TRAVEL BOOK • AUSTRALIA 2019 / 2020

Down Under with Sixfoot

Of Oven-Baked Campers, Breathalyzed Passengers, and the Last Flight Out of Paradise

Heike & Rudi • October 2019 to March 2020 • Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania & the Outback

It was meant to be a grand, untethered journey across the red continent—driving their own expedition camper, "Sixfoot," along Australia's endless coastlines, ancient forests, and remote deserts. What actually unfolded between October 2019 and March 2020 went far beyond any itinerary: a wild mix of blistering heat and pouring rain, deserted dream coves and relentless swarms of flies, bogged axles and dazzling starlit nights—until world history wrote a thriller-worthy finale to the adventure.

Leg	Dates	Region & Stops	Key Highlights
I. Prelude	Oct–Dec 2019	Frankfurt, Perth, Fremantle	Stink bug heat chamber, bureaucracy marathon, indoor water fountain
II. Southwest	Dec 2019	Bunbury to Esperance	Busselton Jetty, Black Point, Fanny Cove, Christmas Eve at Lucky Bay
III. Nullarbor & South	Dec 2019–Jan 2020	Kalgoorlie, Ceduna, Adelaide	147 km straight road, 56 °C on the Eyre Peninsula, Flinders Ranges
IV. Tasmania	Jan–Feb 2020	Devonport, Hobart, West Coast	Bay of Fires, Mount Wellington, canoe debut on Lake Pedder, wombats
V. Outback & Finale	Feb–Mar 2020	Broken Hill, Uluru, Geraldton, Perth	Cameron Corner, Lake Eyre, Finke Gorge, Great Central Road, lockdown escape

CHAPTER I • OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2019

The Stink Bug, the Fountain, and the Bureaucracy Monster

It all began in the autumn of 2019 with one tiny yet remarkably influential troublemaker: the brown marmorated stink bug. Because Australia is terrified of this stowaway, every used vehicle shipped to the country must be fumigated or heat-treated. Fumigation was out of the question, so Rudi and Heike's expedition camper, "Sixfoot," was baked in a chamber at 55 °C for 20 to 30 minutes—with every door and window wide open so the heat could reach every corner. As a result, the living cabin couldn't even be locked until it arrived in Australia.

On top of that came a wonderfully absurd clash of regulations between the shipping line (Wallenius Wilhelmsen) and Australian Border Control: the shipping line banned lithium batteries as hazardous goods but didn't mind camping gear, while Australian customs banned camping gear but had no issue with lithium batteries. The bottom line for Rudi and Heike? No lithium batteries and no camping chairs made the voyage.

Late November kicked off with a racing pulse at Frankfurt Airport. They had arrived early and waited comfortably in the lounge, only to hit an unexpected queue at security right before boarding. Long story short: a full Airbus A380 had to wait while they dashed onboard as the very last passengers. After a pleasant flight via Dubai to **Perth** came the first pleasant surprise—instead of the dreaded strict customs officers, they were greeted by cheerful, friendly inspectors who charged duty on Rudi's declared cigarettes and waved them straight through.



Arrival in Perth: After the long flight via Dubai, the rental car counter delivers a first taste of Australian patience tests.

After their first portion of fish & chips in **Fremantle**, Monday brought the full force of Australian bureaucracy. Ten hours and 120 kilometers crisscrossing Perth: picking up Sixfoot at 10 a.m. from a freight yard where it had been re-cleaned (customs had spotted a bit of dirt), driving across town to their wonderfully helpful customs broker Ryan, crossing town again for the Road Worthy Test, and finally registering and insuring the vehicle. The roadworthy inspection itself was delightfully simple: lights on and off, indicators checked, one lap around the block—followed by a full hour waiting for the paperwork.

