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Journey to Dragon Tree Soak

Friday, Jul 15, 2011 at 00:00

equinox

Looking at maps of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia there is a remote nature reserve near the centre of it. This is most apparent in high scale maps, where the cartographers always include it, perhaps as there are minimal features in the area. For one, who for one reason or another finds it quite challenging and satisfying to visit such places it has been a calling – a task not yet complete, a void in the resume of a modern day desert traveller.

It is Dragon Tree Soak Nature Reserve, declared a Class A Reserve for the conservation of Flora and Fauna in 1979 and within its boundaries lies a gem of desert oases, Dragon Tree Soak (Kurriji-pa-Yajula). It first came to the attention of the non-indigenous in 1977 when Norm McKenzie and Alex George from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife found it via helicopter.



This soak was the immediate goal of a group of like minded people who converged from different parts of Australia to Roebuck Plains Roadhouse, just east of Broome on 4th July 2011. The party consisted of four vehicles, all Toyota Landcruisers, six people and my dog Massie. Two of the group had been there already the year previous, though had taken a different route than the one which was now proposed.

In the morning, 5th July, I led the group out of the roadhouse and made our way south down the Great Northern Highway. I was both extremely nervous and excited at the same time. Many, many hours of studying aerial images and

maps well into the night sometimes, got us to this point and I dearly hoped all went well.

Twenty minutes later we arrived at the turnoff to Dampier Downs Road. This road, or sandy track more correctly would take us close to the desert. It seemed fairly under utilised for a main station access road however was easily enough traversed. We met the station owner and his son near the Dampier Downs Outcamp and after brief dialogue and directions as to the best way to access the southern track we made our way south.



This southern track should take us around the southern end of the Edgar Range and eventually to yet another southern track to take us further to our destination. From the Outcamp the track was extremely overgrown. Flowering Acacia branches overhung the track; it was very thick in some spots. The flowers were collected in various spots on the vehicles. The track hadn't been graded for many years. I only caught a brief view of the range by standing on top of the cab. We only managed about 40 kilometres before we decided to camp, and did so, our first camp together – just off the track in the bush.



We all arose early and after breakfast continued along the track. Some nice views of the Edgar Range were afforded mid-morning, including Goorda Tower, a pinnacle type formation. Soon after I noticed the tops of what appeared to be breakaways so veered off the track to hopefully find a nice place for some morning tea.



We were all surprised to find that the supposed breakaways turned out to be the walls of a huge canyon type formation, part of the Edgar Range – and extended for many kilometres. This was a very scenic spot and we spent about an hour there. Upon further investigation there was another side track not far away which would be the preferred entry to this amazing vista. If we had more time we thought this would be a great place to spend a few days, if not longer to explore, as there were valleys and eroded peaks extending for many kilometres.



Again we continued along the track passing a Coolimon Tree on the way. This track was still very thick and again the

Acacia was the main culprit. Sometimes we drove adjacent to the track as it was easier than the track. We camped in an old gravel pit which was near the most southern point that this track lies, before it swings around the eastern side of the ranges and heads north. Everyone attended to chores like fitting radiator protection and getting the right tyres on for the predicted upcoming desert onslaught. The dog slept most of the time at camp – most out of character.



Overlooking the Canyon



Traversing the track



Acacia

The next day, 7th July we headed easterly along the track before we turned northwards to try and find the "HELP" sign that American Robert Bogucki left in 1999, when he was lost and seeking assistance. He made the sign from nearby rocks, adjacent to a small canyon. The terrain got more undulating and rocky the further we went. My predicted location was not possible to reach by our vehicles from this direction and we had to walk the last 600 metres or so. The location was confirmed when we got there by the background, foreground and a tree, which was compared to photographs taken at the time. The "Help" sign had been washed away. Dave went down to the bottom of the canyon and said there was a pool of water there with some fish.



Dave overlooking Help Canyon



Help Canyon



Help Canyon



Then we made our way back to the track and we now headed down a different track to the south east, which eventually heads to the McLarty Track, though we were not to go all the way there on that track. This track as well had its fair share of overgrown bushes, though not as much as before, and it got better the further we went. It veered to the south over many sand ridges and then a sharp left to the east – it was here we had lunch, and was to be the location where we would head west, hopefully to an old survey line visible on aerial pictures.

