

If you have been following at home, you would have seen **A Quick Trip to Dalhousie Springs - Part 1** last week. It covered the journey from Adelaide to William Creek. Well, here's Part 2, where I travel from William Creek to Dalhousie Springs. Enjoy the journey – and do it someday!



*South Australia's Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources' map of the Witjira National Park. **Available as a PDF here.***

William Creek to Dalhousie Springs

We had been travelling all day and were looking for a nice place to camp. We did find one spot beside a dry creek bed amongst some trees, which would have been perfect, but the remains of an old broken windmill as it squeaked and groaned with the breeze would have kept us awake all night. So we decided to push on to the Algebuckina Bridge where we made camp just as the shadows started to lengthen.

At 580m it was the longest bridge in South Australia until the Seaford suburban railway bridge across the Onkaparinga River was built in 2014. It opened in 1892 and cost 60,000 pounds to build. It makes a nice campsite next to the Neales River which is flood prone. It's amazing to see the bridge sitting there high above the river and to think that in 1974 a severe flood almost had the water touching the bridge decks.



A pretty sunset behind the Algebuckina Bridge.

On the road to Dalhousie Springs

We were almost at Oodnadatta and the road going into town showed the worst flood damage so far, with deep tyre grooves each side of the track. Here we took on some fuel and asked about track conditions ahead. Being told all roads were open, we headed off to Hamilton Station. This is where you turn off and head out to Dalhousie Springs. The road deteriorated almost immediately with bad corrugations and rocky surfaces.

We were traversing **gibber (desert pavement)** country now, and sometimes the gibbers looked smoother than the track. There are a number of floodways and rocky outcrops along this section, so don't push your vehicle too hard. This very remote country so the last thing you need out here is a serious breakdown. The final 70km took us around 2 hours and we were very glad to see the ruins of the Dalhousie Homestead come into view.

Dalhousie Station originally covered an area of some 4500 square kilometres and was acquired by the state government in 1985, to make up Witjira National Park. It was another 12km to the springs.



No cool, refreshing dip at Dalhousie. More like a hot tub. But refreshing nonetheless.

Arriving at the campground

Arriving at the campground you may expect to be coming into some sort of an oasis. In a way you are, but the campground is pretty basic. It is after all on the edge of a large clay pan, on



the edge of the Simpson Desert. There are toilets that are worked with a foot pump and cold showers.

I didn't see anyone use the showers while we were there. Why would you when there was a 38-degree hot bath the size of an Olympic swimming pool that never got cold.

Any sort of soap is banned from being used in the springs which is understandable. So, most people just float around soaking. Water is piped to various taps around the camping area but it is bore water and may not taste the best. It is better to have your own drinking water.

There are large rainwater tanks beside the toilet block if you are running low.

Fires are banned in the Witjira National Park, as they are in the Simpson Desert, even if you bring in your own firewood. Fallen timber is scarce, so what there is needs to be left on the ground as it provides shelter for small animals and insects.

Swimming in the springs

After selecting a campsite we quickly changed and headed for a swim. There are steps to allow easy access, and while the first part is deep, as you make your way into the centre it gets much shallower. It is a bit hot when you first enter the water, but you quickly acclimatise to it and then you can just relax.

Then you meet the fish. There are a several species of fish in the springs, the one you will undoubtedly see is the Dalhousie goby. This little fish, all 2.5cm of it, will love to come up to you and nibble away at any dry skin on your body. They can be very persistent, a bit like flies but under water. They don't hurt, it is just rather unusual.

You will need a **Desert Parks Pass** if you are heading into the Simpson, but you can pay a day rate if you are only staying at the springs. We stayed for two and a half days just taking it easy, having an occasional hot dip.

There are walking trails here that take you around the springs, and also across the claypan to some mound springs further away. You can't swim in these but it is an interesting walk as there are quite a few springs in the area. The scenery is typical of the outback so make sure you bring your camera.



The main pool at Dalhousie is large and is teeming with little goby fish who will invariably exfoliate your body.

The last afternoon

On our last afternoon, I gave the Land Rover and the caravan a check over to make sure all was okay. I also let some more air out of the tyres. I had 25 psi in them coming out so I dropped them down to 20 psi to see if it improved the ride.

It did seem to make a difference as we drove out the next day, and although we didn't travel a whole lot faster it was a more comfortable ride.

Backtracking to Oodnadatta, then heading towards

Coober Pedy

We backtracked to Oodnadatta, then made our way to Coober Pedy. This road was much better and we were averaging about 80km/h, and although there was still the occasional floodway to watch out for, we actually made good time. I've done a lot of travelling in Australia and this would have to be the most barren country I have ever seen. For as far as the eye could see there was nothing. Slightly undulating and featureless gibber plains. Here again, the recent rains have made a change to the landscape with carpets of yellow and white wildflowers coming up between the gibbers.

Coober Pedy

Arriving in Coober Pedy, it isn't half obvious that this is a mining town. Everywhere you look there is an assortment of mining equipment. Some of it was rather old looking and dilapidated, and others looked a little newer. But it is in almost every yard we passed. We had been to Coober Pedy a number of times so we only stopped long enough to refuel and pump the tyres up to around 40 psi before heading down the highway for about 12km to a large free camp that was well off the road. The sunset that evening was amazing, with some great colours that made everything glow a warm golden colour. It was a lovely spot with a number of other vehicles here as well.

The last leg - following the Stuart Highway

We were now on the last leg and followed the Stuart Highway down to Port Augusta. So far we had good weather on this trip. But when we arrived at Port Augusta it got rather cloudy then started raining. We went about another 40km to Mambray Creek campground in the Mt Remarkable National Park, for our last night.

The Land Rover and caravan went extremely well, with the only failure being a clearance light lens that went missing off the van on our first day. We did the whole trip in 8 days and travelled almost 2500km. It was a good trip, but we had some long days on the road.

If you are considering heading up to Dalhousie Springs, then give yourself plenty of time. That way you can enjoy the journey more and truly appreciate the beauty of the outback.

Have you ever travelled out to Dalhousie Springs? Any travel tips for other keep outback tourers?