Even getting a mobile phone plan with 100 GB of data as a non-resident turned into an endurance event. After striking out at the first shop, a very patient salesperson spent a full hour collecting personal details—even their German health insurance card came in handy. Over the next two days, they raided camping and off-road shops scattered across greater Perth for new chairs, a gas bottle, UHF radio, sand flag, emergency beacon, and kayak paddles. Between errands, they strolled through downtown Perth—Christmas decorations at 30 °C in the shade. Then, on Saturday, filling the water tanks turned Sixfoot's interior into a fountain: a loose locknut on a water filter's bleed valve had caused a minor defect with major splash. By Sunday it was fixed, and on December 2 they finally rolled south.

CHAPTER II • DECEMBER 2019

Dolphins, Scratches, and a Beach Python: The Wild Southwest

After beating a hasty retreat from a mosquito-ridden national park complete with virus warning signs, relaxed life in Western Australia truly began along Ocean Drive in **Bunbury**. They fed dolphins in the morning, drove past **Forrest Beach** to **Busselton**, and walked the longest wooden jetty in the Southern Hemisphere—1.85 kilometers out to sea and back, foolishly in 35 °C midday sun. An outstanding artisanal ice cream parlor saved the afternoon.

After a swim at **Eagle Bay** and a stop at **Cape Naturaliste**, December 4 brought their first real off-road baptism: 30 kilometers of narrow, deep sand flanked by tall, thorny bushes on the track to **Three Bears Lookout**. At 2.2 meters wide, Sixfoot barely squeezed through, picking up a few bush pinstripes along the way. When they tried to winch out a bogged Landcruiser, the winch fuse blew—fortunately, a small track-patrol truck came along to pull it free. Sixfoot itself sailed through the deep sand effortlessly, earning an appreciative thumbs-up from the Aussie patrol crew. That evening in **Yallingup**, after a bracing dip in the Indian Ocean, they met Australia's true rulers: trying to eat pizza outside attracted hundreds of flies within seconds, forcing a frantic retreat indoors.

Far more peaceful were two internet-free days at **Hamelin Bay**, where friendly stingrays glided right up to the shoreline to be fed. In **Augusta**, the quiet 1,200-resident "metropolis" of the southwest corner, they tucked into seafood spaghetti with more seafood than pasta, serenaded by raucous cockatoos, pelicans, and a 1.2-meter monitor lizard. On December 9, an 80-kilometer deserted bush track led them to **Black Point**. With tires aired down to 2 bar, three differential locks, and low range engaged, Sixfoot conquered steep, soft sand dunes effortlessly. At Black Point they were completely alone—the only light in the night was the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse, 30 to 40 kilometers away.



At Australia's southwest corner: Sixfoot pauses on the red coastal track with sweeping views across the surf toward the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse.

Spotting snakes and emus along the way, they headed inland to **Beedelup Falls**, the **King Jarrah Tree**, the **Gloucester Tree**, and **Warren National Park**, camping beside the river beneath towering karri trees. Next came climbing **Mount Chudalup**, a blustery night in **Windy Harbour**—where the name proved accurate, yet four kangaroos grazed peacefully nearby—and the first cozy red-wine evening with new Swiss travel friends Andy and Marianne. Via **Rock Window** and the **Valley of the Giants** with its massive Tingle Tree, they reached **Denmark** for swimming days at crystal-clear **Greens Pool**, **Elephant Rock**, and idyllic **Shelbey Beach** in Howes National Park.

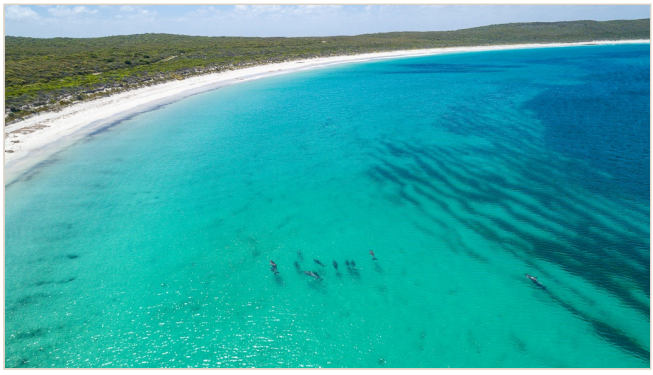


Among forest giants in Greater Beedelup National Park: Only with Heike standing inside does the sheer scale of these ancient trunks truly sink in.

