

## **Stage 19 Sapphire to Cairns**

A major feature of the trip during this stage was the weather's change from the previously freezing and often wet conditions, to warmer weather. This changed the way we travel. Once it got warmer, we could sit outside with a cup of tea or cold drink, and we found it is easier to socialise with other campers once it is warmer outside the van.

Another change was the more remote districts we were travelling through. Some of these towns and communities in the outback are absolutely fascinating, and all are quite lovely in various ways.

A real delight was the number of really pleasant free camps or national park campgrounds between Townsville and Cairns. Although we visited several, there were others just as (or nicer!) which we didn't have time to stay at. The free camp at the towns of Rollingsstone and Balgal Beach were lovely.

### **26 to 28 July 2007**

#### **Sapphire Caravan park, Sapphire**

What a beautiful little park! This is most likely the best park we have stayed at in a long time, if ever! It is relatively new, with a lovely bush setting, right on top of a hill. Each site is well spaced from others, all have concrete slabs and pebbles around the site, together with lovely gardens. And the ablutions block is delightful. I could stay here forever. One of the great joys of the park is the birdlife...lorikeets, butcherbirds, magpies and crows, all have a happy co-existence, if somewhat noisy. The lorikeets are so tame they come down from the trees and eat out of your hands, perched on your arms and shoulders.

We went for another go at washing for sapphires, but got only rubbish this time. Alas. But at Pat's Gems (where we had our original good luck at washing) they have a nice coffee shop with cakes and meals all in a nice garden setting. So we went there a couple of times. And one night we went there for pizza night.

### **29 July**

#### **Theresa Creek Dam (22 kms from Clermont)**

As campgrounds go this is one of the better ones. It has a lovely outlook into a large body of water, where people can and do fish, and hot showers and toilets all for \$5 a night! But it was as busy as could be the night we spent here, and people were all packed in willy-nilly. As you can use a generator, people had them on at all hours of the day and night, and it was very noisy as a result.

There is an onsite caretaker, who takes your money, but there didn't seem to be any real rules to assist with harmonious camping.

I decided we would come back another time, when it is quieter.

### **30 July to 2 August**

#### **Fletcher Creek**

**S 19 48 0.950 E 146 03 0.233**

This lovely rest stop covers quite a large area with vans and tents mostly pulled alongside the creek itself. There are showers and toilets in a block on one side of the river, with walkways across the river to access the ablutions. As it is permitted to stay here up to a month, people often look like they have moved in permanently. This is such a shame as the travelling public needs to be able to access these places and can't if they are selfishly hogged by a few thoughtless folk. That said, we arrived early and got a nice spot, right on the river and with some shady trees nearby for afternoon drinks. We were very comfortable here, as the solar panels did their duty and we didn't need to use our generator once, despite heavy TV use at night. (There were a couple of programs that we particularly wanted to see...). There was patchy CDMA and NextG reception – enough for phone calls with the external aerial installed on the van roof and into the cabin. Nights were cool, and we needed the doona.

While here we met up with fellow Kedronners Glen and Debbie Balint, who had given us two magic suggestions for camping spots.

### **3 to 6 August**

#### **Charters Towers (Big 4)**

We stayed here long enough to replenish the pantry and use town power for printing off documents for work. I loved the old style buildings in Charters Towers (known to locals as "The World") and would like to spend more time here some day, getting to see more of the town.

We went up Tower Hill for an evening film display of the town and its history. The view from the lookout, right on sunset, was spectacular.

I saw a material shop, and bought a piece of gingham, which I sewed into a tablecloth. The material is a fresh green colour, and made a cheap tablecloth, but of a good quality. Now we will be able to dine in style!

### **7 to 14 August**

#### **Townsville Walkabout Palms CP**

Townsville is a large city, but has the feel of a country town. The park we chose is probably not the one I would select a second time, but it was convenient, and as we had an en-suite, it was comfortable. From here I flew to Alice Springs for a few days, to deliver a two day workshop. Val stayed with the van and had a few important things seen to, like a new windscreen on the car.

We also found a doctor's surgery which could fit us in on relatively short notice, and renewed our prescriptions. While there, I had a few small skin cancers burnt off my right hand; the scabs made my hand look mottled and peculiar for the next week...

Then a day before we left both us developed a gastro tummy bug (medical terminology “vomiticus nauseous”) which laid us low. Literally. I was very glad of that ensuite. This was the first time while living in the van that I would have liked to be in a house, with separate bedrooms and a toilet right next to the bedroom. It took nearly a week to feel much recovered, and even then, there was a feeling of lethargy.

