

Kimberley Crusaders – Part 5

Aug 15/2018 – **8,348km (5.217 miles)** from home

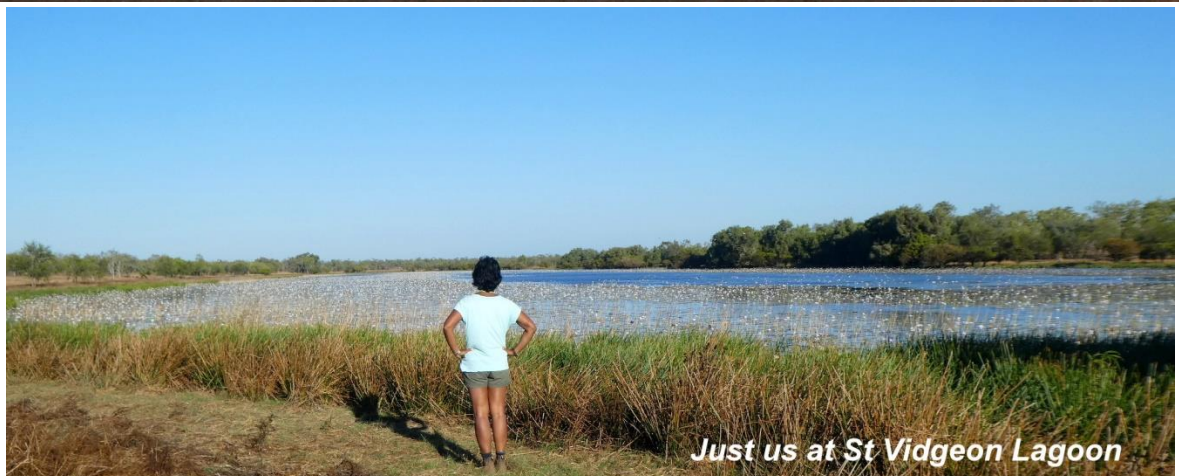
On the way to the regional town of Katherine/NT we camp by an impossibly picturesque billabong named **St. Vidgeon Lagoon** (east of Ngukurr) boasting thousands of water lilies in full bloom.



Billabong's water lily splendor



Deceiving serenity - crocs hide here - no bathing!



Just us at St Vidgeon Lagoon

We check out the famous **Roper River Crossing**.

Although it lies a bit out of our way we decide it *“has to be done”* even for historic reasons: German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt was the first European to cross the Roper River here back in 1845.

He named the river after a fellow in his expedition. Despite its wild reputation settlers moved in soon after and the location became a favourite stopover for drovers bringing cattle across from Queensland into the Kimberley region.



Unable to enter waters in many places because of inhabiting crocs we embrace a sweet swim at **Bitter Springs** in **Mataranka**. This stunning crystal clear creek is cosy warm (body temperature), fringed by emerald green mossy banks as it snakes through a lush tropical palm grove. Drift with the gentle current for about 20 minutes, then take the five minute walk back to the start and do it over again... heavenly!



We touch base with civilization at **Mataranka Homestead** soaking up some excellent musical entertainment over a fine dinner...



Katherine in the Northern Territory is our furthest point north this time. From here we turn south after checking out local sights like Edith Falls and Katherine Gorge (nowadays called 'Nitmiluk').





Katherine Gorge



Well-fed freshwater croc at Katherine Gorge



Edith Falls/Katherine NT



Edith Falls

Heading south from Katherine, before too long, the flat landscapes give way to spectacular escarpments as we near the Western Australian border.

The striking **Boab** trees become ever more frequent along our route.

Some call these 'upside down trees' because their branches look like a bunch of roots reaching for the sky.

Boabs (like their African counterpart 'Baobab') are deciduous: They drop leaves and shrink their trunks in the dry season to conserve water.



