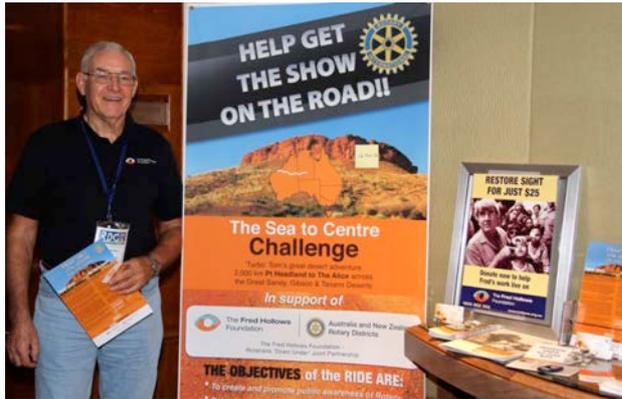


Sea to Centre Challenge

In aid of The Fred Hollows Foundation and to publicise Rotary



Friday 13th July 2012

After months of planning and organisation what's not finished will have to wait until I complete the Challenge. The Sponsored Rightway Industrial 100 series Landcruiser is loaded with food and equipment for the five week trip, tanks fuelled up and ready to go. emblazoned with sponsors logos, "Cyclist Ahead" warning sign with flashing lights and the Trek Superfly 29er mountain bike on the bike rack - provided under the Trek Ambassador Scheme.

Fundraising at Rotary Conference Cairns

But! then the inevitable last minute hitch Just when we were ready to leave, the power socket for the fridge/freezer is dead. Andrew (Sponsor - Rightway Industrial P/L) worked on it for a while without success, but eventually managed to contact an auto electrician who I picked up from the Bunbury wharf as he finished night shift. Dan got to work and had the problem sorted in no time then on my way again to Rightway Industrial's yard to collect Ray the support driver, who took over responsibility for the vehicle and driving duties made quite a change to sit in the passenger seat!

We were on our way by mid morning heading for our first night on the road to Port Headland, I had managed to get the assistance of the Carnarvon Rotary Club to accommodate us for the night. Rusty Miller had contacted fellow Carnarvon Rotarian couple Gary and Hillary Westcott who made us most welcome for the night after an uneventful 1000 km drive.



Gary & Hillary - Carnarvon RC

Saturday 14th July

Easy start this morning as I had kept a day up my sleeve in case of glitches! I decided to head for Coral Bay today, just 220 km further north, for an ocean fix and a shorter 750 km drive on Sunday. Before leaving I spent a couple of hours setting up the Spot Tracker (satellite tracking device) ready to send "All OK" and position reports to family and friends during the ride, while Ray had a walk around town. That done, we said our thankyou's and goodbyes and on the road again, just popping into the Big4 caravan park on the way out of town to collect the Big4 discount card which Big4 had donated.

What a surprise when we arrived in Coral Bay it was wall to wall people! we had intended to camp for the night, but there was no camp sites to be had anywhere, missed the last one by two minutes! but for the fact that we had had to stop on the road to fix the roof rack as a bolt had come undone so it was off to the backpackers where we were lucky to get the last twin room, Ray was going to have to put up with my snoring! That organised then off to the pub for a beer and watch the world (wall to wall people) go by and the sunset over the Ningaloo Reef until dinner time. Sat down to a locally caught snapper meal at Fins Cafe made the most of the fresh fish - probably the last chance for a while!

Sunday 15th July

Arose early to be ready to leave at 6.30 when the bakery opened, great selection and straight out of the oven! bought breakfast to have on the run as I wanted to be in Port Headland by midafternoon, 7 to 8 hours drive away. Uneventful drive north except driving past the track off to Ningaloo Station where daughter

Helen, Vic and Ch'e were camping, unfortunately the 60 km round trip down a really rough track would have taken to long just to have time to say Hi! Arrived in PH at 3.00 and called Keith Murfet now there's a story! I had been trying to contact the Port Headland Rotary Club to try and arrange some accommodation for Sunday night without success, I was asked to be interviewed by the ABC in PH a few days before we left Bunbury, I mentioned that I was trying to contact the PH Rotary Club. Immediately after the interview the phone rang and Keith introduced himself and asked if he could help, after a couple of hours came back with the news that the PH Rotary Club had folded, but said he would find a place for us to stay anyway which he did! Neville of the Port headland Freemasons had some accommodation where we could stay, also he arranged for Mario's pizzeria to provide pizzas for tea, also another radio interview to help get the message out. Then to top it off he persuaded his employer Toll Holdings to donate a tank full of diesel Unexpected but all very welcome help!



After meeting Keith and a cup of coffee we went over to the Toll depot to fill up with the donated diesel and then meet with Neville of the Freemasons who showed us to our accommodation. Neville turned out to be a very interesting character, a regular bushie and PH old-timer, who regrets the current situation of PH but gets out bush and away from the "progress" when he gets the opportunity like his recent jaunt culling camels in the area of the Rudall River National Park, where 16,000 camels were culled by hunting from helicopter, by all accounts this cull only keeps the herds in check. Camels have become a serious problem out in the desert regions causing immense damage to scarce water sources, vegetation and water reticulation equipment in Aboriginal Communities across vast areas in central Australia.

