

Travelling from Adelaide (SA) to Brisbane (QLD)

Stage 27

SA and NT then QLD

This trip is a bit different to our normal travelling; it is a four month journey from home in the Barossa to Darwin (where we spent eight weeks working) and then we travelled on to Cairns via bits of the Gulf country. Of necessity, eight weeks of staying in Darwin at a caravan park (Howard Springs) is likely only to be of interest to us and our closest friend and family – and perhaps not even to them!

Special points of interest:

- The Savannah Way (truncated version)
- Lake Tinaroo
- QLD coast

Trip report

From home in SA, to Darwin

7 April 2010

It was April 7 when we left home and we reached Darwin about a week later. Our route up the Stuart Highway was unremarkable. One night was spent at Mount Remarkable National Park (near Port Augusta), one night on the road near Coober Pedy (at a roadside stop) and a few days at Alice Springs. We overnighted at the Devils Marbles campground which was very full that night, and then pressed on to Katherine. As Katherine Low Level Big 4 is a nice park we enjoy staying there and it is a good rest stop, to do the washing and just relax. Then on to Darwin...

Darwin was to be our temporary home for the next 8 weeks while we both did some work in the Top End. During this time we stayed at the Howard Springs Big 4. It was very busy indeed, but we got a lovely site near some gardens with our awning opening into some flowering ixora bushes and palms. So we had privacy, at least on one side.

The weather in Darwin was hot and humid, right up until the end of May, and it made for very unpleasant times to be in a caravan. The airconditioner worked overtime. One of the highlights of the time at Darwin was the night the power transformer on the pole outside the park blew up (oh! such spectacular sparks and flames!). As it was such a hot night and people could not manage without airconditioning, half the park pulled out their generators. The other half were livid at the noise of all the generators.... Very entertaining. Three nights in a row the power went out, due I believe to the park's residents overloading the power capacity.

At the park we were lucky to be surrounded by some nice people who make this park their home for a few months every winter – it made a difference to have congenial company. They even hosted a farewell party for us!

But when we headed off on 13 June I was glad to be leaving. And I normally love Darwin.

12 Mile Stockyards, Elsey National Park

S 14 57 18 E 133 13 09

13 and 14 June 2010

The 12 Mile campground is one of our favourite camp sites. Over the years, pre-vanning days,

we used to drive down over school holidays or long weekends and camp here with a tent. It is a bush camp site, near the Roper River and about 20 kms or so out of Mataranka (head out to the Hot Springs, and turn south –to the right- along John Hauser Drive). It is a large area with both open areas for camping as well as individual camp sites. There is a large ablution block with solar heated hot showers and flushing toilets. There are no powered sites, and there is either limited or no NextG phone coverage. I managed to get mobile phone and internet – sporadically- with an external aerial, but it was a frustrating and patchy affair.

The park was looking very spruced up this time – they had watered the grass and mowed large areas, and the toilet block was immaculate.

This time we pulled in about 4.00pm and it was still a lovely cool afternoon. We quickly put out our chairs and were having a cold drink in no time. It was a cool night (with the doona pulled up) and it was the sound of the kingfishers laughing at about 6.00am which woke us up.

As we had the Engel full of frozen food we were running a lot of fridge and freezer capacity off the solar panels so it is as well we had the four AGM batteries and 520 watts of solar panels (4 x 130 watts). The charge coming in at one stage was 27 amps!

Little Creek (near Cape Crawford)

15 June 2010

At Daly Waters we turned East off the Stuart Highway to Cape Crawford and travelled steadily till mid afternoon.

We had morning tea at Camooweal's Billabong free camp, a truly lovely spot which was awash with campers. The local store owner grumbled that these travelers tend not to spend money locally, buying their groceries at nearby Mt Isa. This is a shame as we all depend on the goodwill of locals to keep these places open. We bought some milk, bread and sausages from the local butcher.

A nice spot awaited us for a night's camp.. Just to the side of a creek, near Cape Crawford, we found Little Creek (that is its name), and pulled in for the night. I was very tempted to stay for a second night but we did need to press on. Sigh. Still, I managed a couple of hours reading my book beside the creek with a cup of tea. Val used his binoculars to look at birds.



Does life get better than this?

Soudan Rest Stop (Barkley Highway)

16 June 2010

The night was spent at this rest stop, just off the highway. It was very busy, with all the southerners heading to Darwin's warmer temperatures. But we had a drink in the evening with a couple of them, before an early night. Our early morning walk the next day was beside the busy highway, with semi trailers tooting us as we waved to them!

Terry Smith Rest Stop (Burke Development Road)

17 June 2010

Heading due East, we turned our nose up north toward Normanton at Cloncurry. We pulled in late in the afternoon to the rest stop, feeling a bit tired and jaded. It is a small rest area 103K south of the Burke & Wills Roadhouse or 78K north of Cloncurry. The site has good facilities with wheelchair access, shade, water, BBQ shelter, fireplace, a dump point and best of all, room for bigger rigs. But note that some of the sites are on a bit of a slope.... Some of the sites are quite pleasant, and nestled into the bush a little. Get there early for these spots....

