

OODNADATTA TRACK GENERAL INFORMATION

The Oodnadatta Track is a public road maintained and rebuilt by S.A. It undergoes constant rebuilding and realigning along its 650 km length from Marree to Marla. The road surface is unsealed and varies in condition. Two major types could be described as sheeted and unsheeted. 'Sheeting' is raising the level of the road with a quarried, supposedly more stable, mix of sand, gravel, rock and clay. The quality of sheeting depends on what is available nearby. Most of the road between Marree & William Creek is sheeted with the exception of an area around Finnis Creek. Sheetting aids water runoff but does not make the road 'all-weather'. The road should be avoided when wet to avoid damage to its surface. There are very few culverts or causeways and the road follows the land form. The floodways are supposed to be gravelled to resist minor flood damage but surprise washouts in creek beds are not unusual. Position of road hazards should be noted and reported by phone to SA . Port Augusta 03 96 420211 , to the nearest police station or this PINK ROADHOUSE. Conventional vehicles should be careful not to damage sumps and fuel tanks. Two-part plastic epoxy ribbon is a handy addition to the toolkit. The road has an excellent safety record; the most common accident is rollovers at corners . Normal car tyre pressures should remain as on bitumen; trailer and 4WD tyres should have pressures reduced by up to 30% in most cases. Rainfall is unpredictable and good weather at one end of the track does not guarantee a good run right through even though the ends are only about 12 hours or less apart. Check by phone with Pink Roadhouse, or to Oodnadatta Police.

HISTORY

The most pleasing aspect of travelling the Oodnadatta Track is that there is something to see even if you aren't a geologist or plant biologist. The Oodnadatta Track route was established as a trade route sometime during the first 47,000 years of aboriginal population of Australia. Although able to exist in country that lacked obvious water sources, aborigines must have been aided by the presence of the string of springs along which the track is built. The Overland Telegraph and old Ghan Railway were built along springs. The first Overland Telegraphs route followed springs, then moved onto the rail alignment to make repairs easier. As the rail moved slowly north each successive railhead became the closest transport point to service areas at the time supplied by Afghan camel teams. The Ghan line predated the East West rail so places like Coward Springs became the railhead to supply the west of Australia and Oodnadatta, in its time, supplied the whole of Central Australia. The pastoralists had already established themselves with the earlier telegraph construction and the rail supplied the gold mines east of Alice Springs with heavy traction engines and machinery. The machinery that proved too heavy to cross the roadless areas after being brought so far, is still lying around in Oodnadatta. The Overland Telegraph was the major engineering feat of its time and the railway, after a great deal of argument and procrastination as to route was built partly to ease under-employment of the time. The line closed in 1981 when a new faster line was built on higher ground to the west near the Stuart Highway. Signs of major engineering works are scarce on the Oodnadatta Track. Among the most remarkable are rail bridges as at Curdimurka and Algebuckina, emplacements at Beresford, an artesian water bore field to supply Roxby Downs Mine at Bopeechie, copper mines and telegraph station ruins at Peake and Strangways. The most visible stone rail buildings progressively fell into disuse as fettlers camps were found to not be necessary at the 10 mile original interval. North of Oodnadatta on the Oodnadatta Track the only major early accomplishments other than surviving in a harsh isolated environment were deep hand built wells, around which the original pastoralists were granted land in smaller blocks than now found to be viable. The other remarkable features of the general area are off the Oodnadatta Track and include the Painted Desert of Arkaringa Hills, Dalhousie Thermal Ponds, Purni Bore and the Simpson Desert, details and maps which are available at the OODNADATTA PINK ROADHOUSE. PHONE - 08 96707822

NATURAL FEATURES of note on the track include Lake Eyre, Coward Springs, Irrapatana sandhills, the red/purple Algebuckina gibber landscapes and large permanent waterhole.

WATER The Oodnadatta Track is the most extensive string of artesian springs in Australia culminating in the north at Dalhousie, the largest natural outpouring of the largest artesian system in Australia. Bores put down for oil search, pastoral water and steam engine supplies tap from the same source. The water pours out because its point of entry on the eastern seaboard is higher than the low areas in this area. The water's varying heat is gained from the water carrying aquifers route closer to the earth's molten core, and the varying mineral content depends on stratas of minerals the water passes through on its way up. A spring is a natural outlet, a bore is man made (since the 1890s). Get drinking water from townships - the rule for bore water is if it tastes OK drink it - water straight out of a bore or spring doesn't need boiling.

FACILITIES Welding and motor repairs are available at Marla & Oodnadatta and limited facilities are available at William Creek and Marree. Motor Vehicle Recovery can be arranged on about the same basis. Cars can be truck-transported to Adelaide via local carriers from Marla, Oodnadatta and Marree . Passenger coaches run to Marree and Marla only to a timetable (Stateliner, Briscoes, Ansett, Deluxe Coaches). There is a regular Oodnadatta - Coober Pedy passenger service.

OODNADATTA TRACK SOME FACTS:

THE TRACK IS GRADED, UNSEALED & SIGNPOSTED. IT IS ABOUT 650 KM LONG FROM MARLA TO MARREE VIA OODNADATTA. IT HAS A REMARKABLE SAFETY RECORD DESPITE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN WARNING SIGNPOSTS. IT HAS, TO DATE, ONE ROAD FATALITY IN LIVING HISTORY (IN 1986 A HEADON ON BLIND CRESTS AT POLE CREEK). IT CARRIES VERY LITTLE ROAD TRAIN TRAFFIC AND SO IS LESS CORRUGATED THAN MANY OUTBACK ROADS. IT IS GRADED ABOUT EVERY 6 MONTHS. VEHICLE MOVEMENTS ARE ABOUT 10-30 PER DAY IN NON-SUMMER MONTHS AND 2-6 PER DAY IN SUMMER. DESPITE NUMEROUS WATER SOURCES, CARRY DRINKING WATER. DO NOT EXPECT HELP FROM CATTLE STATIONS UNLESS IN LIFE ENDANGERING EMERGENCIES. PETROL (UL & SUPER) AND DIESEL ARE AVAILABLE AT OODNADATTA, MARLA, MARREE AND WILLIAM CREEK.

DRIVE SAFELY AND HAVE A GOOD TRIP !!