



The Land Rover Defender shook and vibrated as I tried in vain to miss the worst of the corrugations. Behind, our 3.5-metre homemade off-road caravan followed faithfully, although sometimes it seemed to want to pass us as it took a line of its own. Even though we were only travelling slowly, I worried that at any time our little van would fall apart, as I thought the fillings in my teeth were about to.

We were on the last section of the track to Dalhousie Springs, and the warm waters of the springs would be just the thing to ease the dust and rattles from our bones.



*A room with a view for this wee bird.*

## Where is Dalhousie Springs?

Dalhousie Springs is situated about 190 km's northeast of Oodnadatta in the Witjira National Park. A great spot for those who are either about to head across, or coming back from the Simpson Desert. Immersing yourself in the warm 38-degree waters of the springs is a soothing and relaxing way to ease muscles and bones after many kilometres of rough dusty roads, it is a hard place to drive past without stopping even for a quick dip.

## Adelaide to William Creek

On a cool and overcast morning we left our home in Adelaide, negotiating the traffic snarls and longing for the open highway. First, we made our way through the wine region of the Clare Valley – a fine place for a spot of wine tasting and certainly worth a visit.

It is an easy drive from Adelaide for day trip, or better still stay overnight and make a weekend of it.



*A fair trip from Adelaide at around 1,350km but well worth it.*

## Beginning the trip

We had limited time and wanted to make the Ikara-Flinders Ranges before day's end, so we travelled on through a mixture of grazing land and crops of wheat and other cereals, before refuelling at Hawker, then on to Parachilna. Here we turned off the main highway and travelled along a good dirt road for 10 kms to Parachilna Gorge.

The Land Rover easily walked over the stones where we found a lovely camp spot beside a dry riverbed amongst river gums and between rugged hills. We set up camp, which in a small caravan takes only a few minutes, got a fire going, and cooked our dinner in the camp oven. Finishing the meal with a glass or two of red wine, we had a peaceful evening and listened to the silence of the Australian bush, before turning in.

## The next morning

The next morning we topped up with fuel at Leigh Creek, before continuing on past Lyndhurst. Then onto the dirt road, where a little further on we stopped to look at the ruins of Farina. This historic town was once the rail head for the northern line until it was extended to



Maree. There were 600 people living in Farina in the 1800s, however today Farina is in ruins. The only usable building is the underground bakery which is manned by volunteers during school holidays in the cooler months, turning out home-baked pies and pasties and the like for travellers on the dusty roads.

There is a campground just past the ruins with shady trees and flushing toilets. It's on Farina Station which is private property, and there is a small fee for camping. But to visit the ruins, it's free.



*On your way to Dalhousie, or any of the great outback tracks, stopping in at Farina is a must.  
To think it use to be a town of 600 people!*

The Oodnadatta Track was closed only a few weeks before because of rain, so we weren't sure what we would find. There was evidence of some boggy sections but it was mostly dry by the time we went through. However, in some places water was still evident in the hollows, and gutters beside the road.

## Maree - the start of the Birdsville and Oodnadatta Track

Maree marks the start of both the **Birdsville Track** and the **Oodnadatta Track**. It's also where the late **Tom Kruse, the Birdsville postman**, used to live. He came to fame when he appeared in a documentary called The Back Of Beyond, made in 1954, which showed how he battled heat, dust, breakdowns, and occasional floods to deliver the mail and freight to remote stations between Maree and Birdsville.

One of his trucks, a Blitz wagon, sits on the old railway station platform as a tribute to him. There are also a couple of old diesel locomotives, which unfortunately have been vandalised, and a couple of railway trucks. In 1980 the railway line (built in the 1920s) from Maree to Alice Springs closed when a new line was built much further west. Then, in 1986, the line from the Leigh Creek coalfields to Maree closed, and the town was no longer connected by rail.

Past Maree there lots of reminders of the original railway line beside the road. Most prominent of these reminders are the earthworks which the railway sat on, still plainly visible. There is also the occasional bridge, and the ruins of most of the sidings, stations, and water towers.

## Coward Springs

One such place is **Coward Springs**, where the station has been restored and is now a museum. There is also camping available, amongst shady desert oaks, with pit toilets, and showers. Both the shower and toilet blocks are made from old railway sleepers.

The showers require a small fire to be lit under a boiler outside the shower block for hot water. Wood is supplied from the remains of railway sleepers. It doesn't take long before you have a nice hot shower.

Once it's started it doesn't take much to keep it going. There is also a small swimming hole where you can go for a dip in the warm bore water.



*Camping at places like this is what outback touring is all about.*

## Passing Lake Eyre

Just before William Creek is where you turn off to go out to Lake Eyre. It's a pretty rough track and takes around one and a half hours to cover the 60kms. I had been out there on two previous occasions and both times the lake had water in it. The colours out here are amazing with spectacular sunrises and sunsets. Scenes of the lake reflecting these colours with various birdlife flying past and this vast body of water stretching to the horizon in such a barren landscape is a memorable experience.

Unfortunately, we didn't have time to visit the lake this time. But we did see Lake Eyre South from the viewing area which is located before Coward Springs. After William Creek, the track deteriorated a little. Mostly corrugations and rocky sections, which meant I had to keep the speed down.

This was the true outback – dry and with little vegetation. The recent rains did have a positive effect though, with grasses and wildflowers popping up from the barren surrounding country. Large areas of yellow flowers somehow giving a softening effect to the dry land.

***Read the second part of Kev and Linda's journey [here](#).***