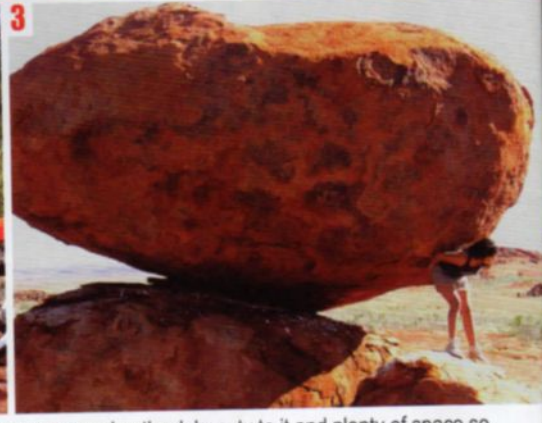


MAIN: Where there's smoke there's fire and this fire near Lake Rason had been burning for five weeks. 1. One lump or two? The locals come in close for a look. 2. Jacko takes a breather at the entrance to Plumridge Lakes. 3. How did this rock get here? Must have been a heavy lift!



The ever changing landscape soon flattened out into endless salt pans, with little vegetation. After a few hours riding we came across the OKAs in a grove beside a mud flat. You've got to love turning up for a ready-made lunch under a large shady awning with ample cold water to wash away the grime!

During lunch Jacko took the opportunity to go for a ride around the mud flat but the ground gave way to some underground moisture – resulting in 45 minutes of hard slog in the mud trying to tow the bike back out of the quicksand! It was another lesson learned with a few smiles and much chortling from the riders.

Camp that night was already taken care of by the time we reached our destination. It was located in a shady group of trees on the edge of mining country. Dinner around the fire was spectacular, the OKA lunch truck well utilised.

It was clear Brett and Botch had marked a good trail – one that was new to those of us who predominantly do day rides near home, as opposed to long outback discovery rides. The further east we went, the more the land changed as we approached the edge of the Great Victoria Desert.

JOB'S NOT OVER TILL THE PAPERWORK'S DONE

That evening the kids had a play on the QA50 mini bike (that's stashed in one of the trucks and is at the ready should anyone breakdown and their own bike be unrideable!) and a new use was found: camp toilet transport! Blokes were lining up with shovel and bog roll in hand to ride the pint-size mini out into the scrub to do their business.

The ride was proving to be quite an experience, made easy because of all the planning and preparation by the OutYonda team. Along the way we were surprised to come across a retired Dutch couple in a custom-made Landcruiser who were traveling around the world via one back-track after another. They had just completed an epic African tour ... what a life!

Each camp site had its own rugged outback beauty to it and plenty of space so no one was crammed up against a neighbour. One rider took to baking a loaf of bread each night and as the days progressed the finished product became more delicious – or perhaps we were just less discerning?

One day I found the group stopped by a burnt-out Pajero 4WD. The driver had parked over a Spinifex bush and up she went: a total barbeque! Amazingly the fire left a 20-litre drum of fuel intact, but behind the vehicle for more than 60km the bush was still burning. Riding through blackened country was fraught with danger, as everywhere there were fire-hardened punji sticks waiting to puncture the tyres of anyone silly enough to leave the safety of the track. Unfortunately a volunteer driver from the city decided to navigate around a fallen tree and managed to puncture two tyres in one foul swoop. This seemed to be of little concern though, as Rick plugged the tyres with jelly rope and they never failed again.

THIS IS PARADISE

A few days into the ride we arrived at the paradise of Plumridge Lakes, which is an interesting place with all the camping spots you could wish for. This time the bikes had arrived ahead of the OKAs and with the number of riders it was impossible to stop everyone heading out in all directions to explore the area. Out in the Goldfields new mining super-highways appear regularly, so the GPS and paper maps are often out of date or easily confused when your intended route is now criss-crossed by wide gravel haul-pack roads. One such new road had thrown the OKA trucks off the intended route but within a short while they showed up and made camp before sunset. How nice it was to swing open the oven tops and get the food cooking under a giant tarpaulin, safe from any rain.

Brett, who had a recent leg surgery and couldn't ride a bike anymore, took the little QA50 for a long slow ride to investigate the area, but didn't see a large,