Past **Albany**, they got their first real taste of Australian solitude. At **Betsy Beach**—reached only via gravel roads—they snagged the last of ten free beachfront off-road spots. During an evening stroll, eyes fixed on the gorgeous scenery, Rudi suddenly spotted a 1.2-meter snake just twenty centimeters from his foot; luckily, a local later confirmed it was only a harmless python. In **Bremer Bay**, a very different mishap struck: while brushing his teeth, a dental crown popped right out—1,500 kilometers from the next big town and just days before Christmas.



Fanny Cove in Stockton National Park: Sixteen kilometers of off-road track led to this deserted strip of white-sand paradise.



The only neighbors in Fanny Cove: For two blissful days, Heike and Rudi shared the entire bay with a pod of dolphins.

Driving through **Fitzgerald National Park** (camping at **Barrens Lookout**) and down a 16-kilometer off-road track through **Stockton National Park** brought them to **Fanny Cove**—a dazzling white bay shared for two days with only a brief ranger visit and a pod of dolphins. Just in time for Christmas, they reunited in **Esperance** with Andy and Marianne as well as Moni and Wolfgang in their MAN expedition truck. On the morning of December 24, a local dentist cemented Rudi's crown back in place, clearing the way for a glorious Christmas Eve at **Lucky Bay** in **Cape Le Grand National Park**—including a 22-kilometer drive right along the beach—followed by a festive group barbecue.



Christmas Eve, Australian style (December 24, 2019): Heike and Sixfoot on the blindingly white sand of Lucky Bay—with a kangaroo lounging right behind the rear tires.



Evening sky in Esperance: As bushfires close the old Telegraph Track and northern routes, the sky above Sixfoot and Moni and Wolfgang's MAN truck glows an eerie, vivid orange.

CHAPTER III • DECEMBER 2019 – JANUARY 2020

Across the Nullarbor and Into the Sauna of South Australia

With raging bushfires blocking both the coastal Telegraph Track and the northern route near Norseman, they chose the long eastward haul across the legendary **Nullarbor Highway**. Shortly after setting off on December 26, Rudi and Heike swapped seats in **Norseman**—and five kilometers later, police pulled them over for a routine random breath test. In a stroke of delightfully bizarre logic, Heike was behind the wheel, yet Rudi had to blow into the breathalyzer from the passenger seat. In the mining town of **Kalgoorlie**—deserted for Christmas at 45 °C in the shade—they stocked up at Coles (the next supermarket was 1,500 to 1,800 kilometers away) before turning onto the **Eyre Highway**.



Kalgoorlie at 45 °C in the shade: Over the Christmas holidays, the historic gold-mining town lies almost completely deserted under the midday sun.

On day one they covered 577 kilometers, almost dead straight, including Australia's famous 147-kilometer stretch without a single bend. That evening they bumped into Moni and Wolfgang out in the middle of nowhere. The next day, a detour to the **Eyre Bird Observatory**—which looked right next to the highway on the map—turned out to be a 35-kilometer off-road track taking nearly two and a half hours, rewarding them with 20 kilometers of completely empty coastline. After another peaceful night behind the dunes of **Eucla** and a two-and-a-half-hour time jump across the South Australian border, they reached **Ceduna** on December 31 after five days and 1,400 kilometers.



90 Mile Straight: 146.6 kilometers without a single curve—while a towering road train thunders down the Eyre Highway in the background.



Camp in the middle of nowhere: Sixfoot and Moni and Wolfgang's MAN truck tucked neatly among low eucalyptus scrub off the Eyre Highway.



Off the tarmac: Along the 35-kilometer off-road track toward Eyre Bird Observatory, views open up over endless coastal scrub.



Two and a half hours for 35 kilometers: Like a thin ribbon, the sandy track cuts straight through the bush down toward the sea.



Nostalgia on the edge of the desert: The historic Old Nullarbor Roadhouse and its vintage fuel pump standing lone guard on the sun-baked plain.

