

Series over the Simpson – 20 May 2017 to 11 June 2017

Tour Group

First Name	Surname	Crew	Other crew	Vehicle	Accommodation
John	Baker			TDI 200 Defender	Vehicle
Geoff	Banbury			Troopy	Vehicle
Steven	Barrington		Max	Series 2A	Vehicle
Gary	Blagdon	Kerryn		Discovery D3	Rooftop tent
Clive	Brindley	Dot	Joseph and Emily	County	Tent
Jim	Eldridge			Landcruiser Tray back	Stretcher
Chris	Greet	Christine		Defender 130	Tent
Liam	Horgan		Connor	Discovery D4	Tent
Peter	Mercer	Margaret		Series 2A	Tent
Peter	Mitchell	Daphne		TDI 200 90	Tent
Kevin	Phillips	Karen		Mazda BT50	Trayback camper
Narelle	Reinhardt	Les	Warwick	Perentie	Rooftop tent/tent
Rick	Robins	Anne	Dave	Defender 90	Walled car awning
Hugh	Scott			Series 3	Tent
Russell	Speldewinde			Discovery D4	Bunker tent
Adam	Stefanski		Luke, Craig, Daniel, Catherine	County	Tent
John	Williams			Defender 110	Bunker tent

This was another Series based event put on by Peter Mercer for the serious members of the club. This includes those that have a passion for the old Land Rovers (and know-how to keep them running) and those who enjoy hanging out with those people.

I arranged with the Blagdons to travel together from Canberra, departing Saturday morning. We decided to overnight at Cobar, thinking this would leave a short run to Louth and onto Trilby Station. It also allowed us to go other ways if there was rain. We booked motel accommodation which meant we did not need to leave Canberra early. A 7:30 departure from Hall was planned. The Greets were staying with friends in Forbes so we arranged to "pick them up" on the way through.

Saturday 20 May

After meeting up at Hall our first stop was at Rose Garden Café in Cowra and we arrived there around 9:30am, ordering breaky and taking up a prime position in the sun on the verandah. We then saw familiar faces arriving, Rod and Kerry from our Cowra branch, to greet other members of the touring party (the Mercers, Robins and Jim) who we thought were leaving earlier. Actually Rick and Anne had stayed with the Venables the previous night so they could finish working on the Robins' 90. The Mercers arrived to the usual toot-fare and we noted the fancy jerry can holder on the back and the carry rack on the passenger side of the vehicle. Noice!

We all huddled in the sunny corner of the verandah and had breaky and/or coffee before the Disco group headed off around 10:15 to head to Forbes to pick up the Greets before heading up the Bogan Way through Nyngan to Cobar. At Cobar we met up with Liam and Connor who were also staying at the same motel due to the road closure to Louth. Nice dinner at the local Thai restaurant.

Sunday 21 May

After touching base with Peter and checking road conditions with the shire council, we headed up the blacktop to Bourke. The road from Cobar to Louth would not be opened until the Monday, when the council workers returned to work. The Bourke shire were more proactive and the road from Bourke to Louth (and then on to Trilby Station) was open. Due to good planning we arrived in Bourke at the same time as Peter and the series folk coming from Nyngan (around half past -12). We agreed a departure time from the Back-o-Bourke museum at 2pm so everyone did their own thing.....lunch, sightseeing or fuelling up.

The tour group congregated at the museum and this marked the official start of the Series over the Simpson trip with tour leader Peter laying down the general route and guidelines.



We headed down the dirt from Bourke to Louth and stopped at the Louth pub (Shindy's Inn) which is where Liam had originally planned to stay the previous night. A short stop for a leg stretch and sight seeing before we crossed the bridge and headed to Trilby Station. This is a working farm stay on the banks of the Darling River and the property holding is so extensive the farmer heads out by plane early each morning and arrives back just after dark.

We camped here for two nights and started the trip with a great fire and a long chat.

Monday 22 May

An early morning/sunrise walk and a leisurely sit on the 3 sided long drop facility watching the sunrise over the mud flats and gum trees for this happy camper. We all had a leisurely morning, meeting and chatting with different people and having breaky. From there a few of us (probably most of the group) had a drive around this property and then out onto the extended property – down the river and across the road looking at old stuff.



This tour was going to be on a double decker bus but after Christine parked it we realised we could not use it....



