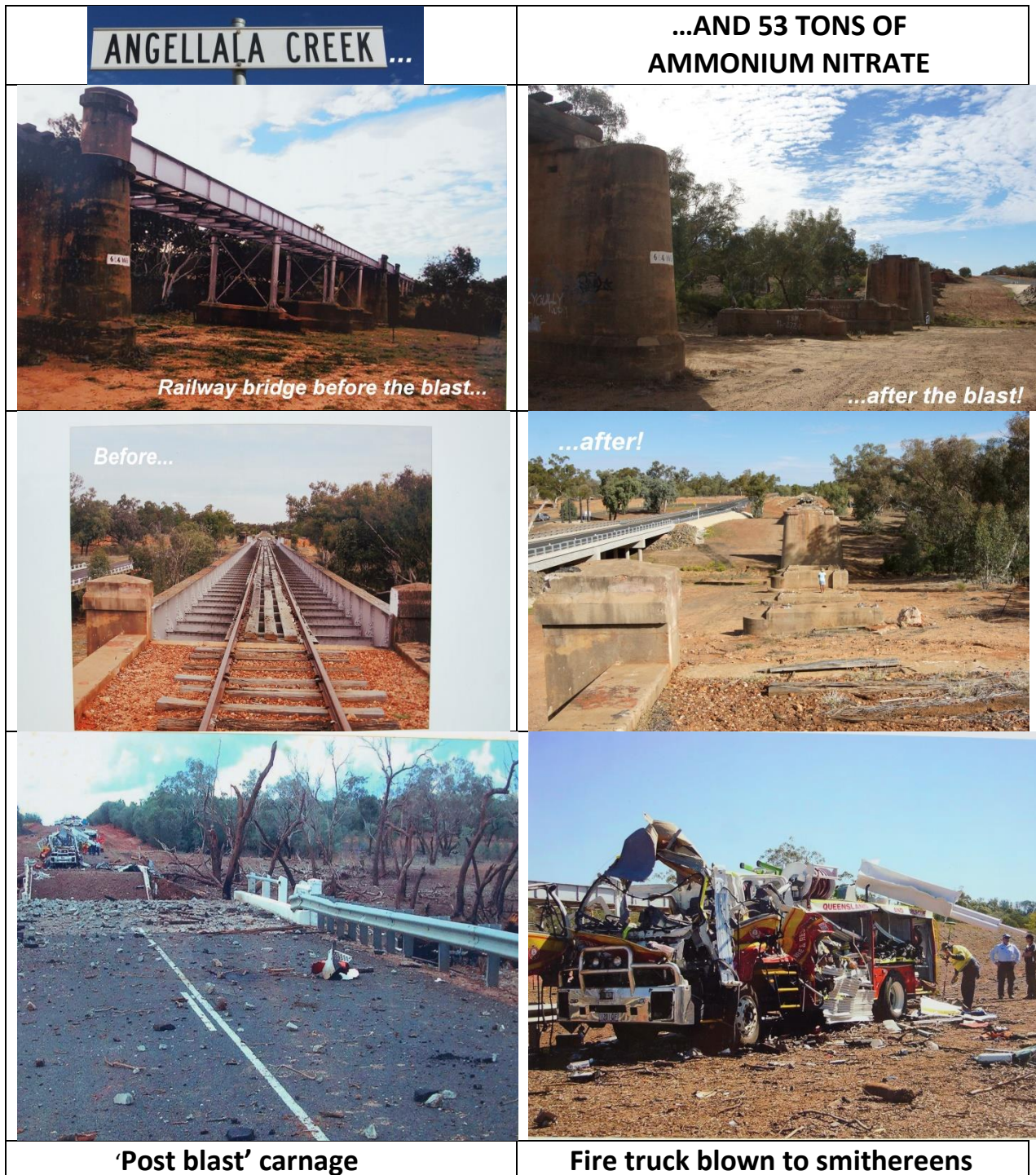


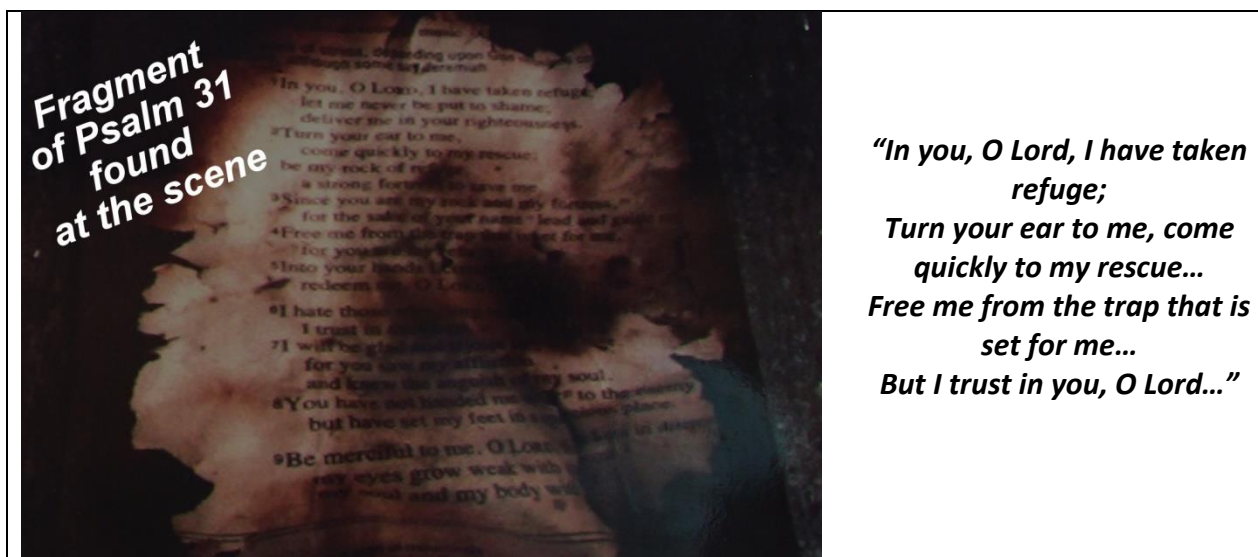
It never ceases to amaze how so many seemingly insignificant *off-the-beaten-track* outposts always have a story to tell or carry some catch to incite visitors' curiosity: The '*biggest this... or the most famous that...*', a historic campsite location of some early-day explorer or some form of earth-shattering event...

Like this one outside Charleville:



A truck carrying **53 tons of ammonium nitrate** caught on fire and then **exploded in September 2014**. The blast radius was more than one kilometre and the shock wave was felt over 30km away at Charleville. The explosion site looked like a war zone with complete demolition of the road bridge. The Angellala rail bridge that stood since 1897 was also vaporized. Eight people were injured, the driver received burns to 35% of his body.