After lunch we went cross country to the west and found a Gravity survey peg which indicated the position of the survey line which was supposed to go due south all the way to the McLarty Track. We followed the line, which had almost gone back to nature. It was slow going, and there were sandridges to get over; the more south we went to higher the dunes were. Every time I saw a survey peg every so often I expressed relief as it meant we were still on course. It was hard to identify the line sometimes and I wondered when it was last traversed. We stopped to admire a rocky outcrop, and then another one with a fig tree on it – it was here we were we camped for the night.



Ghost Gum



Traversing the sandy shotline



Traversing the sandy shotline



Phil coming over the top



Outcrop



Pete on top of dune



McLarty No.1 Drill Site

Leaving this isolated spot in the morning we all headed south again along the line, once again facing the massive dunes and the ill defined line before cutting the McLarty Track where we had lunch. After some searching in the vicinity the McLarty Number 1 drill site was found indicated by a marked steel plate. We couldn't find the actual bore hole – it was probably buried in the vicinity of the sign. Now we headed west until we came across another shotline which headed south. This was the line that the two in our current group has used last year to reach the soak – we followed it.



John and Suze over



Trouble



Chatting on the dune

The track wasn't too bad and the faint indications of last year's party were visible. The McLarty Hills were now visible to the south west and when the highest point was due west we cut in to visit them and probably find a place to camp. The run in wasn't too bad as we were in a dune corridor and the vegetation, apart from the usual spinifex was very sparse. Nearer to the hills it got very rocky and we had to straddle around rocky drop offs to make progress. We managed to get the vehicles close to the highest point of the hills and then walked to the summit. We then all explored the general area, which was made up of many small dome shaped hills before finding a sandy patch amongst the hills where we camped.



En Route to McLarty Hills



Back of Tray



McLarty Hills



McLarty Hills



The group



Massie at McLarty Hills



In the morning we all were either busy attending to chores or exploring the hills. Some Aboriginal paintings were found in a few areas of the hills. We then headed back along our original line in and reached the shotline again. We followed this until we reached a point where last year's group had turned to the west to joined up with another shotline about fifteen kilometres away. Their track was clearly visible in most places and we reached the other shotline fairly quickly. This track which joins the two shotlines we have called Whithorn Way.





The Utes along Whithorn Way



Dune Top



Lunch

From here John and Suzette, who came through last year led the way, more or less following their track in from last year. We arrived at Dragon Tree Soak an hour before sunset.



Dragon Tree Soak



Dragon Tree Soak



Dragon Tree Soak

The soak is truly an oasis, with plenty of water in it – A journey to it is not to be taken lightly, as it is a rarely visited place, and it has taken us a full five days to get here from the roadhouse, and after we left the station owners did not see a single vehicle or other people at all along the way. Still it is another place now visited and I no longer have to wonder!!!!



Journey to Dragon Tree Soak

Recorded: 04 Jul to 09 Jul 2011
Distance: 335.58km
Moving Average: 16.63km/hr
Altitude: 13m at 11.3km to 304m at 132.7km
Max Incline: 144.13% at 256.9km for 50.6m
Max Decline: -119.05% at 132.7km for 84.8m



Google

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Blog Summary

BlogID: 3799 Comments: 9 Views: 7719 Attachments: 1

Comment 1 of 9

Submitted: Monday, Apr 16, 2012 at 12:02

Member - Michael J (SA) commented:

Hi AI,

A superb collection of photo's.
Yet another satisfying trip by the sounds of it.

Cheers

MJ



The magnificent Hanging Rock

Member: [My Profile](#) [Send Message](#)

Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Monday, Apr 16, 2012 at 21:39

equinox replied:

Hi MJ,

Thanks. Yes, very satisfying - great team effort!!!

Those Edgar Ranges certainly deserve a secondary visit at a later stage.

