



## **16 Day Simpson Desert Trek 4wd Self-drive Adventure**

This trek explores the highlights of Central Australia before taking you through the heart of the Simpson Desert. It presents the challenge of crossing approximately 1300 sand dunes – some up to 90 meters high! The trek is difficult due to the remoteness of the region and, while it is safer to travel in convoy, it is possible to complete it without mishap. The easiest direction is from west to east as the sand dunes have a lesser gradient on the western approach and the easiest route is via the French Line/QAA Line. From Birdsville, you tackle the Birdsville Track, a famous driving route, before visiting Lake Eyre and the Flinders Ranges.

### **Itinerary Suggestion**

#### **Day 1 Alice Springs to Glen Helen (Western MacDonnell Ranges)**

Departing Alice Springs at about 8am, head west along Larapinta Drive and stop on the left at Namatjira's Twin Ghost gums, said to be where one of his most famous scenes was painted. Continue on to a sign-posted turnoff to the right and drive down for a walk into Simpson's Gap. Hopefully there will be some Black Flanked Rock Wallabies to see. Your next stop is for a walk between the sheer walls of Stanley Chasm, lighting up a fiery red in the middle of the day.

After lunch, return to Larapinta Drive and turn right. At the road junction veer right at Namatjira Drive and continue on with many optional detours available, to a turn off to the right to spectacular Ormiston Gorge and to your overnight stop at Glen Helen Homestead. You can explore the gorge this afternoon or tomorrow morning.

**Overnight Camping, Glen Helen Homestead. (Full facilities- shower, toilet & washing machine)** (170km (3 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

#### **Day 2 Glen Helen to Kings Canyon**

Pick up your permit to travel through Aboriginal Lands on the Mereenie Loop Road before departure. The vertical cliffs of Redbank Gorge, with its icy pools, make an enjoyable if somewhat chilly diversion. Continuing along the highway, you turn to the right and stop at Gosse Bluff, suspected to be a huge meteorite crater. Turn right at the road junction and begin the Mereenie Loop Road. This unpredictable nature of surface of this track is responsible for more road accidents than any other in the NT, so be very careful. There is the option here to detour to Palm Valley (64km each way). Continue through to Watarrka National Park and spend the afternoon exploring Kings Canyon. Walk up the steep access to the top and be rewarded with stunning desert Canyon views.

**Overnight camping Kings Canyon Camp Ground. (Full facilities)** (238km (4 hours) driving, 3 hours walking)

#### **Day 3 Kings Canyon to Uluru (Ayers Rock)**

This morning you are bound for the heart of Australia, Uluru. Continue along the Ernest Giles Road past Kings Creek Station to the Uluru turnoff and turn right down the Luritja Drive until you come to the Lasseter highway. Stop at the Mt Connor Lookout and Curtin Springs Roadhouse. Travel through Yulara and turn right to the Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). Walk up Olga Gorge between the huge domes before making your way back for one of Australia's most iconic sunsets- sunset on Uluru.

**Overnight camping, Yulara. (Full facilities)** (407km (5&1/2 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

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### Day 4 Uluru to Rainbow Valley

This morning you awaken early and watch the new day dawn on the rock. Make your way to the base of the rock. The Aboriginal Traditional Owners frown on the climb up the rock so most visitors prefer to walk around the base or talk a walk with the Aboriginal guides to learn its significance to this ancient culture.

Departing Uluru, you return along the Lasseter Highway to the Stuart Highway at Erldunda and turn left. A detour of 16km to the left can be made to the Henbury Meteorite Craters and a stop made at the Virginia Camel Farm. Head 15km further up the Stuart Highway before turning right for 24km to

**Rainbow Valley for your overnight camp. (No facilities)** Ensure you get there for sunset. (452km (6 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

### Day 5 Rainbow Valley to Mt Dare Homestead

Return to the Stuart Highway and head south (left). 10km past the camel farm, turn left along the Hugh River track and make your way 38 km along the sandy track to the Hugh River and New Ghan Railway crossing. After a further 33km, you will arrive at the Old South Road and you turn right to Maryvale. Another 45km will take you through to the remarkable Chambers Pillar to spend some time exploring.

