

Stage 20 Cairns to Darwin

This stage of travelling took us to some truly amazing and beautiful places. I think I enjoyed the areas we visited during September 2007 more than any other time in the last two years.

During this stage of our travels we stayed at one particularly special place; Lake Tinaroo on the Atherton Tablelands. A 10/10 for beauty and for its geographic situation. Just an hour and a half from Cairns, and in the midst of lovely cool, green countryside, how could it fail to appeal.

Gregory Downs bush camp was also very special, and as we were able to camp right on the river, it was very scenic indeed.

Also, we decided to change our travel plans and return to the Top End for a couple of months, and that meant some travel through some different and remote countryside.

10 to 17 September 2007

Lake Tinaroo, Kauri Creek Campground

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We drove up from Cairns early on a Sunday morning, and arrived about lunchtime. This is probably a great time to arrive, as the weekend crowds are moving out by then and going home. As it was quieter there than the other campgrounds, we chose Kauri Creek Campground. There are four other campgrounds around the lake but this one suited us best. This spot has terraced level sites set into the slope down to the lake, and beautifully established gardens, with flowering grevilleas, and lovely green lawns. The toilets and shower (cold only) were not too far from our site, which had the benefit of full sun for the solar panels, and some nearby shade for us to sit under if we needed a cooler spot. But the weather was delightful and so we didn't really need more than the awning.

Looking down on the lake, it reminded us of the Italian or Bavarian Lakes districts. The lake, surrounded by pine trees was absolutely enchanting.

Despite being there for more than a week, we had more than enough power from the four solar panels to keep the 230 litre Vitrifrigo going, and to watch TV for a couple of hours a night. I used the computer during the daylight hours, to minimize the power draw. And there was NextG as well as CDMA reception there, although marginal.

Each day we scampered around doing the tourist thing; coffee plantations, a distillery, a mango winery, Lake Barrine, Lake Eacham, and the nearby town of Atherton. This is a fascinating area, full of beautiful spots and unbelievably beautiful scenery.

I can't tell you how hard it was to leave this site.

18 to 19 September Einiasleigh River bushcamp

A Kedron friend gave us the GPS co-ordinates of this 'secret spot' and are we grateful!

We left Tinaroo early in the morning, and drove steadily up to Ravenshoe, the highest town in Queensland, and a very attractive heritage type town, with interesting old buildings. An interesting and attractive town, it has Qld's highest pub, a historic steam train which runs to Tumouli (on Sundays) from the old railway station precinct, and a friendly & interesting Info Centre. There is a large area right in the middle of town, where vans and motorhomes had gathered and were camping. For \$2 a night they have toilets, and a spot to call home for a night or two, courtesy I think of the town Council.

After a visit to the bakery for morning tea provisions, we continued through Innot Hot Springs (stopping for a quick dip in the hot artesian waters in the creek) and morning tea at Archer Creek, a famous rest stop. It was attractive enough, but not as good as when folk could camp along the river's bank.

Onwards through Mt Surprise, where we picked up diesel, and as it was now mid-afternoon, decided that the proximity of Webby's secret spot meant we could stay there for a while. We had no trouble finding it (GPS co-ordinates take all the hard work out of things) and were very pleased with the riverside location for Okie, the offroad Kedron.

Camped right on the river, and with no one else around, we thought this was one of the nicest places to be. Getting a bit warm, but we didn't need the generator for airconditioning....

A couple of days spent at this idyllic location restored the tissues, and allowed us to get ready for the rigours of the rest of the Savannah Way.

20 and 21 September Normanton Top Tourist CP

The park at Normanton was relatively quiet, as many of the winter sojourners had left, but there were still a few travellers and tourists in town. It was however, tidy and the sites were spacious and shaded. I really liked the artesian thermal pool!

We met up with a BT couple, on their journey back to Busselton (WA) with their new van (Rob and June) and another Kedron couple, who amazingly, were the folk who had given Webby the information on how to find the secret spot on the Einiasleigh River.

On our second day at Normanton we drove out to Karumba for a look-see, and were impressed with the town. But I thought the caravan parks there to be run down, and full of dilapidated rubbish, junk and permanents. It looked like a mad dog's breakfast. Maybe a closer look may prove me wrong, but from a quick drive through, the parks did not appeal. While at Karumba we had afternoon tea (me) and a beer (Val) at the pub on the Point, overlooking the bay; **the Sunset Point**. Bliss.

