



It was slow going. The traction control light on the dash kept flashing on and off as the Land Rover's wheels scrabbled for grip on the loose rocky surface. Occasionally, the track would start to level out, then it would climb again. When we finally made the top, we stopped to take in the views of the Davenport Ranges, and they were breathtaking, to say the least. We were on the Frew River 4wd track, which is only around 17 km's long, but took us almost 2 hours to complete. Not a particularly hard track, just very rocky requiring a 'take it easy' approach. We were a long way from help if anything went wrong. The real attraction of this track, however, was the wonderful scenery.

## Beginning at Timber Creek in the Northern Territory

A week earlier we were sitting in the Land Rover, not far from Timber Creek in the Northern Territory, parked on the side of the road, looking at the signs that said the tracks ahead were open. 2180 kilometres, that's how far we had to travel to the other end of the Binns Track. That's a long way.

My wife Linda and I had just come up from our home in Adelaide, to return along the Binns Track and meet our son and his family, as well as some other friends, at Dalhousie Springs. We were then going to cross the Simpson Desert, before heading back home.



*Our starting point at the beginning of the Binns Track. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Gregory National Park

The first part took us into Gregory National Park. The track was in reasonable condition along this section and a short way along we turned off into Limestone gorge.

Here the road narrows and gets harder as you make your way into the gorge. Part of the way in there is a short walk up to a viewing platform where there are fossilised remains of stromatolites.

These ancient fossils were once layered mounds of a single-celled microbe formed around 3.5 billion years ago. They lived in the sea and had an important role of contributing oxygen to the atmosphere. It is interesting to think, that the existence of these fossils, means that the hills we were standing on, were once under the sea.

The track then follows a rocky creek bed with the Land Rover having to roll over some big stones. Ultimately it finishes at a campsite, where we had a short break. Then it was back to the creek bed and out to the main track.



*We stopped by the historic Bullita Homestead. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Bullita Homestead

The historic Bullita homestead and stockyards is a remnant of the past. It's situated on the banks of the East Baines river – a nice spot to have lunch and a wander about.

The homestead is empty, with information boards inside that gives the reader an idea as to what it was like to live and work here. We camped at the campsite nearby under some shady trees along with several other campers.



*A historic name. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Starting on the Humbert Track

The next day we started on the Humbert Track. This track is not recommended for caravans or trailers. It is a narrow and winding track with rocks and sand as well as having some very short, sharp dips and floodways that would have almost any trailer dragging its back end causing the wheels to lift off the ground.

We had heard the Humbert River crossing was going to be difficult, but we crossed it easily, as the sides were not that steep, and there was hardly any water in it.

After about 69kms, which took us most of the day, the road started to improve as we came to the end of the track, and drove out of the Gregory National Park.



*We weren't sure what this bull was going to do. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Making our way to Top Springs Road House

Here we joined the Buchanan Highway and made our way to Top Springs Road House, where we stopped for the night. We were greeted by the friendly staff who showed us a grassy campsite for our tent. After a shower and a meal in the pub, we were off to bed.

Continuing along the Buchanan Highway, the Binns track eventually joined the Stuart Highway, then onto Tennant Creek. We camped overnight at Kunjarra, also called the Pebbles, just north of Tennant Creek, with dozens of Grey Nomads. We arrived late afternoon and was lucky to find a spot. Imagine a smaller version of the Devils Marbles, and you have the Pebbles.



*This riverbed was the road. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Tennant Creek

The following day we went into Tennant Creek to refuel and do some grocery shopping, then continued further south until the turnoff to the Davenport Ranges.

Dropping tyre pressure, we made our way into these rugged and beautiful ranges. The track here was at times very corrugated and rocky and crossed lots of small creek beds which were almost all dry. We bypassed Whistle Duck Creek and by mid-afternoon, we were at Old Police Station Waterhole.



*We dropped the tyre pressure before continuing on. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Camping at Old Police Station Waterhole

A very pretty spot with a large billabong, and shady trees to camp under. There were only two other campers here, so we had a quiet afternoon, relaxing and catching up on some reading. Across the billabong is the remains of the police station that was here from about



1920. Originally it was to investigate cattle rustling in the area, but ultimately it was abandoned.

It was a peaceful night, except for around midnight, when some wild donkeys started braying to each other in the distance. They started to get closer and closer until they walked past, within a few metres of our tent. They certainly can make some noise.



*The view at the Old Police Station Waterhole. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## The Frew River 4WD track

The next morning, we were up around dawn to pack up and head off along the Frew River 4wd track. This cuts about 20Km of the Binns Track and goes through some very pretty country. It's a challenge though with some steep climbs up some loose surfaces.

The early morning sun gave a pleasant glow to the surrounding mountains, the spinifex, which was going to seed, gently swayed with the cool morning breeze looking like silvery wheat.

For me, this was the best part of the track. Recent rains had made such a difference to this country, and we were lucky enough to see it after a good wet season.

While parts of the track still had corrugations, there were also some good sections which allowed us to scoot along at around 60 to 70 kph. Some parts were recently graded, and 80 to 90 kph was achievable. This was rare though, and even though the track was good in parts, we kept our speed down for safety.