To ring in the new year, Ceduna held its very first New Year's Eve fireworks on the jetty—and true to early Australian bedtimes, the show started at 9:40 p.m. local time. Fifteen minutes of fireworks and ten minutes of traffic chaos later, the town fell silent, leaving Rudi, Heike, and their four travel companions as the only people awake on the entire campground to toast midnight. Marianne had kept a meticulous tally throughout the Nullarbor crossing:

Sightings Across 1,400 km of the Nullarbor Highway (Marianne's Tally)	Count
Passenger cars	246
Caravan rigs	100
Motorhomes	50
Road trains (giant multi-trailer trucks)	48
Motorcycles	11
Dead kangaroos along the roadside	265

The new year immediately cranked up the extremes. On the **Eyre Peninsula**—past **Streaky Bay**, **Sealion Point**, **Venus Bay**, and **Sheringa Beach**—the mercury hit 45 °C in the shade on January 3. In a windless side valley, the outside temperature briefly spiked above an astonishing 56 °C, accompanied by a steady Force 5 east wind that felt like "a hairdryer on full blast inside a sauna." Just days later, the weather flipped completely: in pouring rain and cool 20 °C air, they tackled 40 kilometers of demanding deep sand along **Seven Mile Beach** in **Coffin Bay National Park**. After a badly needed car wash in **Port Lincoln**—where 3,000 cruise-ship passengers had just flooded the little town—they enjoyed two serene beach days in **Lincoln National Park**.



Coffin Bay National Park: Kilometers of deep-sand beach driving wedged between sweeping dunes and the ocean along Seven Mile Beach.

Then, on January 8, the heat struck back with a vengeance: 49 °C in the shade. Under hazy skies and fierce winds, the town of **Whyalla** looked like an eerie ghost town. At a rocky cove, they watched a desperate kangaroo drinking seawater, while Heike retreated back into the air-conditioned cab after two minutes with roughly a hundred flies in tow. Only a powered campsite in **Port Augusta** allowed the air conditioner to run through the night. The next day rewarded them with the rugged, empty **Flinders Ranges** along the **Bunyeroo Track** and a football-field-sized campground in **Peterborough** all to themselves. In the **Barossa Valley** wine region, a mild bout of lower back pain caught up with Rudi, which he cured the hard way: 15 kilometers of walking through **Adelaide** at 35 °C fixed his back right up. After visiting **Cleland Conservation Park** and the German-heritage town of **Hahndorf**, it was time to finish every last potato and piece of fruit before crossing the quarantine border into Victoria.

CHAPTER IV • JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2020

Culture Shock, a Canoe Debut, and Green Tasmania

After the vast emptiness of Western and South Australia, Victoria's world-famous **Great Ocean Road** felt like pure culture shock: heavy traffic, parking attendants directing crowds at the **Twelve Apostles**, and packed campgrounds. At least they learned a foolproof wildlife-spotting rule: how do you recognize a koala high up in a eucalyptus tree? By the 20 to 40 tourists standing beneath it, pointing smartphones straight into the sun. Passing through a light haze hanging over **Melbourne**, they boarded the overnight ferry to **Tasmania** on January 19.

Cooler air welcomed them in **Devonport**, though traffic—and sadly roadkill—was heavier than expected. After stopping at a lavender farm in the northeast (complete with an Instagram selfie frenzy and purple lavender ice cream), they snagged a cliffside ocean-view camp at the scenic **Bay of Fires** near St. Helens. Because Chinese New Year, the national holiday, and the final weekend of school holidays had filled every site around **Port Arthur**, they escaped into the quiet forests south of **Hobart** and walked the wild shoreline of **Cockle Creek**—the southernmost drivable point in Tasmania, with nothing beyond the horizon except the Tasman Sea and eventually the South Pole.



Port Arthur: The storied sandstone and brick ruins of Tasmania's historic convict settlement—packed to capacity over the holiday weekend.



High above Tasmania: Sweeping views from 1,200-meter Mount Wellington looking down over Hobart and its intricate bays.