We also got to compare the difference between a touring series vehicle and a non-touring series vehicle – see if you can spot the difference:



Others just strolled around the property, read books or went and had a shower at the facilities near the farmhouse.

Back to camp, dinner while we watched the boss fly just overhead on his way back to the airfield, followed by the chat around the fire.

Tuesday 23 May

This was the start of the single night part of the trip so we practiced our quick pack-ups. The camp started ruffling around 6am to the sound of distant thunder and the sight of the sky lighting up to lightening. Sunrise on this trip was around 7am generally.

We departed Trilby Station around 9:15am and headed to Tilpa for morno's. In appreciation of their existence we paid handsomely for a 43 bean coffee and stood over the banks of the Darling sipping this delightful brew and snacking on morning tea.



From here we split into "over 80/under 80km/h" groups and it was back out onto the Louth-Wilcannia Road to Wilcannia for lunch, waving to a welcoming John Baker as we entered town. Lunch at Wilcannia for most was at Miss Barrett's Coffee Shop. Some also fuelled up and others shopped before we departed around 2pm to head along the black top to our overnight destination of White Cliffs caravan park, arriving there around 3:15pm. After setting up, some took the opportunity for a tour of an underground house while others walked around town, did washing or went to the pub or a combination of all of the above.

Many stayed at the pub and had dinner there with one member acquiring another series vehicle while talking to a couple of fellow travellers, from Goulburn.

Wednesday 24 May

The general practice on this trip was to leave at 9am and arrive at our next camp spot no later than 4pm and today was another attempt at achieving this.

Departing White Cliffs around 9am our destination was Tibooburra however we had an interesting morning tea stop at Reola Station, arranged by Peter. We arrived at Reola around 10:45 after an easy drive on the dirt.

The usual bonnet up on a Land Rover occurred before we had a tour of the shearing shed. Reola has been with the current family since 1948 (post war settlements) and the property, named after the Victorian town of Rheola, now covers 300,000 acres plus 3 other properties and is bounded by about 1,000km of fencing.

The shearing “shed” is a massive self-supporting structure with no supports inside and a mezzanine level housing a round shearing shed accommodating 16 shearing stations. In total this structure can accommodate 4000 sheep during peak shearing and they can shear up to 2800 sheep

per day.



They run dorpers and merino sheep and at the time had been mustering goats which is a great additional income for them. Australia is the biggest exporter of goats with about 50% going to the States and the other 50% going to Malaysia and other Asian countries;

however we are not the biggest producer.



After the tour of the shed we headed over to the homestead and enjoyed a morning tea on the lawns.

Departing Reola around 1pm we headed up the Reola Road to the Cut Line. This is the road from Wanaaring to Tibooburra and with a lunch stop on the side of the road we arrived in Tibooburra not long after 4pm. Our destination was the Granites Caravan Park and we checked in via TJs Roadhouse where we all fuelled up. Dinner that night was again either self-catered or at the Family Hotel.



Thursday 25 May

We had a short day's drive planned for today, heading to Cameron Corner, so we were afforded a late start. This gave us all an opportunity to have a wander around town, look at Sturt's boat,



go up to the lookout,



or do some shopping and have a coffee.

Departing at 10:45am we headed up the Cameron Corner road before hanging left and heading out on the Hewart Downs Rd. This was a very nice drive and took us away from the normal corrugated along a road where we were accompanied by lots of kangaroos, emus, dust and gates. There were a few "Coat of Arms" moments.

After a lunch stop along the road ...



we arrived at Fort Grey around 2:15pm and we took a walk out past the ruins and onto Lake Pinnaroo out to the well.

It is hard to imagine this area was in flood as recently as 1974 when the homestead, relocated to higher ground after the flood of '56, was disintegrated by higher floods.

From here it was on to Cameron Corner, through the gate of the wild dog fence and the obligatory photo, before setting up camp around the store in Queensland. Dinner was again self-catered or a pub meal followed by a chat around the fire.



Friday 26 May

We departed Cameron Corner around 9am Qld time and soon gained half an hour as we travelled into South Australia.

Our first stop today was mornos at Merty Merty sand dune, arriving there around 11am ACST.



From there it was out to the Strzelecki Track hanging a left to head towards our destination for the day - Montecollina Bore. The track was in great nick and we made very good time.

Along the way Liam and Connor, who were only with us on this trip for the first week, decided to head off and start making their way home so we all said our goodbyes, while in motion, and ate their dust!



