

*Surveying the view
from on top of a dune*



CANNDO

The Canning Stock Route is the longest such track in the world and much like its formation, it still presents as a major undertaking

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Negotiating a rocky section



A tricky section on the track



Detours can cause severe damage



Reg with Bugai Whyolter while she was painting



Visiting graves at Well 37

We bought our Explorer motorhome to enable us to take roads we would normally have hesitated in attempting. After previously travelling the Gibb River Road and up to Kalumburu and One Arm Point, the Strzelecki and Oodnadatta tracks, the Tanami Track and across the Gulf – we decided to tackle the Canning Stock Route (CSR).

Taking advice given to us from others who had previously done the CSR, we decided to tackle it from south to north. The reason we were told was that the dunes are steeper from north to south, but that is debatable. We also found that going from cold to hot weather was another good reason to take the direction suggested to us.

Permits are needed and ours started on June 15, 2015 so we set out in our Explorer motorhome; our timing was perfect. Three weeks previously there had been a week of rain across the CSR that would have caused havoc if we'd attempted the track then. But as a result, the wildflowers were prolific all along the track.

The first night we spent at North Pool as a Wiluna police officer said to go there and camp and said that it was full. We thought of people but he meant of water after the rains. We had

one other couple there as well. The water was a brilliant ochre colour and the wildflowers were abundant.

To us, finding each well was like being on a treasure hunt. Well 1 isn't far from Wiluna and is before North Pool. Then there is a right turn to Well 2 and this is where the two-wheeled track of the Canning Stock Route became apparent.

While we were finding Well 3 we took a diversion and were madly looking for the well and forgot to look up and came out of the trees looking like a charging bull with branches hanging off us. We camped near Well 3 and found the first of the toilets that have been constructed by a volunteer group called Track Care, WA. They also have restored some of the wells. The toilets have a small trailer underneath that travellers are asked to tow away and empty in the designated area.

Some of the wells are in such a sad state of disrepair that there are only bits of tin that were the troughs and others had the rotting wood remaining.

There is good quality water in the wells but all the water in the lakes is salty. Then there are magnificent freshwater springs. Well 6 (Pierre Springs) is one of the restored wells with beautiful fresh water in it. There are fantastic gums to camp under also.



Grave of Michael Tobin



Some of the Jigalong men with Reg



Well 4B that is in a state of disrepair



Bull camel calling his mob

A week of rain would have caused havoc if we'd attempted the track then

Some of the restored wells had to be used with a windlass and others had to be pumped to obtain the water.

The track changed surface and scenery so often that we began to wonder what was around the next corner or over the next dune. Some areas were all desert oaks, others just spinifex, some quite bare while others had a lot of mulga and wattle. The track surface changed from soft sand to hard sand to rock and gravel and the inevitable corrugations as well as salt and clay pans. A lot of the track diverted around terribly damaged areas where people had been bogged or water had eroded the surface causing wash outs to be wary of; there were times when the correct line had to be taken or we would have been in trouble.

The sky each night was so clear and the stars so bright – it was magical. We were fortunate to see the formation of a full moon as well as Jupiter and Venus doing their transitions in the heavens each night.

At Durba Springs (near Well 17), there was a group of men from Jigalong community (near Newman) who were spending

eight days out on the Calvert Range burning off and baiting feral cats with 1080 poison. They invited us over to their camp for a movie night (which they do each night with educational films). The movie we saw was about the relocation of endangered rock wallabies that featured most of the men who were watching it. They spoke in their language on the screen so we couldn't understand what they were saying but we knew which person was on there talking as they all giggled and pointed to that person – they loved watching themselves. The following day they had a helicopter coming in to drop the baits and fire starters to the eastern side of the Calvert Range. After an introductory course three at a time had to board to do the work with the pilot.

A couple of the Jigalong men showed us some rock art at Durba Springs that had been written over by white men working on the track. Graffiti was prevalent a long time ago.

There are several springs along the CSR. They come as a wonderful surprise and one wonders how they come to be there when there is desert all around. Geologists know the answer.

JOURNEY PLANNER



FUEL

We used 386 litres of diesel which included side trips.

Wiluna to Parnngurr Community – 148 litres; Parnngurr to Desert Queen Baths and back and refuelled again.

Parnngurr to Kunawarritji Community – 114 litres.

Kunawarritji to Halls Creek – 163 litres (but can fuel at Billiluna Community on the Tanami Track).

