

The Matt Deer Camp 2006



Off to Uluru

21-23 July 2006

The annual MHACA camp (now officially the 'Matt Deer Camp') was held on 21-23 July at Yulara -Uluru. Seven people attended and a good time was had, as Tim MacDonald reports ...



On the Road to Uluru ...

Heading out ...

WE LEFT MHACA Friday morning at 9.30am, with our first stop being at Erlunda where we had a healthy lunch of sandwiches and fruit. As the morning cloud disappeared we continued our journey, which included playing some games in the car and discussing trips we had previously been on.

We arrived at Yulara at 3.30pm and in no time had our tents set up (as everyone chipped in it only took 20 minutes to set up our two big tents). Then a group of us went out to get firewood while the others went about cooking dinner and unpacking.

Following a very satisfying dinner of different meats and vegetables someone mentioned that we had no billy and therefore no way to boil our tea! (which for me as a novice camper was a rather novel idea). So, a few of us went off to find the shop to buy a billy (and anything else we had absent-mindedly forgotten).



Campfire conversations ...

In the meantime, the rest of the crew built a warm blazing fire in one of the pits. Soon, several other campers gathered round to join our conversations, which ranged from religion to people's different traveling experiences. As the night was not very cold three of the guys decided to sleep under the stars in their swags while everyone else slept in the tents. We had agreed to get up early to see 'the rock' at sunrise ...



Up bright and early ...

We woke up early on Saturday and arrived at Uluru well before the sun was supposed to rise. However, with the moderate to heavy cloud cover the rising of the sun passed us by (and the other 100 or so people waiting in anticipation) before we knew it. We only realised the sun had risen by the throngs of people leaving at about 7.45am!

As we left we saw some people on the other side of the rock starting to climb it and a couple of us said we were keen to do the same a bit later in the day. Getting back to camp we had a great breakfast of eggs, bacon, toast and cereal, followed by a hot drink boiled in a billy.



After cleaning up we decided to spend the morning at Kata Juta (the Olgas). Driving out there, a few of us had a sleep (not the drivers!) as we were a little tired from getting up so early. It was a little surreal seeing the Olgas and Uluru at the same time (while we were driving between them) as all around there was just flat land for miles.

When we arrived we went for a bit of a walk along the "Valley of the Winds" trail. We never got to find out why it was called this as we only had a few hours to spend there. But at a glance it was quite amazing as between the great rocks there is a valley with a river and lots of vegetation, like a hidden forest.

Driving back to our campsite we glimpsed a dingo as it rushed across the road, I think the first one I have seen in the wild. We stopped for a quick bite of lunch and some games in the early afternoon and then headed back to Uluru around 3.00pm.

An elevated view ...

There were only two of us who wanted to climb Uluru and only one of us who was fit enough to do it comfortably! I love challenges and this was certainly one (although it seemed to be less of a challenge for many people climbing who were both much younger and much older than myself).

I felt a bit sorry for Laurent as he had to regularly stop and wait for me as I gasped for breath. Eventually we made it up to the top and it was a very interesting scene. It certainly wasn't flat and there was a fair bit of water lying around in little pools and some vegetation growing in some unusual places.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew went to the cultural centre and Gavin explained to me later that it was very informative and insightful regarding the history of Uluru and the surrounding communities and the role of national parks in preserving its heritage.

Spectacular sunset ...

We came together again at the Uluru sunset viewing area (with at least another 100 or so people). It was quite spectacular to watch the sun go down over the rock and see the change in colours. There were also a number of helicopters and light aircraft flying overhead which gave the whole scenario a Hollywood-type feel.

After sunset we enjoyed a delicious filling buffet dinner at the Whitegums Restaurant but, of course, left room for dessert! (which was a delicious rich chocolate cake). We returned to our campsite around 9.30pm and, once again, made a fire and were joined by other campers who enjoyed talking about their travelling experiences. After a long and adventurous day we all retired early.





Another good brekkie ...

On Sunday, we got up a little later and had a very large breakfast (as we had a lot of food to try and finish). Everyone chipped in with packing up the tents and we were all ready to go by 9.45am. As we had planned to leave at 10.00am we spent some time looking at some of Laurent's photos from his recent holiday to Brisbane and Sydney.

On the trip home we made several stops including at Curtin Springs, Mt Connor and Eraldunda. While everyone was fairly quiet (as we were all quite tired from the camping experience) much to our delight, a few 'wild' surprises captured our attention on the way home including some eagles, hawks, camels and horses.

It was two car loads of happy and relaxed campers who returned back to Alice Springs mid Sunday afternoon.



Positive Outcomes

Initial feedback was very positive. Peter summed it up by suggesting that, "If you didn't enjoy this trip then you only have yourself to blame".

The formal feedback was also positive. There was a high level of satisfaction with the camp overall including accommodation, teamwork, food and preparation. Some suggestions for improvements included that next time the camp could be slightly longer and maybe two months earlier or later when the weather isn't as cold. Ideas for the next camp include fossicking, Kings Canyon and Katherine.

From my own observations there were a number of major positives about the trip. Everyone pitched in and helped out in a number of different areas, and no one isolated themselves or refused to help; there was an eagerness on the part of those who attended to help out in different ways.

There was also a lot of communication, both within the group and with others who we met. I believe this helped normalise the opinions and experiences of those within the group and was very empowering. Communication also occurred on a deeper level at times (particularly around the campfire) which helped people to get to know each other better.

Thank you to everyone who came a long. Overall, it was a very relaxing and enjoyable trip.



Tim MacDonald