

Utopia trip #8

The team consisted of Alison Taylor, Louise Nicholls, Adam Cashman, Georgina Lawson, Leanne Knight, Sonna Schramm and Mark Taylor from the Canberra Mob, Pritika Desai from AMRRIC and we had help from Dwayne & Graeme from the Barkly Shire Council for the first half of the trip.

We left Canberra on the 2/5/2015 at 7.30am for Alice Springs. Once we had made it to Alice we retrieved our baggage and vehicles to begin our adventure on the long red dusty road to Utopia.

Along our journey to Utopia we stopped where many teams have stopped before to climb a stack of wonderful rocks to look at the glorious view that this great area has to offer, as well as get a happy snap.



Utopia is an Aboriginal homeland, with many outstations that we visit during the working week.

Our tasks involved treating the many camp dogs with Ivermectin bread

to treat their internal and external parasites, desexing the animals that the Indigenous owners would like to have the 'operation' performed on, as well as educating the families and children we see on our travels about dog health.

Utopia is 300km North East of Alice Springs, and is 3500Sq kilometres. We have been traveling out to Utopia to conduct a dog (and cat) health program since August 2011. We decided on this trip to visit Ampilatwatja, an area we have not gone to before for a couple of days to offer our services. Once we had reached the Amengernternenh health centre we unpacked our things and started organising the veterinary equipment for the following day's work. As we had decided to split into two teams for the next couple of days we need to ensure we both had everything required.

Our first day of work was upon us. We had prepared and split into two teams. One was to go into Arlparra and work in the basketball courts as we have done so many times before, and the other was to head off to Ampilatwatja to set up at the health centre. The team in Arlparra would go on to treat and desex animals from the 15 other outstations around it for the next three days (with the other team coming into help on the third day). The teams worked really well together and went on quite a few adventures. There was even a nosy donkey at Ampilatwatja who was happy to keep Louise, George, Pritika and Sonna on their toes, especially when he managed to get into the health centre's building. This team treated all animals with Ivermectin, and desexed as many animals as the community wanted done in the first day meaning they would head out to Irrultja and Atnwengerrpe

to treat and desex animals if needed. Only two dogs needed desexing, however we managed to treat many dogs with Ivermectin. On the way to Arlparra we stopped, treated and collected dogs from Atheley to operate on with the other team. Meanwhile Alison, Adam, Leanne and Mark were working through the outstations one by one treating and de-sexing as they went. On their first two days they had visited Soakage, Arlparra, Camel camp, Kurrajong & Mosquito Bore.

On day three we worked together as one large team finishing up with any outstations we had not yet visited or were told to come back when the owners had returned. We managed to desex another 18 animals from Arlparra, Camel Camp & Anterrengey. We did a tidy up and stocktake on this afternoon to ensure we were ready to travel to Hart's Range the following day. During our working days, Alison and Pritika headed to the local schools and did educational presentations to the children about how to look after your dog.

On the day of travel, we cleaned up our huts and headed to Arlparra while Alison travelled to the remaining outstations we had not visited yet to check in with the people and treat the dogs with ivermectin. We wanted to ensure we had not missed any animals to desex before we headed on the Hart's Range. We ended up doing another eight surgeries before we hit the road from Soapy Bore, Three Bores and Apungalindum. Once the surgery was complete we set off to find a nice spot to stop for lunch. We found a shady spot in the Sandover River riverbed. We then headed along the back road through Redgum and Mt Swan before finishing up in Hart's Range by late afternoon. We unpacked and prepared ourselves for the day's work ahead.



As pictured it's not always dogs needing the operation

Alison and her team headed out in the morning to Bonya to set up for the day. We had never been there before but were responding to a request for a dog program. We desexed 12 animals and mixed with the community where possible. This is just as important as treating the animals because there is a trusting relationship developed with the locals and when we return they are very happy for us to help them and their animals. Louise and her team set up at the house we were staying at and desexed animals within Hart's Range. The local Crèche was having its open day on this day which meant that many people were not at home. However, we managed to desex 11 animals, clip a

Shih Tzu, trim the nails of another dog and treat a small kitten that had been attacked by a dog. The team also went to the crèche opening and mingled with the locals. Many people worked in this community between 9am and roughly 3-4pm, so we found it a little difficult to gain consent from owners to do surgery. Potentially more desexing could have been done in this community if everyone was home or a system whereby animals for desexing were identified in the days leading up to our team arriving was implemented.

