

Cyclone Nathan: Couple bogged for 30 hours near Nhulunbuy rescued by helicopter

Photo: Shannon Veltman and Aayden Price on the night of Shannon's 18th birthday party in Darwin. (Supplied)

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A Northern Territory couple stuck in a bogged ute amid floodwaters for 30 hours with two dogs and nothing to eat but a chocolate mud cake have been rescued by helicopter.



Shannon Veltman and Aayden Price, 20, were driving to Nhulunbuy on the unsealed Central Arnhem Highway after celebrating Shannon's 18th birthday in Darwin 1,000 kilometres away.

They set out on Sunday, the day Cyclone Nathan hit Nhulunbuy, and nearing their destination on Monday they entered the swathe of destruction caused by the category two system.

"We knew there was a cyclone and that," Ms Veltman said. "But mum and dad said it was over."

"We started seeing trees fallen over. The road started getting really sloppy.

"We saw lots of leaves and branches on the ground. We thought the cyclone must have come through here pretty hard.

"We got rope out of the car to pull trees off the road. It was pouring down with rain and we were freezing.

A stretch of road that normally took eight hours to cover took 20 hours. Twice they nearly flooded the car crossing rivers that had broken their banks.

"I didn't really know whereabouts on the track we were because it looked so different," Ms Veltman said.

Then they got bogged.



Photo: Ms Veltman and Mr Price's bogged ute outside of Nhulunbuy after Cyclone Nathan.
(Supplied)

'It was a mud cake. Ironic.'

Having driven 1,000km, they were only 60km short of Nhulunbuy.

Between them and town was the Giddy River, which had swelled by floodwaters and become impassable.

They called Ms Veltman's dad and then sat in the car waiting for the water to subside and help to arrive.

My dad and Aayden's dad were at the airport waiting for us with chicken and chocolate milk. I smashed down a couple of chickens.

Shannon Veltman

With them was a puppy that stayed in the cabin and a 10-month-old dog kept in a dog cage on the vehicle's tray.

"He was freezing," Ms Veltman said. "We had an umbrella in the car and I put it over the dog cage for him."

They had enough water, but only Ms Veltman's birthday cake to eat.

"It was a mud cake," she said.

"Ironic."

As they waited, rain continued to fall and the car sank further into the ground up to its chassis.

"We couldn't really go outside. It was freezing cold. It was all muddy in the car," she said.

"We had our phones pushed up against dash to get reception."

Nhulunbuy police had been in regular contact. On Tuesday morning, with the forecast showing more rain, police phoned and told the couple they would be sending a rescue helicopter.

"It was a big relief after sitting in the car for 30 hours," she said.

"My dad and Aayden's dad were at the airport waiting for us with chicken and chocolate milk.

"I smashed down a couple of chickens."



Photo: Ms Veltman and Mr Price arrive at Gove Airport by rescue helicopter. (Supplied)