

Key vocabulary

Ayers Rock: an Australian landmark, located in the Northern Territory, which has particular significance for Indigenous Australians. Note that 'Ayers Rock' is no longer the accepted name; 'Uluru' is preferred. However, when quoting the text, use the terminology Davidson uses.

- Q** *Tracks* is about Robyn's solo journey across the desert. Why do you think Part One, which describes her preparations rather than her trek, is (at 105 pages) by far the longest of the parts, accounting for almost half of the book?

Part Two: Shedding Burdens**Chapter 6 (pp.109–24)**

Summary: *Robyn completes her first day on the journey; she becomes lost for the first time; she stops in Areyonga; Bub panics and Robyn beats him.*

In contrast to the chaos of the trial run in the previous chapter, Robyn's first day on the journey feels blissfully free and easy. She follows tracks, enjoys foraging for food and observes in great detail the landscape and wildlife around her. She describes her day and evening and the regular routines that will fill her coming weeks and months: food, responsibilities tending to the camels, setting up camp, and so on.

Key point

Page 115 is the first instance of Davidson reporting her self-talk as traditional dialogue, as though she were several characters conversing. The impact of this is to remind us of her extreme isolation and the fact that she is dependent on her own company in times of stress and challenge.

Though the first day is easy, the journey quickly becomes difficult: the map doesn't match the roads, causing Robyn to take the wrong trail; the physical pain of the travel takes its toll on her and Diggity; Robyn learns that the camels already have injuries and infections. The pleasant visit to Areyonga and the Pitjantjara people, with whom Robyn feels comfortable despite the

language barrier, balances these challenges. Such shifts between ease and difficulty characterise the journey to come, as Robyn overcomes challenge after challenge, enjoying periods of relative calm in between.

The incident with Bub prompts Robyn to undertake more self-assessment: she feels ashamed that she could not be 'terrified with any dignity' (p.123), confessing that it would often be her animals who would suffer from this flaw in her personality. This contrasts with her previous claim that she treats the camels 'like porcelain' (p.117), and is evidence that she can be an unreliable narrator.

- Q** Robyn discusses the history of the Aboriginal reserves (p.118).
What evidence does the text offer that her explanations may be coloured by personal experiences or biases?

Chapter 7 (pp.125–47)

Summary: *Robyn approaches Ayers Rock and begins to encounter tourists; Rick and Jen meet her at Ayers Rock; Robyn and Rick have sex; Dookie is injured and they rest for six weeks in Docker, during which time Robyn flies to Alice and back; Robyn dances with Indigenous women but is left feeling hopeless about her trip.*

The initial novelty of the journey wears thin as Robyn tires and finds herself plagued by the insensitive presence and intrusive curiosity of passing tourists. The reality of the daily trudge sets in and she realises that her remarkable journey has not yet brought the 'great clap of the thunder of awareness that, as everyone knows, knocks people sideways in deserts'; rather, she is 'exactly the same person' as when she set out (p.127). Yet at the same time she is already observing change in herself, such as her new obsessional levels of organisation. Again, this is evidence of the unreliable narrator.

Despite the tedious presence of tourists, Robyn is still deeply moved by Ayers Rock, and she swallows her objections to the ranger's view that it is 'the blacks' who are a nuisance in the area. When Rick arrives to photograph her there, she is cynical about the images, feeling that his photography, while beautiful, tells lies about the real world.

When the tension between them reaches a head, Robyn poses an ultimatum and they finally overcome some of their conflicts to become friends, though tensions swiftly build again. This fraught combination of conflict and respect is soon complicated by the element of sex in their relationship. Perhaps

unexpectedly, this brings some resolution, as they both commit to finding ways to work together.

Key point

From her authorial perspective looking back, Davidson says that at this time she began viewing the trip as a narrative and thinking about the article she had committed to write about it: she was 'beginning to see it as a story for other people' (p.136). This reminds us that while the book tells a 'true' story, it is also consciously constructed and shaped, not unfiltered.

The stressful time in Docker, while Dookie's leg heals, brings more discomfort between Robyn and Rick. This time their conflict centres on their differences of opinion about photographing the Indigenous locals – an issue that, Robyn feels, sabotages her hopes of building positive relationships and spending time with the Indigenous people. However, these concerns are overshadowed by Robyn's reluctant decision to fly to Alice in search of medical support for Dookie. This decision leaves her feeling defeated, an emotion that is compounded by a misunderstanding when some Indigenous women teach her how to dance, then unexpectedly ask for money. She is also dispirited by her inability to convince one of the locals to accompany her through country to avoid travelling by the road for the next leg of her journey.

- Q** Why do you think Robyn considers giving up her trip at this point? Why does she decide to continue? Can you identify any similar decisions or crisis points in *Charlie's Country*?

Chapter 8 (pp.148–56)

Summary: *Robyn shoots some wild male camels; she begins to panic; she meets Eddie.*

Already tired and demoralised, Robyn is further traumatised and exhausted by her run-in with the wild camel bulls. Just as she is recovering from this episode, a group of Pitjantjara pass; a few share her camp for the night. One is Eddie, of whom she is immediately fond. She is delighted when the men decide Eddie will accompany her on the next two days' walk.

- Q** How does this chapter convey the deterioration of Robyn's sanity?