

Investigation Into Fading--Thrilling Travel Tale--Valuable Time Chart--Afternoon Sessions Welcomed.

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Thrilling Travel Tale From 1YA.

This article is continued from the cover. In it, Mrs. Gladys Sandford gives a thrilling account of her experiences while establishing the record endurance run round Australia.

RUNNING NORTH.

We travelled via Kingoonya, over the Tarcoona Tablelands, where for 60 miles not a tree is to be seen, nothing but salt bush about 18 inches high. From Lanjoonya on to the Opal Fields, where everyone lives underground, even the Commonwealth Savings Bank and Post Office have their quarters like that. Toot the horn and the inhabitants come out like rabbits! Then 110 miles on to Anna Creek without meeting anyone. From here to Oodnadatta, 120 miles, is heavy sand and bad creeks, and we learnt our first lesson of getting stuck in sand. Oodnadatta is the railway terminus, with an ordinary population of about 60 or 70 people. From here to Alice Springs, 367 miles, is mostly very heavy going, and with a load of 3½ cwt. it meant heavy driving. We crossed the Finke River five times. In the wet season this is a roaring torrent, but now it is a dry riverbed of heavy sand, and unless tackled in a correct manner will cause hours of hard work to a driver. We were very lucky, and only had to use our coconut matting twice, and were most thankful, as the flies came round us in swarms.

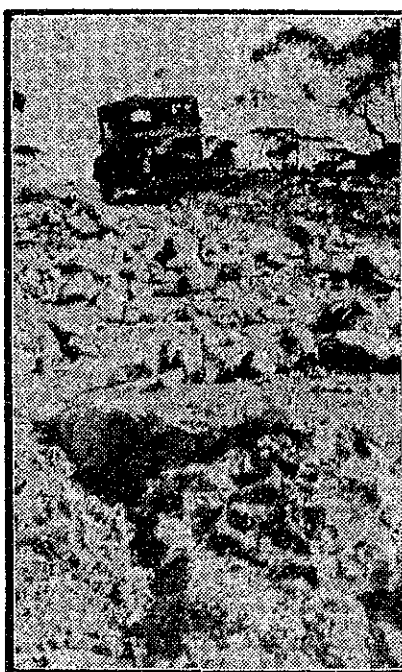
At one crossing there is a mile of heavy sand known as Tragedy Mile, because so many motorists have come to grief there. This part of the country is almost waterless, and yet for miles on end one is always faced with a mirage of a lake in the distance. Alice Springs is the last settlement from here to Katherine, a distance of about 800 miles, and on this stretch we met not more than 42 white people. The overland telegraph is followed most of the way, but one has to deviate sometimes several miles from it in negotiating the different ranges. Petrol supplies were laid down for us. In one instance it had been carted 900 miles from the rail-head for us. The track is almost always fairly visible, but on wide stretches when cattle have obliterated it there is constant danger of losing it, and one may become hopelessly tangled up in one's own tracks, unless great care is taken.

MEETING THE NATIVES.

We often passed natives carrying hunting spears. They were invariably devoid of clothing and would run into the long grass and hide, but never molested us.

The northern route varies a great deal where troubles are concerned. Anthills are a big menace, as in the very high grass it is difficult to see them. Then bad creeks, washaways, prospecting holes, big stones, bush fires, and particularly between Darwin and Katherine, bogs, made me keep a wary eye well open. Grass was often 8 to 10 feet high for miles on end. But we seemed to have days when all went without a hitch, and others when nothing was right. There came one day when I burnt the clutch out in a sandy creek, which seemed to be quite easy to negotiate, but as soon as the four wheels of the car were in it they sank down almost to the axles. We had left the coconut matting at Alice Springs for our return journey, so the proper assistance was not available. However, there was only one thing to be done, and that was to rework the plates. Fortunately, before leaving Oodnadatta I purchased five dozen medicine bottle corks. The weather was frightfully hot--glaring sun and no shelter--and the sun's rays seemed to concentrate in the basin of the creek. I have often thought that I must have made one of the most pitiful sights in Australia that day. You can picture a car axle deep in sand and me sitting on the bank on an old army blanket to