**First escarpments on the way south
after leaving Katherine/NT...**

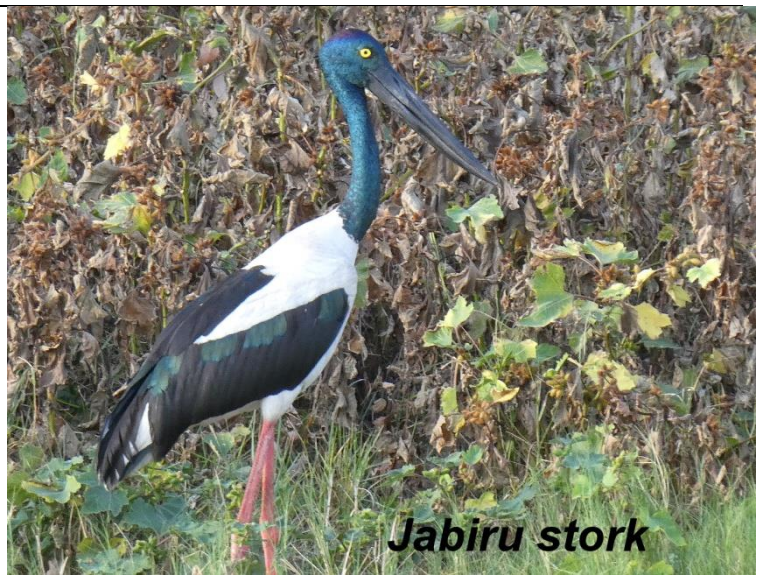


Approaching the WA border 'upside down' Boab trees are becoming more frequent

At **Timber Creek** we visit the local prison museum and join a cruise on the **Victoria River**: We notice some massive saltwater crocodiles, water buffaloes (an introduced pest!) and native Jabiru storks.



One-man cell



Jabiru stork

Jabiru on the banks of the Victoria River

■ *Prison museum at Timber Creek*



Victoria River sunset



4.5m "salty" monster at Victoria River



Fearsome water buffalo/Victoria River



Natural stones from Zebra Rock Mine near Lake Argyle

11km before the WA border and 57km from **Kununurra** we take a 90° turn south starting an 858km detour roundtrip via the **Duncan Road, Halls Creek and Bungle Bungle National Park** (instead of aiming directly for Kununurra.).

After a one-night-stopover at the **Zebra Rock Mine** a short way into the Duncan Road, we pass famous Lake Argyle on the east side and find a remote picture-perfect camp spot on the Negri River. It has stopped flowing due to the dry season and is now reduced to a string of billabongs. Within 24 hours three other cars pass by – none bother stopping to camp. ***Sheer bliss for us caravan-park-shysters!***

Negri River camp along Duncan Road



We count no less than a dozen freshwater crocs inhabiting the waters!

Sharing Negri River billabong with a dozen 'freshies'



The Duncan (gravel) Road turns out to be in very good condition, making a wonderful route through most scenic country.

Although **two things** happen along the way ...

The first is a flat tyre which must be taken on the chin without murmur. It would be unusual not to end up with a flat somewhere over hundreds of miles off the bitumen.

The second incident, one hopes we will see never again: After the tyre change we have a short rest for refreshments beside the road before rushing on...

Back on the road for **46km** we'd just hit a bull dust hole: In the rear vision mirror I admire the thick-as-smoke pall of the talcum powder like substance explode in our wake where I can't even see the van behind for a split second.

But what else do I see ?... unthinkable... my delight turns into desolation: The van's largest window is open... not just ajar but in its **widest** open position possible!!!

Yes, up until now we've been telling fellow caravanners (*with pride*) how our Matrix travels 'dust free'...

*"the only dust you get inside is the one the wind blows in when the windows are open". **SURE AS HELL *&%#@!****

No further elaboration required... except maybe an answer to this question: ***Is such the onset of old age senility or merely the distraction by a flat tyre?***

Finally we do cross into WA some 61km before meeting up with the Buntine Highway at Nicholson.



Looking for our next camp called '**Palm Springs**' we end up on some unidentified track by mistake... It has been a long drive from the Negri River, we are tired and the sun is setting when we arrive at a massive 'wash out' erosion. The unmapped track demands an immediate stop to our advance.



"The location is scenic, it is getting dark and we are hungry. Camp chef Katherine gets a goat curry going and things look decidedly brighter before too long!"



Following morning's assessment: The washout that halted our journey!



After a 180° turn we back-track all those obstacles from the previous day and soon are on the road again:

Though, before locating elusive 'Palm Springs' we come across 'Sawpit Gorge' which turns out just perfect – a classic spot for a Matrix: Tight entry, little room to manoeuvre, across a creek bed and up a steep hill – onto a platform! We call it Sawpit Gorge "HEIGHTS"

Circumnavigating track erosions



Cross country



On the road again...





Sawpit Gorge

A magnificent hideout!



