

Headin' Out Yonda

MAIN: A desert mirage near Lake Rason. 1. Setting up camp near Burtville, a deserted ghost town in outback WA. 2. This is the start of a large outback wild fire that burnt out more than 60km. 3. Brett washing one of the OKAs after a desert thunderstorm.



temperamental camel standing behind him in the river bed. Despite our frantic waving for him to turn around and look behind him, he never saw the camel.

COOLING DOWN THE PACE HEATS UP

The next couple of days the weather cooled down, thankfully, and with no mechanical problems we made good time. For the large vehicles the going got easier once clear of the nature reserve, with the tracks all widened and graded by the mining companies. The lads were stopping more to check out the new sights along the way and as Botch was leading us in a smart fashion, this was no problem. The rocky outcrops grew in size and number, as did the dry salt lakes.

Near Lake Rason we stopped by the edge for lunch in the shade of the vehicles, a welcome relief from the wind but not the outback flies. Continuing north-west we soon spotted smoke on the horizon and as luck would have it our tracks took us directly towards the smoke... All around us was burnt or smouldering bush – this was the extent of the fire caused by the burning Pajero and we were now two days past our encounter with the burnt-out vehicle! It was a slow, relentless fire that we found out later had already been burning for some five weeks.

That night we camped in the lee of some large rocky break-aways, and Brett entertained us with stories of his time working in Africa as an off-road tour operator. With the 25 riders, drivers and family sitting on the chairs provided by OutYonda and having a feast, it seemed like everyone had some food they wanted to share with the group. Despite my love of free food, I couldn't fit another bagel or blueberry muffin in past the roast I had just consumed, all amply washed down with various fluids that everyone offered as well. It was almost the makings of another TV cooking travel show.

After dinner the more vigorous or youthful amongst the group would wander off in the twilight to explore the hills, while those of us who are getting sedentary continued to sit around the camp fire, gnawing on the remains of pork rib and listening to the tall stories and hyperbole.

The following day saw us arrive in Laverton en-masse, a line of trucks and dirty

dirt bikes heading to the fuel station and down to the take-away joint to experience the best chicken and chips we'd had in a long time.

After a few hours of rest and regrouping and we were okay for the final push back towards Kalgoorlie. The OKA trucks departed along the black-top while we threw caution to the wind and took a more direct route down to the historic gold mining town of Kookynie, arriving there before the trucks and with time to spare we paid a visit to the Grand Hotel for burgers and chips.

These old Goldfield towns once were home to thousands of people with dozens of hotels, bakers, hospitals, schools and shops, but now they have almost no residents or are close to dying and it's only the dollars that visitors bring on these outback holidays that keeps the history and memories alive. In any case, a stop was necessary to change a few air filters in the shade of some historic ruins before the big push down the tracks all the way to Kalgoorlie. Not far south of Kookynie is the camping hamlet of Niagara Dam, which is a great place to stop with its gas barbeques and toilets, but as it's usually crowded with caravans, we kept on heading south.

The last 300km was the fastest run along some great undulating tracks, making for a fun blast to the finish and following a few former Australasian Safari tracks into Kalgoorlie. With no issues along the way we all regrouped for the last time just north of Kalgoorlie, then arrived in town to where our vehicles were parked, repacked our gear and said our good-byes.

I have to thank the OutYonda crew for an amazing trail ride adventure that would not have been possible for us without their knowledge and logistical support over the eight days of trail bike heaven. If you feel the need to go and explore the wilds of Western Australia, or even head across the centre to Alice Springs and even further, check out what Brett and his crew can offer you.

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