

AN OUTBACK LEGEND

Experience one of Australia's greatest
touring routes when you travel the
Oodnadatta Track

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I don't know about you, but when we travel, there is always a level of excitement when we finally get to hit the dirt. So on this trip, we needed no excuse to get off the Stuart Highway black top and make our way down the sensational Oodnadatta Track. I doubt this route really needs any introduction as it would have to be one of Australia's most iconic.

Being a well maintained track suggests it's not a difficult drive. This means if you're wanting to cut your 4WD teeth on an excellent remote touring track, then the Oodnadatta Track could be right up your alley. The track has played a major part in our history, as it once linked Australia's south to the north through its railway and overland telegraph line.

When it comes to travelling the Oodnadatta Track, there is no hard and fast rule for which way the track should be tackled. It just so happened that we were returning home to SA from a trip up north, and welcomed getting off the Stuart Highway black top we'd taken on many previous occasions.

■ WHERE:

The Oodnadatta track is located between Marree and Marla. When coming from Adelaide, travel the scenic route and pass through the Flinders Ranges towns of Quorn, Hawker, Leigh Creek & Lyndhurst to arrive at Marree. If travelling from the north, turn off the Stuart Highway at Marla and take the Oodnadatta Track turnoff.

■ INFORMATION:

The Oodnadatta Track is 620km in length and is located at the northern end of the Flinders Ranges between Marree and Marla in South Australia, and is an all-round top touring route. The entire track is full of history and the small towns along it each have something to offer visitors. Outside of the towns, experience bush camping, 4WDing, many photography opportunities, and wildlife. William Creek is the best location for arranging a flight over Lake Eyre.

■ WHAT TO TAKE:

The track is generally in good condition, but subject to closure when it receives heavy rain. The basic gear to carry with you includes recovery gear, air compressor, basic spare parts and a repair kit.

