

Australia 2008

The Finke Desert Race

Leg details

Date June 4 - June 11, 2008
Leg Alice Springs - Bundooma - Alice Springs

PDF **Not yet available**

Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



Finke Desert Race Track:
 Alice Springs - Deep Well - Rodinga - Bundooma - Mt. Squires - Rumbalara - Finke (and back)
 2 days - 226 km per day

The Finke Desert Race - a few facts



See also the Finke Race Competitor Leaflet

What it is	<p>The Finke Desert Race is one of the world's toughest off -road races. The track runs through rocky desert, river beds, sandy desert, clay pans and the like.</p> <p>The track leads from South of Alice Springs along the Old South Road, which more or less follows the Old Ghan Railway track, to Finke.</p> <p>Most of the race track is right beside the Old South Road. The track is about 5 - 7 m wide, in parts has not been graded for the last few years or less has a lot of nasty woops.</p> <p>For about 40 km the track runs on the Old South Road itself. This part of the track is wider, hard and freshly graded.</p> <p>It is a 2 day event. On day one the track is raced in southerly direction and on day two the same track is raced back.</p>
History	<p>The first race was held in 1976 with 50 bike competitors. 2008 for the first time the maximum allowed amount of bike riders has been reached which is 500. A total of 700 race competitors are expected this year.</p> <p>1999 was the first time the bikes were beaten by a car (buggy). 2004 was the last time the race was won by a bike rider.</p>
Track length	226 km one way
Fastest competitor 2008	<p>A Pro Buggy car.</p> <p>Time: 1:47:19 one way</p> <p>Average speed: about 126 km/h</p> <p>Max speed: around 190 km/h</p> <p>Time limit is 2 hours to Bundooma and 4 hours to the finish line.</p>
Start	<p>Starts are made in 1 minute intervals.</p> <p>Cars: The fastest 10 from the prologue are started single; the rest is started in groups of 2.</p> <p>Quads: The quads are started before the bikes.</p> <p>Bikes: The fastest 10 from the prologue are started in groups of 2; the rest is started in blocks of 10.</p>
Checkpoints	<p>Ewanninga (km27)</p> <p>Deep Well (km68)</p> <p>Rodinga (km 98)</p> <p>Bundooma (km 140)</p> <p>Mt. Squires (km 179)</p> <p>Two additional moving checkpoints along the track.</p>
Fuel stops (official)	<p>km 65</p> <p>km 116</p> <p>km 179</p> <p>Teams are allowed to have their own fuel and service stops along the track.</p>
Ambulance	<p>One 4WD ambulance is located at every checkpoint, at the start/finish line in Alice Springs and in Finke.</p> <p>1 paramedic helicopter is based at Bundooma.</p> <p>The Royal Flying Doctors service is ready in Alice Springs and can land in Maryvale Station and at the Aputula Community. This means there is only one medical team about every 50 km!</p> <p>Injured competitors rely on the help of other competitors and spectators. Informing officials about accidents is done by the competitors at the next checkpoint and by spectators using UHF radio.</p>
Communication	<p>Main communication is via UHF -radio using repeaters along the track.</p> <p>Other communication: Sat -phone; VHF-Radio; Next -G and GSM Mobile Phones.</p>
Price Money	<p>Fastest bike:</p> <p>1st \$10'000</p> <p>2nd \$1'250</p> <p>3rd \$1'000</p> <p>Fastest car:</p> <p>1st \$10'000</p> <p>2nd \$1'250</p> <p>3rd \$1'000</p> <p>Class price:</p> <p>1st \$600</p> <p>2nd \$300</p> <p>3rd \$100</p>
Classes	<p>Bikes two strokes: < 200 ccm; 201-250ccm; > 251 ccm</p> <p>Bikes four strokes: < 250 ccm; 251 - 450 ccm; > 451 ccm</p> <p>Bikes masters: 35 - 45 years of age</p> <p>Bikes Veterans: older than 45 of age</p> <p>Quads: All sorts of quads</p> <p>Sportsman Buggy: < 1330 ccm; 2 crew members</p> <p>Super 1650 Buggy: 1330 - 1650 ccm; 2 crew members</p> <p>Prolite Buggy: < 3500 ccm; no turbo; 1 or 2 crew members</p> <p>Pro Buggy: 1650 - 6000 ccm; 1 or 2 crew members</p> <p>Performance 2WD: < 6000 ccm; Modified 2WD cars</p> <p>Extreme 2WD: < 6000 ccm; Highly modified 2WD cars</p> <p>Production 4WD: < 6000 ccm; Production 4WD cars</p> <p>Extreme 4WD: < 6000 ccm; Highly modified 4WD cars</p>

We sign up as volunteers at the Finke Desert Races 2008.

