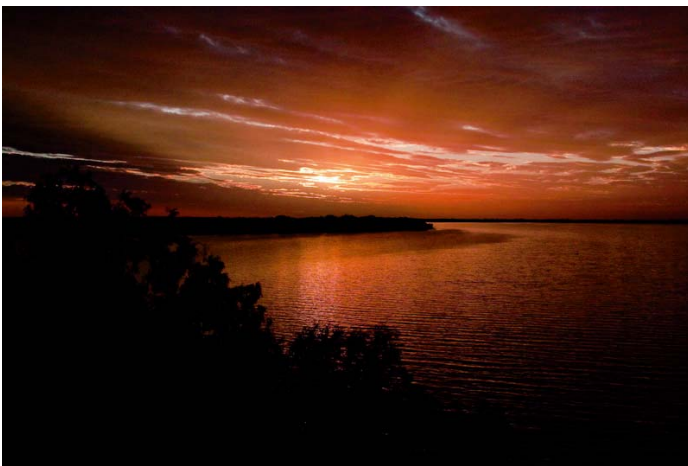
Black Kite at Coongie Lake

to camp lakeside you must first negotiate a scary looking sand hill which often frightens many would be campers. However in actual fact the sand hill really is quite a pussy but people do seem to be able to get bogged from time to time. Anyway this sand hill seems to scare many travellers, especially those with trailers, and so competition for the best camp spots is somewhat eased. Beyond this initial sand hill there is considerably more sand to negotiate to get to the really good spots so with this in mind we put the Prado in low range 4WD and after a while came up trumps with an excellent camp spot. Coongie Lake is very special to us and I can only hope that the photos can at least go part way in conveying its many moods and colours. Some days it is tranquil and some days it is windy and blustery. The contrast between desert and lake is truly remarkable. It really is quite amusing sometimes with other people in the area. One night we were sitting down after dinner, enjoying the tranquillity, when we heard car motors breaking the silence. In these remote sites it is very unusual for people to be



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driving around after dark, particularly when there are difficult sand hills to negotiate. Shortly afterwards there was silence followed by motors being revved anew. A vehicle then went off over the sand hills away from the area followed by another vehicle which was obviously in trouble. We could see in the distance the lights in the vehicle in the night sky as they made several attempts to cross a sand hill without success. As we were the only



Sunset - Same scene - 10 Minutes Apart

camp around I said to Chris that we should perhaps go and see if they need some help. Well when we reached the vehicle it was a middle aged couple trying to get their Aussie made OKA 4WD (gutless heap of scrap metal) over a sand hill. Apparently they had been summoned by a fellow who had become bogged in a creek crossing



Eastern Sky at sunset



Two inseparable Wedgetail Eagles survey their domain

between a smaller lake and the main Coongie Lake. Not realizing that we were nearby, he walked about 1.5 Km to fetch help. Now he thought the track that he was on circled back to Innamincka some 110km away but when he realized that he would only end up in the middle of the desert he had turned back and subsequently gotten bogged in the creek. Once the older couple had rescued him from the creek he just set off across the sand hills leaving the couple stranded without making sure that they were OK. He was apparently "in a hurry" as he had