**Camp Matrix
Sawpit Gorge**



Sawpit Gorge "Heights"

Eventually we do hit Palm Springs...

Just ten minutes along from where we turned down that "wrong" track earlier:





Soon after **Palm Springs** we cruise into the small town and aboriginal settlement of **Halls Creek**.

After stocking up supplies, namely vegetables which (by law) are banned from “import” into WA, we head north again to the Bungle Bungle National Park.

A short stretch out of H. Creek we encounter a grass fire along the highway. There are dozens of ‘fire hawks’ circling in a feeding frenzy. These clever birds take advantage of such fires snatching and feasting on insects and small vertebrates fleeing the blaze.

It is said, these hawks have been observed on occasions picking up burning sticks and carrying them on; dropping the smouldering sticks with intent to start new fires...

In wonderment of the spectacle we stop to take photographs when a truck of the local Fire & Emergency Services approaches, makes a U-turn and parks right beside Katherine’s window. The chap in the truck winds down his and advises “...it is safe to proceed through the smoke but sure... take your pictures”.

In a split second sussing each other out, we all grapple with disbelief... the friendly ‘Firy’ chap in the emergency vehicle turns out none other than ‘Christopher’ , son of our dear Hawks Nest friends Sonja and Ian Ridden.

Yes, it IS a small world and Australia a small place at that...!



Fire hawks chasing fleeing lizards and insects



Bushfire near Halls Creek



*Fireside
chance meet
with Chris*



Next are the **Bungle Bungles**, also known as 'Purnululu' in more recent times. These striped bee-hive-looking domes are situated some 292km south of Kununurra.

The 53km access road into the Bungles from the Great Northern Hwy is **murderous** by anyone's standard. After much contemplation, head scratching and lengthy discussions with a number of fellow travellers we decide to take the 'soft option': Catch the tour coach into the park instead of a self-drive.

We are so glad we did: This track is reportedly the worst in the whole of the Kimberley!

We enjoy an uninhibited full day of hiking to various sites and sights plus a sumptuous complimentary fire-side dinner back at base, courtesy of the tour operator.