Our job is to collect the left-behind rubbish on the stretch between Maryvale and the Finish line in Alice Spring after the race.

For that we are equipped with a badge, an orange safety vest and some rules and regulations.

We also have to fill-out a few lists and of course sign disclaimers.



After getting rubbish bags we leave Alice Springs on Wednesday, May 4, and make our way south towards Maryvale Station.

On our way back from Chambers Pillar we had already taken a few GPS positions for possible spots where it could be good to watch the race.

There is lots of traffic on the road motorbikes coming back from training, vehicles with motorbikes and buggies on the back or on trailers and also a small 2WD car with some Aboriginal people in it.

We let them pass so they don't have to swallow our dust.

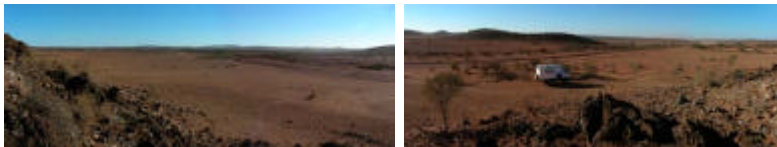


Later on, as we are lowering the tire pressure they pass us again.

Shortly after we reach a sandy patch and find the 2WD bogged in the middle of it.

We stop and agree to pull them out.

It is amazing how far these people get with these cars



Then we continue on and start checking out our spots.

At the second one, south of Bokhara, we stay for the night.

We are surprised about the amount of traffic on this track but guess that lots of it has to do with the races.

On Tuesday morning after a rather cool night with only 5°C we are woken up by beautiful sunshine.

Soon after the first cars drive past us.

We are please to see that the dust stays way below our OKA which could be good for the races.

At around 9 AM two 4WD drive pass quite fast and just a few hundred meters behind them a helicopter follows just about 100 m above ground.

We guess that it has to do with the races too, probably filming the track.

It looks really good how the helicopter chases the dust-cloud of the 4WDs.

We drive south to Maryvale to the art gallery to check if the picture we saw last week is still for sale.

But bad luck, it has been sold in the meantime.

The lady in the shop just says "If you find one you like you have to buy it on the spot"

In just one week they have sold so many pictures.

We are happy to find that our "second choice" is still there and buy it quickly.



We leave Maryvale on a small track marked with "Finke".

At the gate we stop for Susi to take a picture and to let an oncoming LandCruiser pass.

The driver of the LandCruiser happens to be the owner of Maryvale Station.

He informs us that this track is a private farm track; the public track is off Rodinga, some 10 km further north.

We explain to him that we are volunteers that will collect the rubbish after the race and ask him for instructions on how to find the turn off to the track that leads to Finke.

He explains it to us and at the end the instructions adds "... but you can continue on this track, I give you the way of right on it."

That's nice of him.

Thanks.

After a bit of a chat he leaves and we continue on towards the race track.

Once on the Finke race track we turn south and on a narrow stretch of the track we soon find a good spot for watching.

As the race track is already open for training some motorbikes come past and we get a first class idea on how it would be to watch the race from here.

While Ruedi takes the GPS position Susi goes on a short photo session.

She hears a motorbike coming from south and gets really close to the race-track, which is normally located a few meters beside the regular Alice - Finke track, to shoot a picture. But the

bike comes on the regular track heading north and Ruedi is just turning the OKA on the track on the other side of the crest to head south on the track!

Quickly the motorbike is stopped and after a bit of a puzzled look from its rider he understands that he would have raced head on into the OKA.

Because the OKA had not been moving fast there had been no dust in the air and therefore the rider of the motorbike had no chance to realise that there was oncoming traffic.



After every 10 km there is an old bonnet on the side of the track indicating the distance from/to the start/finish line south of Alice Springs.

We continue on and keep taking positions of possible spots to watch the race.

Each of them gets a rating but somehow we don't find the ultimate spot and decide to turn around at Bundooma and head back to the spot where we had already spent the night.