They reckoned it was a miracle, no one was killed. Or maybe not quite: One fragment of the driver's bible was found at the scene stating Psalm 31. He must have said his prayers that day!



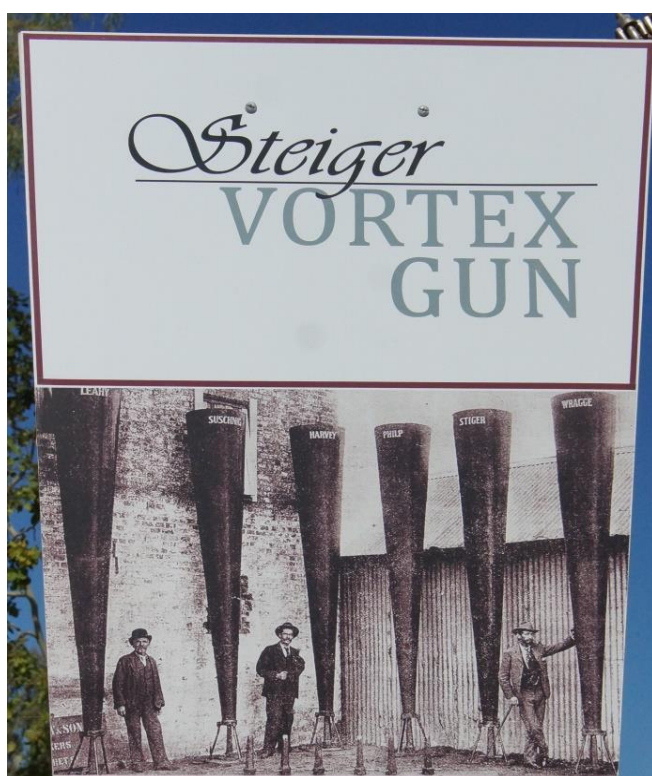
The locals had a **history of blasting things** long before that, though!

Namely by the curious invention of the **VORTEX GUN** – renown meteorologist **Clement Wragge**, equal parts genius, eccentric and larrikin, arrived at Charleville on September 12 – 1902 to try to end the draught. The self-confessed rainmaker had six massive Vortex guns, four-metre high steel cylinders, imported from Austria and placed them at strategic locations around the township to begin his rainmaking operation when suitable clouds gathered above the township by firing rain-producing gas into the atmosphere.

