



A funeral at Coober Pedy 1970

As funeral directors at Murray Bridge we are at times called upon to arrange funerals at places far from the area we normally cover.

In August 1970 we arranged the funeral of a retired opal from Wellington who wished to be buried at Coober Pedy. We checked the option of flying but the light aircraft that serviced Coober Pedy had made a forced landing a few days prior and was undergoing repairs.

A decision was made to use our 1960 Ford Fairlane. Extra fuel was taken in Jerry cans as we needed enough fuel to travel from Port Augusta to Coober Pedy (640 kms of unsealed road). There were 2 petrol suppliers , Pimba and Kingoonya but they were not open 24 hours and we were travelling overnight.

The funeral was arranged for 1.00pm on Saturday. We left 8.00pm on the Friday night, planning to drive through the night. We refuelled at Port Augusta at midnight, where we were told the road Coober Pedy hadn't been graded for 12 months due to the lack of rain. At 2.00am it started raining and continued throughout the night. Progress was slow due to clay sections of the road, some tens of kilometres long, being so slippery that our vehicle slid from one side of the road to the other. There was no other traffic, only the occasional kangaroo. The road in 1970 went through Kingoonya and Mt Eba - a far different route from today.

The road took its toll on the Fairlane- a broken rear shock absorber and a broken engine mount which caused the fan to hit the radiator. Repairs were made with a few metres of fencing wire. We arrived at Coober Pedy about 11.00am on Saturday. The local police officer led us in his 4wd Land Rover to the cemetery, where we found a round grave "dug" by way of a charge of explosives set and the hole blasted. Two planks were laid across the centre- "make sure you step backwards off the planks " was the instruction.

The funeral service was held underground in the Catholic Church and burial completed. We refueled and repaired the Fairlane and headed back down the track, arriving home at Murray Bridge at lunchtime on Sunday completing a 40 hour return trip of 2000 kilometres.

Claude Minge