Retrace your steps to the Old Ghan Road and turn right. Travel parallel to the Old Ghan Railway line to the town of Finke for a stop. Travelling through New Crown Station and on to Charlotte Waters, an old Overland Telegraph Repeater Station site, you make your way over the border into South Australia and into the Witjiri National Park. It's a long day and may be cut short by bush camping en-route.

**Overnight camping in the National Park at Mt Dare. (Showers and toilets).** (454km (7 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

### Day 6 Mt Dare to Dalhousie Springs

After a long travelling day, it is time to relax a bit today in the warm waters of Dalhousie Springs. Travel from Mt Dare to Dalhousie Springs and then detour to visit the ruins of Dalhousie Homestead. Return and explore some of the 80 or so mound springs in the area before setting up camp at the grassy camping area at the springs, surrounded by date palms, a remnant of the Afghan Cameleer days.

**Overnight camping Dalhousie Springs. (Toilet facilities)** (94km (2 hours) driving)

### Day 7 Dalhousie Springs to Lone Gum

You climb up to a tableland of gibber (stony) plains and, after 20km, cross a swampy area that may be a problem after rain. After more claypans and sandy plains, you begin to encounter sand dunes and enter the Simpson Desert. Stop at Purni Bore for a hot soak but check the water temperature before entering!

Continue to follow the Rig road, as the French Line can be very sandy, and pass an airstrip. Keep veering right and be careful on the steep sand dunes, especially of anything coming the other way. The track then turns easterly and you pass the Lone Gum, a solitary Eucalypt, as its name suggests. The gum contrasts well against the noticeably more yellow sand dunes. This section of the road has deteriorated, so take care. This is a good spot to set up for

**Your overnight bush camp in the Simpson Desert Conservation Park. (No facilities)** (264 km (6 hours) driving.)

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### Day 8 Lone Gum to Poepell Corner

Continue on past your first Playa Lakes and Poolowanna Well, an abandoned exploration site a short way off the track. You wind around these lakes for about 100km before reaching the K1 Line and heading north. Re enter the Conservation Park and continue north to Poepell Corner and your overnight bush camp on the border of the three states, SA, NT and QLD.

**Overnight bush camping Poepell Corner. (No facilities)** (209 km (6 hours) driving)

### Day 9 Poepell Corner to Birdsville

Head north from Poepell Corner and into the NT. Turn east on the QA Line into Queensland and travel through the Simpson Desert National Park. The track becomes sandier and the dunes more difficult to cross. After crossing the famous Rabbit Proof Fence, you come to the floodplain of Eyre Creek. If this has water in it, you may need to take a long detour to the north. The Simpson Desert Crossing finishes with a 'final fling' of 'Big Red' (Nappanenca) Sand Dune, the highest in the Simpson. It is difficult to cross and can be by-passed to the north. Continue on to Birdsville and celebrate a successful crossing with a well-earned beer in the famous Birdsville Hotel.

**Overnight camping at Birdsville Caravan Park. (Full facilities)** (160km (5 hours) driving)

### Day 10 Birdsville

Explore the cemetery, the Diamantina Waterholes and the Burke and Wills Camp to soak in some of the pioneering ambience before returning to your

**Camp at the Caravan Park. (Full facilities)** (75km (2 hours) driving)

### Day 11 Birdsville to Mungerannie

Head south down the Birdsville track towards Pandie Pandie Station. Note the memorial on the way to the Page family, who died in 1963 when their car broke down and they tried to walk to safety. Continue down this famous droving route until you reach your

**Overnight camping at Mungerannie Roadhouse. (Shower and toilet facilities)** (315km (5 hours) driving)

### Day 12 Mungerannie to Muloorina

Continuing south, you cross the Cooper Creek, usually dry here as it only rarely makes its way on to Lake Eyre. Pass Etadunna and Dulkaninna Stations before passing through the dog fence. Continue past Lake Harry, with its date palms as a reminder of the Afghan droving days, and explore Marree before setting out north to Muloorina Station. Continue through to Lake Eyre on Madigan Gulf and explore on foot Australia's largest lake, often a dry salt lake. Return to Muloorina Station for your