We stocked up on meat at one of the butchers, and filled the water tanks ready for the next part of the journey.

Gregory Downs

21 and 22 September

On the way to Lawn Hill NP, we drove South down to Burke and Wills Roadhouse and then turned West toward the national park. About 150 kms from the Burke and Wills Roadhouse is a camp spot right on the Gregory River at Gregory Downs. All that's obvious to the casual traveller at the site is a hotel and the river, with its camping spots along the river's edge. People had told us this was a beautiful camp site and indeed it is. It is also popular. Very popular.

Given that it was mid September when we arrived, and starting to get pretty hot (40° +days) it was interesting to note the number of vans, tents and camper trailers along the creek's edge. The river is spring fed, so it was crystal clear and relatively fast-flowing. After setting up camp in a particularly nice spot at the water's edge and near some trees and pandanus palms, we first had our cup of tea, and then went in for a refreshing swim.

Our new Bushtracker (BT) friends were there already; June and Rob had arrived the day before. We had dinner together, sharing our sausages and some salads, as well as potatoes in their jackets. June cooked the potatoes first in the microwave, using her inverter...) and then finished them in the barbeque.

Solar panels are a wonderful thing. We have had to use our generator for power needs only once in the last 18 days of bush camping, and that was due to having put the van under some shady trees back at the Einasleigh River. No sun on the panels, means no energy going into the batteries... The solar panels generally meet all our power needs, including a 230 litre fridge/freezer, a couple of hours of TV at night some evenings, and an hour or two of the computer most days – photo downloading takes some time.

23 September

Soudan Rest Stop, Barkly Highway

We left Gregory Downs fairly early, as we were unsure just how rough the road was likely to be and how fast we would be able to travel. The direction we took was south-west from the Downs to Camooweal. Mostly the road was good as the hotel staff use it to drive to Mt Isa, but the last third was a bit rougher and far

less used. The vans coped well (as you expect from a Kedron and BT) but we both got flat tyres on our cars. I think Rob and June's flat was on their car...

We pressed on fairly solidly to arrive on the Barkly Highway and a rest stop by about 4pm.

Soudan Bore is a camp spot we have stayed at a couple of times in the past and is marked in Camps Australia Wide. It is an hour or two west of the Barkly Homestead, and a

Good spot for an overnight camp. We pulled both vans together, awnings together, and had afternoon cold drinks organised before the car engines had time to cool down. June nipped into her van and had a loaf of bread being prepared in her breadmaker, with the help of the generator. Before drinks were finished she had a loaf of bread on the bench. Impressive. I would like to follow suit, but there is only so much room in an 18 foot (internal) van...

The evening was cool, not cold, and we all had comfortable nights' sleeps.

24 September

Dunmarra

Although it is only a small park, a part of this place's appeal for us is the nearby roadhouse for a good evening meal. But we were surprised at how dry and dusty the park was, and how busy it was. By 7pm it was about full, with vans and camper trailers and tents spread out through the park. This has been an interesting phenomenon throughout north Queensland as well; travellers are staying far longer into the Wet Season this year than usual. Park managers are all commenting on it.

25 September

Mataranka Homestead

Rob and June wanted to visit the hot springs and to be as close as possible to those restorative waters, so we stayed at the Homestead. Although the park was dry and dusty, and the ablution facilities were primitive and dirty, we were comfortable enough. I thought the fee of \$24 a night was a bit high considering the standard of the park, but the hot springs do make up for it. (Incidentally, the park does not own or maintain the springs; that is the responsibility of the NT Government, through their Conservation Commission).

It was getting warmer by now, and quite humid. Hence our desire not to bush camp any longer; we needed the airconditioning on all night and day.

26 September

Darwin (Howard Springs CP)

And we arrived back in Darwin in the late afternoon of the Wednesday, after calling in to have lunch with my two brothers at Pine Creek. It was good to see family again, and to watch the antics of their dogs, which would be certified as

crazy if there were any diagnostic criteria for dogs' mental health. I might do some work on this area...I could use my brother's dogs as a case study. (Only joking, Kevin).

We planned to stay in Darwin only a week, before continuing out to Ngmariyanga (near Wadeye) where Val will be teaching for Term 4 of this year.

And so, there will be no more trip reports until after we re-commence our travels in December.