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# The Canning Stock Route

## Hinerary.

**B = Breakfast**

**L = Lunch**

**D = Evening Meal**

**C = Camping**

**M = Cell Phone Coverage (usually Telstra in remoteregions)**

**P= Payphone Available**

**S= Shower, swim or bucket of warm water**

### Day 1

We The convoy departs Alice Springs heading north up the Tanami Road. Drover Nat Buchanan pioneered a stock route across the Tanami Desert. Today it is a cattle road providing a vital link between the cattle stations of the Tanami and the Kimberley and Central Australia. Shortly after leaving Alice we'll pass the Jindalee "over the horizon radar" system and cross the Tropic of Capricorn. We stop at Tilmouth Well for morning tea, and the chance to meet our fellow travelling companions. After lunch at a granite outcrop just north of Yuendumu we enter the realm of the termite. The vast Tanami Desert stretches before us, the anthills are in places so dense they resemble a city of skyscrapers. Further up the track, we pass The Granites Mine, operated by Newmont. The Granites Goldmine is a highly efficient and profitable operation. Between 150 and 200 people work at the mine. We travel through Rabbit Flat and camp just short of the Western Australian border. **LDCMP**

### Day 2

We detour to the Aboriginal community of Balgo and visit the Warlayirti Art Centre. Whilst at Balgo we will drive out to view the Balgo Pound - a spectacular breakaway. We continue on up the track to Sturt Creek and visit the remarkable Wolfe's Creek meteorite crater, the second largest in the world after the Canyon Diablo crater in Arizona. Scientists estimate that a meteor weighing about 40,000 tones hit the earth here. The rim of the crater is 800 meters wide and 35 meters above the surrounding plains. The view from the rim is breathtaking. We will camp on Ruby Plains Station, the only Kidman property in the Kimberley. **BLDCMP**

### Day 3

The first payable gold in Western Australia was found at Halls Creek in 1885, at the top of the Tanami Track. By 1886 more than 2,000 prospectors were digging on the goldfield. The present town was built in 1955. Halls Creek is on the Great Northern Highway, and will be our last opportunity to take on provisions before heading south. 168 kilometres south of Halls Creek, we arrive at Billiluna, on Sturt Creek. Cattle from this station made up 29 of the 35 known drives down the Canning. The first cattle drive was in 1911 and the last in 1959 - the cattle mobs were between 300 and 800 head. The station was sold to the Aboriginal Land Trust in 1977. We leave the maintained dirt road here, and the rough driving starts. We are in explorer country. Carnegie passed the Canning in 1896/7, Gregory in 1856, and Warburton in 1873. Following the western edge of the Sturt Creek overflow, we arrive at the first Canning Stock Route Well 51, known as Weriaddo. This is the real start of the Canning; it was the delivery camp for the drovers, and the last well constructed by Canning. We camp on a large clapyan interspersed with white gums near Well 50. **BLDCSMP**

## Day 4

At Well 49 we visit the lonely grave of Jack Smith who died in 1939 after a horse fell on him. We will draw water from the well that was known by the drovers as the "Diamond Well" due to the quality of the water. Some 70 kilometres further we enter the Southesk Tablelands. The spectacular buttresses of the Breaden Hills rise above us. The escarpments are rugged and very spectacular. We will explore Breaden Tank, a rock hole with an Aboriginal hide surrounded by massive fig trees and walk to Godfrey's Tank, where the explorer David Carnegie and Canning's second in charge Hubert Trotman carved their names into the sandstone. We will continue south to camp on a flat surrounded by Snappy Gums at Well 46.

**LBDCS**

## Day 5

Beyond Well 46 we enter dunefield of the Great Sandy Desert. Over every sandhill an entirely new landscape presents itself. Sometimes we are in a sea of spinifex with its blonde heads waving in the breeze like a vast wheat field, other times we are in a forest of holly grevillea with its red inflorescence hanging like Chinese lanterns. The dunefield is punctuated by rocky outcrops, some containing Aboriginal art, and lakes, including the Gravity Lakes. We camp at Billowaggie, Well 43. **BLDC**

## Day 6

We are now in the heart of the big dune country. The track winds its way down to Well 42 at the southern end of Lake Guli, a shallow playa or salt lake mostly covered in brightly coloured samphire. We travel on down to Well 41, which is surrounded by dead melaleucas, victims of the 2001 flooding. It is then on down to Well 40. A kilometre or so behind the well is the grave of Michael Tobin, a member of Canning 1907 Survey Party who was speared by natives. The lonely grave on top of a sandhill is a poignant reminder that this area was until recently very much a frontier. We cross Lake Tobin and travel through Desert Oaks to our camp north of Water 38. **BLDC**

## Day 7

We visit Water 38, Wardabunni Rockhole, beside a rocky creek. Explorers and drovers have carved their names in the rock here, and there are also some ancient Aboriginal scrapings. We travel to Well 37 the so-called 'Haunted Well', due to several graves of drovers and prospectors speared or bludgeoned by Aboriginals. We will hear the stories of first contact, and the horrors of the subsequent Police Punitive Expeditions led by Sgt. Pilmer. Beyond the haunted well we enter the area Canning called the Great Oak Forest. We travel along a track pioneered in 2002 to avoid the floods which runs along the top of the sandhills to Well 36. We visit Bungabinni Native Well and continue on to our camp amongst the melaleucas at Well 35. **BLDC**

