

The word desert for many conjures up images of endless sand dunes with little or no vegetation on them. The Great Central Road crosses Australia's largest desert and is a far from being a boring drive.

Rather, it's a journey across a sublime landscape that regularly changes from Mulga woodlands, multi-coloured breakaways and mesas rising above gibber plains with a tenacious low scrub or red sand dunes covered in spinifex and acacias and occasional copses of the desert or black oaks. The colours, the light and the silence further add to the experience of this journey.



The Eastern end of the Great Central Road.

The Great Central Road

The Great Central Road is, in fact, the western end of 'The Outback Way' or 'Australia's Longest Short Cut'. This is a journey linking Laverton in Western Australia to Winton in Queensland and a bit over 1100km of the total 2700km. It is also the world's longest geocaching trail.

The road crosses the northern extremities of The Great Victoria Desert and links with the Tjukururu and Kata Yjuta Roads to Yulara. This road takes you through very remote country on a mainly unsealed road which is subject to the weather and the amount of traffic on it.



The Great Central Road is otherwise known as the Outback Way.

Do you need a 4WD?

There are corrugations, potholes, soft sandy creek crossings and hard rocky rises to navigate on this road. But basically, the road is in good condition. We actually saw a number of 2WD vehicles driving on the road as well a couple of dedicated bicycle riders weaving along. A well-prepared 4WD with tyre pressures dropped and speed adjusted for the conditions will cross the road easily.



The road is generally in good condition along the Great Central Road.

Is it appropriate for caravans, off-road campers and trailers?

We saw a number of conventional caravans being towed across here as well as more robust off-road campers and trailers, such as our Australian Off Road Quantum Plus.

There was a 100km section between Warakurna and Docker River that was severely corrugated when we crossed, which would certainly test out your vehicle. So this is something to be aware of on the drive.



We did see some off-road campers and trailers, as well as caravans on this road.

What are the points of interest you should look out for?

Along the road, there are many points of interest, often with informative panels that enhance your understanding of the area. Among these are Gnamma or water holes that are found on the breakaways and mesas that are scattered across the landscape.

Obviously, these sources of water were of great importance to local wildlife, Aboriginal groups and later white explorers moving across the land.



You can catch some incredible views of the red breakaways along the Great Central Road.

The breakaways are the exposed underlying base rock, some of the oldest in the world, consisting of granites, gneiss and greenstone of the Yilgarn Block. Giles Breakaway, the White Cross and Desert Breakaway are examples of these, with spectacular views and colourful rock strata to be seen.

At one lookout just south-west of Warburton and on the old road, (one of a number of sections rerouted) the ground seemed to be like Swiss cheese - full with gnamma holes.



The view of the colourful rock strata.

Stopping over at Warburton

Other stops include Warburton and its fantastic display of Indigenous art. If you visit the local council chambers you will be given access to the gallery and its priceless works. More Indigenous art is on display at the Warakurna Roadhouse. Giles Weather Station is on the outskirts of Warakurna and has a great display room that you can freely visit.

It is full of fascinating information about its history and present-day operation. It also features cartoons by Len Beadell who actually chose the site and created the airstrip and access roads in 1955. Staffing has been reduced so tours are no longer available. But, you can view daily releases of weather balloons from the visitor area.



The Warburton Art Gallery has a great display of Indigenous art.

Warakurna Roadhouse

Len Beadell's Gunbarrel Construction Company grader is on display here. This grader was the one used to level the ground to create the Gunbarrell Highway. This is alongside the remanent nose cone from a Blue Streak rocket which is part of the rocket research program in the 1960s.

About 65km east of Warakurna Roadhouse there is a ghost gum on the side of the road with a Len Beadell Plaque (replacement) on it.



You can check out the Len Beadell grader which is on display.

This was the original junction of the Great Central Road and the Sandy Blight Junction Road. The country both north and south are connected by other famous Beadell roads such as the Gunbarrel, the Ann Beadell and the Connie Sue to name a few.

 
The remanent nose cone from a Blue Streak Rocket fired in the 1960s.

Stopping by Lasseter's Cave in the Northern Territory

Further east you'll find yourself now into the Northern Territory. Here another familiar name crops up as a short diversion takes you to Lasseter's Cave. This is where Harold Lasseter sheltered for 25 days in the January heat before attempting to walk for help and perishing in the desert.


Along the road, you'll come across Kata Tjuta - or otherwise known as the Olgas.

Kata Tjuta - Olgas and Uluru

Further on you suddenly get glimpses across the land ahead of large rock formations. Then, gradually the spectacular Kata Tjuta (Olgas) will fill your vision. You can take time here to visit the viewing areas before heading to Yulara. Here you'll find an equally mystical and spectacular vision of Uluru rising from the horizon in front of you.


Uluru will slowly rise up from the horizon as you drive along the road.

Where to camp for the night

Many of the stops along the road are great places to camp for the night for the self-sufficient traveller. There are night skies to see and towards the eastern end, you might be able to hear dingoes howling at night. We had a number of them trot past our camping spot, but we were never bothered by them.

Every camp we had was quite different on our trip. We spent one amongst black oak trees, another evening was spent on the edge of a large spinifex plain and the other was spent camping on the side of a hill with an awesome view of Gill Pinnacle and the Petermann Ranges.


We had great views of the sunrise over the Peterman Ranges.

Camping grounds and motel units on the road

For those wanting amenities, there are camping grounds and motel units found attached to the roadhouses near the larger Aboriginal communities of Tjukayirla, Warburton and Warakurna. Unleaded (Opal) petrol and diesel are available at all these roadhouses. The longest distance between fills is 303km from Laverton to Tjukayirla.

Information centres to visit before your trip

This road is looked after by the Laverton and Ngaanyatjarraku Shires. During our drive, there

were a number of redirections of the road. So, I'd recommend getting up to date information before you set off. You can call the Laverton Shire on (08) 9031 1202 or check out their [website](#) for more details.

Laverton has an excellent information centre called the Great Beyond Visitor Centre. This centre has an interactive display you can visit as well as providing information sheets relevant to the Great Central Road.



The view of the red desert contrasted against the spinifex.

Do you need a permit to drive on this road?

You will need a permit for both the WA and NT sections of the road. Both of these permits are free, and you can quickly get them online before you set off on your trip. Head to this [link](#) to get the WA Permit and [here](#) for the NT Permit.



To drive along both sections, you will need separate permits.

Phone reception, water supplies and vehicle considerations

This is a very enjoyable drive but remember to fully prepare yourself and your vehicles for the trip. It's a remote area, so water is limited and there is no mobile service except in Warburton and Warakurna (consider carrying a satellite phone and [PLB](#)). Vehicle services and repairs are also limited so make sure you are ready for that.

However, most importantly take your time and just enjoy this fabulous area for what is a large relatively undisturbed arid wilderness.

Have you driven Australia's Longest Shortcut?