We arrived at Montecollina around 1pm.

There were already a few campers there and, due to the earlier than expected arrival, we felt it was too early to set up camp. We decided to make it a lunch stop and head on to Lyndhurst at the southern end of the track.

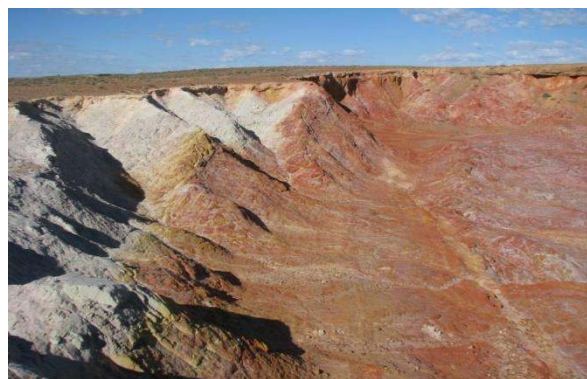
The rest of the drive was easy and the views were spectacular as we headed past the Gammon and Flinders Ranges as we arrived at Lyndhurst a bit before 5pm.

We camped on grass at the campground attached to the hotel where dinner was held and mobile devices were active!

Saturday 27 May

After a longer than expected day yesterday we had a lazy start to the day as we were only heading 80 km up the blacktop to Maree.

This trooper had a late shower and found he was on his Pat Malone when he came back out to look at the campground!



Anyway, after catching up with the group we all congregated at the Ochre Pits just north of town before heading up to Farina, an old Ghan railway town now being fixed up. Farina has a fantastic campground with a small fee to cover the new facilities and community and volunteer groups are doing great work in bringing the town's building back to life. Hard to believe it was only 40 years since the last resident left.



From Farina we drove the short distance to Maree where we fuelled up, stocked up and set up. We camped at the Oasis Caravan Park and coffeed at the Oasis Café. Fuel was \$1.80/litre which was more expensive than Lyndhurst. Dinner at the pub which also houses the Tom Kruse museum and this is well worth the visit. Tom was the outback mailman from the mid-thirties to the late fifties, driving his Leyland Badger along the Birdsville track from Maree to Birdsville and back (two week journeys).

Maree is another town on the old Ghan railway and was at one point the major railhead for the cattle industry. It was even modernised to be able to accommodate two rail gauges and became a break-of-gauge point to keep the transport going to the north and to the south. It was also the home of the Lake Eyre Yacht Club!



Sunday 28 May

Unfortunately for Huw, Maree was to be the end of the line on the trip as he got crook and ended up being airlifted down to Port Augusta. His Series 3 was parked behind the pub and we got word later in the trip he was reported to be driving it back home via Broken Hill and accompanied by his wife. Good onya Huwie!

Once we knew Huw was in good hands and his vehicle was being looked after we departed about half past (10) towards Coward Springs along the Oodnadatta Track. We were now a convoy of 16 vehicles



On our way there we dropped in to the:

Wangianna Siding Ruins;



Mutonia Sculpture Park;



lunched at Lake Eyre South

(with some of the crew venturing below sea level to walk on the lake)



and Curdimurka Siding



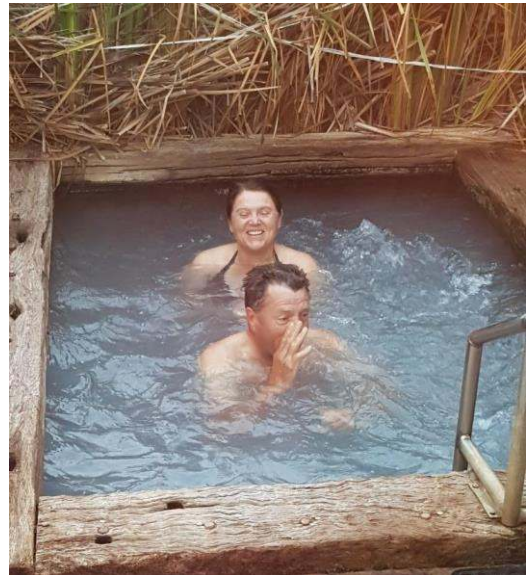
before reaching Coward Springs around half past (3). This is a lovely camp spot with long drops and a fire heated boiler for those wanting a shower.



