



# QUENCHING A DESERT THIRST

For the ultimate remote touring destination,  
you can't go past the Gibson Desert

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When you mention to someone that you're planning a trip to the desert, you can pretty well guarantee the Simpson Desert will generally come to mind. But in fact, the Simpson couldn't be any further from where we were heading. This trip was going to be absolutely epic, as it would take us smack bang to the middle of central Western Australia, to the remote Gibson Desert.

Travelling the Gibson would unquestionably be one of the most remote regions in Australia. Out here, it's not difficult to put yourself in a life or death situation if you're ill-prepared. Careful desert trip planning and preparation is the key as it's the last place you want to get into any strife!

Setting up a vehicle for a trip like this is by no means a five minute job. Sure, there is all the standard stuff you take care of such as

servicing and spares, but out here you need a lot more than what can just be purchased over the counter. You'll be amazed that little things like spinifex seeds and not protecting your shockers can cause such huge issues on a trip like this.

Before heading off, we spent considerable time calculating our food and water for our remote six weeks adventure, building in several days extra for any emergencies. Finalising the trip itinerary took ages, and fuel was always going to be a concern when it's a killer for weight. With 330L on board, we knew there was no way we were going to be travelling light.

There are a few entry points when you're travelling to the Gibson Desert, and as we were approaching from SA, the quickest route was through the APY lands. What an absolute cracker this route turned out to be!

Turning off the Stuart Highway onto the Giles Mulga Road, you don't travel far before passing through the super spectacular Musgrave

**■ WHERE:**  
The Gibson Desert is located in remote central Western Australia. Travelling the Great Central Road, access is via Warburton (560km from Yulara and 560km from Laverton). From Alice Springs, travel the Gary Junction Road before turning onto the Gary Highway.

**■ INFORMATION:**  
Travelling to the Gibson Desert requires a range of permits depending on the route taken. The area is extremely remote and best suited to experienced 4WD tourers. The region has significant historical importance and would best be described as a 4WD trip of a lifetime. Experience rough and rugged tracks, magnificent bush camping, wildlife, wildflowers, and stunning landscape photography throughout this entire region.

# THE ICONIC LEN BEADELL MADE REMOTE TRAVEL POSSIBLE IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY



How's this for a magnificent relic... you don't get to see a Mk 5 Jaguar in the outback too often!

**■ BEST TIME TO TRAVEL:**  
Desert conditions means extreme temperatures prevail. Spring and Summer temperatures can easily be 40°C plus, so there is only a small window of opportunity to visit at the most comfortable time. Best times to travel are during May – August. We experienced a desert full of wildflowers during July and August.



One of the highlights of remote camping is setting up camp and enjoying a coldie

**■ WHAT TO TAKE:**  
You need to be fully self-sufficient for this trip. It's also advisable to travel with at least one other vehicle. With cold nights and warm days, have appropriate clothing. Take recovery gear and include a set or two of vehicle traction aids. Travelling with a good air compressor, spare parts, at least two spare tyres, a couple of tubes and a tyre repair kit are essential. A satellite phone is a must and an EPIRB is advisable. Carefully calculate your fuel, food and water for the duration – build in a minimum of three additional days in the case of an emergency.





■ CAMPSITES:

Travelling in such a remote area with only small amounts of visitors, finding a bush camp isn't difficult. If you camp near one of the bores, avoid setting up too close to the water as they're frequented by birds and other wildlife. The campground at Warburton has good facilities including a laundry.

Warburton



Geraldton Bore



Mount Allott



■ FUEL & SUPPLIES:

Fuel and basic supplies are available at Marla, SA and Laverton, WA. Closer to the Gibson Desert, you can purchase fuel and restock supplies at Warburton, Western Australia (760km from Marla and 560km from Laverton). A few of the aboriginal communities may offer fuel when travelling through the APY lands, but don't rely on these as your only fuel source.

Ranges. Having travelled the Stuart loads of times in the past, I had no idea just travelling a short distance west had such jaw dropping scenery. Talk about it being a well-kept secret.

