

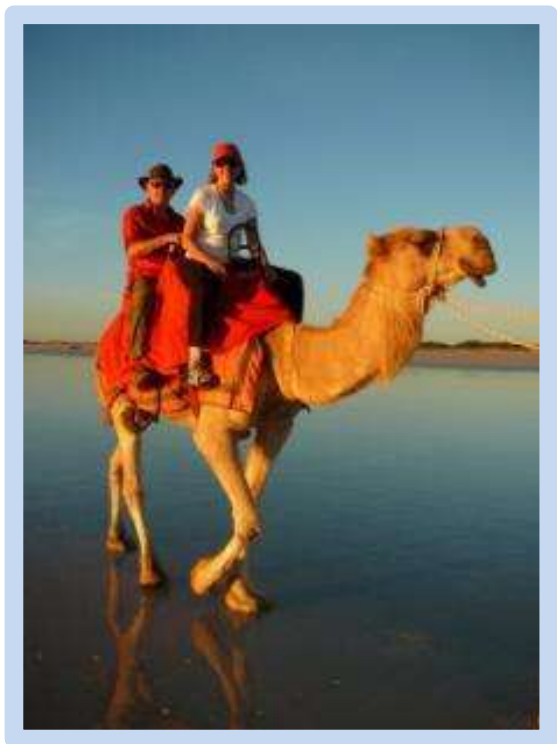
# Our 2010 Australian Outback Safari

*By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan*

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The glorious Cable Beach at Broome was a spectacular destination after returning from NZ after spending 3 chilly weeks placing Graeme's belongings into storage at Rotorua following the sale of his home.

Locals and tourists alike celebrate the most glorious sunsets each day in all sorts of ways from family picnics on the sand, drinks at a fancy seaside bar, or a camel ride along the beach!



**Our camel, named Ghan was 30 yrs old.**



**Our camel train heading south along Cable Beach**

Literally hundreds of 4WD vehicles make their way onto Cable Beach every night to watch the sun set across the Indian Ocean. Some fish, others simply enjoy picnicking and watching the Camel Trains pass by.



We thought about going to three wheels instead of four, but the roof top tent didn't quite look the part, and where would we fit the winch and the recovery gear? >>>

Well, that's enough of city life, wining, dining and camels riding, we've thawed out now so it's time to head back into the desert and enjoy some real four wheel driving which is what we're here for.

After a night on the beach at Barn Hill we headed south off the Great Northern Highway adjacent to Eighty Mile Beach and entered Wapet Road (also known as the Kidson Track) and followed this for 508km, crossing the Great Sandy Desert to connect with the Canning Stock Route at Well 33. This trek took two days to complete and we saw only one vehicle in its entire length. Travelling along the edge of the Gibson Desert we observed plenty of wildlife, sometimes avoiding and sometimes following wild camels along the way.



As this track is very seldom used, high winds often cause some portions to become obliterated by sand drifts.

**Navigating our way across the "Great Sandy Desert" >>>**



**<<< Note all feet of both camels are off the ground at once. (We don't even do this with the Landcruiser.)**

Camels often stake their ground and confront you before accepting the fact that a track is to be shared with four wheel drivers like ourselves.



<<< Megan was exploring this cave system until she discovered many footprints & droppings. It was apparent this cave was home to many Dingoes' and other wild animals.



At Kurawarritji, a small aboriginal community near Well 33 (population 50) where we took the opportunity to top up our long range deisel fuel tanks (at \$4.26 NZ per litre) before heading south along the Canning Stock Route.

This was Megans first visit to this iconic 4WD track known as the Canning Stock Route. It was built by Alfred Canning in 1906/07 to drive large herds of cattle from the Kimberley Region in the north to the southern markets in the Gold Fields of Western Australia. This stock route is longer than New Zealand, so 51 wells were sunk along its entire length, one day's droving apart. Some of these wells still have good water but the track has not been maintained since it was last used for droving in 1958, causing severe corrugations to form as a result of wind & approx 1000 4WD vehicles passing through per annum.



### **Negotiating one of 1200 sand dunes on the Canning Stock Route.**

**A self preservation sand flag is essential >>>**

There are in excess of 1200 sand-dunes averaging 15m in height spanning the length of this track which crosses several deserts including The Great Sandy Desert, The Gibson Desert and the Little Sandy Desert. Whilst travelling at 260 metres above sea level, day time temperatures were in the 40s and at night would sink to zero.