Our tank holds 76 litres and we carried 140 litres extra. Prior to leaving home we rang Parnngurr (08 9176 9099) and spoke with Ben, who advised we could purchase diesel from the community, same with Kunawarritji (08 9176 9040) and spoke with Bill Johnson who said the same. Fuel is available at Billiluna (08 9168 8076) and no need for a phone call.

PERMITS

Two permits are required and should be ordered at least a month before departure:

One from Four-Wheel Drive Australia, 4WDA (0438 853 342 or www.4wda.org.au) at \$110, and the other from Kuju Wangka (08 9425 2099) for \$100.

PREPARATION

We used Mickey Thompson Baja Radial ATZ P3 All-Terrain tyres and carried Maxtrax, snatch straps, long-handled shovel, tyre repair plug kits, winch and an extra spare tyre. We didn't use any of this but you cannot be complacent.

Savoury Creek is very salty water and it runs into Lake Disappointment. This creek had to be crossed but prior to crossing we came across a mob of camels. A big bull camel was on a dune calling the rest of them away from near us – they actually obeyed him and ran away.

At Parnngurr community (pronounced Bungoat) we refuelled with diesel and bought fresh fruit and vegetables and other supplies – the people there were so friendly. Up north of Parnngurr is Rudall River National Park that has a lot of campsites on springs, including Desert Queen Baths where we camped for a few nights. We came back to Parnngurr and refuelled again and then headed back onto the CSR to stay at Georgia Bore, another restored well – this one was operated by a handle.

While we were on the CSR, we met up

NAVIGATION

Our vehicle has a genuine Toyota GPS which showed the CSR and we had a Hema's *Great Desert Tracks map* and *The Outback Travellers Track Guide* on the CSR.

WATER SUPPLIES

We have an 80-litre tank but could refill at Wells 6, 15, Durba Springs, Georgia Bore, Kunawarritji and 49.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS (POLICE)

Wiluna 08 9981 7024

Newman 08 9175 1201

Halls Creek 08 9168 6000

Notify Wiluna and Halls Creek police of your departure and arrival.

We used UHF radios and carried a sat phone and an EPRIB.

TIPS

Take an extra two weeks to do more side trips.

Get to know your vehicle, particularly what

speed and gears to use on sand hills. We

stayed in high-range/drive for the sand hills.

We were advised to use low/low but found that not suitable.

Take a wire coat hanger to clear spinifex build-up from under vehicle and remove the fire hazard.

Have a tetanus injection before going and a dental check-up for obvious reasons.

Wrap everything in bubble wrap, etc. to stop rubbing.

Tyre pressure 28-30psi on corrugated and rocky sections and 10-18psi for sand.

with motorcyclists, walkers, a 90-year-old man travelling alone, a lady doing the track while living on bush tucker, containers of food left out for pushbike riders who will be starting their trek after we had been past. We actually only met 13 vehicles until the last day and then met 19 vehicles in the one day.

We saw very little litter along the whole 2100km. This was amazing considering there are no rubbish bins – what is taken in has to be taken out.

Kunawarritji community is another place for refuelling and restocking supplies. We met a 75-year-old lady doing her artwork. All the artwork from the communities goes to Newman where it is sold. Oh, of all the wildflowers we saw, the one that took our interest the most was the upside down pea.

The graves of people who had been



attacked by Aboriginals were in a couple of different areas; sad to see them out there where it is so isolated and hot. The people of the 1800s and early 1900s had to do it very tough on the CSR. Our admiration goes out to the explorers, surveyors, drovers, Aboriginals and the cattle. The people who dug the wells and knew where to dig them were an amazingly resourceful.

At Well 37 there was a grave for drovers James Thomson and George Shoesmith and a grave next to them is for an Indigenous man called Chinaman who were killed by Aboriginals.

The history of the Canning Stock Route is phenomenal. It took very strong-willed men to go through the hardship, heat, finding water and then digging the wells. It is amazing.

In our Explorer motorhome we felt as though we did the CSR in luxury. The commercial tour operators and people who saw us commented that they hadn't heard of a motorhome on the track before. When we pulled up we were set up whereas others had to spend so much time setting up their camp. We had our own shower and toilet – we showered sparingly and when we knew there was plenty of water at certain wells we could then refill our tank.

We didn't come through unscathed – neither did anyone else as the vegetation is so close to the track in places that everyone's vehicles were scratched. The beauty of our motorhome is that it is fibreglass and the scratches will polish out.

We had an amazing time and would love to do it again taking more time in the national parks adjoining the track and seeing more of what is to offer out there.

What else can we say? Do it! If you have an adventurous spirit and a 4WD, don't hesitate – just go for it.