After set up a few of us drove back to have a look at the Bubbler Mound (artesian water naturally rising to the surface)



while others explored the Cowards Springs set up or had a dip in the thermal pool. The old engineer's cottage has been converted into a railway museum and is well worth a visit. This spot is truly an oasis on the Oodnadatta and great spot to camp as an alternative to William Creek.



Monday 29 May

After a cool night we hit the Track again and headed to William Creek for mornos before pushing on to Oodnadatta and the Pink Roadhouse and campground, stopping for lunch at

the Algebuckina Rail Bridge and Waterhole on the Neales River.



Upon arrival at Oodnadatta we fuelled up, stocked up and set up before dining at the roadhouse. Fuel was \$1.77...cheaper than Maree but not as cheap as Lyndhurst. Again we were treated to the site of Steve smothered in dust and sporting a sunglass outline around his eyes. He still hasn't worked out that if he closes down the back and maybe winds up the windows there may be less dust...or not!

Tuesday 30 May

After a cool night we were soon warmed by the rays of the sun and left Oodnadatta to head to Mt Dare, stopping at the Eringa Ruin and Waterhole.



This was a short but dusty drive and we arrived at Mt Dare before 3pm, leaving enough time to fuel up, stock up and set up before having some thirst quenching squashes or icy poles. Some self-catered that night while others dined at the hotel. We were accompanied that night by a group from one of the commercial outback tour companies and two of the members in that group were Kevin's and Karen's next door neighbours! Small country...



Wednesday 31 May

This was the day we started the crossing of the Simpson. After a mild night we were entertained by some of the group reporting mice in the tents and crawling over Jim on his stretcher bed. This was evidenced in the chewed bread bags. This was going to keep some anxious for a while!

We departed Mt Dare around 9am and headed to Dalhousie ruins before heading over to Dalhousie Springs for lunch and a dip.



We departed the springs at 1.45pm and headed out into the desert..... to our next destination of Purni Bore.



70 kms but the start of the dunes and slow driving with a mix of gibber track, sandy drifts, corrugations and ruts, had us arriving at the bore around half past (4). This time we just set up but then had a demo of snatching. It

was a cold starry night and no fire was allowed, so it was very early to bed.

Thursday 1 June

Again we had a cold morning – about 1° - but were soon warmed by the sun. The nights are going to be cold for a while! I had a walk around the bore and there was great bird life and steam rising. Then we heard the stories of Peter fighting off the dangerous dingo to try and retain his beloved thong (footwear). It was certainly chewed up!



From here we split into two groups for the desert crossing to reduce the impact for oncoming vehicles. First group was essentially the Series vehicles (9 vehicles) and Land Rover Group Two was the rest (7 vehicles). It was from here I always enjoyed the sound of two engines starting in the morning...John's Defender and Clive's County.

With the two groups we decided to start about half an hour apart, this became 45 minutes after the second day. From Purni Bore the trip became challenging and I got to muck around with a few settings while those in the Series group got to fix a few problems on the go. I certainly admire those drivers and their machines for the no fuss ease with which they were able to resolve the issues as they arose. Unlike my modern machine which experienced ongoing suspension faults but luckily did not impact my crossing other than the multiple stop-starting to clear the error messages.

Morning tea was about an hour along the track and just inside the Simpson Desert Recreational Reserve. I later found that these stops are essential for getting vehicles across the sand as it allows vehicles and tyres to cool down. I was running a cold tyre pressure of 18psi but soon found the low profile standard tyres on the D4 quickly heated up and pressure at 25psi. Another hour and half down the road and we stopped for lunch and another cool down opportunity. We had travelled about 50kms in 3hrs and the D4 was consuming fuel at about 15l/100km.



We arrived at our campsite east of Colson Junction around half past 3 (s26-8-56; e136/48/43) and had travelled around 74kms. Set up and fired up to ward of the cold of a starry sub-zero night. Early to bed/early to rise became the routine.



Friday 2 June

Early to rise to watch the sunrise and feel the warmth of the sun...eventually. It was also amusing to watch all the folk head out to the scrub in different directions to check out the vegetation. Our planned destination for today was Approdina Knolls so we headed off in our two groups "eastbound on the French Line" as we repeated over the radio to reduce the chance of confronting oncoming vehicles as we crested the dunes. There were a few vehicles heading east to west and the Finke Desert race was the main attraction.