Bungle Bungle NP from above



Purnululu



'Bee hives' of Bungle Bungle NP

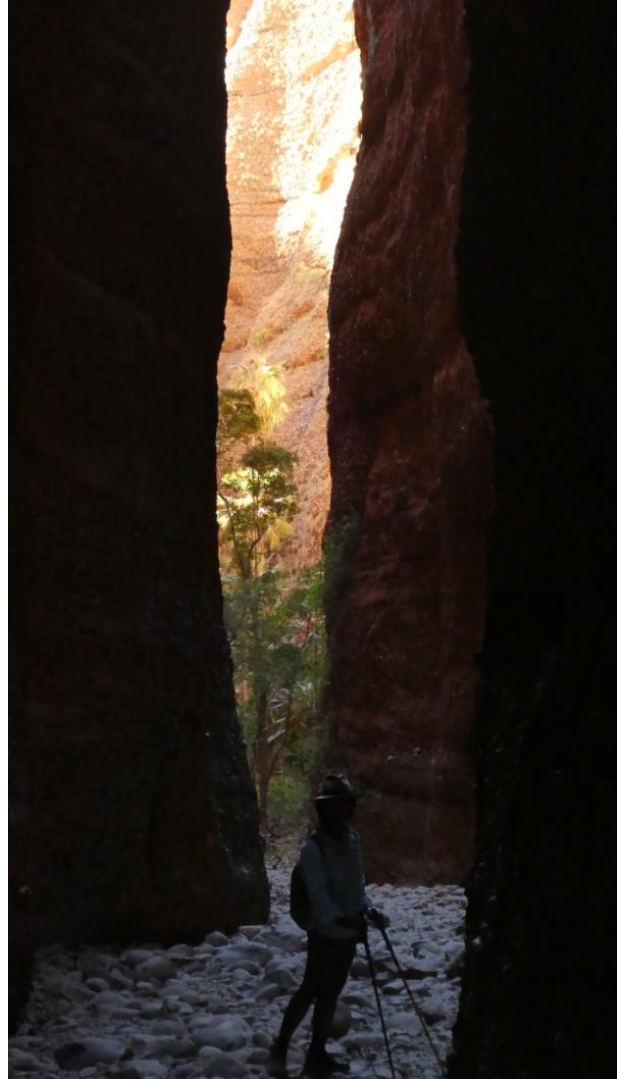
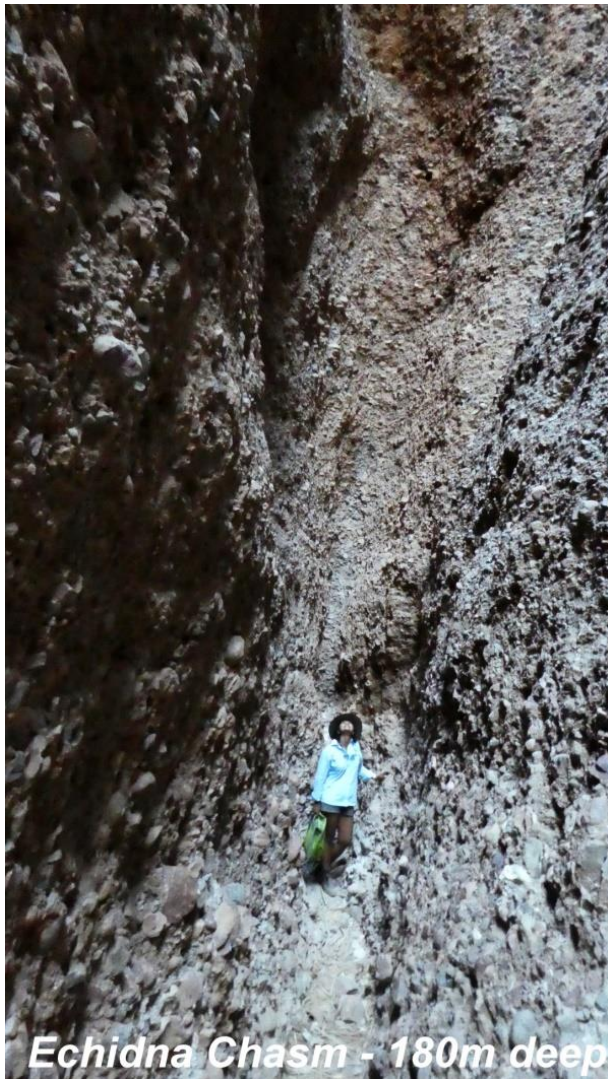


**Hiking at Purnululu -
the Bungle Bungles**



Purnululu trekking







Entering Echidna Gorge

The Bungle Bungles (Purnululu) are known for their striking sandstone domes, striped with orange and grey bands. This Range is an estimated 360 million years old, rises over 200m high and was carved over 20 million years through erosional forces - water and wind. The orange banding is the result of oxidised iron compounds within the layers, the grey bands are formed by cyanobacteria which turn jet-black in the wet season, making the contrast even starker.



*Osmand
lookout*



Aussie humour: Bungle's cane toad rappers

Our long and winding 853km detour sees us finally sneaking up to the **Eastern Kimberley region**, sort of from behind!

A few nights at Kununurra, a new spare tyre, stocking up supplies, exploring some local sights and we are ready for attack - last not least set to explore the Kimberley (proper).



Boab Prison Tree



Prisoner inside

All Boab trees are hollow inside!



Yeah, its dark in there!

Originally known as the “**Hillgrove Lockup**” this Boab tree was used to house aboriginal prisoners from 1890s to 1920s. In the Dry Season a police trooper would undertake a three-month police patrol to the interior.

The prisoners collected along the way were escorted back to Wyndham in irons and chains.

This prison tree was the last night’s camp where the poor sods were held before arriving at Wyndham Gaol to await trial.





Prison Tree monster Boab - difficult to hug!



One finds some unusual landmarks travelling the Outback!

No better suited introduction to the Kimberley than delving headlong into the (in)famous Gibb River Road!



***Start of the "Gibb"
Aug 13 - 2018***

PS: Many of you readers have commented on our 'yabby catching' exploits in the previous report. While some voiced concern the species might become extinct by the end of our trip, others have encouraged us by sending new recipe suggestions. In any case, your input is much appreciated! **BTW**, *Red Claw* yabbies are indigenous to Australia while *Blue Claw* yabbies are in fact an introduced pest that fast outbreeds the former and therefore must be eaten in great numbers 😊😊😊

Fasten your seatbelts... more soon!

Greetings from Chris and Katherine