### **15 to 18 August**

#### **Rollingstone CP, Rollingstone**

In part, we used the time at this lovely beach resort to recover our equilibrium and to be able to eat normal meals again. I felt cheated, as the park had a lovely outlook and was a spot that people enjoyed for the long energetic walks on the beach, and long lazy meals at the nearby Rollingstone Hotel. But all we enjoyed was the view of the caravan ceiling above the bed, and the chairs outside the van. We routinely slithered from the bed to the outdoor chairs, and then back to bed. Still, it was a lovely spot in which to recover. I hope to go back there sometime and really enjoy it properly.

I ate a lot of yoghurt here, as it was the only thing I could successfully digest.

### **19 to 22 August**

#### **Big Crystal Creek NP Campground**

**S 18 58 0.783 E 146 15 0.417**

Ah, now this is a spot which takes some beating! Managed by the QLD Parks and Wildlife service (or its equivalent), the campground can accommodate up to about a dozen groups or vans. It is not large, and those rigs larger than about 19 foot may not be able to maneuver their way in and out. We had a lovely spot just above a (dry) creek gully, and surrounded by bush. Nearby is a lovely, clear, deep pool for swimming. The toilet block has flushing toilets and cold showers. On our last day here, I decided I needed a good long shower (not one of those skimpy, short showers in the van where you take care not to use too much water) and wash my hair. Armed with shampoo and towel off I marched. Oh lord that water was cold! It literally took my breath away.

One of the great appeals of this campground was the nearby Frosty Mango coffee shop on the Bruce Highway (only 5 kms from our campsite) which had lovely meals and good coffees. We got into the habit of darting across there each morning, buying the newspaper at the nearby BP roadhouse and then reading the paper over a cappuccino at the Frosty Mango.

One night we drove the 20 kms back to the Rollingstone Hotel for a pub meal; delicious.

The weather was perfect while we were here – not too hot during the day, and cool enough to sleep comfortably at night.

The camp fee was \$4.50 per person per night. We emptied all our change into the envelopes, paying each day...I imagined the dismay on the rangers faces as they counted out all the 5c pieces! Our little coin change box is much lighter now.

**23 and 24 August**  
**Upper Murray Falls NP Campground**  
**S 18 09 0.200 E 145 48 0.967**

Did I say that the last campsite was lovely? Well, this one was just as good if not better. 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 a higher part of the camp ground, and could look down at all the other campers.

In the evenings we set up our tablecloth over the nearby wooden table and bench chairs, and with candles lighting our meal, felt we were dining in paradise.

In the mornings the kookaburras woke us up, and we were surrounded by bird calls all day.

It was getting a little warmer each day, and we were conscious that soon it would be hot and probably humid. But it was lovely weather for our two days here.

The camp fee was again \$4.50 per person per night. The parks service were again the happy recipients of our remaining change.

**25 August**  
**Fisheries Falls CP (30 kms south of Cairns)**

This must be one of the region's best kept secrets. The park is right alongside the busy Bruce Highway, and has delightful gardens. And within easy strolling distance is a pub for counter meals. We only needed one night's accommodation, but wished we could have been staying for longer. Our booking at Cairns awaits!

**26 August to 8 September 8, 2007**  
**Cairns Crystal Cascades CP (Big 4)**

Cairns is very special, but everyone knows that. It is green and lush, and although it can be warm, it is often cool and moist. I love the hills and the lakes in the nearby highlands are so very special! And a Myers shop – oh joy!

The park was a great spot to base ourselves while we scooted around doing the 'tourist thing' and relaxing around the van. We found the park very busy and quite crowded, even though it was late in August. When we left in the first week of September it was getting a lot quieter, as many vans had moved on, presumably heading to the cooler southern climes, now that the tropical Wet Season was arriving.

While in Cairns we scheduled a flight back to Darwin for a week, to catch up with family and friends, and to do the dreaded tax returns!

One day we spent up in the Atherton Tablelands, having a look around Mareeba and Atherton, and checking out Lake Tinaroo for camping sites.

Near Mareeba we were encouraged to visit a tourist venture called Coffee Works, which charged an exorbitant fee of \$25 a head for a guided tour and information on growing coffee. All we got for the overall cost of \$50 was unlimited cups of coffee (how much coffee can a person drink?!), a tasting of two liqueurs and a tasting of chocolates – which were whisked away pretty smartly. My advice is if you go there, pay for your cup of coffee, and then buy the chocolates and coffee beans of your choice.

By the time we got back the weather had become markedly warmer and more humid, but still pleasant enough.

We were delighted to see that our van (which had been put into storage by the park's helpful staff while we were away, at a cost of \$11 a night) was parked next to another Kedron. So we spent a couple of hours over evening drinks with Narelle and Mark from Busselton.