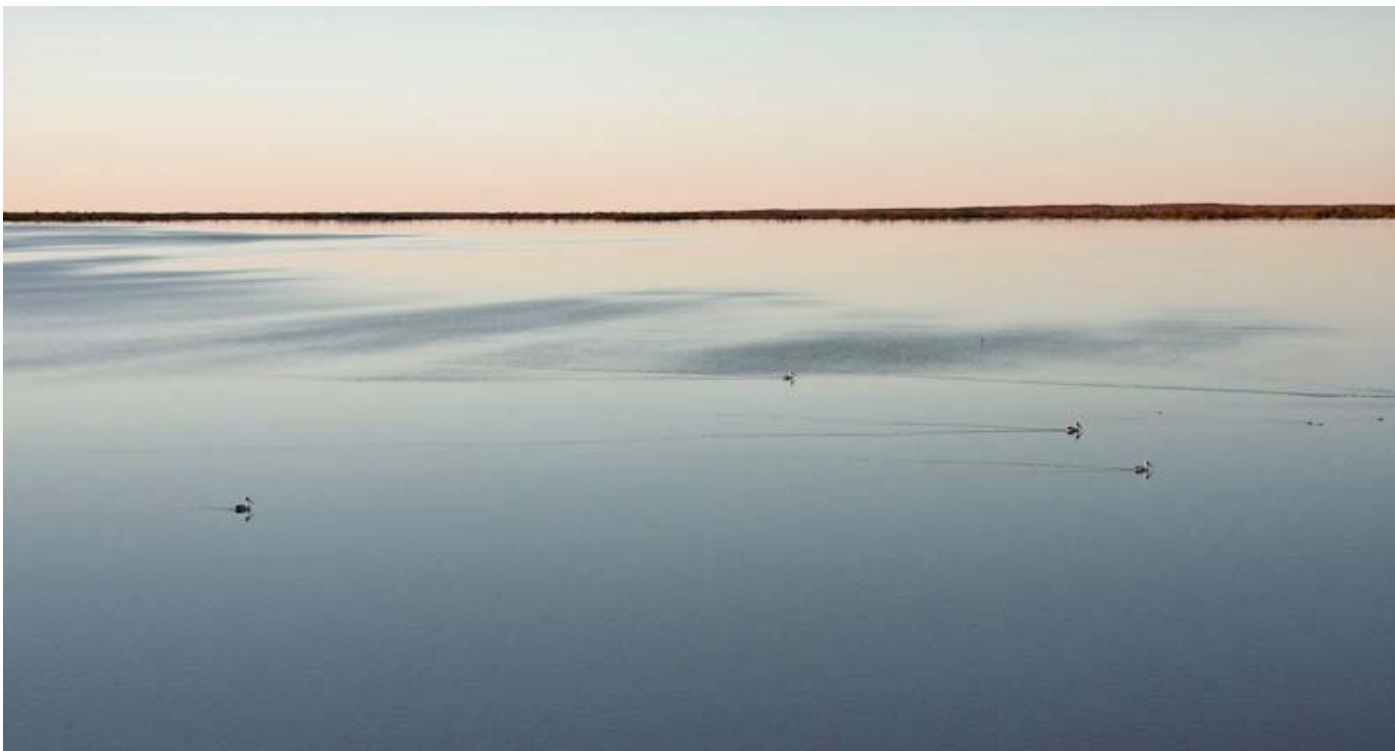


Doing a little exploring



We could watch the pelicans for hours

to be in Mt Isa by the following day to help count birds from the air. He must have had the brains of an ant because it is very hard to explain just how dangerous it is driving these tracks at night. Not only because they are only two wheel tracks but also due to the wild life on the road. Anyway, we suggested to the couple that they should attempt to get back to their camp by crossing the sand hill near our camp instead of the one that they were finding impossible, so they followed us back to our camp and after 4 attempts were on their way but not without a few run ups that we could hear in the still night air at subsequent sand hills , before reaching their



Late afternoon on Coongie

camp.

Next day we were lounging around our camp when we were startled by a bloke wondering into our camp. Luckily we were decent, and he was seeking our aid in getting him and his family out of the creek crossing. We were flummoxed; we could not believe that anyone else could get bogged in the creek let alone in broad daylight but there you go. So we hopped in our 4WD and headed off to rescue the bloke and his family from the creek. On our arrival at the crossing there was already another good Samaritan, who had happened by, snatching (the process of using a snatch strap to extradite a car from a bog) the bogged car out of the creek.

Now the ridiculous thing about these two cars getting bogged in this creek is that if they had followed standard practice of crossing creeks they would have crossed on hard base with water not even as high as their axles. I



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think part of the problem is that they took too much notice of the sign that the rangers had placed at the crossing "Deep Crossing". Then instead of walking the crossing they had decided to go where no other cars had gone, upstream from the crossing to try and negotiate the creek.

There are some simple rules in crossing unknown creek crossings.

1. Walk the crossing and determine depth of the water and condition of base.
2. Never attempt making a new crossing point unless you are very very sure of what you are doing. Nearly always take the route that has had the most traffic.
3. Generally the downstream side of a crossing is the best bet as it is nearly always shallower and the base usually the most solid.



Setting out from Coongie

The 2 people who got bogged did none of the above and to make it even more staggering there had been many cars that had crossed the crossing each day that we were there. We had crossed it 1/2 a dozen times ourselves. When you can see that the crossing had been obviously used frequently from the tyre marks why on earth would you attempt to cross in some other highly questionable spot.