We park the OKA in such a way that the dining table window faces north and we will have a first class view on the oncoming competitors.

In this section the race track runs on the Old South Road for about 40 km.

It is the high-speed section of the race where buggies reach a speed of up to 210 km/h.

There is a crest nearby where we might get some great shots of vehicles flying over the crest we will see.

Besides that should the rain that is forecasted for Saturday really come we have a great spot on rocks above the track and should have no issues getting bogged with the OKA in mud as we would in a clay-pan.

On Friday we start our volunteer work and clean up the area around our camp.

It seems to be a popular site for the races, especially the little hill that allows excellent views to all sides.

It is littered with cans of all brands of beer (except VB!!), mixed drinks and a few soft drink cans. Most of the cans have been shoved into and under the rocks and it is a real pain to get them out. This indicates that the people leaving their rubbish here are mainly non-indigenous

We also collect a few bottles but leave the many broken ones alone; it is just too much work and too dangerous to collect the glass bits!

Then we concentrate on the surrounding area.

Here mainly VB cans are just thrown on the ground. They are easy to be picked up.

This rubbish indicates that it is mainly left by indigenous people.

You wonder why we think so?

Aboriginal people that drink usually drink VB (because it is the strongest beer you can get for a good price).

And they don't bother squashing the cans and hiding them under rocks or smashing bottles.

They just through the empty cans and bottles away.

Quickly the pile grows



Next is the old race track on the other side of the road.

Here we mainly find old tins and also old drink cans.

Also some bits and pieces of the old Ghan track are lying around but we leave them as souvenirs for tourists.

After a few hours of work we have collected some 76 lt of cans, all compressed before we put them in the bag to save space!

All is dumped at the side of the road so it can be taken to Alice Springs after the race.

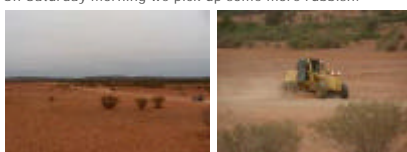
Let's hope the place is kept clean during this race.

During the afternoon clouds start appearing and it looks like the forecasted rain is building up.

If it comes down as a drizzle it will be a blessing, if all comes down in one quick fall it will generate a mess, especially in the area with clay-pans around Rodinga.

Well, we will see

On Saturday morning we pick up some more rubbish.



During the morning a grader clears the border of the track.

The weather does not look very promising



More and more spectators and support crews pass our spot to get to their preferred location along the race track.



Then the rain sets in.

First the water just disappears in the sand but then puddles of water start appearing.

The track slowly but surely is turned into a muddy slippery something the vehicles slide and slither past our OKA.

The rest of the day we read books and wait for the rain to ease but it doesn't.

As it gets dark the lights of the vehicles travelling south shine on the wet track

Sunday - first leg of the race.

It is still overcast with still a bit of drizzle falling and only 11°C.

Today the competitors race 226 km from south of Alice Springs to Finke.

We listen to the start of the race on ABC radio.

First the buggies and cars are started: the fastest 10 from the prologue as single vehicles and the rest in groups of 2.

Then quads are sent on their way in pairs of 2 in one-minute intervals.

Then the bikes are started: the fastest 10 from the prologue in groups of 2 and the rest is started in blocks of 10.

This equals to nearly 1 hour until all bikes are on the track

We also hear that Alice Springs has received more rain than we have and that the start area is very messy

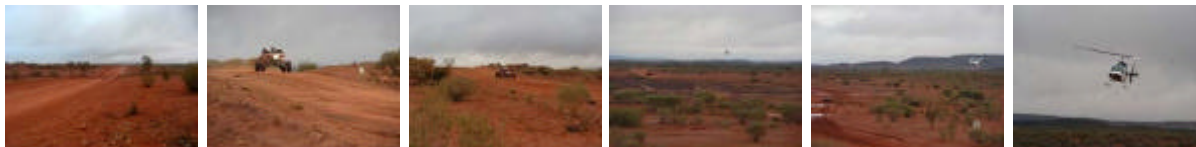
The starting vehicles have to cross a large puddle of water at the starting line and the more vehicles start the deeper the mud gets.

Some of the vehicles get stuck and have to be helped out

Finke Race control uses UHF-radio and a UHF-repeater station along the track as the main communication media between the various full points, check points, the finish line in Finke, the police and the ambulance.