Monday 16th July



Up early to get ready for the start at 9 am from the BHP Billiton Marrapikurinya Park on the water front in Port Headland, 3m above sea level, Alice Springs is about 700m above sea level looks like it's going to be uphill all the way! Started riding on time after another ABC radio interview but soon realised it was going to be a hard day as the wind was blowing at 20-30 kph from the SE. Rode the first 50 km to the Marble bar turnoff at a very slow average of 15 kph battling the wind all the way. stopped there for a bite of lunch before heading in a more southerly direction on the Marble Bar road still a head wind! After seven hours of hard peddling for the day I reached the planed overnight camping spot on the Shaw River bank, the first 100km completed. I can tell you many

times that day I questioned my ability to complete the ride if the wind didn't abate. We pitched our tents on the bank of the dry river, had a wash down and a feed then collapsed into the sleeping bag and, promptly out like a light.

Tuesday 17th July

Up at dawn after a cool night packed up the tents, cooked my porridge which I soak overnight to speed up the cooking and increase the digestibility. Good wholemeal porridge is a good source of slow release carbs and with the protein supplement (supplied by sponsor Hammer Nutrition) gives the body a good start for the days effort which looked like a repeat of yesterday, as after a calm night the wind had risen with the sun! Set off on the next planed 100+ km to Marble Bar Geees! that wind! right on the nose. Pushed on even having to peddle downhill! Uneventful day on the whole, listened to Ray talking to the truck drivers on the

UHF radio when he was in range, letting them know I was on the road and to give me a blast on their horns when they sighted me, as the headwind wind prevented me hearing them coming until they were close behind me. These trucks are huge, with four trailers, they cart ore from the mines to the port (about 500 km one way) and you need to get off the road as they pass so it's crucial you know when they are approaching. The truck drivers, who all talk to



one another on the radio, were quite incredulous and funny with their comments when they learned what I was up to - most unrepeatable here. During the day a couple of caravaners stopped to give Ray a donation for me, some of them listen to channel 40 (truckies channel) on the radio so get to know what's going on.

After about seven hours (another tough day) I arrived in Marble Bar and headed for the caravan park where we were given a cabin (read basic donga) at half price as a donation by Margaret the manager. I wasn't long before she had the word out around the caravan park letting everyone know what I was up to, consequently several people came along to make donations excellent!

Off to the famous Iron Clad pub in "the hottest town in Australia" for a beer and dinner and collect more donations from the patrons.

Wednesday 18th July

Day off today cleaned and oiled the bike.

Good rest in the morning then had a look around the local sites talking to all in sundry about the project, collecting several donations in the process, including \$25 from the Williams guys for taking a group picture in front of the Iron Clad for them.

Back to the pub in the evening for dinner and a chat to Thomas who said he was the yardman, but we later surmised he was actually the publican as he donated a carton of Coopers pale ale, a couple of stubby holders and tee-shirts, he also gave me an envelope which I thought just had a postcard picture of the pub with a good luck message included - later on closer inspection I found \$200 also hiding behind the postcard!

Thursday 19th July

Back on the road again - wind still blowing from the SE, quite cool in the mornings but warms up by mid morning to a low 20 degs C. Rode the 9 km back out to the airport turning off onto the Newman road, the mine truck route. 23 km further on onto the Ripon Hills road through scrubby, hilly country. Plenty of mine trucks on the road not many private vehicles as the road only leads to pretty remote 4x4 destinations

Where I'm heading!

After another full days riding we found a campsite on the Yilgalong Creek for the night.

Friday 20th July

Carried on along the Ripon Hills road to the Telfer Mine road turnoff where I made a change of plans as I had had a shorter days riding, instead of the planed camping in the bush we drove from the Telfer Mine road turnoff the 20 or so km to Carawine Gorge, a large expanse of water on the Oakover River, the last expanse of water we were likely to see for the rest of the trip. There were a few other people camping there which is a tricky drive in over loose deep stones it was evident that a few vehicles had got their selves bogged. We found a comfortable camp site and were soon set up with tents erected and the fire going. The fire was great to help keep warm during the cool evenings, collecting firewood before it got dark was always a priority,

Ray often collecting and stored logs on the roof rack during the day while waiting the hour or two until setting off to catch up with me to top up my water bottles.

The bike was due for clean and oil, duly done all ready for the start of the serious off road riding tomorrow.

Saturday 21st July

Broke camp early and drove back to the start of the Telfer Mine road where Ray dropped me off and I started riding through the hills of the Gregory

Range, and on to the start of the Great Sandy Desert. The Trek 29er came into its own in this territory with the 29 inch wheels rolling so easily - what a difference from 26 inch wheels, so much easier.

By this time the truckies were used to me being on the road giving me a toot when they approached and slowing down to avoid covering me in dust. a couple of them even stoped to have a chat and give me a donation really unexpected! The graders were working on the first few kilometres of the road making a nice flat and hard surface to ride on didn't last though!

While in Marble Bar I had made a few phone calls after speaking to a Telstra technician, Kevin, at the pub who suggested I call the Indigenous Liaison Officer, Ben Bryant at Telfer and let him know we what we were doing. I had written to Telfer's parent company Newcrest Mining months previously asking for a donation and not received a reply. Ben was very welcoming and told me to call into the mine where they would give us accommodation for the night and feed us, also gave me the contact for the next Aboriginal community we pass at Punmu.

The weather was more accommodating today with varying winds - not on the nose all day, so made good time reaching Telfer, covering 110 km by 4 pm. As instructed we went to the gate house to be inducted and issued passes for the mine, then shown to our accommodation - a nice comfortable room each, a good shower for a change, then off to the canteen for a feed couldn't believe the selection! Wrong about not seeing fish for a while back at Coral Bay the chef cooked me a nice piece of barra while I waited, went a bit overboard with the courses had to sample as much as I could get in, wasn't going to get fed like this for a while and I reckoned I was going to burn it off pretty quickly anyway so go for it!