The following day Louise and her team headed out to Eagle Beak and Irillirri to set up and see what could be done for these communities. Alison and her team stayed at Hart's Range, continuing to desex a few animals and mingling with the locals. During the day, they made a trip out to Foxwell to treat the dogs out there. Louise and her team got a flat tyre on the way back to Hart's Range and needed to change this. After overcoming this slight hurdle, they returned to Hart's Range to help the others finish up their day's surgery. The late afternoon after everyone got home from work was the busiest time for us. The teams managed to desex another 18 dogs on this day in total. We all



worked together to clean and pack up ready for the following day's travel to Engawala, where we would work together for one last day of surgery.

Once the whole team had reached Engawala we set up in a mechanic's work shed where we had four vets operating at one time along the make shift operating table. The team worked very smoothly, and always looked out for each other, checking that others had had something to drink, or eat, or even taking a small break to recover in between surgeries.

The team desexed another 24 dogs this day which was the most animals in a day for the group on the whole trip. This was largely due to commitment of the community to overcome an overpopulation problem and also the excellent local assistance that we received. Once the final spey (female desex) was done, we then had a short tea break and moved onto the big task of stocktake. The team had not been told where they were staying for the final night. Alison had left this as a surprise and this made the last lot of travel fun. We ended up at Gemtree for the night where the

team sat around the fire and discussed the many highlights we had all had over the trip, the challenges we had faced and what made us smile the most.

The final day of travel had arrived and we were moving back to Alice Springs before jumping on our planes home. We managed to have a quick look around the town centre before all heading to the airport. I think a lot of us spent this time thinking about our last whirlwind of a week and the many lives (both animal and human) that we had been a part of along our journey.

Below is a table of the procedures and communities we had visited.

Location	Dog Female	Dog Male	Cat Female	Cat Male	Average Body Score	Average Sarcopt score	Comments
Arlparra	3	3	1	0	2-3	0	
Soakage	0	0	2	4	3	0	
Mosquito Bore	1	1	0	0	2-3	0	
Camel Camp	11	10	0	0	2	0.5	1X Mange
Atheley	2	2	0	0	3	0	
Ampilatwatja	1	1	6	4	3	0.2	1X Tumour removal 1X puppy IVF 2hours
Irrultja	1	1	0	0	3	0	
Anterrengey	3	5	2	2	1	0	Ticks all over all dogs
3 Bores	1	2	0	0	3	0	
Soapy Bore	1	0	0	0	3	0	
Apungalindum	0	2	1	0	2	0	
Hart's Range	15	5	0	0	3	0	1X Dog clip 1X nail trim 1X Kitten IVF overnight Ticks on most dogs 3X pregnant done
Bonya	1	7	1	2	4	0	
Eagle Beak	1	1	0	0	3	0	
Irrliri	6	1	0	0	2-3	0	Mange/Ticks
Engawala	8	16	0	0	3	0	9X Euthanasia Ticks/lice on most dogs

In total we desexed 137 animals, we treated a few animals with intravenous fluids, removed a tumour from an old dog and gave a cute little Shih Tzu a hair cut. This was a very productive trip where we desexed the majority of the animals the locals wanted desexed and continued to educate them about taking care of their animals and what our program has to offer.

For our next trip we are hoping to have help from a Central Desert council worker going in to Hart's Range earlier than us so that the community is ready for our arrival. This might include putting collars on the animals that are for desexing and owners signing consent forms. This may help to overcome the difficulties we had of people being at work during the day when we were trying to operate our program.

We really appreciated the help that Dwayne and Graeme provided when we were working in the Barkly Shire and are very hopeful that we will have their assistance for future trips.



This trip was very successful for many reasons but the main ones were that we had the help of many different organisations (Barkly Shire Council, Central Desert Council, AMRRIC, Urupuntja Health Clinic and Arramwelke Aboriginal Corporation) and another hard working and committed team of workers operating under the banner of the Canberra Mob.