A couple of days earlier this had been the originating site of a camp fire which got away and burnt out a good part of the nearby station. Some inspectors arrived to take photos etc and we feared the bad press could result in the site being closed at some point as it is situated on the station itself and relies on the owner's good will. Why do some people feel the need to have fires at their camp sites, at every opportunity? On a cold night it can of course be nice to sit around a fire but we have noticed many folk light fires even in the hottest conditions (and not just to cook their food).



View of the hills in the distance- and burnt out country.

Gravel Scrape (Capricornia Highway)

18 June 2010

Unfortunately I didn't capture the co-ordinates for this spot but it is about 80kms East of the town of Croydon. We had looked at the cp in Croydon (it looked nice, but we really wanted to just pull up without unhitching, and didn't need power or anything the park could provide, so kept going).

About 75 kms from Croydon was a busy rest stop on the Gilbert River (I think) which was chock a block with campers and vans in a dusty hell hole. Worse – it was full of bull dust! Every foot step I took raised great puffs of fine dust. We kept going.

Eventually we found a lovely spot on the side of the road, on a gravel scrape, screened from the road by a stand of trees. It was a nice, quiet and tranquil spot, especially compared with the last rest stop back 10 kms. Clearly people stay in official rest stops for a number of reasons including security, but why anyone would prefer such an unpleasant spot compared with the peaceful tranquility of a spot off the road by yourself is beyond my fathoming.

Lake Tinaroo, Kauri Creek Campground

S 17 08 18 E 145 35 53

This camp ground is one of several around the rim of the lake, which is in Danbulla national park. I have never stayed at a spot which has had better views. Our van was right on top of the hill overlooking the lake and had an uninterrupted view of the sweep of lake. Gorgeous.



Sunset at Lake Tinaroo



View of the Lake

On weekends it can get busy here with tenting campers who descend on the camp sites from nearby regions and who party hard, and worse, bring motorboats and water skiing equipment with them. We had only one day of this mayhem and then we were blessed with peace and quiet. There should be places put to one side exempt from waterskiing, in my view. Together with those noisy little motor bikes that rev up and down in otherwise nice bush camps, they should be banned. I am sure they have their place – but preferably not in my hearing. They really do annoy everyone I speak to.

The greatest problem we had at Lake Tinaroo was the constant rain or drizzle (they call this area the misty mountains with good reason I guess) and the effect this had on the batteries was to deplete them just slightly each day. I was using the computer a fair bit and we watched TV each night for a couple of hours....not to mention the big 12 volt compressor fridge. When the sun did come out (rarely) we had 47 amps of charge coming in! Just not for long enough.

But really, we did have a lovely stay up here and enjoyed it immensely.

Murray Falls Campground, Upper Murray Falls NP

S 18 09 0.200 E 145 48 0.967

26 to 28 June 2010

I think this is probably a 4 out of 5 camp site. Located right beside a fast running mountain stream, and within the roar of a waterfall, the campground is spacious and set among shady gums. There are flushing toilets, and a separate cold shower. We set up camp on an open area (for the solar panels to replenish our depleted batteries. After a week of rain and overcast conditions up on the Tablelands, we desperately needed the extra power. Each day was a blaze of sun for several hours, with cool nights so weather was perfect. But the solar panels were not in enough open space to take advantage of the full day's sun so each day they sagged



just a little progressively. And they had been depleted already up at Tinaroo.

Actually, I am impressed they were still keeping going at this point. I hasten to add that we did not deplete them to the point where the batteries were at risk of damage. We never got below 12.4 volts charge (the reading first thing in the morning before light falls on the

panels).

I decided this trip I would do the walk up the escarpment to the top of the Falls. Touted as a “moderate level walk”, I found it to be more like a “Hard level but for determined walkers”. Note to self: must work on the fitness levels.

It was very quiet at the campground but on our last night a whizzbang van pulled in right next to us, with two young women campers. Luckily they didn't make too much noise, or I would have

had something to say to them. Those bloody sliding doors can be a real pain.

On a day trip to Cardwell (what a lovely coastal town!) we did a trip to a spot called The Spa, which had intriguingly coloured water. On a hot day it would have made a welcome swimming pool but the weather this day was anything but warm.



The Spa Pool, near Cardwell

Rollingstone Beach Caravan Park, Rollingstone

29 June to 2 July 2010

This caravan park was a refuge three years ago when we were both sick with tummy bugs. This time it was a more pleasant stay, although the midges attacked a bit. On this visit it was a retreat to gain power into the batteries, after overcast or rainy weather for the last 10 days. The batteries were showing 12.4 in the morning of our last day up at Murray Falls NP. Rollingstone was the first time we had stayed on power since leaving Darwin!