avoid the grass seeds, which have a horrid habit of digging into the skin, with the complete clutch and transmission lying around me--our precious billy at my side full of corks bobbing up and down as they soaked in engine oil--flies all around me, on my lips and in my eyes--the air was black with them. I not only had to put in the cork inserts, but had then to shave them down to the necessary thickness with a sharp hunting knife we had, which, incidentally, was never used for its original purpose--that of skinning alligators. At the end of two hours the plates were corked and my forefinger was one large blister. Then came the crisis--the clutch had again to be assembled and we had no clamp to control the heavy springs. How we wrestled with that clutch. The sergeant-major stood by with the four large nuts to whip on as soon as the thread was visible, and for over an hour I sat and stood in turn on the wretched plates, which would spring apart just when it seemed we were about to conquer it. Finally, with the aid of a tire lever and hammer handle, levered down with my knees, we fixed it. Then the whole thing had to be replaced--not an easy matter when there is no pit and a heavy piece of mechanism to handle. But there is always an end to everything, and at 6 p.m. we turned in for the night, still in the creek bed, but with only a little coupling up to do in the morning before getting out. After replacing the clutch we moved on again through Newcastle Waters Station, where we stayed the night, in order to wash our only pair of breeches, which were covered with oil after the heavy work, then over the Stuart Plain, where for sixteen miles we never had a yard of smooth running owing to the black soil foundation and cattle footprints which had dried hard. turkeys, but only wounded two, and then could not find them in the long



A well-metalled road through Australia's ack-blocks.

tance of 204 miles. I was anxious to see the road, but the guard assured us there was no road, only a bridle track. This route of 240 miles by car has only been traversed by an average of two cars per year for four years.

ARRIVED AT DARWIN.

At Darwin we were greatly surprised to find the Mayor and town councillors down to meet us. We stayed here ten days to give the track time to dry after the rain. We were assured by one and all that it was eight weeks too early in the season to tackle the trip, and many bets were laid against our getting through. This was the only part of the journey on which we carried

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ward position with a train expected to arrive any moment.

WAYSIDE PROBLEMS.

I jacked up the chassis and cut down a young gum and gradually got the car back. This was only one of many incidents. We were 30 hours in one creek, during which time we cut down about 15 blue gums and split them into lengths of three pieces to build up the bank. After getting the car three-quarter way up a ganger came along the line on a motor-trolley and showed us how to use a Spanish windlass. It took another six hours to get out, even with that assistance, and the car was on such an angle that all the oil drained out of the clutch down the transmission shaft. Another time our guide took us 14 miles out of our way up and down steep gullies, into creek beds and Chinamen's holes. Finally we came to a small clearing and a bush hut, out of which came an old Chinaman. After repeatedly saying "Which way road," he wave his hand towards the country ahead and said he come "he go two mile." We looked in vain, getting into more and more trouble. At last, seeing a big bush fire approaching, I took matters into my own hands and turned back, eventually finding our way back to the line. The petrol tank was crushed underneath like an accordion and a good leak started, but I made a temporary repair with a patch of soap. At Borroondie Siding a ganger brought us two large tins of water, which we heated, and then bathed in the tiny waiting-room and general office. On the fifteenth day we forded the river into Katherine, having put up the record of being the first closed car to have done the trip, and also the first women to have tackled it. It had previously been considered impossible for a car to get through without

was not so bad when the coffee was added. At any rate it did not look quite so dirty.

AT A CORROBOREE.

At Marenboy we were taken to a corroboree--a wierd sight, the natives squatting naked within circles of small fires. There were two tiny babies, which I christened, saying to the lubra, who translated it to her tribe, "This fella, him name Hudson" for the boy, and "This fella him name Essex" for the girl. One native blew through a very long burnt-out piece of wood--they call it a didgerie doo, and it makes a weird hollow noise. Three lubras danced a sort of Charleston shuffle in the background, but the men continued their chant, taking no notice of them.