After driving up 1,200-meter **Mount Wellington** and catching up on laundry with Moni and Wolfgang in Hobart, one of the trip's most magical days awaited deep inside **South-West National Park**. On a lonely dead-end gravel road beside **Lake Pedder**, a wombat visited right next to the camper at dusk, and the next morning they awoke in thick mist—feeling as though they had woken up above the clouds. At the end of the track, after 55,000 kilometers with Sixfoot, they finally unpacked their inflatable canoe for the very first time. Under brilliant sunshine at 30 °C, they paddled completely alone across the lake to an untouched, roadless shore of this World Heritage wilderness.



Canoe debut on Lake Pedder: After 55,000 kilometers stowed aboard, the boat glides across clear wilderness waters to a shore without roads or trails.



Evening visitor at camp: A sturdy wombat ambles calmly across the mossy clearing in Tasmania's southwest.



Wildlife paradise near Couta Rocks: At twilight, wallabies and pademelons graze undisturbed right beside the pond next to Sixfoot.

Past the towering dam wall at **Strathgordon**, they headed to the west coast south of **Couta Rocks**. For three peaceful days they simply took a vacation behind the dunes—completely alone save for dozens of wallabies, pademelons, wombats, and kangaroos grazing at dusk right outside their door. After a relaxing weekend with hot-water laundry and cozy cafés in **Stanley**, one last night in **Narawntapu National Park**, and picking up Heike's mail-ordered eucalyptus book at the Devonport post office, the ferry carried them back to the mainland on February 10.



A well-earned travel break in Stanley: With the big laundry done, the historic coastal village's veranda cafés invite a leisurely stop for tea and scones.

CHAPTER V • FEBRUARY – MARCH 2020

Sandstorms, the Red Heart, and the Dramatic Escape Home

Once clear of Melbourne's two-hour traffic gauntlet, they slipped back into solitude on an open gravel road along the western edge of **Alpine National Park**: 20 hours without seeing a single other vehicle, a silent night in the clouds at 1,100 meters, and a pastry breakfast in idyllic **Jamieson**. A fallen tree soon blocked a forest track—the winch pulled it clear, sacrificing yet another spare fuse in the process. Following colorful silo-art trails to the **Murray River**, they fled ants, midges, and screeching cockatoos in **Yarrawonga** before finding peaceful nights in **Swan Hill** and under a crystal-clear starry sky near **Mildura**.



Evening calm on the Murray River: Between Swan Hill and Mildura, soft twilight clouds mirror themselves on the still water.



Heading into the Outback: Swirling red dust envelops Sixfoot along the gravel track toward Menindee and the Darling River.

At the **Darling River** near **Menindee**, the Outback bared its teeth: a fierce sandstorm coated the entire interior in fine dust while the batteries dropped to 60 percent without solar charge—only to give way the very next morning to radiant sunshine and a crisp 20 °C. Past **Silverton** (filming location of *Mad Max 2*) and **Broken Hill**, they topped up the diesel tanks in **Tibooburra** and launched onto 650 kilometers of desert tracks. Crossing parched **Sturt National Park** and 30 kilometers of bone-rattling corrugations brought them to **Cameron Corner**—an outpost roadhouse at the edge of the earth where it hadn't rained in 15 years, yet a mouthwatering steak with gravy awaited.



Cameron Corner: The last roadhouse before 450 kilometers of desert tracks—15 years without rain, yet serving up a superb steak.



Along the Oodnadatta Track: Quirky desert metal art by the roadside—and the indispensable fly net firmly over the hat.

Over 450 kilometers of desert—past **Merty Merty**, along the road-train-traveled **Strzelecki Track**, and onto the deserted, washout-scarred **Mount Hopeless Track**—they reached the remote **Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary**. After two days of desert dust, the pool felt heavenly—until Rudi spotted a young, highly venomous brown snake right beside the steps, which a staff member calmly scooped up with his hat and returned to the bushes. Via the **Gammon Ranges**, the nearly deserted mining town of **Leigh Creek**, and **Copley**, they rolled into **Marree** to reunite once again with Moni and Wolfgang.

