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## THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE 2009 –ITINERARY

The Canning Stock Route is the longest and most remote Stock Route in the world. One solitary set of wheel tracks lead for almost 2,000 kilometres across the Great Sandy Desert, the Little Sandy Desert and large portions of the Gibson Desert. It is a place of living history - the longest heritage trail in Australia. A series of wells, first dug in 1906 by a party under the leadership of A.W.Canning connect the stock route. These wells are generally situated on or near earlier Aboriginal wells. The Stock Route is also a place of great natural beauty - a desert wilderness with diverse land systems. The scenery changes constantly, and there is never a dull moment! Combine all this with Diamantina's great cuisine, fine wines, friendly knowledgeable guides, and you have an outback odyssey unequalled.

### Day One

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.

### Day Two

We detour to the Aboriginal community of Balgo and visit the Warlayirti Art Centre. Some of the famous artists we may meet include Eubena Nampitjin, Elizabeth Nyumi, Boxer Milner and Helicopter Tjungurrayi. 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 tonnes 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.

### Day Three

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 claypan interspersed with white gums near Well 50.

#### Day Four

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.

#### Day Five

Beyond Well 46 we enter the Great Sand Desert. Over the coming week we will cross hundreds of deep red longitudinal sand hills. Over every crest 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. Most of the sandhills will not give us much trouble; however there will be the occasional monster that may require recovery. We will camp at Well 41 in an eerie forest of dead Melaleuca, victims of the 2002 floods.

#### Day Six

We travel down to Well 40. A kilometre or so behind the well is the grave of Michael Tobin, a member of Canning's 1907 Survey Party who was speared by "natives". After stopping here we shortly cross Lake Tobin, a dry playa. On the other side we travel through a fine stand of desert oaks, and gradually make our way down to our lunch stop at Water 38, beside a rocky creek. One of the depressions was blasted to create a catchment. It is a great place to look around. Explorers and drovers have carved their names in the rock here, and there are also some ancient Aboriginal scrapings. After lunch we travel to Well 37 the so-called "Haunted Well" due to several graves of drovers and prospectors speared or bludgeoned by Aboriginals. Beyond the haunted well we enter the area Canning called the "Great Oak Forest", and here, beneath whispering casuarinas we will make our camp.

#### Day Seven

The day starts with some very rough travel along a track that makes constant detours round areas

that were flooded in 2001. Many of the desert oaks have died here. We travel over high lateritic ground and ironstone plains to Kidson Bluff. Here we run down heavily corrugated sections of track to Well 35. We will visit the 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.

#### Day Eight

No 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. Larry Wells named all the features in the area during the 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 black-footed rock wallabies here.

#### Day Nine

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 and head to our camp on a sand hill beneath desert oaks with a spectacular view over Lake Disappointment.

#### Day Ten

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 Drovers 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.

#### Day Eleven

With permission from the Martu People, we are privileged to travel to the seldom visited Calvert Range hosting the most extensive Western Desert Aboriginal rock art galleries in the arid zone. There are several galleries containing hundreds of ochre paintings as well as petroglyphs (stone carvings). We will spend the day exploring this spectacular yet fragile place that was first described by Dr. W.J. Peasley in his wonderful book "The Last of the Nomads".

#### Day Twelve

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, often covered with a carpet of myrtle heath. At well 15 we replenish our water supply and travel through the Ward Hills to our camp in the Mulga beyond Lake Aerodrome.

#### Day Thirteen

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 John Forrest in 1874 to protect his party against attack by Aborigines. We continue south around McConkey Hill 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 –neither grass, nor trees, these magnificent Xanthorea are beautiful to look at. We continue on to camp in Mulga near Well 5.

#### Day Fourteen

At Well 5 we leave the stock route, and travel through station country out to Granite Peak Station, where we pick up the main road in to Wiluna having completed the world's longest and most remote stock route. During 's, 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).

#### Day Fifteen

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 an ephemeral wetland in the heart of the Gibson Desert.

#### Day Sixteen

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.

#### Day Seventeen

We travel south along the Heather Highway- named after outback legend David Hewitt's daughter Heather. David is reputed at the time said regarding naming, "If its good enough for Len Beadell, its good enough for me". We pick up the Great Central Road at Steptoe's Turnoff. From here we travel to Warburton to refuel and shower. Whilst at Warburton we visit and lunch at the Ngaanyatjarra Art Centre, a spectacular modern building. Here you can see examples of their beautiful slump glasswork. We travel north along the Great Central Road and camp on the Rebecca east of Giles Meteorological Station, in view of the Petermann Range.

#### Day Eighteen

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.

## Program Includes

17 nights camping in swag complete with mattress, fitted sheet, doona, doona cover and pillow

Crockery, cutlery and all camping equipment

All meals commencing with lunch on Day 1 and concluding with lunch on Day 18

Transport as per the itinerary in a comfortable expedition vehicles equipped to travel the outback roads with experienced driver

Entry fees, permits, visits and entry fees

Use of appropriate reference materials

Support of a motor mechanic if needed for self-drive participants whilst in remote locations

Satellite Emergency Phone Access

## Program Excludes:

Cost of transfers to and from Alice Springs

Comprehensive Travel Insurance

Costs of a personal nature

Any optional activities elected by participants

All camping equipment for self-drive participants

Fuel costs for self-drive participants

Costs associated with damage, breakdown and recovery of vehicles used in self-drive transport or costs associated with vehicle preparation for the program.

Self Drive Participants: You will be required to have a roadworthy, four wheel drive vehicle appropriately equipped for travel in isolated regions.

Fuel arrangements and a check list will be communicated to interested participants prior to departure.

Self-drive participants are required to assist by carrying up to three cartons or packages of food for common use and a Jerry can, with water, for use in the kitchen.



Government of South Australia  
Department for Environment & Heritage



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