*The Frew River Road 4WD track has some beautiful scenery. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Stopping for the night at Tower Rock

We stopped for the night after a long day's drive at Tower Rock. A bit hard to find coming from the northern end, but a pleasant enough spot for an overnight stay.

The facilities there are non-existent, however, there is a loo which consists of a drum over a hole with a toilet seat on it, and no walls at all. There were just four stakes in the ground where there must have been some sort of roof. Talk about a loo with a view!



*At Tower Rock, we were treated to a loo with a view. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Gemtree and the Arltunga Historical Reserve

The next morning, we finally made the bitumen near Gemtree – bliss! Devonshire tea for us and diesel for the Landy, and then along the Arltunga Tourist Route toward the Cavenagh Ranges.

We lunched in the carpark of the information centre for the Arltunga Historical Reserve, where gold was discovered in about 1887. A town sprung up as prospectors rushed in. It kept going until about 1916 and is now a ghost town. Some restoration work has been carried out though with several buildings restored.



## Homestead stay at the Ross River Resort

From here it was a short drive to our destination for the night at the Ross River Resort. The Homestead at the resort is thought to have been built around 1898, by the then foreman of the Arltunga gold mining town. It is now a tourist destination offering cabins and camping as well as a dining area and bar in the original building.

We decided on a cabin for the night, as we wanted a rest from the tent. A shower and a relaxing afternoon, followed by a meal in the homestead and a few drinks, had us ready for bed.



*We stayed in a cabin for the night at the Ross River Resort. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Following the 4WD track to N'Dahla Gorge

We were up early following the 4wd track towards N'Dahla gorge. This section of the track crosses the Ross River several times and is impassable after heavy rain. The first crossing had water but the other crossings were soft dry sand.

Once we got to N'Dahla gorge we cooked up the last of our bacon and eggs for breakfast, then walked into the gorge to see the petroglyphs (rock carvings), which are possibly around 2000 years old. Some may be as old as 10,000 years. We were still following the Binns Track, as we made our way into Alice Springs.



*The ancient rock carvings we saw – some were as old as 10,000 years. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Stopping over in Alice Springs

We had a few day's break in Alice Springs where we restocked on fuel and supplies, before travelling on to Mt Dare in South Australia. This meant that we were now on the last section of the Binns Track as it headed out past Santa Teresa.

We travelled through some more fantastic country passing through several low mountain ranges.



*We stopped over in Alice for fresh supplies before tackling the last part of the track. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## The Old Andado Homestead

Before long the sand ridges of the Simpson Desert started to appear. The track didn't cross them but weaved its way around as we headed in a parallel direction to them. It was late afternoon when we arrived at Old Andado Homestead.

This was home to Molly Clark and her husband Mac, who lived on Andado Station from 1949. After a new homestead was built 18 km's west of the old homestead the old place was abandoned and started to fall into ruin. Eventually, they owned the property outright in 1969, but, in 1978 both Mac and their eldest son Graham died in separate instances, and the property was ultimately sold in 1984.



Although it was part of the original station, Molly secured a crown lease over 45 square kilometres of land around the old homestead naming it Old Andado. She lived there for many years by herself until her family convinced her to move to Alice Springs where she passed away in 2012.



*We stopped by the Old Andado Station at the end of our trip. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## A step back in time

Stepping into the homestead felt like you stepped into the past. Family photos still sit on the mantles and side tables, plates and bowls in the cupboards, books on the shelves, rugs on the floor. One cannot wonder if she hoped to return one day.

Old Andado is now looked after by volunteers who stay at the property maintaining the buildings and surrounding grounds. It gives the visitor a great insight into how people lived in this very remote part of Australia. We camped the night here for a small fee, which goes into the upkeep of the place.



*We could see that the end was near when we saw the sign for Witjira National Park. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Our last day on the Binns track

The next morning, we headed off on our very last day on the Binns track. This last section went through a mixture of gibber plains, claypans, open forests and sand dunes. The dunes did not cause concern, as we were still mostly travelling parallel to them. Those that we had to cross, were clay topped so were no problem.

This stretch had some very long sections of bulldust with some deep ruts. The dust was spewing out from under the wheels like water as we rolled from one deep rut to another making it difficult to keep the Land Rover in a straight line.



*The last day had some rough road ahead. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## Arriving back in SA

We knew we were close to the finish when we crossed into Witjira National Park. It also meant we were back in South Australia. We were now less than 20km's from Mt Dare. The track improved slightly from here and before long we arrived at Mt Dare.

We had done it and we congratulated ourselves on completing the Binns track from top to bottom.



*The finishing point of our trip – the end of the Binns track. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

## What you can expect

As I said at the beginning of this journey, 2180 km's is a long way. The Binns Track was



named after Bill Binns who worked for NT Parks for 32 years. It consists of not only one road, but a combination of several roads and tracks.

On it you will encounter corrugations, rocks, and bulldust, there will be creek crossings, some harder than others. Other sections are smooth and easy to travel on.

Sometimes the scenery is a little mundane, but it's always interesting, and the ranges we went through were spectacular. The Defender gave us no problems at all, it performed flawlessly covering at times some very difficult sections of track, even though it weighed more than 2.5 tonnes with all our gear.

We're so lucky to have a beautiful country like Australia to live in, and a great way to see part of it is to travel the Binns Track.

***Have you experienced the Binns track? If so, what was the best part of your experience?***