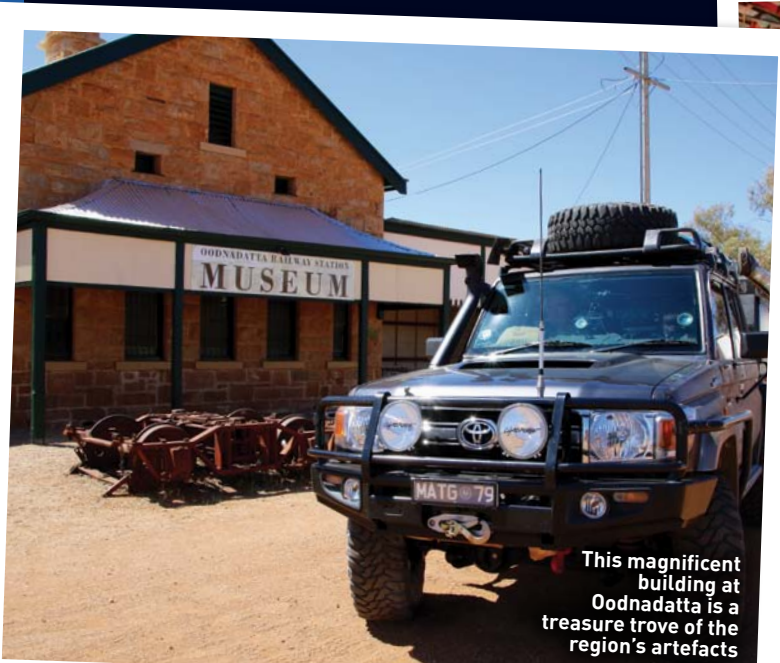
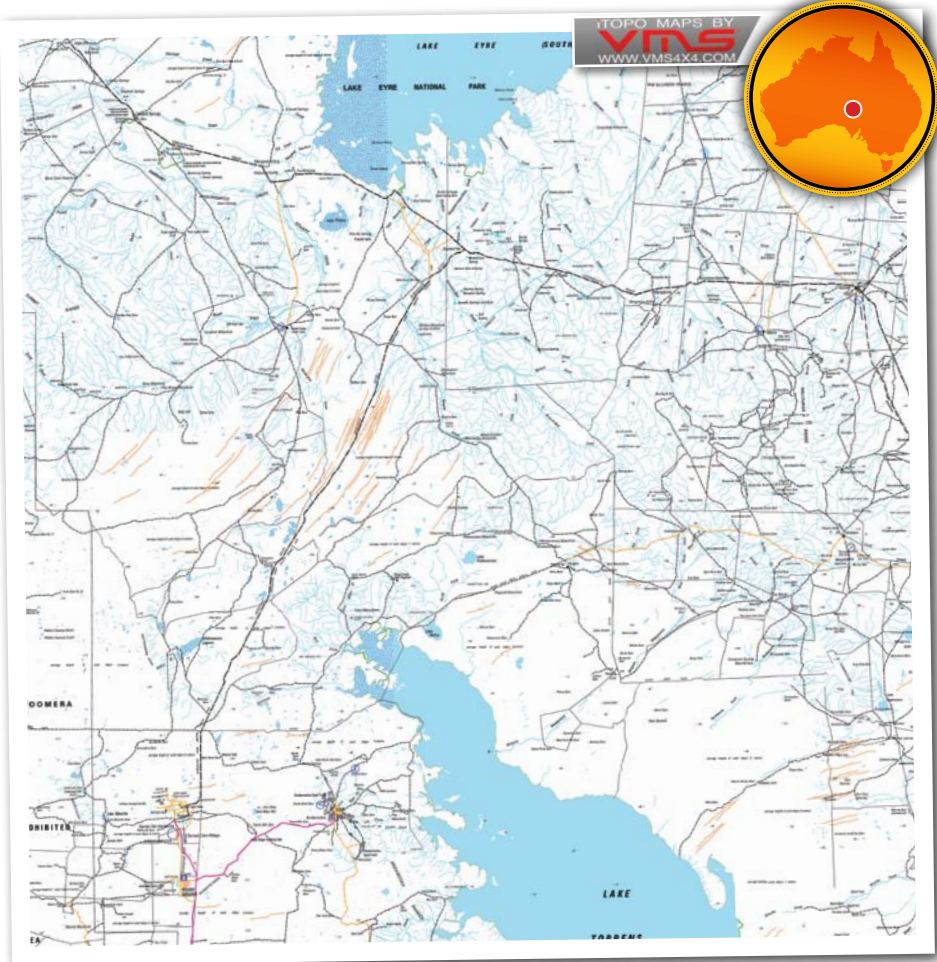


A quick stop at Marla saw us fuelled up and we were hitting the Oodnadatta Track dirt before we knew it. After airing down tyres all round, what hit us really quickly was the region's sparse, flat and stony landscape. We asked ourselves how anything could survive out here. But as we found out, there was wildlife galore! You name it, we saw it...emus, kangaroos, goannas, plenty of birds, and some cattle in surprisingly good condition.

Finding hot camping spots on the track means you need to be prepared to drive off it

to get to some cracking locations. One of these close to Marla is at Kathleen Creek. Here you'll be camping alongside the dry creek bed where shade is available, and you're also far enough away from the road to avoid being showered in passing vehicle dust. And the sunsets here were crackers!

With the stretch of track between Marla and Oodnadatta being little more than 200k's, you're not needing to travel vast distances for fuel. The iconic Pink Roadhouse at Oodnadatta has fuel and all the basic supplies you need,



This magnificent building at Oodnadatta is a treasure trove of the region's artefacts



Reading the graffiti on the walls of the William Creek pub will definitely keep you amused

THE OODNADATTA TRACK IS
THE PERFECT INTRODUCTION
TO REMOTE TOURING



■ BEST TIME TO TRAVEL:

The Oodnadatta Track is unsealed, but well maintained. As the track can occasionally be closed, it's important to check road conditions before travelling. Summer temperatures can be extreme, so the best times to visit are from April to October (busy during school holidays).