The park is right beside the beach, although our site was a little back from the front and so had no sea views. It also suffered from being the most sloping site we have ever been placed on – necessitating the drawbar being lowered so far it was lying level with the ground. And our van has good high ground clearance.

While here we did day trips up to Ingham, out to Big Crystal Creek campground, out to Toomullah Beach and down to Balgal Beach. And to top it off we had dinner one night at the pub at Rollingstone – a nice meal.

We noticed that nearby Crystal Creek caravan park (on the Bruce Highway) was a very pleasant little park and would stay there in future if we needed a powered site.

Freecamp in Canefields (near Ayr)

3 and 4 July

We spent the next couple of nights with friends (Shane and Elle) on the cane farm where they are currently working. They were kind enough to prepare a spot for our van right next to theirs.

Each evening we spent yarning outside while sitting under the awning with a cold drink. Life doesn't get better than this!

It was cane burning season and we were privileged to see a couple of fires, right in a front row seat. The staff in charge of the fires really know what they are doing! It was a great experience.



While staying here we traipsed into Ayr to buy some meat from a butcher who is well known in the region. The McAuliffes, in Cox Street have the most amazing salamis, ham off the bone and sausages. Their steak was a great quality and so well priced. The meat was so good we had some cryovacced to take with us.

Burning the canefields



Elle with her truck – she drives that thing!

Here is Elle, with the truck she drives in the canefields, for about 12 hours a day. She is nothing short of amazing. Pulling a three tonne van will be a piece of cake to her now.

Lake Elphinstone

S 21 32 22 E 148 14 06

5 to 7 July

Lake Elphinstone is a natural lake with great facilities – all free. It is about 90 kms West of Mackay and you access it via Suttor Developmental Road on the way to Glenden. We came down through Collinsville and then just followed the GPS. (There were no signs to the site).

When not in times of drought, facilities beside the lake allow camping and fishing for those wanting to get away from it all for a few days. Water skiing is allowed in one section of the lake when water height allows. When full, the lake attracts an abundance of birdlife making bird watching a popular activity with visitors. It is a fair size; eight kilometres long by one kilometre wide. People wishing to camp at Lake Elphinstone need to be self sufficient, there is one shower block (with a donkey water heater) and flushing toilets. Animals are allowed. There was even NextG coverage – although a bit patchy.

We joined three other Kedrons at the lake and had a lovely time together, yarning, and swapping van ideas. There were groups of folk here who had been there for a month or two – clearly the place is a firm favourite with them! After all, it has flushing toilets, hot showers and taps to get water. What more do you want from a free camp?

As the water height was high enough to allow water skiing, the dreaded boats and skiers were out in full force, right up until dusk. Plus everyone was using a generator, (some all day!) making it quite noisy.

Calliope Rest Stop

About 26km south of Mount Larcom and 7km north of Calliope.

S 23 57 49 E 151 09 11

8 July

I am sure everyone knows about this rest stop, but it was our first visit there. It is near the highway, and on the banks of a river a bit inland from Gladstone, and would have to be one of the best ever roadside rest stops. The grass was green and had been mowed, and boy, was it popular! There were 80 plus vans there that night, and there was still plenty of space. We pulled into a nice quiet spot near some tall grass for privacy and had a peaceful night. By now it was getting cold at nights, and we put the diesel heater on in the morning to dry out the bedclothes and towels. This works a treat. Within about 15 minutes (and a total of maybe one or two amps) the van is warm and everything inside is dry. I really LOVE the diesel heater.

Bargara

9 to 10 July

Bargara is a coastal town near Bundaberg which still has a small town feel but you can almost smell the developers' interest. Some high rise flats are already dotted along the foreshore....

But we had a few lovely days here, visiting friends (Jane and Potta) and we chose a great caravan park. Our choice was the Bargara Beachside cp, along the Esplanade.

The park is big but has an almost intimate feel and there was plenty of room between sites. We were intrigued to see another four Kedron caravans there – clearly it must be QLD, the home of the brand!

Each morning we went for a walk along the Esplanade which has a great walkway along the beach. When we got back we picked up a nice coffee (good quality stuff) from the Surf Club opposite the park, as our treat. We sat at a table overlooking the beach while we drank the

coffee and talked to the other coffee aficionados. Luxury. I wished we had longer to stay and see more of the region, but time was getting on, and we had a park booking at Brisbane as well as appointments to get the car serviced and the van to have a couple of things done at the factory.

Brisbane

11 to 17 July

Our booking was at the Brisbane Northside Caravan Village in Zillmere. We always stay there and find it a reasonably nice park which is centrally located. It is certainly close to the van's factory but also to a shopping centre (Chermside). We did have to choose a site carefully, as the new van is quite long with its extended A-frame. We had site 37 which suited us just fine.

Brisbane was all about catching up with family and having the car serviced, as well as having a couple of modifications done on the van. This included a new mat on the floor from the rug shop next to the caravan park – the shop we had bought the one from our first van, and which was showing its age. So Brisbane was a chance to catch our breaths before the next stage of the trip – heading home.