

Kimberley Crusaders – Part 3

July 1/2018 – **4,441km** (2,775miles) from home

We leave Birdsville along the Eyre Developmental Rd. travelling north through the Diamantina Shire. This true frontier country covers 95000 square/km, is twice the size of Denmark and comprises a variety of land types including the renowned Channel Country – a braided system of river channels that stretch across the landscape like fingers in the time of flood.

The country seems harsh to the eye but holds some of the **best cattle fattening areas of Australia**. The Channel region has also been accredited with 'Organic Beef' certification!



Diamantina Shire/Channel Country

A short 12km north of Birdsville is a stand of **Waddy trees** (*Acacia peuce*), some of them nearly a **1000 years old**. Only three such stands exist in Australia (another one is located out of Boulia further north). These trees grow to about three to four metres high. The wood is so hard it can damage an axe and will not usually burn.

No wonder, these tough surviving acacias are thought to be remnants of the last ice age!



We encounter a **hot bore**, water pouring out of the ground at 85C (105F). The nearby cooler pool downstream looks tempting but is still too hot for a plunge at 45C (113F).



Along the way stands the ruin of **Carcory Homestead** built in 1877. It once belonged to cattle king Sidney Kidman who abandoned this land in 1906 after losing 4000 bullocks in years of draught. Evidence of the hardships experienced by early pioneers!



Soon things look up as we spot a promising sign at **Bedourie Hotel** a little further up the road...



Living off the land

There are an estimated **750,000 feral camels** roaming the outback wilderness. They were imported from Arabia in the 19th century and used for transport and heavy work but became obsolete when motorization kicked in. How many camel burgers would be in that number above? We'll do our best to make a dent in reducing the **world's largest camel herd!**

On June 18 we cross the 'Tropic of Capricorn' – hopeful to soon arrive at warmer climes.



Overnight at Boulia before heading for Mt Isa...



Next morning 25km out of Boulia, with an **almighty 'BANG'**, the right rear tyre on the truck decides to crap itself without warning and we grind to an unscheduled halt from 85km/h (53mph).



After a bit of head-scratching we figure using the Hi-Lift jack at the rear end to lift the truck far enough off the ground to be able to fit a regular jack under the frame, forward from the busted wheel. This way we clear the ground sufficiently to slip on the spare tyre.



Our travel was delayed for about an hour, but no major drama otherwise as we carry three spare wheels at any time (interchangeable between truck and van).



Stopover at mining town Mt Isa for a few days as we wait for delivery of a new tyre. Our next stint will be a more lengthy one: Off-road and rough – we'd better be 'armed to capacity' with spares. Meanwhile we enjoy a day at the Mt Isa Show:

A snake education lesson is always a helpful reminder to be thoughtful in the bush.

Katherine gathers valuable knowledge on camp oven cooking from a couple who are paid professionals at the show. Pat & Bruce/*Gidgee Gang from Townsville* willingly share their knowledge.





Admiring a pro's perfect damper



Oldest of Aussie traditions: Camp oven baked damper



Boy's toys at Mt Isa Show



Katherine & friend

You know you've arrived at the Far West when road kill reaches this size!



Living off the land



While waiting for our new spare tyre to be shipped from Townsville we hang out at **Corrella Dam** some 70km east of Mt Isa. It gets a rather busy here this time of the year but we score a waterfront spot away from the main camping area.



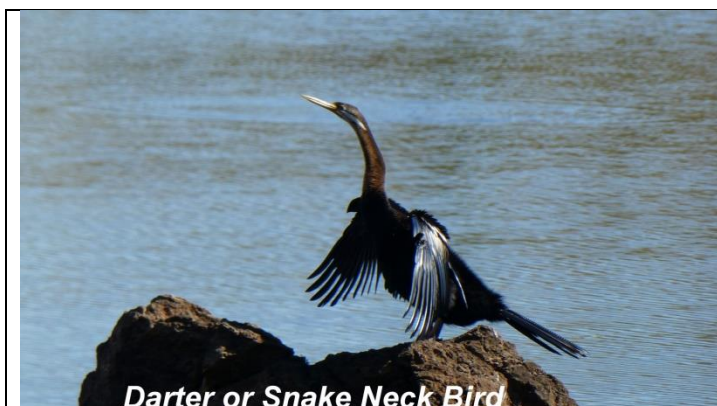


Camp Matrix/Corrella Dam

We hike and bird watch...



Surveying the horizon at Corrella Dam



Darter or Snake Neck Bird



Rainbow Bee Eater

The **Darter** above has an unusual design (flaw?) for a water bird: Its feathers are not waterproof although their main diet is fish pursued by diving and swimming under water. The poor bird gets so much soaked it renders him flightless. Hence they perch themselves in the sun for hours to dry out their flying gear in between fishing sessions.

Bee Eaters can be observed in many places up here carrying out their skirmish acrobatics hunting insects mid-air; on the feed they fly their rounds, usually returning to the same elevated look-out and readying themselves for the next of their frequent forays.



After a brief stopover at Camooweal which is completely 'camped out' (lasted one night!) we flee north to **Gregory Downs** along the Camooweal Rd. Thankfully our rig allows us to get off the beaten track most of the time and the greeting sign at the start suggest so (above)! 200km down this road we find two spots that aren't marked on any map – right on the banks of the **Gregory River**. Feels like paradise – we stay for three nights. The only formal attire called for are our birthday suits ☺ - we see no one the whole time – camping bliss!



Somewhere on the way a major **cattle drive** crosses the road. The herd must have counted several hundred head. We stop, watch the spectacle unfold and take pictures. Who's in a hurry? We've got twelve months the soak up all the comes our way.



Revisiting **Tiranna Road House** north of Gregory Downs (SW of Burketown) we follow last year's fond memories (we had our biggest yabbie haul here!) but find the track to the camp spot on their

private property so badly washed out in the last wet, it is rendered impassable even for the keenest. Nevertheless, friendly owner 'Nemelia' lets us in on one of her other secret yabbie spots and we catch enough for a couple of big yabbie wraps! (Very sorry for lack of pics – we scoffed them down – too delicious – couldn't wait!)



Tiranna Road House owner "Nem" with her pram shares another secret: Best bait for yabbie traps is sweet corn (Katherine scores a bag full of cobs from her)

And yeah, kids grow up care-free out here!

We are leaving for **Hells Gate** tomorrow along the dirt track to Boroloolah: 468km (350miles). No communications for most of the way – hoping for some decent fishing – we have now well and truly arrived in croc territory. Looking forward to the next stint...

More soon 😊😊😊

Greetings from Chris and Katherine

