

# HUNTING THE HUNT

Article & Images by Phil Bianchi

Most people race along the Great Central Road without realising they are passing some of the most spectacular 4WD driving in Australia. This trek on the Hunt Oil and David Carnegie roads has it all; rich early exploration history, spectacular ranges, breakaways, caves, rockholes, vast spinifex plains and best of all few people travel here.

Tjukayirla Roadhouse on the GCR, home of the famous Tjuka burger, was our starting point. I've seen many a traveller, when receiving the Tjuka, grin – you can see them thinking 'How the hell am I going to finish that?'

We then headed north east along the GCR to the Hunt Oil Road turn off. The first 70km of the Hunt is in reasonable condition; from there it deteriorates with wash outs and rocky patches, it's rutted and overgrown and speeds are down to a break neck 6–10 kph! On this trek

additional character lines on your vehicle are guaranteed; if you're worried about such pin striping then maybe this trek isn't for you!

Letting your tyres down to around 20 psi is very wise; the vehicle will handle the sand, corrugations and climb out of holes and ruts more readily. It will also reduce puncture risk and make for happy passengers in the cab.

Arriving in the area of Mounts Worsnop and Allott we set up a two day camp with Mt Worsnop as a back drop. One of the crew turned 48 and not missing an opportunity to celebrate we soon had a long line of camp ovens cooking roast beef and veggies, followed by homemade apple crumble and custard. A tough life isn't it?

A climb up the steep sided Mt Worsnop gives 360° views, with fantastic vistas across lake and spinifex country,

breakaways and mounts including Mt Allott. Nearby Woodhouse Lagoon is dry most times, only once have I seen water in it.

A few kilometres north of Mt Allott is Alexander Spring, so named by Explorer John Forrest in 1874 after his brother. When explorer David Carnegie visited here in 1896 expecting to find water, he was devastated to find it was miss-named – it was only a rockhole and it was dry.

Once we left the breakaway country and headed north we entered vast wheat-like bonnet high spinifex plains; here we attached lengths of shade cloth across our bull bars to prevent seeds blocking radiators. Spinifex fires are a real risk and under vehicle spinifex fires do happen – on this track we found the remains of items from a Nissan that was destroyed by such a fire in the late



**Clockwise from left:**  
Breaden Caves | Inquisitive locals | Almost there | **Breaden Caves** | Washouts were deep | Cleaning out Alexander Spring







**Clockwise from left:**  
From Mt Worsnop | Spinifex fire risk | Mt Worsnop  
Mt Allott | Note spinifex screen



1980s. Clean out spinifex regularly, it doesn't take long.

On reaching the Gunbarrel Highway at Geraldton Bore we set up camp and topped up with water. My philosophy out bush is to never go past water (or fuel) without topping up.

The section of the Gunbarrel to David Carnegie Road turn off had bone jarring corrugations so bad that travellers have created up to four bypass tracks in an effort to avoid them. The corrugations were so tall they cast shadows; it was like driving over a long line of copper logs!

A trackside large group of camels provided us with many photo opportunities; they stared back at us probably wondering what we were. Camels often trot down the middle of the track for kilometre after kilometre, leaving a following driver frustrated in not being able to get past them. A camel

through the windscreen may provide lots of rissosles but it would certainly spoil one's trip. I urge caution around camels.

The top end of the David Carnegie Road is on a plateau and it's rough, with dips, washouts, rocky sections, bypasses and many overgrown vehicle caressing sections.

Once on the spinifex plains we went in search of a tree blazed F59 by explorer John Forrest (F for Forrest and it was the 59th camp of the trip). We found it but the blaze had been eaten out by termites. Some 2km away from the blaze is Windich Rockhole; the water in it was green pea soup-like and most unappealing.

Our next stop was the magnificent Empress Spring, some 120km further south, and the track was overgrown, washed out, rocky and rutted. I had some of the crew thinking of palm

trees around a lagoon; weren't they disappointed! It's a pool of murky water at the bottom of a cave.

On the surface there's a narrow entrance to the cave and then there's a seven metre climb down a chain ladder to the cave floor. From the floor of the main cave a very narrow tunnel takes you further down to a smaller cave that holds the water.

Explorer Carnegie in 1896 was desperate to find water; he was led here by a very thirsty Aborigine that he had tied up the night before and then fed salt beef. His good fortune in getting water here probably led him to get carried away and name it Empress Spring after Queen Victoria.

When exploring the main cave, let your eyes become accustomed to the light and you'll see numerous bones of animals. You'll also see a number of tall poles reaching the ceiling, these were

used by Aborigines over thousands of years to access the cave floor. A drawing in Carnegie's book *Spinifex and Sand* shows the same poles in place in 1896.

Our next quest was Breaden Bluff further south; this bluff has magnificent breakaway and cave systems to explore. The track off the DCR is tight, twisty and very overgrown with tank trap-like wash outs. The vast breakaway system had some 150 metres of caves along one section of it. Some caves went in 15 metres, some cut through and joined up with others leaving only a pillar and some had piles of long forgotten firewood ready for the gatherer to return.

With our trek now drawing to a close we returned to Tjukayirla Roadhouse to refuel both vehicles and tummies.

The next time you're venturing along the Great Central Road give yourself extra time and check out some of the sites and enjoy some of the best 4WD driving around.



## Top Tips

- The Hunt Oil and David Carnegie roads are little travelled tracks in the Gibson Desert of WA.
- Allow a minimum of four days; six would be better. Rushing it may result in vehicle damage and breakdowns.
- Entry permits to travel through Aboriginal Land are required. You can apply on line at: [www.daa.wa.gov.au/land/entry-permits/apply-for-a-permit](http://www.daa.wa.gov.au/land/entry-permits/apply-for-a-permit)
- Only very basic supplies and services are available at Tjukayirla Roadhouse, plan carefully.
- Hema Great Desert Tracks South West map is an excellent guide.
- Fuel is available at Tjukayirla Roadhouse for the 650km round trip.
- The best time to visit are the cooler months of April to September.

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