

The first part of this 3 part series looked at issues related to the vehicle, how to get to the Simpson Desert and a possible itinerary. The Simpson Desert 4WD trek is not one to be taken lightly and will often throw up a variety of challenges.

This article looks at what kind of gear you can bring and how you can prepare to avoid any serious problems that may come your way.

Challenge One - Water

- The general recommendation for travel in this area is to carry 6 litres per person per day and this should be carried from home.
- Don't assume that you can fill up large water containers at outback towns or stations.
- Each litre weighs about a kilogram so keep this in mind when working out where to store it.
- There are many solutions to this from expensive purpose built water tanks to flexible bladders and the humble jerrycan.
- Purpose built tanks can be mounted under some vehicles or thin poly tanks can be mounted in the back of utes or up against the cargo barrier in wagons.
- Flexible bladders carry a surprising amount and can be stored in a variety of places in the vehicle, even on the floor in front of the back seats or between the back seats and cargo barrier.
- Ten-litre casks of spring water, available from most supermarkets, are handy for drinking water as they can be discarded (in a responsible way) when empty to save space and weight.
- The flexible casks can also be packed around other non-sharp or abrasive items.
- Another great use for an empty water or wine cask is to partly inflate it and pack in your fridge and boxes/drawers as you start to use up supplies. This stops things bouncing around on rough terrain.



If you're going to be super cautious and serious about one thing when you head up to the Simpson Desert, make sure it's water.

Challenge Two - Food

You will need to be self-sufficient for the number of days you are in the desert. Basic supplies are available at Oodnadatta and Birdsville. These towns, plus Mt. Dare, have pub or roadhouse meals. On our next trip, our group have decided to have the evening meal out, when one is available, thus reducing the amount of food that needs to be carried. A more expensive choice for sure but hey, it's a holiday.

- Have enough extra food to keep you going in the event of bad weather or a breakdown

where you may need to stay put for longer than you expected.

- Dried and canned food is a good solution, and don't forget a healthy supply of chocolate (for life-sustaining energy of course).
- Even though it is good fun to cook on a fire or to use a camp oven, when wood is at a premium it's better to keep what you can carry for a bit of warmth and ambience at night (and maybe roast the odd marshmallow).
- Cooking is much easier with gas either with the traditional twin burner stove or the small "suitcase" cookers that run on butane canisters.
- These cookers and the gas canisters are incredibly cheap, portable and work well for most general cooking. But, one word of warning – butane canisters don't work well in near-freezing conditions with the canisters needing to be warmed to work efficiently.

Challenge Three - Good health

Safety and well-being should be of paramount concern, after all, you want this trip to be memorable for all the right reasons. So:

- Drink, drink, drink – water that is. Dehydration will not only cause problems such as constipation and headaches but can be life-threatening.
- Carry a comprehensive first aid kit – not just band-aids but full bandages, anti-vomit and diarrhoea medications from the chemist, sting medication and antihistamines. A packet of cold and flu tablets and sore throat medication can also be handy. If in doubt about any of these, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Have a good supply of prescription medications – there are no chemist shops in this neck of the woods
- Be aware of native animals – snakes and scorpions live in this area. They are generally more scared of you than you are of them. But don't tempt fate by walking through the bush in shorts and bare feet. Be especially vigilant with children and explain the dangers to them, without scaring them to death.

Challenge Four - Having a warm bed

The desert is closed to visitors over the summer months due to the extreme weather conditions. Consequently, travel will be in the cooler months which can still bring quite warm days, but often very cold nights – zero or lower. There is nothing more certain to make for a miserable trip than an inability to sleep from being cold. To avoid this:

- Have very warm bed clothing – thermals, tracksuit or similar
- Have a sleeping bag or quilt that has a low-temperature rating
- Use an old boy scout trick – have as many layers below you as you have on top. A large amount of the cold you feel in bed comes up from the ground
- Wear a beanie and socks – a cold head and cold feet can make you feel cold all over.

If the night turns out to be warm, you can just use part of what you have.

Challenge Five - Having a warm campfire

Note - In 2014 there were some rule changes, read about them here - [Simpson Desert Alert](#).

Once in the desert, you are in either National or Conservation Parks. Picking up any wood is strictly forbidden so if a campfire is on the agenda you must bring the means with you. Some ways of achieving this are:

- If space and weight allow, bring wood from home. If there are several vehicles in the group, get everyone to take what they can fit
- Bring a small brazier or an old "superchef" type bbq (a metal bowl on 3 legs) and use heat beads or briquettes and small pieces of wood to produce a flame. A packet of fire starters is essential with this method.
- Ecologs, or similar, can be purchased from hardware stores. These manufactured "logs" are compact and consistent in size making them easier to pack than normal cut wood
- If travelling along the [Oodnadatta Track](#), there are still thousands of old railway sleepers along the [old Ghan rail line](#) that can be used for firewood. If you have space, grab some.

Challenge Six - Communications

The Simpson is a very remote area. Even though many people undertake the crossing, being able to communicate in the case of an emergency is essential. There are only two sure ways of achieving this:

- Satphone - these can be hired before you leave or you can use the great system provided by the Mt. Dare Hotel and Birdsville Information Centre. Pick up a phone at either of these places and drop it off at the other end. See the [Mt Dare website](#) for information.
- HF Radio - most people will not have one of these unless you are seasoned outback travellers. These days a satphone is more reliable and you can make direct contact with the emergency service required. It also allows family and others to contact you if required.

In addition, a UHF radio is essential for contact between vehicles in your convoy and with others crossing the desert.

What else do you need?

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Enough of the challenges, let's finish with some miscellaneous items that you will need for a successful trip:

- [Desert Parks Pass](#) - You must have this permit to cross the desert. At \$125, it is not cheap but comes with copious information and maps. It lasts for 12 months and also provides

access to other areas, such as the Innamincka Regional Reserve. Get your pass from the South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage, the RAA or at outlets at Oodnadatta, Mt Dare and Birdsville.

- Sand flag - a long pole with a red flag on top so that your vehicle can be seen by oncoming vehicles when climbing dunes. This is essential to avoid head-on collisions and should be on at least the lead vehicle of a convoy. An old fishing rod, old radio antenna, children's bike flag or bamboo garden stake attached to the roof rack or bull bar are simple solutions to this problem. On a previous trip, a pair of women's red knickers made for an interesting flag
- Fly nets - get some from Snowy's. Cheap and if flies are around you will be very thankful.

Well, all you have to do now is get up and go. We are off in a few days and will write of our experiences □ what worked, what didn't, what I haven't included in this blog. Catch you soon.

Next: Crossing the Simpson Desert for Beginners (Part 3)