Ben said that I should have contacted him instead of the head office and they would have organised a fundraiser but the security guy said he would do it anyway - we'll see what happens!

Sunday 22nd July

After a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed it was off to the canteen for breakfast they had everything imaginable laid out, hot and cold - even porridge! had another good feed and then were directed to the crib room where the guys make up their lunches, lots of salads , cold meats, fruit and sweets. we loaded up before contacting the security guy to escort us back to the road and on our way again.

The road from Telfer is little used as it mainly services the small community at Punmu about 140km from Telfer and Kunawarritiji a further 180+ km further on. We only saw one vehicle today, a 4x4 with an off road camper who stoppeded couldn't believe what I was doing and gave me a \$50 donation.

The road was quite good most of the way with long stretches of a hard chalky material changing to sandy areas which were hard going and the wind! Managed about 80km to a good campsite by a windmill. We came across a few operating windmills between Telfer and Kunawarritiji not indicated on maps, which had been erected to provide water for travellers in a generally waterless desert.

There were lots of signs of animals in the soft sandy areas on the road - footprints everywhere, camels, donkeys, dingos, hopping mice, lizards etc. but no sign of the owners except for a few lizards on the road.



Weather still good, cold nights and mid 20 C days and not a cloud in the sky, amazing sky's at night with the stars so bright and looked so close you could almost touch them.

Monday 23rd July

Off once again on the 60+ km ride to the Punmu Community keeping my fingers crossed that the wind would stay the mild easterly breeze it was when I started the day, it did, and was much more pleasant riding as I skirted around the north of Lake Dora.

My legs were now ride fit with no aches and pains after a hard days riding. The first few days of riding were very hard and I experienced serious cramping at night which left painful muscles' for days.

I probably missed quite a few things on the way as I had to concentrate on the road surface, which constantly changed - always trying to find the best surface with the least loose sand which when riding through felt like riding with the brakes on, avoiding holes, corrugations and rocks never a dull moment. A few kilometres from Punmu I was riding up a sand hill when I spied four young Aboriginal girls waving from the top of the sand hill off to the left, I gave a quick wave as two hands are needed to hang on to the bars on steep soft sand. The girls came running down to the road to meet me, with "what you doin mister" after a detailed explanation I think I got the message across and was told they were making a camp on top of the sand hill. These girls were about five kilometres away from the community with no water makes you wonder! Anyway I called Ray on the small radio I carried telling him to catch up so I could give the girls some water, we only had a one and a half litre bottle we could give them which they shared straight away, refilled and off running up the sand hill to carry on with their project.

Rode on into the community asking a couple of the locals where I could find John the Community Manager who I had spoken to while in Marble Bar. John had said he would give us free accommodation for the night. Located Johns office in the middle of what looked like an unplanned community with buildings dotted here and there, in an unkempt landscape with lots of mangy dogs and rubbish unfortunately like most indigenous communities.

John - a bit of a character - looked he'd be more at home in a bikie club, duly took us to the accommodation house which we were to share with the Telstra contractors (who were coming to install some phones) pretty basic but at least had a shower with hot water.

Later we saw John belting around the community on a dirt bike giving the local kids rides on the back - stirring up clouds of dust on the dirt roads.

The community had a resident nurse , Paul, who I had a chat with about my cough which was persisting from before I left Bunbury and becoming quite annoying, keeping me awake at night. He prescribed some medicine and instructions to help clear it up.

It was good to have a bit of company with the contractors in the evening for a change - cooked bangers mash and onions for dinner which went down well with a couple of the Coopers beers from Marble Bar.

Tuesday 24th July

Left Punmu on a cool morning with little breeze heading east before turning north to loop around Lake Auld and to the right turn onto the Wapet road leading to Kunwarritiji, straight on is the Kidson track which takes you through to the Great Northern Hwy near the Sandfire Roadhouse 500+ km to the north you wouldn't want to miss the turnoff here! by the way there are no road signs either. Drew a big arrow in the sand for Ray to follow, although he did have the track notes - but just to make sure he didn't go belting off the wrong way and waste precious and expensive diesel fuel \$3.40 a litre out here!

Just past the junction a putrid smell wafted on the breeze, not much further on I came across two dead camels laying in the road wow! what a smell, I held one of the dust masks I carried over my nose and mouth and tried to hold my breath - not too much avail.

No traffic at all today - real lonely out there in the middle of the Great Sandy, just how I like it! a couple of hours of peace between Rays appearance on the scene every couple of hours.

Found a camp site for the night after riding about 100 km from Punmu but didn't have a very good night as my self-inflating Thermarest mattress was somehow punctured and wasn't holding air, on top of that I was still coughing on and off all night.

Wednesday 25th July

Wearily dragged myself out of my sleeping bag at daybreak and readied myself for the 80 km ride to Kunawarriritji. Pretty cold this morning but soon got warmed up when I got peddling wearing a thermal vest tee-shirt and wind breaker jacket. SE breeze was up again this morning so tough going, but buoyed by the thought of a day off, a comfortable bed and a shower at Kunawarriritji tonight. I had met the manager Graham last year when I stopped there to fix broken shock absorbers on my way down the Canning Stock Route which passes close by the community. I had been in touch with him a few times since for information and he was expecting us, offering free accommodation for two nights which I was really looking forward to. Another quiet and traffic less day - just head down and bum up into the wind - what a relief when I sighted the water tower at Kunawarriritji in the distance seemed to take forever to get there!

