

00:04

Rick Foote is a truck driver in Australia. Every week he crosses the huge country: 3,000 km from south to north and back again.

00:19

Rick and his wife Vicki are working two-up - when Rick drives, Vicki sleeps - and vice versa. They drive a road train, one of those huge trucks, so essential for maintaining the Australian way of life.

00:47

Rick Foote, Australian Truck Driver

"We literally drove trucks ... been to every capital city in Australia, but this is the best road to be on, the Stuart Highway! Just something about this road that once you've been up it, you just don't want to leave it.

01:07

On the way from Adelaide to Darwin, the road train passes through several climatic and vegetation zones: from the Mediterranean, fertile south - through dry savannah - saltbush steppe and desert - to the tropical monsoon forest in the north.

01:34

The road trains on the Stuart Highway are 54 meters long - a lot of accidents happen when people try to pass them - tourists often underestimate the length of the trucks with their 16 axles and 64 tires.

01:53

On the evening of the first day the truck approaches Coober Pedy.

01:59

Under this desert lies the world's largest opal field. In 1915 the first opal was found here, now the desert has been completely undermined.

02:12

People have piled up thousands of mounds of debris here. Next to each hill a perfectly straight shaft descends 30 to 40 meters into the ground.

02:23

The Swabian Günther Wagner came to Coober Pedy 43 years ago and stayed.

02:35

Today he is 65, but he 's still looking for more. The next opal could be hiding only a few centimeters deep in the rock. And so Günther has conscientiously blown off piece by piece over the years. That's why it looks like this under the desert.

02:53

Günther Wagner, Opal-digger from Coober Pedy

"In the 60s and early 70s they were just crazy. They'd find \$150,000 worth in one night, but would lose it all in card games by next morning. If you had invested it correctly, you wouldn't have had to work for the rest of your life." (Original in German)

03:11

The Australian natives, the Aboriginal people, called the place "Coober Pedy" - "White man's hole". 1,430 white men and women are currently living in the so-called dug-outs. Because of the extreme temperature changes most in Coober Pedy live, work and pray underground.

03:35

Günther is getting ready for blasting. Everything he needs, he has made himself.

03:47

Less than 50 meters away he waits for the explosion.

04:11

Today Günther is lucky:

04:18

He finds an opal – worth nearly \$ 2,000.

04:30

The road train approaches the center of the continent. The world famous Ayers Rock is located about 300 kilometers west of the Stuart Highway.

04:44

Several years ago this huge sandstone rock formation was given back its original name: Uluru. It belongs to the Anangu people.

For them, Uluru is a sacred place. In the mythology of the indigenous people, it is of great importance. The Aborigines of Uluru prefer not to be filmed. Tens of thousands of tourists visit Uluru National Park every year.

05:14

Wild dromedaries. About a million of them live in Central Australia and eat the semi-desert bare.

The 19th Century explorers brought them here – they were ideal expedition animals.

Many of their owners did not have the heart to kill the loyal camels after their travels and released them into the wild - with dire consequences. Currently, the number of camels doubles every nine years.

Even Conservationists are now requesting they be shot, because they displace native animals.

05:50

On the way to Alice Springs, shortly before 5 am, Rick and Vicki stop at a gas station.

06:07

The truck consumes nearly one liter of diesel per kilometer. This adds up to about 5,500 liters for the entire tour.

06:22

Rick is very tired.

06:27

After refueling, he explains why driving is so exhausting.

06:32

A film by Dirk Schraeder

Rick Foote, Australian Truck Driver

"If you move the steering wheel an inch, two inches, like that, just like that, the back trailer will move a good foot, two foot, three foot ... like that across the road."

06:49

The road train continues north past the Aileron roadhouse.

06:57

Shortly after 1 pm on the second day, the truck passes the Devils Marbles. Erosion and weathering formed these rounded boulders. Several thousand of them are clustered here. The Devils Marbles is the largest granite boulder field in the world.

07:17

Our journey continues to the area of Larrimah.

07:23

A helicopter appears.

07:26

The cattle farmer Ben Tapp is an aviation legend in the outback. Rick picks up the radio.