This gives us the possibility to listen into what's going on during the race.

This makes the race even more interesting as the progress and positions of the riders are also constantly reported on the UHF-radio.



Then the first buggy arrives with a helicopter flying low over it.

The second and third buggy are also followed and closely monitored by TV-helicopters.

Watching the helicopters fly over the buggies and the buggies chasing each other is fascinating have a look for yourself by [clicking here for a movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'576 KB).

The pro-buggies reach about 190 km/h this year at our spot.

While the off-road buggies, 4WD's and 2WD's are passing our spot the track is still wet and there is quite often a slight drizzle.

This is good as it keeps the dust away.

We move down to the gate where there is a small depression to get a bit more action in the mud



Some of the cars have a windshield that protects the drivers from the mud but most buggies and many cars don't
 The poor buggers get plastered with mud in their vehicles!
[Click here for a movie on buggies](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 2'772 KB) and [here for the movie on the car](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'272 KB).
 One of the buggies chickens out and tries to avoid the mud [click here for the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'631 KB).



It is hard to tell if the smoke that they are blowing is just water from the puddle that is drying off or if they are burning oil ...



Since the vehicles are started one by one in intervals of a minute there are not many cars passing by at the same time and we have time to study them.
 It is hard to believe that these buggies are very very expensive



Then the weather clears up and the sun breaks through.
 It is amazing to see how quickly nature reacts and the dry stuff turns green and starts providing flowers in no time!
 The better weather comes just in time for the quads and motorbikes arrive at our spot.



By the time they reach us the bikes have caught up with the quads.
 Mind you, overtaking is not easy because either there is dust ... or there is mud!
[Click here for a movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 2'795 KB).



The bikes are much more interesting to watch than the cars and there are of course much more bikes passing at a given time.
 It is amazing that some bikers even find time to wave at the spectators when they pass by.
 After the race we drive further south to the area of Maryvale where we will stay for the night at the spot we have chosen for tomorrow.
 South of Rodinga the track is pretty rough and chewed up from the many cars that have been driving through it during the rain.
 We take GPS waypoints where we see spectator or support camps so we don't miss the spots on our rubbish pick -up run on Tuesday.
 Unfortunately there are quite a few accidents and injuries along the track during the race-day.
 In one instance even one of the bike riders dies.
 He hit a tree about 160 km after the start.
 Nevertheless the race continues and also the Monday race-leg back from Finke to Alice Springs will not be stopped.
 Monday - the second leg of the race.
 Today the weather is more to our liking - sunny!
 It is a cool 6°C in the early morning but it the temperature raises to 23°C during the day.
 Today the competitors will tackle another leg of 226 km from Finke back to Alice Springs.
 Especially the bike-riders feel their tired muscles and many accidents happen due to fatigue.
 But fortunately no more serious accidents happen today.



We pick up the rubbish on and around our camping spot before the race starts.
 The friendly owners from the Maryvale store will take the collected rubbish back to the community after the race.
 Thanks guys.

A lot of Aboriginals from the close-by Maryvale arrive to watch the race.
 They are real race -enthusiasts.

Some children ask us for lollies but are quite happy to get an apple instead.

Today's spot is on a slower part of the track with a lot of nasty "woops".
 Again the cars and buggies are started before the bikes and quads are and again the first few are escorted by choppers [click here for the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 2'451 KB).



It is absolutely amazing how fast the buggies manage to cope with the severe bumps of the track ... [click here for the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 2'451 KB).
 But many of the competitors have broken down already ... others sound very sick when passing by Including some of the favourites.



Some cars are all made up like this one with a dog in the back of the ute ...



Just a few meters down the track there is the pit stop of one of the Honda crews. They cater for a few bike-riders from their company including for the boss. It is quite interesting to watch them setting up all the tools, the refilling station, some spares, drinks and food, etc.

Then their rides arrive and a hectic rush starts. Quickly fuel is refilled, the driver supported, new equipment given, every second counts and then the bl..... thing does not start anymore! [Have a look at the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 4'897 KB).

The next few go well, no worries, have a look and [click here for the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 9'163 KB).



Again there is much more action with the bikes than with the cars. It is amazing how they manage to drive over 450 km in 2 days under tough racing conditions without falling to pieces!



The section with the whoops is very special. [Click here to look at a movie of some quads](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'772 KB) and here for [a movie of some bikes](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'623 KB) in the whoops.