This community is so different to all the others I have visited around the north clean and tidy, friendly people, no wire mesh around the fuel pumps and over the windows, only a few dogs that are all healthy looking - quite a contrast and a credit to Grahams management. Shame he is retiring later this year.

Had a great reception from Graham who is a great joker - wanted to know if I was going to stay for a while as he had a few jobs ready for me, last year I sorted out and tidied up his tool shed and workshop while I was waiting for a couple of shockies to be shipped up from Perth. After a catch up he showed us to a motel unit each for the two nights. Graham has seen the opportunity with all the 4x4 traffic on the Canning Stock Route doubling every year and has installed a large fuel storage facility, a well stocked shop, eight motel units, shower and toilet block with washing machines. and a large fully equipped workshop off roaders are always breaking something! This is a busy place during the winter months a constant stream of 4x4 adventurers tackling the 900 sand hills of the CSR, reputed to be the most remote track in the world and the ultimate 4x4 adventure. Just about every vehicle that traverses the CSR stops there to fuel up as the next fuel is either about a 800 km to the north at Bililuna or 1200 km south at Wiluna. A great move for the community.

Bliss, a comfortable bed and I don't have to get up early in the morning!

Thursday 26th July

Just sauntered through the day after a lay in, cleaned the bike, chatted to other patrons and passers through who were interested in what I was doing - collected several donations over the day. Went and had a chat with the community nurse Betty, about my cough which wasn't responding to Punmu medicine. Betty reckoned I needed a course of antibiotics, cough medicine and paracetamol we'll see!

Watched some of the Olympics on TV - then off to bed early.... a big day tomorrow.

Friday 27th July

Reluctantly raised at dawn, packed up, said our goodbyes and mounted the trusty steed for another day in the saddle, which my backside was very reluctant to be involved in calluses on calluses by now!

Today I wanted to get to Gary Junction which is at the end of the Jenkins track and the start of the Gary Junction road about 80 km from Kunawarriritji, which I did, riding for another day into those unrelenting SE winds. I had checked the historical weather information while planning the ride which indicated that there was fifty per cent calm and the strongest winds were from the west during July/August, It was mostly calm at night so I figured that the 50% calm was at night!

At Gary Junction there is a steel box with a visitors book which I duly added my comment about the ride and left a bunch of business cards which have donation info on the back. We found a camp site at the junction for the night, camping out here is great just pick your spot as nobody else to worry about. Ray knocked up some pasta for dinner. I had a wash down then off to the sleeping bag where I spent the night on the thermorest which went flat pretty soon after laying down too tired to worry too much about it!



Saturday 28th July

Rather chilly this morning, took a bit of willpower to exit the sleeping bag and get dressed for another days exertion against the S Easterly, it feels like it's becoming a battle of wills who's going to give up first! There have been times when it got so tough I allowed the thought of giving in to cross my mind, but just had to make it to that next landmark, a sand hill, tree or bush. How can I capitulate after all the work and commitment keep going to that tree a couple of kilometres away!

This was one of those days. Not far after starting to ride this morning the track had been graded recently and



soft sand had been graded from the windrows at the side of the track to raise the road level, making it almost impossible to ride over, tyre pressures don't make any difference in this stuff riding along, feels like the brakes are on then the front wheel buries - sudden stop, Oop's! fell off again. I had been riding with cleats on my shoes which keeps the feet in place on the peddles, but find that when riding through sand, even when adjusted to the lowest spring pressure they are hard to get the foot free quick enough, consequently balance is gone and contact with the ground is inevitable. After the third fall I was getting a bit peeved not helped by having to resort to

shanks pony and bush the bike one of those days!

Removed the cleats to avoid more falls and maybe more serious damage, riding not so efficient as not able to pull up on the peddles riding through the sand.

After a couple of hours I caught up with the grader and stopped for a chat with the driver, who said the road from here to Jupiter Well was pretty rough, about 150 km distance, and there was another grader working further along and another pair out at the NT border. Lonely job these guys have working in really remote country keeping these roads (which are not much more than tracks in these parts) drivable - but unfortunately not bikeable!

After passing the graders the road was pretty rough but not so much soft sand so riding a bit easier, at least managed to keep up about a 15 kph average - and stay on the bike.

Achieved about 80 km by 4 pm, time to look for somewhere to camp for the night and a welcome rest.

Sunday 29th July

Another cold morning typical desert weather - freezing nights and warm days. Today the objective was Jupiter Well about a 70 km ride which hopefully wouldn't be too hard and get an early finish - wishful thinking! that wind kept blowing and the track varied from sandy to rocky to corrugated, some sections I was forced to walk. Then I found that the



windrows had a crust on the sand and if I road fast enough with low tyre pressures I could ride the 45° banks without bogging, but not all the sand sections were like this and pushing the bike was the only way another hard day! A couple of vehicles past today both stopping to find out what this was all about, didn't let them go until they made a donation. One couple told us about a tame dingo that hung around Jupiter Well, scrounging, and to watch your boots dingos have a habit of taking off with boots if you leave them outside at night.

Reached Jupiter Well about 4 pm - a pleasant spot among the desert oaks, and plenty of water from the hand pump which was installed by surveyors back in the sixties.

I had planned to have a rest day here but as I was behind schedule I decided not to and keep going, I had hoped to cover closer to 100 km per day but due to the adverse conditions 70 - 80 km was all I was managing most days.

After setting up camp I gave the bike a good clean and oiled the chain using dry lube, dry lube which is a wax lubricant doesn't collect the sand and dust so much as regular oil. I have to clean the chain every other day as it starts to creak when it is getting dry with the dust.