07:34

Rick Foote, Australian Truck Driver

"How's the cattle muster going this year, Ben?"

07:37

Ben Tapp, cattle farmer and helicopter pilot

"It's not too bad at the moment. It's been worse, it's been better, but it's an average year".

07:44

Ben's cattle farm, Maryfield Station, is 1,500 square kilometers, twice the size of Hamburg.

07:54

Cattle drives with horses are a thing of the past. For over 30 years, almost all farmers have been herding their flocks with helicopters and jeeps. To do this they need at least two helicopters.

08:14

First, they fly zig zag over the station and drive the cattle toward the corral. This maneuver requires much more concentration using helicopters than it did with horses.

08:28

Ben Tapp, cattle farmer and helicopter pilot

"I use to like it before, there was a lot more enjoyment with it, with the horses, but this is pretty good too. This is a lot different you know. You can do a job with a helicopter, you know ... what should probably take you a week. You can do it today in about half a day or a day, you know."

08:49

A short time later: the two pilots have breakfast and a briefing with Rob, the boss on the ground.

08:56

Rob's ground crew consists of Irish seasonal workers.

09:04

After the camp fire is put out, the really dangerous part of the cattle mustering begins. Several pilots die every year in Australia during the roundup.

09:23

On the ground Rob organizes the work of the ground crew.

09:33

These cattle will all be exported to Indonesia.

09:41

They still have 350 km to their destination. Rick and Vicki don't often sit side by side. When they retire, they'd like to visit places in the camper that they don't have time for now – and see their favorite animals.

10:00

Rick Foote, Australian Truck Driver

"Crocodiles. See them in the wild, see what they're like. You drive down the road sometimes, especially going out the west you can see them swimming in the river, but you don't get real close to them, you know. You can't see 'em too well."

10:16

There are crocodiles in several national parks, a few hours from Darwin.

10:25

Since 1989 the Nitmiluk National Park has been managed by Aboriginal people. Park guide Jamie Brooks is Aboriginal. There are also white employees, but all decisions are made by the council of elders.

10:45

Jamie Brooks, guide at Nitmiluk National Park

"The Jawoyn people have full control over their land. They're able to protect their ancient art sites. They can bring tourists into certain areas and they can also control where tourists go and stuff like that, so ... so you haven't got the people wandering into sites that are culturally significant to the Jawoyn people, like a burial site, stuff like that."

11:08

The bloody history of Australia's colonization – with the extreme violence of the whites – is over, says Jamie.

11:15

Jamie Brooks, guide at Nitmiluk National Park

"Since it became illegal for people to go out and, you know, shoot an Aboriginal person in the bush, the laws have changed and so people have learnt to live with each other, so the racism part of it isn't as bad as it used to be.

These days now Aboriginal people are allowed to have control over their land. So for instance:

"Stolen Generation" if an Aboriginal woman had a child to a white man, that child would be taken

away. That's not happening any more. Aboriginal people can work quite comfortably with white people."

11:55

After three hours of searching, a tiny crocodile finally appears.

12:05

If you want to be sure to see larger crocodiles, you can find them in Kakadu National Park.

12:10

The Salties, as the saltwater crocodiles are called here, can be up to six meters long. They are the largest reptiles in the world.

12:25

But in Kakadu there is much more than just crocodiles.

13:12

After 40 hours of driving Rick and Vicki are almost there. Only 9 miles to Darwin. Today, many women also drive the huge trucks, but when Vicki began 30 years ago, they were not accepted by the male drivers.

13:29

Vicki Foote, Australian truck driver

No, a lot of them didn't talk to you. A lot of them thought that you were somewhat, you know, if you were two-up with another driver, they thought that you had to be the girlfriend. They used to call us the "seat covers", so they thought that we were, you know, not there to work, they thought we were there for something girls ... just to keep the men happy.

13:51

Darwin is extremely humid. The three trailers are brimming with food - well chilled. There are no dairies here in the north, so every yoghurt must be transported across the continent to Darwin. It's only thanks to the huge road trains that the Australian outback can be supplied.