Every so often we hear about injuries along the track. A rider dislocates his shoulder near our position, gets back on the bike and drives about 15 km on the regular track to the next checkpoint for medical treatment. Directly in front of us one driver falls down but fortunately doesn't get injured and can continue the race. [Click here for the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 2'029 KB).

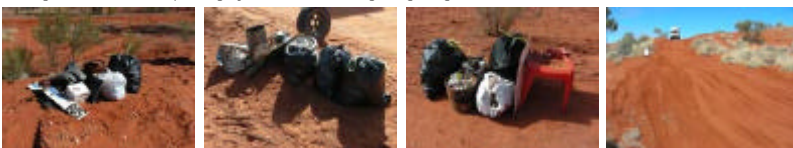
Also a very special person, Isaac Elliot, is the rider of bike number X61. Last year during the training for the Finke Desert Race he broke his backbone and became partially paralysed. This year he races again as a paraplegic! He rides a custom built bike with supports to hold him on it. He also is accompanied by 4 support riders which should he fall would have to lift him back onto his bike.

The first incident already happens at the start line when his race clothes catch fire while he gets ready to start. Being fixed on his bike he cannot just hop off so his trousers get a bit burned but luckily he remains unharmed. After extinguishing the blaze he takes off with some delay but manages to catch up with the rest of the field. [Click here for a movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 428 KB) of him managing the whoops. X61 finishes the race as 262 of 503 riders! Congratulation.



Then the race is over, the spectators and the support crews go home and the desert gets quiet for the night

On Tuesday we drive south to Bundooma where we start collecting rubbish. The place is a mess and soon we realise that we will run out of plastic bags in no time. We flag down all the cars passing by and ask them for garbage bags.



The piles of rubbish bags grows and grows and within a few hours we realise that it will be impossible for us to carry the waste back to Alice Springs. It is simply too much! We call race control and let them know about this problem. We agree that we will make depots along the Old South Road, take pictures and GPS positions of the rubbish, estimate the m3 and enter all in a EXCEL-file. They will then send a truck out to pick it up.

Slowly we make our way up from Bundooma to Rodinga. But in Rodinga we give up: the task is just too big to be tackled by just 2 people! We return to Alice Springs on Wednesday evening and present the result of our collection to the race office: we collected 5 1/2 m3 of rubbish on a stretch of roughly 40 km in 3 days! Finished the collection up to the Start / Finish line would take us at least an extra week We leave the problem with them and head over to the Big4 Caravan Park where we take a long long shower

The next day we head into Alice Spring for some shopping.



When leaving Coles and returning to the car park a German speaking radio correspondent waits for us at the OKA. He travels around Australia and finances his travel with interviews he makes from various, german speaking travellers.

He then sells the interviews to SBS -radio (the radio station for immigrants).

He has seen our ".ch" on the OKA and now would like to interview us

There is only one small issue: Thorsten has already made 3 interviews in Alice Springs ... so we agree that this interview has been made at the shopping centre in Tennant Creek.

Also we cannot say "you" to each other, we have to be formal.

This works at the beginning but only for a short time and at the end, when Thorsten finishes the interview!

Anyway, we have a lot of fun making the interview and without being selfish we believe the result is very good.

But judge yourself: [Interview in German](#) (file type: .mp3, size: 2'797 KB).

Thanks to Radio SBS (www.radio.sbs.com.au) and Thorsten (www.creutzburg.eu) for allowing us to publish the interview on our web page.

Note to the reader:

Only a few weeks later we drove through Tennant Creek and of course had a look at the local shopping area

If listeners of the interview had been to Tennant Creek they will instantly notice that the interview could never ever have been done here because there is almost no traffic in that little sleepy town (no traffic noise) ... and the "shopping centre" is so small that one would never hear trolleys being pushed around :-)))

After all these race movies one last one completely out of context except that it is from Alice Springs and made at the same time ...

After the finished rubbish collection we have to stay in Alice Spring for a few days while some repairs are done at the OKA (yes, we busted a dog clutch in Ruby Gap ...) so we move to a Motel as the OKA is not available during this time.



Right outside of our room we can watch the Rock Wallabies that come for a visit at dusk and dawn.

Have a look at them and [click here for the movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 6'412 KB).

And this is the end of this journal