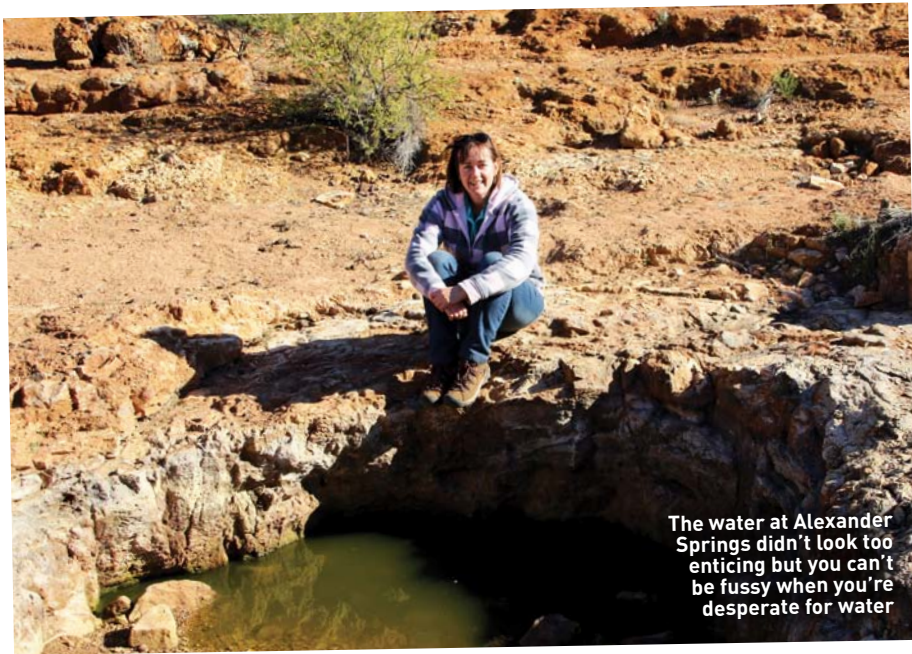
But for a trip like this, don't think you can just drive anywhere as you're going to need a range of permits. In fact, we hadn't even reached the WA border when we were pulled over by local Police for a permit inspection. So make sure you do plenty of research before leaving home because permits aren't available from a one-stop shop. It actually took us five different sources to obtain the nine permits required for our trip.

And applying for a permit doesn't necessarily mean it's a tick in the box process and your permit is automatically granted. In some cases,

consideration is given to the purpose and duration of your visit. Play it safe by allowing plenty of time to arrange your permits, and have a backup plan if your request is denied.

If you're anything like me, you'll find that a highlight of travelling outback roads is when you come across all sorts of relics that just don't make it out. We came across a few old wrecked vehicles on the way to Warburton, but an old Mk 5 Jag from around the 1950s? You're kidding me! It was an amazing find, but it also makes you wonder how it actually got there in the first place when you look around at the surrounding environment.

So if you do come across any relics or artefacts, it goes without saying that you should leave things as you find them. Seeing this stuff



The water at Alexander Springs didn't look too enticing but you can't be fussy when you're desperate for water



This campsite was a top spot as it's protected from the cold winter wind at night



YOU'LL BE HARD-PRESSED TO FIND BETTER SUNSETS ANYWHERE ELSE!



With scenery as good as this, there shouldn't be any complaints!

in the flesh and just being able to photograph it is a buzz, and it means it will remain there for others to enjoy after you're long gone.

Crossing over the WA border, Warburton is the last opportunity to refuel and restock supplies before going any further. The campground at the rear of the roadhouse also provides a laundry and powered sites, so take advantage of these facilities as well.

Now it was finally time to hit the desert tracks! We learnt early in the trip that around sixty years ago, the iconic Len Beadell made remote travel possible in this part of the country. So when we found numerous plaques and remnants of his work scattered over the area, it was only natural we stopped and reflected upon the amazing work he and his team performed in such harsh conditions.

Pulling out of Warburton, travel along the Great Central Road before turning onto the Hunt Oil Road. Being an abandoned exploration track, this road is full of all sorts to explore. Some caves you'll come across make for a few hours of top exploring, and there's plenty of space nearby for a cracking camp if you're looking for an overnigher. Continuing further, you can explore the old oil company's camp, but an old windmill and bore were the only life left here.

Not far away, the 360° views from Mt Worsnop allowed you to see for absolutely forever, and the area at its base also made it another sensational camp spot. And if the sunset at Mt Worsnop was any indication of what was to come, then I was convinced the rest were going to be absolute crackers! You'll be hard-pressed to find better sunsets anywhere else!



