Twelve months of planning between MBBC and Andrew Morse of Global Four Wheel Drive Adventures came to fruition when a combined MBBC and Gregory Terrace trip to the Simpson Desert got underway from Gatton at 6.30 on the morning of Friday, June 29. Six vehicles carrying seven adults and nine boys drove through the sleety morning drizzle in Toowoomba and further west to make camp for the night in Mitchell where a soothing, warm artesian spa awaited tired fathers and excited boys. Meanwhile our guide Andrew displayed his organizational and culinary genius by dropping down the side of his 4wd Ute to reveal a fully stocked kitchen. Steak and salad on the first night was later followed up by good, hearty, filling meals of spaghetti bolognese, beef stroganoff, soups and pork chops, deserts.

Day two saw us through Charleville and on to the wide open expanses towards Quilpie and the evening Corella swarms of Windorah where the local pub was the venue for a Wallaby’s victory over the All Blacks. Past road trains of three double decks and “grey nomad” driven campers and caravans, we left the bitumen and came across our first sand dunes before we finally crossed the Diamantina River into Birdsville late on Sunday. After dinner the iconic Birdsville Pub beckoned us to share drinks, yarns and a game of pool with the locals.

Late morning on Monday, after three days of travel, we entered the Simpson where the forty metre high dune known as Big Red awaited. The incredible contrast of huge, red desert sand dune to one side and a vast open expanse of green after recent rains on the other was only the first of many amazing desert sights. While the boys climbed the dune to slide down on pieces of cardboard, the drivers prepared for their first of many sandy challenges.
Over the next three days we traversed several hundred dunes, circuited enormous salt lakes and stood at Poepell’s Corner where Queensland, South Australia and Northern Territory meet. We had astronomy lessons in skies with ten times as many stars visible as from an urban environment. Andrew was full of information on the local industry, history, geography and geology. We slept to the cries of dingoes, followed numerous tracks in search of one of the half million camels that inhabit central Australia before eventually catching sight of just one before we finally crossed that last big dune (that did its best to stop our progress) and left the Simpson.

But not to fear, Sturt’s Stony Desert awaited, followed by a brief dash across a corner of the Strzelecki Desert (more a golf course and mass of yellow desert daisies than a desert) and on across the Cooper to Innamincka for a two day rest. The waterholes of the Cooper at Innamincka have never been known to be dry since discovered by Sturt in 1845, and only the aboriginals know for how long before that. As a result we were surrounded by hordes of pelicans, galahs, corellas, herons, whistling kites, spoonbills, a seagull, fairy martins and the occasional mighty wedge tailed eagle. Visits to the graves of Burke and Wills were a must, as well as to the site at which the only survivor of the expedition, John King, was found in September 1861 living alone with aborigines after the deaths of Burke and Wills in June. The boat ride up the creek with Peter Wear was most worthwhile, full of interesting local facts but very cool on the creek in the morning breeze.
On Saturday morning we left Innamincka and headed for lunch at the Dig Tree located on the four million acre cattle station, Nappa Merrie, on the Queensland side of the Cooper before starting the long trek home via Noccundra, Cunnamulla, St George, Toowoomba and eventually home by Monday afternoon.

By trip’s end we had all formed a very close bond and had undergone one of life’s great experiences. The boys have all gained immensely from this trip in terms of learning our country’s history, heritage, culture and natural history. They may not know it yet, but what they saw, did and learned in the desert will pay back dividends for years to come. We all look forward to doing a trip like this again.

Finally, I must commend Andrew Morse for his degree of organization and for his professionalism in leading the tour. The confidence that he inspired in ourselves through his calm, unflappable manner made us feel safe at all times in what is a potentially very dangerous environment. I would not hesitate to do a similar tour with Andrew in the future.