After 7 wonderful days at Coongie we headed off to Innamincka on Sat 25th July, for what supplies we could get. We had timed it so that we could take advantage of the supply truck that usually arrives on Friday each week. We have taken to always enquiring what days the supply truck arrives in outback towns (usually once a week) so that we can time our visits accordingly to replenish our supplies. In Innamincka, besides stocking up we had a shower in the public showers, and lunch in the pub. Also talked the pub into grinding me some coffee as the store only had instant. We then set off for Windorah via the Cordillo Downs road. We have never travelled this road before and there is a heritage listed Shearing Shed that is sup-



Cordillo Downs Woolshed



Cadelga Ruins



The stock density in this area is one beef cattle to the square kilometre. This bloke is standing in the middle of his (if you can make him out)

posed to be the biggest in the world. We have subsequently discovered a couple of other shearing sheds that

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are supposed to be the largest in the world also but anyway we do know the Cordillo Downs shed did have the most stands at 110. The shearing shed is situated on Cordillo Downs station, now a cattle station, the sheep having been wiped out by dingos many years ago (in the 50's I think). Although there was a camping area at Cadelga Ruins we elected to bush camp about 1km off the road behind a stand of trees that night then set off for Windorah the next morning. We set ourselves up in the Council Caravan park at Windorah (\$10/night including power) and found some more supplies that we could not get in Innamincka, did the washing, did some exploring around Coopers Creek for a potential camp site then had dinner at



Solar power generation in WIndorah



Welford National Park

camp. The sand hills in the area were a deeper orange than we had experienced elsewhere and very dramatic. Welford was teeming with wildlife particularly a large variety of Kangaroos and Emus. Also quite a number of

the pub. Windorah has just had a solar power plant installed and is not quite up to full operation. By contrast, Birdsville uses the hot artesian water to generate its power, the by product being cool water for the town water supply. Next day we headed off for Jundah along the "alternate route". Very quick drive around Jundah then off to Welford National Park. Stayed at Welford for 2 nights and while it was not an overly exciting park it was a very enjoyable



Spinifex Pigeon - Welford



Out of order long drop

barking owls. At night you can not tell them apart from a dog with their regular "woof woof". Now when it comes to toilets in these parks generally they are pretty good but Welford takes the prize. How on earth a long

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drop toilet can be out of order beats me but here is a photo to prove the fact. Sign reads "out of order" and the door is padlocked.

After leaving Welford we decided to head north to Yaraka with the intention of eventually making it to Longreach.



Main Street - Yaraka, with median strip no less



Lookout that also sites a Telecom Tower so we could put the sat phone away



Emmet Railway Station



The entire town of Emmet captured in 1 photo

Barcoo River. Now there were many, many travellers camped on the banks of the river but with some astute exploring we found a very secluded and out of the way camp spot so decided to stay for a few days. Cost of camping was \$2 per night but the down side was they asked for a voluntary donation for a hot shower. Yet another community that gets its hot water straight out of the ground. In addition there was a coffee shop and 2 pubs. A virtual oasis in the outback and for those of you who are golfers an exquisite golf course as you can see by a couple of the photos. The examples of traveller friendly outback towns in Queensland continue to delight us. Had dinner at the pub one night and met this amazing couple about our age who were extremely nondescript. Well



Clancy's Overflow Hotel - Isisford

never judge a book by its cover. They had done a lot of travelling and had a lot of experiences. Then much later in the conversation they slayed us when they informed us that they had eleven children and could actually remember all their names. The wife had Chris and I splitting our sides while hubby just stoically smiled and said that the pity is they weren't legally married, at least not in the eyes of the church, she was catholic and he had refused to convert.

About 20k's down the Blackall road is another "Largest



Our camp on the banks of the Barcoo River, Isisford



Brolga takes flight - Barcoo River



10th Tee, Isisford Links Golf Course



A typically snobby Bustard

Shearing Shed in the World". This one I think is probably larger than the Cordillo Downs shed but it only had 54 stands compared to the 110 at Cordillo Downs. The really interesting thing, much of the equipment was still in place, in particular the power station that was powered by steam. If anyone is interested in some photos let me know and I will organize to send them.

Now that we had phone coverage for the first time for quite a while we were able to collect our emails and I was able to send out the links to our first Journal.

This is the end of part 2 - next part will probably get us to Brisbane via Longreach and Carnarvon NP.



13th Green