Monday 30th July

Had just finished packing up ready to leave when Albi the French mechanic from Kunawarriritji came past saw us and drove over - he was on his way to Kiwirrkurra taking a couple (who we had met at Kunawarriritji who were looking at taking over from Graham and Joy when they retired) to catch the mail plane to Alice Springs, We chatted for a while until they left, Albi saying he would see us on his way back.

Another tough day - I caught up with the second pair of graders later in the day and a guy at their camp who was welding up their fuel trailer which was falling to bits with the constant vibrations driving over the corrugated roads, stopped for a rest and a chat and complain about the wind, he said this time of the year the wind has usually died out and it is calm just my luck its decided to blow a bit later this year!

Managed another 80 + km by 4 pm and stopped at a native well site at the top of a hill. Ray had gone ahead and found the spot and had come back out to the road to wait for me, as we were

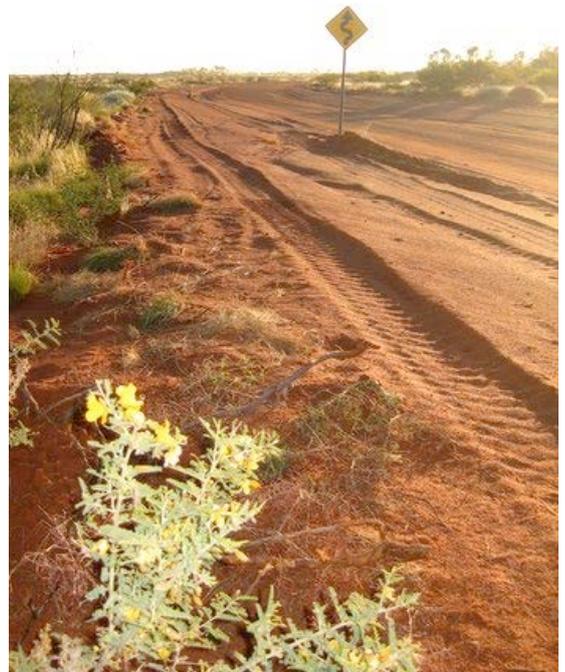
just about to go down the track to the campsite I spotted a cloud of dust in the distance heading our way, so we waited and as expected it was Albi on his way back to Kunawarriritji, the ute loaded with supplies, he duly pulled over - everyone stops in the bush except the ones that are city dwellers who have watched scary movies like Wolf Crater. Albi decided to have dinner while we chatted - a tin of corned beef and dry bread washed down with a coke, said, would rather it was a beer but none available as these are dry communities out here no beer!

It was starting to get dark by the time Albi was ready to go so said goodbye, Albi heading west into the sunset while we made our way down the track to get our camp set up the fire going and the billy on.

Tuesday 31st July

Got going a bit earlier this morning as wanted to get to Kiwirrkurra early as we were not sure if Andrew the Manager had received the message that we were on the way - Graham was going to call him to arrange accommodation for us.

According to the map it was 66 km to Kiwirrkurra but we were finding the map distances didn't correspond with the car speedo we always seemed to be travelling further than the map distances.



The terrain had changed over the past couple of days as we had now left the Great Sandy Desert and were now in the Gibson desert, more undulating country with eroded rocky hills and less sand hills, many long uphill drags plod, plod, wind wind!!

As I was riding early afternoon I spied a rather large camel sitting in the road a fair way ahead, I kept riding towards him and as I approached he got onto his feet Geez he was big! by this time I was about 100 metres away and he was standing his ground - never been able to get a definitive answer as to whether bull camels are aggressive. Anyway standing there facing off a giant camel discretion seemed the better part of valour and I gave Ray a call on the two way, fortunately he was in range and suggesting he caught up with me rather rapidly, after about what seemed forever, eyeball to eyeball with the camel who by this time was making grumbling noises, Ray turned up. I told him to wait as I rode towards the camel but catch up quick smart if the giant became aggressive. I started to ride forward and the camel started to move in my direction that was it Ok Ray get between me and Goliath, the camel decided to back down then and wandered off into the bush Phew! Bur still don't know if camels can be aggressive! Did hear of a car being attacked once!

Drama over for the day I rode on through the Pollock Hills in the afternoon getting close to Kiwirrkurra, road very rough with bad corrugations, then I spotted what looked like bike wheel tracks, hard to believe somebody else is out here on a bike!

Then later in the day as Ray was catching up with me I heard him coming from a way off - it turned out the exhaust pipe had broken off at the manifold clamp and one of the support brackets was missing, luckily we hadn't lost the whole system and another casualty to add to the many along the track! nothing on board to do a temporary fix so pinched a couple of gear cables from the spare bike to hold the pipe in place until we could do a better job - no number 12 fence wire laying around out here!

I was really pleased to eventually see the sign to the community, 8 km off the road, where I waited for Ray and got an assisted ride by hanging on to the spare bike on the bike rack into town.

Another Community on the lines of Punmu no semblance of order!

Found Andrews office who didn't know we were coming - bush telegraph not working to well he said! but we were very welcome and there was accommodation in a couple of dongas for us. we were then introduced to the Elder and community boss Mr Brown, a very imposing Aboriginal - black as night, over six foot tall, looked even taller under his off white Stetson atop a mop of black curly hair, a pair of cowboy boots and massive belt buckle supporting his red dust stained jeans. He was impressed with my challenge couldn't believe I had ridden all that way and said I was welcome in his community anytime!

I had previously made inquiries regarding permits for this territory and was told they weren't required but then I learned that Kiwirrkurra Lands required a permit which I didn't have, so I broached the subject with Mr Brown everybody called him Mr Brown? Anyway Mr Brown said "Mr Brown *you* don't need a permit you are welcome on my land" emphasising the *you*. So no I didn't need a permit after all.