Although the contraptions had successfully protected European crops and vineyards from hail, Wragge's rainmaking efforts were an utter failure. Some of the guns apparently also exploded when fired, narrowly missing onlookers 😊

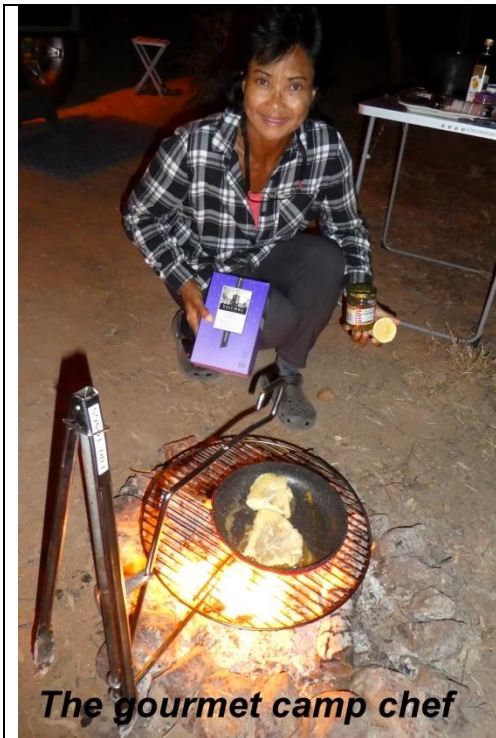
Charleville's drought problem remains unsolved to this day – anyone with a brighter idea??

Please make yourself known...



In the meantime we're getting used to living off the land again - Kyabara Creek...

When a **stormy squall** blasts through the camp at **2am** it's 'all hands on deck' – a sudden jolt out of bed without warning, rush outside, rescue the gear and... **fishing rod bell going off**, all at the same time, while engulfed in a hazy dust cloud whipped up by the frenzy! I (the '**starkers stalker**') find myself in the mix with my 46cm 'Yellowbelly' which I actually manage to land: **Fish pacified**, I take a shower, wash off the dust and crawl back to bed. All part of a novel night's angling action, I surmise.



It is one thing catching your food – travelling with a gourmet camp chef quite another stroke of luck!



On the trek from Kyabara Creek to Birdsville we overnight in a couple of places:
Deon's Lookout and Betoota.



Overnighting on top Deon's Lookout on the way to Birdsville



Diamantina Plains early light

**Camp at
Deon's lookout**



Ready for the early morning walk



We cause a
dramatic population explosion to 2 !!

(for one night at least)

Roadtrain approaching Deon's



At iconic Birdsville we visit the famous 'Big Red' sand dune some 35km west of town.

The first and tallest of a 1000+ sandy ridges to conquer for those keen to cross the Simpson Desert from here. We are satisfied watching the sunset from atop as crossing with a van in tow would be impossible.

*We hear, Lake Eyre south of the Simpson is currently filling with water run-off from Queensland's wet season since the beginning of the year. Only once in every thirty years the Lake fills to overflowing capacity covering 9,500 square kilometres (3,668 sq/miles). We decide on a scenic flight to witness the spectacle. ****

Mostly the waters seep into the desert and disappear but not without giving life-changing hydration to surrounding cattle station's grazing lands transforming barren landscapes of the Channel Country to lush habitat .

The phenomenon reminds us of the vast Okavango Delta in Botswana where massive floods wash into the Kalahari every year from the far north of Angola.

***For those less familiar with Lake Eyre...

This salt lake lies in the deserts of central Australia and contains the continent's lowest point: 15m below sea level. It sits 700km (950miles) north of Adelaide and 700km south of Birdsville.

The salinity is the same as the ocean. When all water has evaporated the salt crust is up to 50cm thick.

There exists a '**Lake Eyre Yacht Club**' – a dedicated bunch of sailors who take to the waters when the lake floods: 2009 was the last time they did so.

British record braker **Donald Campbell** busted the land speed record at 634km/h (396m/h) in his rocket-powered 'Bluebird' vehicle on the salt pan of Lake Eyre in the sixties.