## Day 8

The day begins with some bone jarring corrugations as we travel down a track once graded for 40km. We will fill up with lovely fresh water from Well 33, but will not camp here given the barren location. We will visit remote Kunawarritji Aboriginal community store and refuel. There is a chance to shop in their small store and have a shower. We will drive on down to Well 30 and camp beneath impressive stands of Bloodwood trees. **BLDSPC**

## Day 9

Not too far south we will come to Thring Rock, an impressive sandstone outcrop rising from the sandhills. A short climb to the summit is rewarded with excellent views of the surrounding country- right out to the west you can see Lake Auld, another vast salt lake. Surveyor and explorer Larry Wells named all the features in the area during the ill fated Calvert Expedition after members of John McDouall Stuart's party that first crossed the continent. Well 29 is burnt out; nothing remains of well 28, and there is little left of 27 except some old rusted troughing and a couple of timbers. We camp in a magnificent natural amphitheatre in the Slate Range. If you are very quiet and wander about the hills, you might spot some rock wallabies here. **BLDC**

## Day 10

We continue on to Teiwa Well (26), which in 1983 was the first well to be reconstructed. The complete reconstruction of this well gives you a very good idea of what the wells would have been like in their original condition. Shortly the Canning joins the Talawana Track, which if followed 450 km. to the west, one would arrive at Newman. The Talawana Track was surveyed by Len Beadell and built by his Gunbarrel Road Construction Party as part of the network of roads that serviced the Woomera Range. Using a hand pump we will refill our tanks with pure water from Georgia Bore, drilled by CRA in the 1970's and head to our camp on a sand hill beneath desert oaks with a spectacular view over Lake Disappointment. **BLDC**

## Day 11

Past impressive stands of Desert Oak and giant termite mounds, we come to Savory Creek, which can be quite boggy and often presents a challenge to get the vehicles across. We continue down to lunch in the dunes near the Tropic of Capricorn. In the afternoon we continue south to the Durba Hills. We track eastwards along the northern flanks of the range, past giant boulders that have fallen from the scarp. Hidden along the range is Durba Springs-described by Dick Smith as one of the most beautiful places in Australia. The Drivers took advantage of its natural pound shape making it an ideal place to make a cattle camp. We camp on soft grass beneath river red gums. **BLDC**

## Day 12

We return to the Stock Route and head south. We now enter the Little Sandy Desert. The dunes are still longitudinal and a deep red colour,. At well 15 we replenish our water supply and travel through the Ward Hills to our camp in the Mulga beyond Lake Aerodrome. **BLDC**

## Day 13

South of Lake Aerodrome the large sand hills recede and we continue on to Weld Springs at Well 9. Here the remains of a stone fort can be seen that was built by explorer and later Western Australian Premier John Forrest in 1874 to protect his party against attack by Aboriginals. We continue south and travel down to Pierre Springs. The well here has been reconditioned, and is surrounded by majestic river red gums. We encounter a magnificent stand of Grass Trees -*Xanthorrhoea preissii* -neither grass, nor trees, these magnificent plants are beautiful to look at. We continue on to camp in Mulga near Well 5.**BLDCS**

## Day 14

We continue south along the Stock Route to Well 4 and Well 3, camping in beautiful granite country. Whilst we are getting close to civilisation, the country still feels very remote. **BLDC**

## Day 15

After stopping at Well 1 and 1A we arrive at the main road and turn for Wiluna having completed the longest stock route in the world. During the gold rush, Wiluna had twelve taxis, five sporting ovals, three swimming pools, three soft drink factories and four pubs, but in 1947 the mine closed and the population dropped to around 1000. We'll use Wiluna to clean up, both the equipment, and ourselves and re stock for the next leg, the journey back across Australia either on the famous Gunbarrel Highway or the Great Central Road (Please note that we will choose which route we take depending on local conditions at the time). If the weather is dry (which it usually is) we take the Gunbarrel. **BLDCSPM**

## Day 16

From camp we travel east to Carnegie Station, the last outpost before the Gibson Desert. At Carnegie we will refuel. There is a store and small museum with information on Len Beadell here. We then travel past Mt. Nossiter to our camp at Mungilli Claypan a RAMSAR listed ephemeral wetland in the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve. **BLDC**

## Day 17

From camp we travel to Everard Junction. From here the Gary Highway, another Beadell road heads north. A short walk brings us to the top of Mt. Everard, affording spectacular views of the Gibson Desert. The track is very rocky and rough as it turns southward toward Mt. Beadell. Here you can climb to the top which houses a memorial theodolite to Len Beadell.

We continue on past Notabilis Hill to our camp near Mt. Samuel on the Heather Highway.  
**BLDC**

### **Day 18**

We travel south along the Heather Highway- named after outback legend David Hewitt's daughter Heather. David is reputed at the time the highway was named to have said, "If its good enough for Len Beadell, its good enough for me". We pick up the Great Central Road at Steptoes Turnoff. From here we travel to Warburton to refuel. We travel north along the Great Central Road and camp on the Rebecca east of Giles Meteorological Station, in view of the Petermann Range. **BLDCMP**

### **Day 19**

We cross the WA/NT border near Docker River and head due east to Kata Tjuta - The Olgas. It could only be described as culture shock arriving at the tourist circus that is the Uluru National Park. Sleek tour busses, perfumed men and women, shiny street cars, hotels, do this, don't do that signage. Whilst the rock and the Olgas are spectacular, they are not a feature of this itinerary, and we stop for lunch at the Olgas, and briefly refuel at Yulara before continuing on past Curtain Springs and on to drop off late afternoon early evening at Alice Springs Hotels. \*Those who wish can leave the expedition at Uluru to explore this area further. **BLMP**