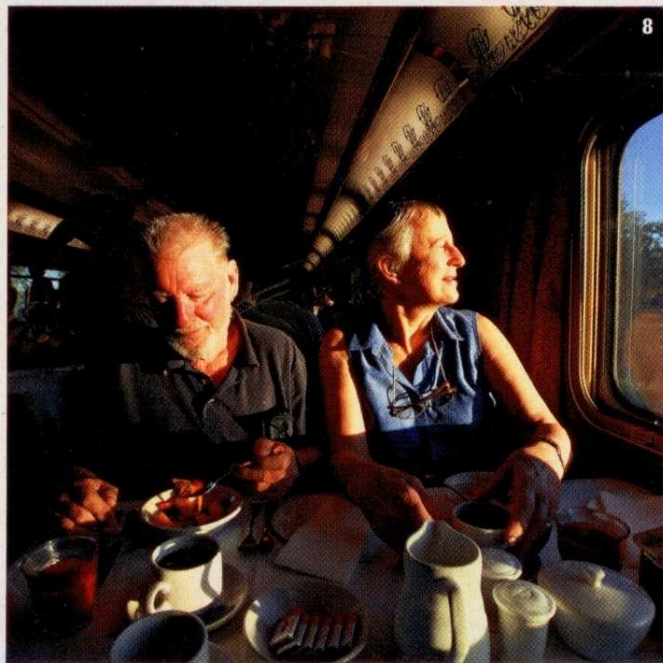
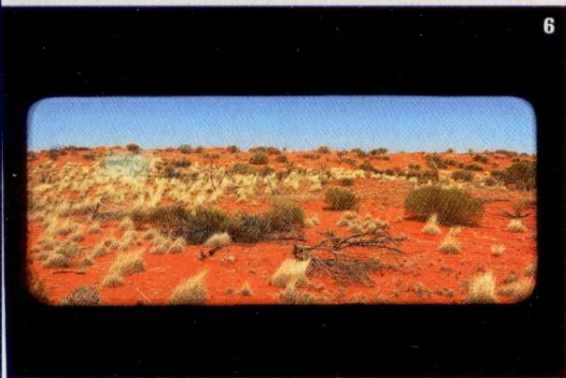
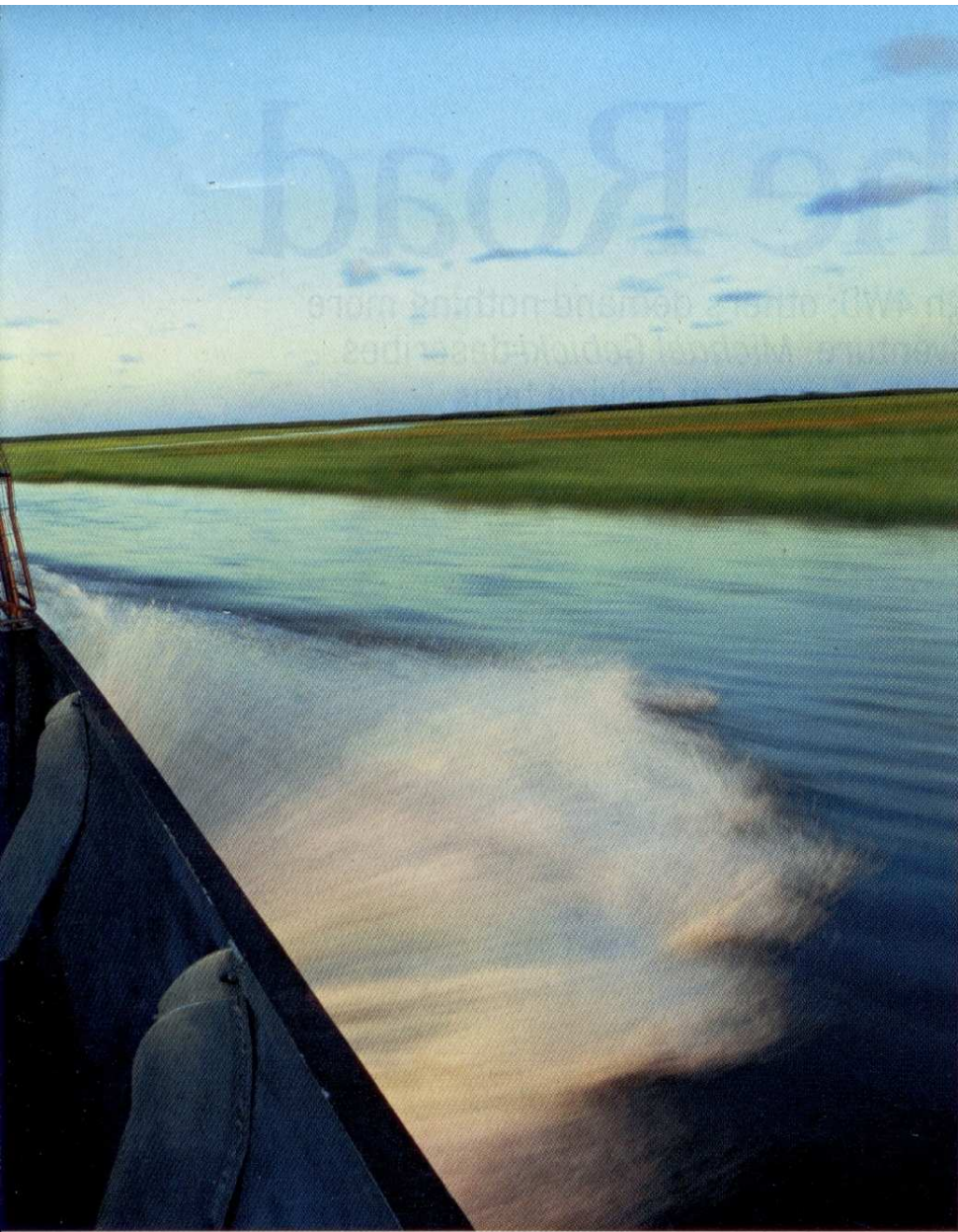