Six hundred miles away from any shops the sergeant-major wore out her only pair of breeches. She is a tiny thing, and weighs under seven stone, and a friendly mounted police from Newcastle Waters Station, who weighed easily 14 stone, gave her a pair of his riding breeches, so the situation was saved. Farther down the line we went on to a station, where there was a sewing machine, and they were cut down to fit her.

Two hundred and forty miles north of Alice Springs we ran short of water, and after waiting on the track for four days in the hope that a native might possibly come by had to walk 16 miles through heavy sand, the sergeant-major carrying water bags. I carried the .38 Winchester, not because of blacks, but on account of cattle, for which I must confess a deadly fear.

ISOLATION.

Seven miles in from Wycliffe Wells we met a man, his wife, and two daughters. The girls, aged 20 and 23, had never yet seen a white baby or a train, and we were the first white women they had seen for 12 months. We spent three weeks with them. They lived in a bush whirley, and we slept in the car. Every night we sat out in the open on benzine boxes and taught them the latest ragtime songs, while one girl picked up the tunes on an accordion. As soon as the girls grew to know us they drew the sergeant-major aside and wanted to know "did she believe in love at first sight as they had read about it in books!"

The rest of the journey was fairly uneventful. Very bad weather again held us up, and we were bogged several times south of Oodnadatta. Game was plentiful on the northern route, turkeys, pigeons, kangaroos, dingoes, emus, and an occasional snake--one I killed with the spade measured over 6ft.

THE RECORD TRIP.

At Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney we received a great welcome, and as we drove into Macquarie Place to the Obelisk, the spot from where we commenced our journey, the cinema man was busy turning the handle, a host of photographers and a large crowd waiting to welcome us. A remarkable feature of the trip was the wonderful hospitality shown right through Australia, and the kindness of the people out back will always be remembered by us.

On our return to Sydney a leading motorist remarked:

And to think it took two New Zealanders to hold the record of doing the longest single trip ever completed in Australia.

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This shows some of the company kept by Mrs. Sandford on her journey. Although warned to carry revolvers against these aborigines that was

not done, and no dangers were encountered from them. A feature of the trip was the human element met with at various points. Read this story--it is romantic.

grass. We came back after our search with our legs like porcupines from the long, sharp grass seeds. We took just three hours to do sixteen miles. It is impossible to travel at more than seven miles per hour on this soil.

The fine sand was a source of constant annoyance, and after a hundred miles or so it was quite a usual occurrence to find the inside of the carburettor thick with sand. On one occasion after breaking our only screw-driver, I took the carburettor to pieces with the tomahawk and a tin-opener.

At Marenboy we were warned by telegram not to attempt the trip from Katherine to Darwin, as two inches of rain had fallen the night before at Pine Creek, so on arrival at Katherine the car was mounted on a truck, and we We rested occasionally by shooting at ourselves travelled in the only accommodation, the guard's van, for a dis-

a guide, but as the grass grows higher than the top of the car after each rainy season, it is impossible to find any track over a great part of the way. Our guide lost us repeatedly, and we decided too late it would have been better to have risked it ourselves. We took five days to travel 240 miles--into deep black soil bogs which can only be likened to quicksands, into prospecting holes dug by Chinese who forgot to put the rubbish back, digging a track up and down creek banks where heavy rain had washed away the approach, and chopping down trees with our precious tomahawk to build up roads out of apparently impossible jump ups. On one occasion I drove a short way along the railway line to avoid bogs and, crossing a culvert, the loose sleepers piled ahead, and down came the car on the front axle with the wheels spinning round in mid-air. An awk-

the hood being either fastened down or entirely removed.

There are some old characters in the Northern Territory, and unless one meets them personally you have never really been up there. There are Macay, the original Mac of "We of the Never-Never," by Mr. Gunn, travelling carrying stores complete with goats and hens for fresh milk and eggs. Also Freddy Haines, who keeps a tiny inn between Darwin and Katherine. Fat red arms akimbo. "Hullo, old sport."

I was presented with a .38 Winchester rifle in Darwin, and shot some good turkeys, using the smaller rifle for pigeons. We had some jolly good stews of pigeons, tinned peas, and onions. Once we ran short of water, and had to boil up some dirty water from a pool under a bridge, but it