**The  
Thorny  
Devil**

**A shy  
desert  
dweller.**

These little creatures are very scarce and hard to find. We found this one trying to cross the track so we took the opportunity to assist him across and at the same time we decided to include him in our photo shoot.



**<< Graeme inspecting the damage to Well 26.** Unfortunately this restored Well had been struck by lightning in 2009 and has been rendered unusable for the time being.

**Typical signage  
along the  
Canning >>>**





<<< **Graeme checking the water level in this disused well. (Well 25)**

Near **Well 23** is a fuel dump where many 44 gallon drums of fuel are dropped by prior arrangement. You just have to hope that nobody siphons fuel from the drums with your name on before you arrive. We found approx eight full drums and 40 partly full ones, indicating



the importance of estimating ones fuel requirements with reasonable accuracy as many drums were left half full and abandoned, looking obscenely untidy in this desert setting.

**Note: Hand siphoning pumps on the drums for all to use. >>>**

The desert supports many different plant species and these basket shape trees never fail to amuse us as once they die the wind tips many of them upside down.



Exiting the Canning Stock Route near **Well 22** via the Talawana Track, we topped-up our fresh water supplies at the **Georgia Bore**, a bore sunk in 1990 by an exploration company and left in



working order for the benefit of all travellers. The visitors book here makes for interesting reading and acts as a record of all those passing through this arid & isolated area. >>>





We headed west towards **Rudall River National Park**, stopping at a tiny Aboriginal Community at **Cotton Creek** where we paid a record price for diesel - \$5.33 NZ /litre, cash only!

Just short of the Telfer Mine Site we spent a night at the picturesque **Desert Queen Baths**. This was a most scenic 18km one-way 4WD track into deep cool pools hidden within these glorious canyons. A few drinks and a chat around the campfire was very pleasant. At daybreak we headed west via Watrara & Tchukardine Pools to attempt a track (marked 'Impassable' ) on one of our maps. (Now - there's a challenge! )

Along this track we camped beneath this enormous rock, known as **Hanging Rock**> but not too close as it looked like it could crumble at any moment! From here we pushed our way north through dense scrub towards the



Woodie Woodie Mine site.

Much to our surprise (and theirs!) we came across **a herd of wild donkeys**. They kept well away but we captured this shot using maximum zoom.

This track had obviously not been used in many years, and the overgrown track was barely visible. Megan searched on foot for signs of the track on several occasions, waving me on but this was slow-going as we made our way forward with lots of help from the GPS.



We explored northward as far as the impressive Carawine Gorge and the Upper Carawine Gorge, zigzagging towards Newman. We made camp beside the warm pools at **Running Waters** >> then the next morning we picked our way across country to find Eel Pool (shown only on one of our 4 maps). This very pretty pool is seldom visited as the track has completely disappeared. Without a decent GPS it's a no go!



**Well, there's nothing like a relaxing Paper Bark <<< 'bush lounger' but where's the champagne!**



At Running Waters we discovered the most extensive area of **Paper Bark trees** we had seen anywhere in Australia. Coupled with this, we were able to take a dip in these tranquil hot spring fed pools.

**A classic example of an old Paper Bark tree with layer upon layer of shedding paper bark >>>**



We exited this area via Scull Springs Road, an interesting and undulating route towards the mining town of Newman.

**<<< This is one of several abandoned mine sites along Skull Springs Road.**

This leg of our journey has been hot, remote and the most challenging section so far. With 12 days between supermarkets our supplies held

out well, but we really enjoyed a new supply of fresh fruit & veges not to mention the restocking of our depleted supply of wine & beer!

Now at Newman we took the opportunity to visit the theatre within the Information Centre.

Here visitors are given the opportunity to watch a most informative video outlining the history of the Newman Mine Site, the building of the town and the surrounding infrastructure which we will outline in more detail in our next newsletter.

Until then we bid you farewell and kind regards,

Graeme & Megan



**<<< Helping a fellow traveller.**

On a deserted desert track this 40 year old English lady, travelling on her own had staked her tyre.

She plugged and re-inflated this tyre within 10 minutes.

Impressive!