Unfortunately some of our series group were experiencing fuel intake issues so it was slow trip as these were rectified along the track. It was again a challenging drive as we sorted out the best track to take over the dunes, in several cases having to reverse and try again or try another tack.



The result of this slow progress was a camp further west than anticipated at S26-2-57; E137-26-11 however it was a nice spot and seemingly sheltered from the southerly breeze. Another cold night and another great fire to allow a chat before early to bed and a gander at the big starry sky.

Saturday 3 June

We headed off around the usual time and our destination for today was Poeppel Corner. Our morning tea stop was Approdina Knolls which was still a further 20 kms from our campsite. We got there around 11 am (about an hour's drive) and had a wander, took photos and headed off about an hour later. The road from the French Line passes the Knolls is called Knolls Track and if you follow it further south you will get to the Rig Road/WAA Line. The French Line is marked by regular survey markers, courtesy of the SA government.



We continued our journey "eastbound on the French Line" with all but Adam having to have more than one attempt on at least one dune. As the day progressed the oncoming traffic increased as it was only a week before the race started in Alice. We encountered some motor cycle riders with support vehicles; a family towing a T-van and a couple of fellows in Pith helmets trying to flog map books. (turns out they were legit!). The concern with the motorcycles is the speed at which they travel and the fact they were not radioed up so they had no idea of oncoming vehicles. We were lucky to be pulled over when they went past.

Steve in the Series group experienced some closed points so the lads did some more trackside repairs. More error messages on the D4 meant a few more stop/starts.

We also went past a couple of OKA parked on the side of the track, one on top of a dune and the other at the bottom with a broken axle.

Due to the trackside stops, the increased westbound traffic and the challenging driving we did not get to Poeppel Corner until 5pm where we took the obligatory photos and the went and set up camp in the Northern Territory. 60 kilometres in 7 hours but what a great day!



The camp spot was great with views across Lake Poempel to the west and a nice sunset over the lake only bettered by the sunrise colours. After another nice fire to ward off the cold it was a slightly later night as we realised we were heading towards the end of the desert adventure.

Sunday 4 June

It felt like a far more mild night and this may have been due to the protection from the southerly breeze. We woke to more stories of wild dogs traipsing through the camp area but no thongs were damaged this time. Again it was good to hear those two engines starting up.



We headed off in two groups as usual and our destination for today was Eyre Creek. Again we had some challenging tracks and bigger dunes albeit we were now travelling “eastbound on the QAA Line”. Added to the driving challenges we also had some vehicle issues which were dealt with but slowed us down so we did not quite make it to Eyre Creek. We found a camp site around half past (3) at S25-54-25; E138-40-18 which was a nice sheltered spot on the edge of a clay pan but still within the Simpson Desert National Park. This was our last night camping in the desert so we attempted a longer stay around the fire.

Monday 5 June

Woke up after a relatively mild night to a glorious sunrise. Our destination today was Birdsville via Big Red.



As this was our last camp in the desert it was time to take those group photos so after a lot of choreography and mixed calls we spent about 45 minutes taking lots of piccies. It was worth it and Swan Lake had nothing on our Salt Lake routine.





Departing at the usual times we encountered even more traffic; it was like Pitt Street relative to where we had been and meant we had to be ultra-cautious regarding oncoming vehicles. It is disappointing the number of times we radioed our presence to seek out oncoming traffic only to find oncoming vehicles who had not acknowledged our calls (Channel 10 is the Desert radio channel to be used by all drivers). Luckily we only had a couple of close calls on dunes.

As we travelled east the dunes seemed to get wider apart but also higher and the descent on the eastern sides more cut up (wombat holes). By the time we got to Big Red we had already experienced some high dunes. However as you crest the last dune west of Big Red you experience a long drop down to the salt plain and Big Red certainly makes an impression as it stands alone rising from the flat floor.



We spent some time getting the convoy up to the top with some having a go at the straight up ascent while most opted for the southern-most track (the one to the right in the picture above left) which was a left handed dog leg to the top.

From there it was back down on the eastern side, air-up the tyres and then head into Birdsville.



We arrived in Birdsville about 3pm and a few went straight to the pub for some social celebratory squashes. This was not the last time the oldest and newest Land Rovers on the trip would end up at the same destination at the same time.

