

Roadtrip

- 1 SYDNEY, Australia — Police officers near the Australian mining town of Broken Hill stopped a sport utility vehicle Saturday that was being driven by a 12-year-old boy who had been on the road in the middle of nowhere, driving alone, for 800 miles. And he was only a third of the way to his chosen destination on the other side of this vast nation.
- 2 The police said the boy, who has not been identified in the media, took the family car and started driving on Friday from his home in Kendall, a small town about 220 miles northeast of Sydney. A quick reminder: the boy is 12. And while it's common for young people in Australia and all over the world to drive tractors or other vehicles at young ages, this boy managed to drive on major roads for an entire day without being found out or being harmed. The police said they stopped him at 11 a.m. Saturday, which means he spent a night driving alone on the road.
- 3 The distance traveled doesn't look like much on a map, particularly given Australia's size, but the 800 miles that he drove – again, alone, as a 12-year-old – is about the equivalent of making the long and annoying drive from San Francisco to Los Angeles, back and forth, with a few dozen more miles thrown in for rest stops and food. Or, for our non-American readers, it's like driving from Paris to Prague, deciding that's not far enough, then deciding to head for Vienna.
- 4 Road trips in Australia are a little different than road trips in many other places. The police said the boy had clear and specific plans. But to complete his intended journey, he would have had to drive through the Nullarbor Plain, a flat, desolate, hot and largely empty stretch in the south that is about four times the size of Belgium. Those who have made the drive warn people to pack extra gasoline and car parts in addition to ample food and water. This is necessary because gas stations are so far apart from each other. The tourism board advises that people take six days just to get across the Nullarbor.
- 5 It should be noted that the boy is safe. He was released into the care of his parents on Sunday, and the police said they hoped to speak with the boy and his parents on Monday. An investigation into the incident is continuing, and the police have not said much beyond that. "It's not something that occurs every day. So it's pretty 17," a spokeswoman for the police said in an interview Monday.

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