There were several whities visiting the community - a couple of people from Centrelink sorting out registrations as there were apparently a number of locals not receiving their social security payments.

Another guy who oversees the administration of the communities, a woman and guy involved in the indigenous women's art organisation, who were all staying in the same accommodation as us - ours was pretty basic as we were the last to arrive we got the one star rooms while the others were in the upmarket two star rooms. But we all had to use the same shower.

Gave the bike its bi daily clean and oil, found some fence wire and secured the exhaust system a bit better - cooked dinner and sat up a bit late chatting to the Centrelink manager Bill and watching the Olympics on tele, also collected more donations from the visitors.

Wednesday 1st August

Bit slow getting going this morning too many people wanting to chat! Mr Brown his usual jovial self, Ian the school headmaster who revelled that the bike tyre tracks were his as he often went for a ride up the track for

some exercise. I also had a too long a discussion with him about indigenous education and his disillusionment with the system and the bureaucrats running it, Bill from Centrelink, the Admin guy, the women's business lady and Andrew the manager.

Eventually said our goodbyes and put the bike on the car roof rack for a ride back to the Gary Junction Road and head towards the Northern Territory WA border about 140 km away. Nothing changes still hard going, sand, corrugations and rocks. later the admin guy pulled up alongside and chatting for a while, while I bounced over the corrugations riding alongside his 4x4. A couple of other cars came past today, one stopped and told me they had seen my entry in the visitors book at Gary Junction, they had my card and were going to make a donation when they got home.

Managed to cover 100 km today ... very little wind for a change, was pretty bushed after that effort and promptly fell asleep as soon as camp was set up. off to bed early and hope the ground isn't too hard.

Thursday 2nd August

Next stop Kintore only about 50 km away in the Northern Territory. I had reached the major milestone of the NT/WA border in the afternoon and decided to camp there as we would be too late arriving in the community if I kept going.

The tack East from Kiwirrkurra to the border was very rough, corrugated and narrow as the East Pilbara Shire (the biggest shire in the world) don't do much maintenance out here. The thinking seems to be that the locals will go West for services rather than to Alice to the East, although Alice is closer but in another state, the NT. The local Aboriginal people in this area are the Pintubi who are related to the people to the East in the Gibson Desert whereas the people to the West at Kunawarritiji and beyond are Martu of the Great Sandy Desert and the Pilbara region, consequently the Pintubi are more inclined to travel East but the road is not maintained very well at all, but the locals don't seem to care - they fly along at crazy speeds in mostly battered two wheel drive cars which gradually fall to bits with the constant shaking, there are plenty of these cars abandoned along the tracks when they won't go anymore. As I was riding I would regularly come across sections of exhaust pipes and mufflers laying in the road along with other bits and pieces of vehicles. The same applies to the track cross the border into the Northern Territory, the road between the border and the Pintubi community of Kintore about 50 km East of the border the road is not maintained either, I encountered some of the worst corrugations on this stretch, the corrugations covering the whole width of the track from one side to the other so there was no avoiding them, that was really hard going!

Soon after I crossed the border a truck came along and stopped to have a chat - the guys were grader drivers who had just finished grading the track to the East of Kintore who were taking a drive out to the border to see the Len Beadle plaque at the border, they also said that that Kintore was as far as they were going with the grading, you would think as they had graded well over 500 km they would do the last 40 km to the border!

Friday 3rd August

Started off at 8 am to tackle the 40 km horror track to the Kintore turnoff that was hard work! what a relief when I reached the turnoff and the freshly graded and mostly hard surface road for the last 10 km into the community, fortunately the wind was also quite light today.

About 5 - 6 km out of town I came across an Aboriginal guy walking into town - his car had broken down, so I called Ray to give him a lift. It seems he had intended to travel to Papunya, about 400 km away, for a footy carnival but the car had let him down - he said that most of the guys from Kintore had gone.

The Aboriginal people in these remote locations still speak and use their own language as a first language then other adjoining tribes languages, then English as a third language, sometimes it's a rather difficult to understand them.

When I got into the community the place looked deserted so pulled into the police station, the first building we past - no sign of life there! hung around for a little while, eventually we spied a truck and set off in

pursuit. The driver turned out to be the power and water maintenance man Ian from whom we were able to ascertain all the information we needed. The community manager was away along with most of the community but he said there was a house we could use in the Shires compound. He went and got a key for us and explained that the guy who had been living there had been taken away by the police as he was wanted over in Queensland, he didn't know what for but sounded quite serious, just shows you can't hide anywhere! Anyway the house looked like he had just got up and gone to work, with food in the fridge washing on the line etc. so we just moved out of the way what we needed to and made ourselves at home with a tele to watch the Olympics, a hot shower and a comfortable bed, which I just laid my sleeping bag out on. Ray had bought a chook and vegies from the shop and we had a roast dinner that night quite civilised for a change!

Gave the bike a clean and oil and checked out if there was any welding equipment around, no luck there, had another go at making the exhaust more secure with some more no 12 fence wire I found laying around, still very noisy but hoping it would hold till we got to Alice, as it seemed there was no chance of a more permanent fix out here.

Saturday 4th August

Packed up in the morning and put everything in the house back as we found it and returned the key - loaded the bike on the roof rack for the 10 km ride back to the Gary Junction Road and another days punishment. Not long after starting off the road took a slight upward incline and as straight as a die for as far as you could see, I later learned that Len Beadle had named this section the "Gary Rise", what with the still blowing head wind and the upward incline on a sandy track it was a continual slog! I had been looking forward to a nice hard surface with no corrugations no such luck, no corrugations But plenty of soft sand! The graders had flattened the road surface but left all the soft stuff spread over the track ... if this is what I was in for the rest of the way to the Tanami road, geez the thought was depressing!