■ TRIP STANDARD:

The track is suitable for off road camper trailers and would be D-grade. Corrugations can be present and avoid speeding due to wandering stock, kangaroos and emus. The track to Peake Ruins is also D-grade, but can be slow going when towing.

■ FUEL & SUPPLIES:

Along the track, fuel is available from William Creek. Both fuel and basic supplies are available from Marla, Oodnadatta and Marree.

■ RESTRICTIONS AND PERMITS:

No permits are required for travelling the Oodnadatta Track. However, if you're planning to visit Lake Eyre or the Simpson Desert, purchase a South Australian Desert Parks Pass which can be arranged online.

The Oodnadatta Track is just an all-round cracking touring route. There's no complaints from us!

and we even picked up a couple of ice creams to have later that night. There is something special about bush camping and pulling out a little luxury from the freezer after a great meal.

Oodnadatta's colourful history sees it play a large part in the Old Ghan Railway dating back

a key from the roadhouse to take a look inside at some artefacts of yesteryear.

I doubt you'll find travelling the track to be dull when there is evidence of the Old Ghan railway so close by. Whether you are passing remnants of old railway sleepers, visiting the

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- AND RIGHTLY SO!

to 1891. At that time, it became the terminus for the northern railway from Port Augusta. It was here that camel herders met the train to take goods and passengers to further remote outback regions. Today, the stunning old railway building is used as a museum, so grab

numerous railway bridges, or exploring the ruins of old buildings, it's not hard not to be proud of everyone that put in the hard yards to make the railway happen in the middle of nowhere.

If there is one stop you must make, it's the magnificent railway bridge at Algebuckina. Its



popularity is like the Pentecost River crossing in the Kimberley! You'll find pictures of the bridge in nearly every major tourist brochure. The bridge spans nearly 600 metres, and if you time your visit right, the water below makes this spot a cracking bush camp location for a night or two. With the popularity of bush camping all along the track, make sure you

bring your own firewood as it's pretty scarce. If you have the time, rather, make the time, take the track to the ruins at Peake. I don't think you'd be disappointed. The track is just over 20kms and can be slow going, especially when towing. But exploring the extensive Peake Overland Telegraph Station and Copper Top Smelter ruins was sensational. Allow



■ BUDGET ATTRACTIONS:

The Oodnadatta Track is jam packed full of history as you follow the Ghan Heritage Trail. So there are many points of interest along the route which don't cost anything and are an excellent way to break up your journey. Explore the many ruins, wander through the magnificent and quirky Mutonia Sculpture Park, check out the William Creek pub, and learn more about the area's history at Oodnadatta and Marree.

■ THINGS TO DO:

Stop at the various signposted points of interest along the track to learn more about the Old Ghan Railway and the Overland Telegraph Line. Oodnadatta – Old Ghan museum. William Creek – bush pub, outdoor museum, and Lake Eyre flights. Coward Springs – an absolute oasis, with a fantastic campground, thermal springs and small museum. Marree – Camel Races (July), Old Ghan history, and Tom Kruse tribute.

■ KEY CONTACTS:

PINK ROADHOUSE, OODNADATTA
PH: (08) 8670 7822

WILLIAM CREEK HOTEL
PH: (08) 8670 7880

MARREE ROADHOUSE
PH: (08) 8675 8352

■ CAMPSITES:

Excellent bush camping is available at many of the creeks along the track. Campgrounds with facilities can be found at Oodnadatta, William Creek, Coward Springs, Marla and Marree