Cheers

Alan



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Comment 2 of 9

Submitted: Monday, Apr 16, 2012 at 12:31

Mick O commented:

A good read Al and bought back a lot of memories of GDEC 2010. You've given a taste of how tough remote area travel can be. I don't think many grasp just how much preparation, planning and effort goes into undertaking a trip like this. It's very much a group effort. Congratulations on scratching your itch. Another box ticked.

Cheers Mick



A written note outlasts the longest memory

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Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Monday, Apr 16, 2012 at 21:40

equinox replied:

Hi Mick - It's a good feeling when a plan comes together that's for sure...

Cheers

Alan



Cruising Around....

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Comment 3 of 9

Submitted: Monday, Apr 16, 2012 at 18:55

Member - Stephen L (Clare SA) commented:

Hi Alan

A great read followed by great images, well done.

Cheers

Stephen



Roxby Downs Special

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Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Monday, Apr 16, 2012 at 21:42

equinox replied:

Hi Stephen

Thanks, You'll have to come for a look up that way sometime, great country.

Cheers

Alan



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Comment 4 of 9

Submitted: Tuesday, Apr 17, 2012 at 21:18

Member - Justin O (QLD) commented:

Great to see DTS looking so good. It had a lot of camel damage in the other wet areas nearby in 1982.



Member: [My Profile](#) [Send Message](#)

Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Wednesday, Apr 18, 2012 at 23:54

equinox replied:

Hi Justin,

It seems to still somehow lack many signs of the camel, I guess they make do with, like you say - the other wet areas nearby. A good thing as it is a special place!!

Cheers

Alan



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Comment 5 of 9

Submitted: Sunday, Apr 22, 2012 at 09:56

Phil B (WA) commented:

Well done Alan,

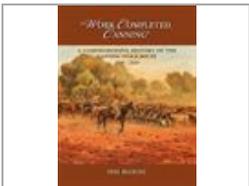
What a terrific blog that captures the essence of our journey - the pics do it almost by themselves.

That trip seems so long ago now - but without doubt it was right up there amongst my enjoyable off road adventures ever.

I'm sure you'll have more EOites licking their lips for more Equinox adventures.

regards

P



Phil B

Today is the oldest you've ever been, yet the youngest you'll ever be, so enjoy this day.

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Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Sunday, Apr 22, 2012 at 16:45

equinox replied:

Hi Phil,

Thanks, true it does seem a while ago now - how time flies.

I'm glad you and the others could come along, a great team!!!

Cheers

Alan



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Comment 6 of 9

Submitted: Monday, Aug 27, 2012 at 16:13

Candace S. commented:

Now THIS is the kind of trip I wish I could go on when I visit Oz!

Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Tuesday, Aug 28, 2012 at 09:28

equinox replied:

Hi Candace,

You never know your luck, I hope you get what you want when you come over!!!

Cheers

Alan



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Comment 7 of 9

Submitted: Wednesday, Aug 29, 2012 at 14:47

Candace S. commented:

Have you planned any similar adventures for 2014? That's when I'll be there!

Comment 8 of 9

Submitted: Sunday, Nov 17, 2013 at 15:42

Mick O commented:

Al,

thanks for that. I should be out enjoying the magnificent weather, instead I'm indoors reliving a few trips into the unknown. Great write-up and photos. Just one question, who is helping who in the photo of Petey and Jaydub with the snatch-strap?

;-)

Cheers Mick



A written note outlasts the longest memory

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Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Sunday, Nov 17, 2013 at 16:58

equinox replied:

No worries Mick, I'm indoors too even though I have the car wash shampoo and polish ready by the door. Can't tell you what happened with the snatch strap, you know the rules - what happens on tour stays on tour :-)



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Comment 9 of 9

Submitted: Sunday, Nov 17, 2013 at 17:10

The Landy commented:

Fantastic read, great photos, sand good to know that there are others out there who enjoy reading maps well into the night!

As Cecil Madigan said, in a number of words, it is all in the planning, plan well and it should all go well...

Cheers Baz...The Landy

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Blog Owners Reply

Submitted: Sunday, Nov 17, 2013 at 19:12

equinox replied:

Hi Baz, there's something to be said about a bit of preperation that's for sure...



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