Pushed on all day through soft sand with very few areas with a hard surface unrelenting!

Around midday a billowing cloud of dust appeared on the horizon and 4x4 came into view, I did my usual procedure, stopping well into the track leaving enough room for them to comfortably pass if they weren't going to stop, keeping my dustmask at the ready just in case. This tactic worked 90% of the time as they were usually confused seeing a lone cyclist in the middle of nowhere and had to stop to find out if I was OK. This time it turned out to be a cop on his way out to Kintore after being in Papunya for the footy carnival. He was quite concerned when he stopped, wanted to know where my support was, what communications we had etc. etc. but soon pacified him after explaining everything, taking his leave saying "oh well you seem to know what you're doing you've got this far in one piece" No donation though! Only met one other group of vehicles on the track today they were a team of Sydney University scientists, entomologists, ornithologists etc. heading for the Rawlinson Ranges on an expedition. managed to collect almost \$100 from them. but thought they were a fair bit off track for the Rawlinson Ranges as the only way South was down the Sandy Bight track, the junction I had passed earlier, but this track would take them too far West maybe they were not telling me where they were really going?

Managed to cover nearly 100 km today before finding

a campsite for the night I had applied for a permit to transit and roadside camp while riding this section, I had had to notify the Central Land Councils anthropologist of my plans with GPS locations of where I wanted to camp - pretty impossible to do but went through the motions anyway locating what looked like



likely camping places on Google earth. The anthropologist then had to contact the various elders of the communities who's land I was proposing to camp on and get their OK before permission would be granted, that was three months before I started the ride and I still had not received the permit when I left home! Just hoped it had been issued while I was on my way. Trying to locate a campsite from a Google map which just gives you a horizontal plane isn't easy, consequently this first one wasn't suitable, but found another accessible area nearby - set up camp had dinner then off to bedvery tired I slept like a log.

Sunday 5th August

Set off early leaving Ray to pack up camp as I wanted to get as close to Papunya as I could today - proved to be another very hard day - soft sand most of the way. Had my first puncture today luckily just after one of the water bottle refill stops, so Ray was in sight and I was able to get the high pressure pump from the car, save me pumping away with the small emergency pump I carry on the bike, not that I needed much tyre pressure on these tracks.

A quiet day on the road again today a couple of cars stopped and gave me a donation but several more went straight past in a cloud of dust, mostly locals heading back to their communities from the footy carnival in Papunya.

The angular outline of Mount Liebig came into view early in the day but it seemed like it took forever to

reach. I eventually past the community of Liebig which lies near the mountain, but did not stop as the shop would be closed on a Sunday and we were OK for fuel, also it was too early to stop for the night so kept going until about 5 pm and time to find a campsite.

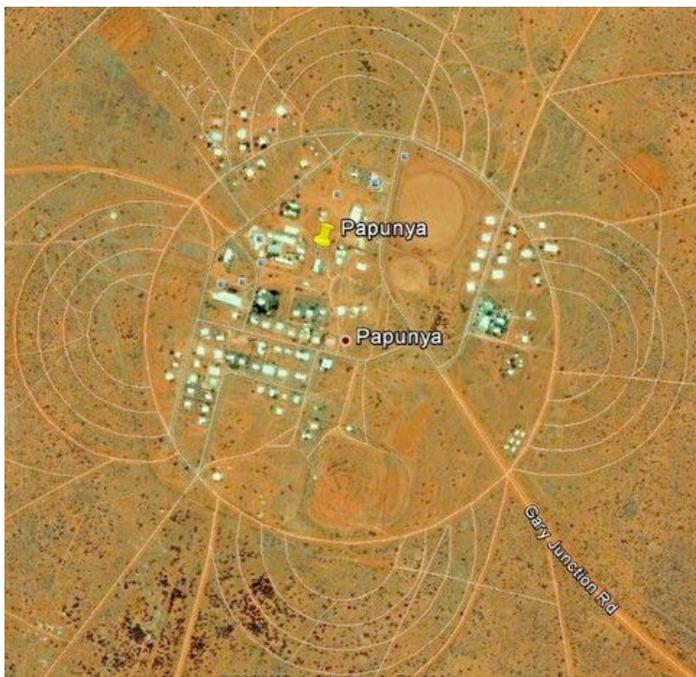
Monday 6th August

We had camped about 30km out of Papunya which took a couple of hours to reach but not without incident, I had left Ray to finish packing up camp and walked the bike out to the road and started to ride, hadn't gone too far and I saw a large goathead burr stuck to my front tyre, pulled it out and the tyre immediately went down, I had overlooked replacing the spare tube that I punctured yesterday and had left it in my saddlebag, so I had to walk back to our

campsite and fit a new tube and replace the spare must remember to repair the spares sometime.

Arrived in Papunya late morning after battling through more sand. This mainly Pintuby and Luritja community has an unusual layout (see photo), apparently the idea was to relocate the western desert people here back in the 60's, and each of the four groups would occupy one of the semicircular sections but it hasn't been very successful. The layout is pretty confusing when you're trying to find your way out of town as there are no direction signs, but the place was fairly buzzing when we arrived as the footy carnival was still in full swing.

On the way through town we stopped at the store for an ice-cream which Ray had gone in to buy while I stayed with the car and bike



not a good idea to leave things unattended in these communities as the locals culture is 'everything belongs to everyone'!