Algebuckina Waterhole



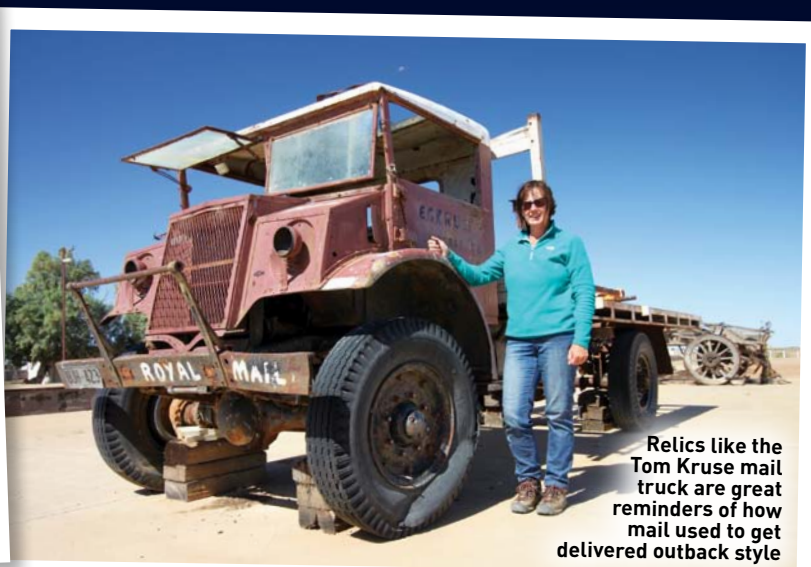
Kathleen Creek



Coward Springs Campground



It's time to hit the tracks!



Relics like the Tom Kruse mail truck are great reminders of how mail used to get delivered outback style

LAKE EYRE'S REMOTENESS AND ENORMITY WILL SIMPLY BLOW YOU AWAY



yourself a couple of hours and pick up a brochure at the site which provides self-guided walk information.

Another thing the Oodnadatta Track is famous for is its cattle stations. In fact it's really famous, as you travel through the largest cattle station in the world, Anna Creek. This station is so big that it's almost the same size as Belgium! But perfectly positioned in

the middle of the station is the William Creek pub. Known as South Australia's smallest town, we called into the pub for a coldie and a top feed. You also can't miss the outdoor museum across the road from the pub – the rocket relics are fantastic.

When travelling this route, the track passes the southern end of Lake Eyre. If you haven't experienced salt lakes before, Lake Eyre's

enormity will simply blow you away. You won't get to see much from the track, but the information boards along the track provide some good information. Take a flight from William Creek if you're keen to see the lake from a bird's eye view.

Further along you come to the Mutonia Sculpture Park. Kids young and old will want to stop and wander through here, as the massive

TRAVEL

Oodnadatta Track, SA

■ AUTHOR'S OPINION:

What was your favourite part of the trip?

I didn't really know a great deal about the track's history before travelling. Exploring the ruins and learning about the railway gave me a better appreciation of what a significant effort was made to get it up and running. It also highlighted how difficult conditions would have been for everyone involved when you're so remote.

Where else have you been recently?

We have recently explored western Victoria and South Australia's Limestone Coast. Cracking bush camps and stunning natural attractions topped this trip off nicely.

Where are you heading next and why?

We're planning a trip to the Red Centre for our next adventure. In the past, we've generally just stopped in Alice Springs to re-stock supplies on our way to the Kimberley, but this time we're going to spend time exploring the region's West McDonnell Ranges.



quirky sculptures are made from old junk and simply rise up out of the landscape. They've definitely given a new life to an area that was once an old railway siding.

After a few days on the dirt, you may be craving a little respite from the dust. So there

will probably be no arguments to stop at Coward Springs. The campground and facilities here were impressive to say the least. And to top things off, you can wash away the dust and soak up the minerals in their artesian bath.

Perhaps it was the time of year, but there was just one thing we couldn't escape...the flies. So here's my tip – leave your fly lotions and creams at home, as out here, they are immune to the stuff. Whatever you do, make sure you pack a fly net hat and cover up. It's that simple!

Pulling into Marree, this was once a thriving town for the railway and overland communications. It's a sleepy town today where you'll find many relics dotted around the place. Make sure to check out the excellent tribute at the Marree Hotel for Tom Kruse, who was once the outback's mail man. Other free attractions you can't miss include Tom's mail truck and a couple of old train engines that stand proud in the town's centre.

You'd be hard pressed to find a more iconic touring route anywhere in Australia, and there's no wonder that the Oodnadatta Track has pretty well etched its place on every tourer's bucket list. And rightly so! ■