**Overnight camp near an expansive waterhole. (Toilet and shower facilities)** (300km (5 hours) driving, 2 hours walking)

### Day 13 Muloorina to Brachina Gorge

Return to Marree and continue down the Oodnadatta track through the ruins of Farina, once thought to be viable for growing wheat! The town of Lyndhurst is the junction of the Strzelecki Track, another important early droving route. Continue south past the Leigh Creek coalfields to the mining town of Leigh Creek. A few kilometres further south; a detour to Beltana is worthwhile to explore the restored historic buildings. Turn left at Parachilna and travel through Parachilna Gorge to Blinman. Turn right here and head through Gum Creek Homestead. Turn right to Brachina Gorge and find a delightful stop to Bush camp. Another option is to the north at Aroona Valley.

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**Overnight bush camping Brachina Gorge (No facilities)** (425km (6 & 1/2 hours) driving)

### Day 14 Brachina Gorge to Wilpena Pound

Travel south through Bunyerroo Gorge through the Flinders Ranges National Park. You emerge on the main road and turn right to Wilpena Pound for your overnight camp and walks through the pound. St Mary's peak is energetic but rewarding. Another day could happily be spent in the area if desired.

**Overnight camping, Wilpena Pound. (Full facilities).** (42km (1 & 1/2 hours) driving, 4 hours walking)

### Day 15 Wilpena Pound to Burra

There are a number of 4wd Scenic Treks available in the area if you want to further explore the Ranges. Head south to Hawker and on through the small towns of Craddock and Carrieton to Orroroo. Continue through to Peterborough, where lunch may be had. As you are crossing the railway line, observe the 6 tracks denoting three different gauges used by 3 different states in their railway lines.

Head south along the Barrier Highway to Burra and spend the rest of the afternoon exploring this early copper mining town with its fascinating old buildings.

**Overnight camping, Burra. (Full facilities)** (251km (3 & 1/2 hours) driving)

### Day 16 Burra to Adelaide

Travel south to Hanson and deviate to the right to Clare, a fertile agricultural area also renowned for its wine. There are numerous wineries that can be visited, but be careful of drink driving. There are other wine areas that can also be visited in the region. Continue south to Gawler and on to Adelaide at the end of a wonderful trip in the footsteps of the explorer John McDouall Stuart. An extension of 2-3 days can also be taken down to Kangaroo Island. (220km (3 hours) driving)

### Recommended References

The above itineraries are not intended as the sole guide to the details of your route. Four Wheel Drive Hire Service recommends the following referenced be consulted or purchased prior to departure.

### Maps

Hema Maps – The Flinders Ranges, Great Desert Tracks of Australia SE, Central Australia.

### Guide Book

*The Flinders Ranges- An Adventurers Guide* by Ron and Viv Moon  
*Discover Australia by 4WD* by Ron and Viv Moon.

**Extra Preparations** – You will require a South Australian Desert Parks pass and a permit from the Queensland National Parks & Wildlife Service. This allows you to camp and use the tracks in the region. Have a well-prepared vehicle and carry adequate food, fuel and water. Bring firewood if you plan open fires. The Desert can inflict extremes of heat in the November to April months with day temperatures usually well into the 40'sC. Night temperatures in the winter can be below zero.

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### Background Reading

*The Explorers* by Tim Flannery

*The Flinders Ranges and Beyond* by Ronald Coudrey and Richard Land

*A Town like Alice* by Neville Shute

### Websites

Moon Guidebooks- [www.guidebooks.com.au](http://www.guidebooks.com.au)

Hema Maps for an idea of the range of maps and information on suppliers - -

[www.hemamaps.com.au](http://www.hemamaps.com.au)

NRMA Outback Tracks information

[www.mynrma.com.au/travel/go/outback\\_tracks/index.shtml](http://www.mynrma.com.au/travel/go/outback_tracks/index.shtml)

SA Desert Parks- [www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks)

Uluru (Ayers Rock)- [www.ea.gov.au/parks/index.html](http://www.ea.gov.au/parks/index.html)

Other NT National Parks- [www.nt.gov.ai/ipe/paw/parks/index.html](http://www.nt.gov.ai/ipe/paw/parks/index.html)