Together they tackled the **Oodnadatta Track**. At the vast salt flat of **Lake Eyre**, the inevitable finally happened: driving a touch too far onto the deceptively soft crust without engaging the diff locks, Sixfoot sank in and got stuck. Fortunately, Wolfgang's mighty MAN truck was still on firm ground and pulled them right back out. After a meal at sleepy **William Creek** and a breather in the opal-mining town of **Coober Pedy**, they arrived at **Uluru**. One hasty "yes" to Heike's suggestion landed Rudi on an 11.5-kilometer base walk around the monolith—escorted by tens of thousands of flies, yet rewarded by an unforgettable sunset.



Front-row seat at Uluru: Perched atop Sixfoot's roof—safely behind her fly net—Heike captures the glowing red monolith at sunset.

With the Mereenie Loop flooded, they hiked **Kings Canyon**, camped among dingoes and brumbies at **Kings Creek Station**, and set out on March 5 along the 105-kilometer **Finke Gorge Track**. Successfully skirting a flooded section right around the first bend, they spent two thrilling days crawling along the dry riverbed over sand, rock, and gravel with tires aired down to 0.9–1.8 bar. A quick fuel stop in the Aboriginal community of **Hermannsburg** ended with a quirky escort out of town by the local ambulance after they took a wrong turn without a permit. After pure rock-crawling in **Palm Valley**—four kilometers in over an hour—and another fly invasion in the **MacDonnell Ranges** (where the driver's cab now served as an airlock), the shaded, grassy campground and cool pool in **Alice Springs** felt like pure luxury.



Finke Gorge Track: For two days, Sixfoot and the MAN pick their way through the sandy riverbed framed by towering red canyon walls.

On March 12 they launched into their final epic push: 2,600 kilometers back to the Indian Ocean. Passing the soaring red domes of **Kata Tjuta (The Olgas)** with all transit permits in hand, they drove the 1,100-kilometer **Great Central Road** through remote Outback and Aboriginal lands. Across two days they met just nine vehicles—yet counted a staggering 232 wrecked cars along the roadside. With evening temperatures over 40 °C and nights never dropping below 30 °C, they powered through another 900 kilometers along the Goldfields Highway until, on March 15, they stood on the fly-free, 25 °C beach of **Geraldton**.



Kata Tjuta (The Olgas): One final natural spectacle before tackling 1,100 lonely Outback kilometers along the Great Central Road toward the Indian Ocean.

THE FINALE: OUTRUNNING THE LOCKDOWN

Right here, back by the ocean, world history caught up with their adventure: COVID-19. Although Western Australia had recorded only 62 cases and restaurants in **Fremantle** were still open, the global situation was escalating by the hour. With heavy hearts, Rudi and Heike decided to cut the trip short to be with their family and steer their company through the crisis. Sixfoot was scrubbed spotless and parked safely with their trusted customs broker Ryan in Perth.

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> Saturday evening in Fremantle, trying to check in online brought a jolt: Emirates had canceled all flights from Dubai to Germany effective midnight March 22. After hours on hold and a sleepless night on the Brussels waitlist, Sunday morning brought a lifeline—a downgrade onto the very last flight to Amsterdam, paired with a one-way rental car to Cologne.

Perth Airport felt apocalyptic: every shop had slashed prices by 50 percent ahead of shutdown, while stranded travelers queued in shock at the desks. Inside **Dubai's** packed transit concourse, the drama peaked one last time. Of three scheduled flights to Amsterdam, theirs was the only one still operating, prompting a last-minute swap to a giant Airbus A380. Problem one: no A380 pilot was rostered—two and a half hours of anxious waiting. Problem two: once on the runway, the air-conditioning condensate line sprang a leak—back to the gate for two more tense hours.

Just after noon, the wheels finally lifted off the tarmac. At 5 p.m. they touched down at a ghostly empty **Amsterdam** airport, picked up their rental car, and cruised home to **Königswinter** in three traffic-free hours. A wild, unforgettable journey had ended abruptly—yet on the far side of the world, Sixfoot waits patiently for the next chapter to begin.

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