While I was waiting for Ray to get the ice-cream one of the local cops drove up and parked near us - it was more like abandoned as it was just a large open dusty space around the store, anyway we started chatting as he was interested in what an old guy was doing there with a bike. During the conversation he suggested that it would be a good idea if I changed my plans and instead of going into Alice via the Tanami track, he thought it would be a better plan to take the Haasts Bluff track about 18 km out of town going South down to Namatjira Drive which is now sealed, cutting out about 80 km of sand track, also there are many trucks using the Tanami now since several gold mines

have started operations up in the Tanami Desert. you could see the Haasts Bluff from where we were standing and I wondered how long it would take to reach it!

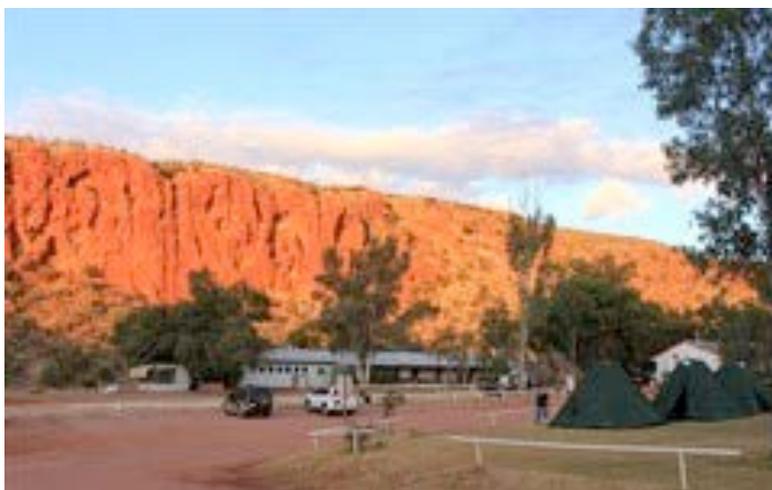
Ray was taking a while to come back from the store, so the cop said he would go and take him to the front of the queue as there seemed to be half the local population in the store. We eat our ice-cream and then followed the cops directions out of town. The road was no better but much wider and busier. I ploughed on through the sand stopping for a while in the shade of a desert oak for some lunch.

Arriving at the junction of the Haasts Bluff track I started to ride South happy to see this road had not been graded for a while and there were sand free areas, the wind had dropped also so managed to crank up the average speed to a more respectable 20 kph - but it didn't last for too long and started to get very variable forcing me to zig zag back and forth across the track looking for firm ground.

After a couple of hours of this I heard a motor bike coming from behind it was actually two bikes, these guys had cameras stuck on top of their helmets and had been following my tracks for a while, they stopped for a chat and told me that they had spoken to the same cop as I had in Papunya and asked about these bike tracks they had been following, he had told them I had left town a couple of hours previously and the way we were going. I gave them my card as they wanted to make a donation when they got back to their farms in the West Australian Wheat Belt



Glen Helen Gorge on the Finke River



Glen Helen resort

Later I came to the junction where the Haasts Bluff community road carried on and the Namatjira Drive connecting track went off to the left. This is another community built in the sixties to house some of the desert people, there are Pintuby and Pitjantjatjara people living here who have a strong art tradition. We didn't go into the community but pressed on for the remainder of the afternoon until the last section of the track became impossible to ride on, very narrow twisting and turning through treed country and deep soft sand to top it off. As we were near the junction with

Namatjira Drive which was 40 km from the Glen Helen Resort we decided we could do with a comfortable

bed and the opportunity to get cleaned up and celebrate finishing the unmade tracks part of the ride, so we loaded the bike on the car roof rack and headed for the resort. After checking in we got cleaned up showered and cleaned the bike, later we met up with the bikie farmers in the bar for a welcome beer and then dinner, a very sociable evening and an invite to visit any time I was passing through the western wheat belt off to a comfortable bed for a change and a good night's sleep.

Tuesday 7th August

Set off early and Ray drove me back to the Haasts Bluff Namatjira Drive junction to start the 160 km ride into Alice Springs and the end of the "Sea Centre Challenge". I had pumped the tyres up nice and hard to decrease the rolling resistance for the ride on the sealed road - really got moving on the undulating road which runs parallel to the West McDonnell Ranges, very different scenery from the deserts. there were some nice downhill sections where I was able to free wheel for a change No wind!!

This is a popular tourist route so there was quite a bit of traffic and nobody stopped so I had an uninterrupted ride back to the Glen Helen Resort for a feed and break after covering the 40 km in 1 hour and 20 minutes.

While there I got chatting to an outback tour driver telling him what I was doing (never miss an opportunity!) who gathered his dozen or so passengers to tell them the story - so it was photos all round and almost \$60 in donations that was to be the last donation collected on the road.

I set off again with 120 km in front of me, but it was easy riding compared with what I had become used to, arriving outside Alice approaching 5 pm that was it all over my backside has never been more relieved !!!

put the bike on top of the car and made our way to the caravan park and a cabin for the night.

Wednesday 8th August

Contacted the Alice Springs Rotary Club who had arranged for us to stay with a member Steve and his wife Jane. The Rotary Club also invited me to give a talk at their meeting and a mention was made of a donation to follow.

I also contacted the local Fred Hollows Foundation representative who had arranged for me to give a talk and have morning tea at an Indigenous Health conference being held in town.

Had the car fixed, tidied up and loaded ready for the 2500 km drive back to Bunbury via the Great Central Road more dirt roads!



The End