Others found their accommodation and had a refreshing tub. At Birdsville the group split into different accommodation types but we all got back together for dinner at the pub. This was a two night stop and you could see people looking forward to the day of doing not much.

Tuesday 6 June

No racing at Birdsville Day! – Leisurely morning wandering the town. Breaky at the bakery, visit the information centre, walk out around the lagoon, have a look at the racecourse, the hot water bore used to create hydro power for the town. Read books, magazines had chats but did very little driving. Everyone was obliged to fuel up so they could tell the group their fuel usage. Mine was 17.6l/100km (93 litres used). I certainly learnt a bit on the drive and now need to do it again to apply those lessons.

Wednesday 7 June

It was back in the car today to head to Windorah. A quick call to Kathy at Windorah where we arranged to again camp on the Sports Ground – this was our camp spot on the Heritage drive last year. Dave headed down the Birdsville Track to go back to Farina while Clive and Steve and their parties headed south towards Innamincka, once they found the turn off. Now we were down to 13 vehicles at Windorah.

We drove along the Birdsville Developmental Road which was a well maintained gravel road with sections of bitumen which allowed for overtaking and also performed the role of landing strips for emergency situations.

After being surprised by the big serpent on the hill west of Betoota we stopped off for mornos at the impressive Deon's Lookout near Betoota.



This lookout was named after Deon Brook from Cordillo Downs who was killed in the mid 90's while flying solo back to the property. From here you get expansive views all around.



We got back on the road and headed into Windorah on the Diamantina Developmental Road, past the Big Red Dune just out of town, arriving at Windorah around half past (3). Once set up, people went here, there and everywhere wandering the town before heading over to the pub for a few squashes and dinner. It was a cold night and we looked forward to sitting around the fire at the back of the pub. Just wished they had thrown some timber on it.

Thursday 8 June

Up to watch another sunrise, pack up and then breaky followed by a coffee at the pub. Outside the pub we were treated to one of those outback experiences. A semi-trailer carrying fruit, vegies and other items had rolled into town on its fortnightly cycle and we were able to go in and get colder to but fruit and vegies. Fantastic!

We headed off for Toompine via Quilpie stopping off at the Cooper Creek crossing, which was under water the last time some of us were there last year.



Into Quilpie to fuel up, stock up and have lunch before heading down to see Dogga and Robyn at Toompine.

Another night experiencing Dogga's hospitality, free camp (unless you want to make a donation to the Toompine Progress Association and some of the cheapest beers I can recall having at a pub made for another memorable night at Toompine.

Friday 9 June

We headed off down the blacktop to Thargomindah and I finally got my Land Rover moment, getting an error message and experiencing performance constraints. I had to stop on the side of the road and lift the bonnet. Classic Land Rover experience! Got the scanner out and checked the fault code – removed, cleaned and re-attached a couple of sensors and “all good”. Back on the road to Thargomindah where we stopped at the information centre and café for brunch and coffees before looking around town or fixing cars. Thargomindah was the third place in the world to get electric street lights after London and Paris.

From Thargomindah it was short dirt road drive down the Dowling Track to Kilcowera Station where we were staying that night. Kilcowera offers nice grassed campsites at the Shearers Quarters along with flushing toilets and showers as well as bush camping beside the lagoon. What a great variety of choice and this looks like a place to come back too, weather permitting.

This was the last night of the Series over the Simpson and the three weeks had certainly been busy. Again it was sad to end what was a great trip which challenged most drivers and some of the vehicles. It was great to see everyone get over the Simpson without needing a tow.



The next day the members of the group would go their own way to get back to their various home towns.



What a great trip and thank you Peter for putting it on. I would also like to thank Kevin and Garry for the assistance they provided in getting Peters vision onto the road and I greatly appreciated the inclusive and cooperative nature of all the members of the group. It was great to see Clive achieve his emotional drive of taking Joseph and Emily across the Simpson in the same vehicle he had driven when taking their father 30 years earlier. The calm and serene manner in which Adam managed his troop was outstanding and Max appeared to have fun living out of the back of Steve's Series 2, he just needs to fix his "ball-drop" and leg swing. As I mentioned earlier I observed with admiration the calm and expert manner in which the series drivers were able to identify a fix issues as they arose.

However, after approximately 5,500 kms the oldest and youngest Land Rovers on the trip arrived at the same place at the same time.....the workshop for repairs!

ALL GOOD