The Ghan and her visit to Bamurru Plains on the edge of Kakadu. She was half the age of her fellow passengers – but no matter. “It’s the sort of train trip where everyone talks and eats together,” she says. “They’d line up their pills at dinner, and they were shy about it at first, but by the end they were telling me, “There’s a pill for every decade...”

The Ghan has seen some changes, too, since its first service departed Adelaide on August 4, 1929. Back then, the Pacific NM steam locomotive and its 12 coaches puffed out of the station to a big crowd waving handkerchiefs in the air (a scene that manages to be both magical *and* unhygienic), and went only as far as Stuart, as Alice Springs was then called.

In 2004 the line was extended to Darwin, and 2008 saw the introduction of Platinum Service, with cabins featuring a full-sized double bed, lounge and private ensuite bathroom (at the platinum price of \$2987 per person). One can only wonder what the hardy “Afghan” camelers who opened up the heart of the continent in the 19th century – and after whom The Ghan is named – would have made of that.

Ross Bilton



1: The Ghan's emblem is a tribute to the cameleers who blazed a trail into Australia's interior (ironically, it was train services that eventually put the cameleers out of business) **2:** In the kitchens **3:** The township of Adelaide River, pop. 190, was originally settled by workers on the Overland Telegraph Line **4:** On an "airboat" at Bamurru Plains **5:** Flooded forest at Bamurru Plains **6:** Stark landscape of the Red Centre **7:** Lotus flower, Bamurru Plains **8:** Enjoying the morning light at breakfast aboard The Ghan **9:** Magpie geese at Bamurru Plains **10:** Meals are included on The Ghan's Platinum and Gold services **11:** Alice Springs, for years the end of the line