Legendary Birdsville Hotel



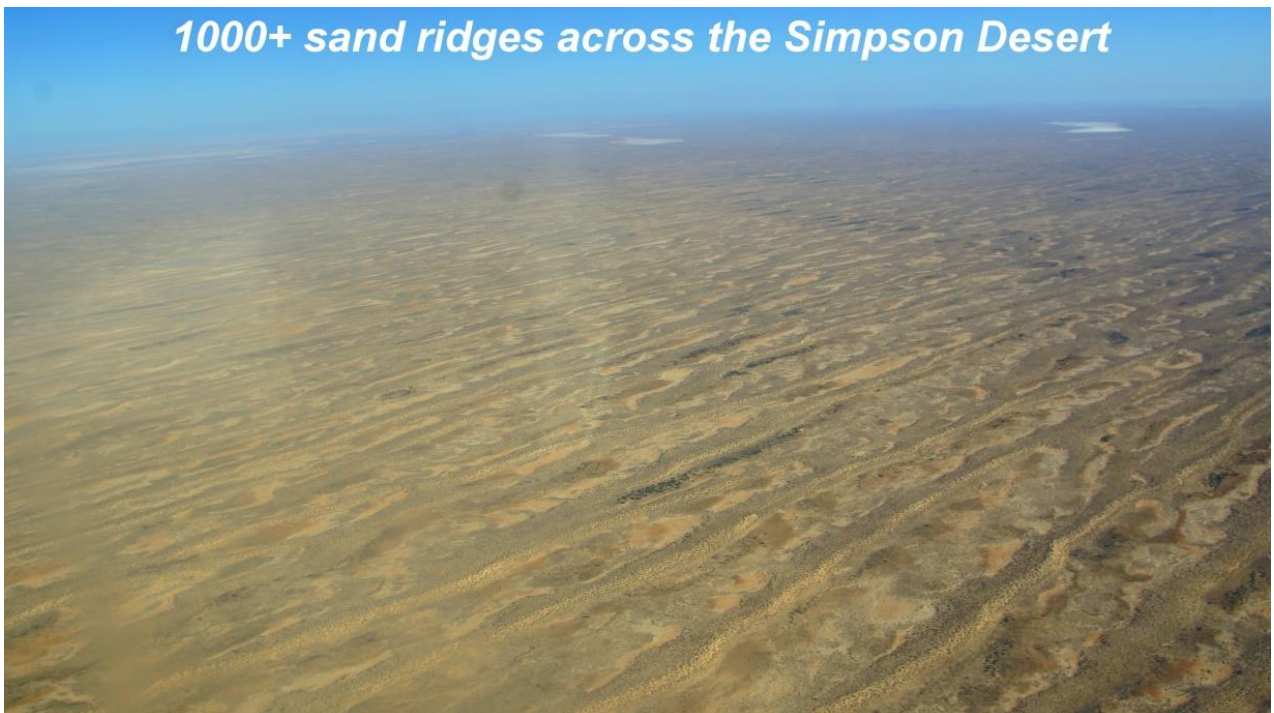
Aerial view of the Big Red and track leading into the Simpson Desert



The Big Red - gateway to the Simpson Desert



1000+ sand ridges across the Simpson Desert



1,658km from the East coast



Scenic flight over Lake Eyre



Channel country near Birdsville



Desert: Add water and wonder...



From barren landscapes to lush habitat



**Flock of pelicans
in the desert**



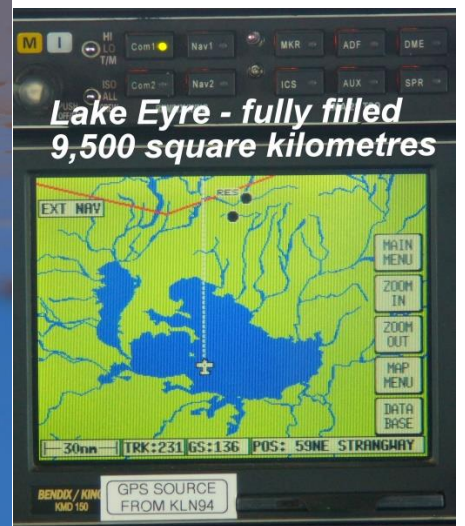
River system's desert crossing

Lake Eyre filling with water: Run-off from Northern Queensland's wet season earlier in the year

Desert inundation



Lake Eyre scenic tour





Space junk: SKYLARK ROCKET at William Creek

These 8.75m long missiles were used from the late 50's reaching altitudes of up to 770km. Their main use was carrying scientific payloads into space. Of this type 419 had been launched from Woomera/South Australia by 1990 – the boys must have had plenty of fire-work fun back in the day!

We had decided to drive from **Caloundra on the East Coast** in a straight line west to witness the environmental changes from **coast to desert**: Finally, **after 1,658km (1,036miles) we touch the eastern edge of the Simpson Desert**. From **Birdsville** we aim north for a further 1,280km (800miles) into the tropics, to the bottom of the **Gulf of Carpentaria**.



Greetings from Chris and Katherine – more fire side chat soon 😊