Another awesome place to visit along the Hunt was Mt Allott. Explorers, Forrest & Carnegie, stopped by during the 1870s and 1890s, and a cairn has been placed at the top to commemorate their visits. So strap on your walking shoes, pack your camera, and let your hamstrings get a bit of a work out as you climb up for some simply spectacular views.

With Alexander Forrest travelling right through this area, make sure to find the springs he found in 1874 when his exploration party were pretty well dying of thirst. The

TRIP STANDARD:

The nature of this trip and its remoteness would see it as B-grade. Once you leave Warburton it's not uncommon for tracks to become overgrown where trees and shrubs encroach onto the track causing pin striping to your vehicle and trailer as you pass.

BUDGET ATTRACTIONS:

Being one of the most remote areas in the country, the region is by no means heavily populated. Exploring the natural attractions tops the list here, and they're not going to cost you a cent. Finding evidence of early occupation by the Aborigines and following in the early European explorer footsteps are some of the activities available. Having the ability to re-fill water supplies in the middle of a desert is also a buzz.

THINGS TO DO:

Many of the attractions aren't signposted, so it's advisable to travel with some good detailed maps. Various Len Beadell markers are displayed on maps, so stop at these when you come across them to learn more about the region's tracks. Remnants of cars, trailers and other items that have succumbed to the region's harsh conditions are also worthy of exploring.

RESTRICTIONS AND PERMITS:

To travel from Marla through to the WA border is through APY lands which requires a permit (\$22 per adult and \$11 per student/concession). Entry to any Aboriginal communities along this section is not permitted unless signposted. A permit is also required to travel the section between Blackstone and Warburton on the Great Central Road which is free.

Being able to follow in early explorers' footsteps by climbing Mt Allot is one of the trip highlights



spring isn't difficult to locate, but it was a dark shade of green when we visited. I guess desperate times means desperate measures, so we were thankful we didn't need to refill our supplies just yet!

At the end of the Hunt Oil Road (263kms in total), you arrive at the junction of the Gunbarrel Highway. Geraldton Bore is close by, so refill your supplies while you have the opportunity, as we found the water quality good. We always travel with a couple of empty water containers to take on "B" grade water –

you may not drink it, but you can always shower with it, or use it for doing laundry down the track. If you take time and do a little research before you leave home, you can even turn that water into drinking water if needed!

Now theoretically, you have reached what is the start of the Gibson Desert! If the zero amount of traffic on this leg of our trip was any indication of what's to come, you can appreciate how remote the area is. And we've only just scratched the surface! Catch you next time. ■



We met the rest of our travelling party for the first time in Warburton and travelled together for a few weeks



Take the opportunity to top up your water supplies at Geraldton Bore



No, it's not a fashion statement – shade cloth helps keep spinifex seeds from entering the radiator



You'll find many remnants along these tracks – this Engel didn't quite make it



Cheap sponges make excellent stuffers under the bull bar to prevent any spinifex seeds entering the radiator

THIS IS THE LAST PLACE YOU WANT TO GET INTO ANY STRIFE





### ■ KEY CONTACTS:

#### **Warburton Roadhouse, WA**

PH: (08) 8956 7656

#### **Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Western Australia (permits)**

W: [www.daa.wa.gov.au](http://www.daa.wa.gov.au)

#### **Anangu (APY land permits)**

W: [www.anangu.com.au](http://www.anangu.com.au)

### ■ AUTHOR'S OPINION:

#### **What was your favourite part of the trip?**

The scenery through the APY lands and the Hunt Oil Road towards the Gibson Desert is nothing short of spectacular. Having an interest in history, I was excited to be able to travel some of the tracks developed by the iconic Len Beadell. And following in explorers, Forrest and Carnegie's footsteps was humbling.

#### **Where else have you been recently?**

We've recently travelled the iconic Oodnadatta Track as winter is a top time of year for inland travel.

#### **Where are you heading next and why?**

We'll continue further into the Gibson Desert and explore some of the other sensational tracks and attractions this region has to offer.



Road conditions through the APY lands were much better than expected

We've done plenty of travelling over the years, but this was our first time we've been checked for a permit

