

Cape Crusaders – Part 1

May 25/2017 - **1,735km** (1,084miles) from home

Monday May 15/2017 it is:

After a delay of two weeks it feels like we actually disentangle ourselves from the sticky web of life's *run-of-the-mill* commitments and last-minute executions of bright ideas in the packing & sorting department. Astonishing, what effort it takes to finally "break lose" ...

It is autumn, days are getting markedly cooler, the leaves are turning and so are we: Turning the next page in our book by heading to the tropical north for six months – the great winter escape.



This time our aim is the northernmost point of Australia: **Cape York**.

We bid farewell to sweet home 'Ravens-Burg' and our rig is launched at last – all 6.23tons of it.



After the briefest of stopovers at Hawks Nest (½ hour) we head west to our first overnigher:

Lake Liddell. A scenic place though we learn, the lake has been shut down by the authorities and is off limits due to an amoeba (*Naegleria Fowleri*) which may cause a rare form of meningitis if lodged in the upper nasal passage. This organism can occur in abnormally high fresh water temperatures such as here: The Lake's water is used for cooling the nearby power station.

The result, a thriving park for all kinds of water activities including fishing has shut indefinitely.

Only the resident gaggle of geese doesn't seem to care!



Our next stop is **Coonabarabran** where the folks of our friend Rod run cattle farm 'Timaru'.

Rod insisted we must visit and we are so glad we did.

We enjoy three days of welcoming country hospitality by Neville and Nancy Wiese with hearty home cooked meals such as 'sausage rissoles' (*Neville's all-time favourite*) and signature family dishes like 'pineapple mince'!



We are taken on a scenic tour of the property in the 'one-tonner'.

Katherine 'city slicker' did not know what such vehicle was at first but finds out soon enough:

Three squeezed onto a single-cab front bench seat for a few hours!

We learn about fertilizing, water distribution, the different types of grasses and cattle's preferences.



Neville tells many a yarn about the good and the tough times on the land (i.e. when loans' interest was 22%).

It must be said, anyone farming this unforgiving land called 'Australia' and surviving a lifetime deserves a bunch of gold medals. In a lucky break meat prices are currently fetching top dollar.

Despite decades of hard labour and knock-backs content Neville says "Life owes me nothing!"

A lesson learnt for us...



During our stay we take day trips to nearby **Warrumbungle National Park**.

In 2013 a devastating bush fire ripped through the area. Classified a '*catastrophic*' event there was fear the **Siding Spring Observatory** might be lost. Massive water-bombing from the air saved the structure in the last hour. Surprisingly, eucalypt gums (unlike conifers) recover quite well from such events. Nodules embedded in the bark are activated by fires which spark growth of new branches within weeks.



**Warrumbungles
National Park**



**Siding Spring
observatory**



**A fire ravaged
eucalypt recovers**



Siding Spring observatory

Inside: Impressive cosmos gazing gizmo



**New undergrowth
after the fire**

On the way to the Warrumbungles we pass a several mile long string of rather **funny letter boxes**. Here are some of them: Seemed to be a *one-up-man-ship* comp to better next door neighbour's!



Crazy Dragon



Wise Owl



Mad Goat



Gun Toting Dog



Rusty The Stove



Gnome



Grumpy Gasman



Truck Enthusiast



Scalded Cat



Rocket Scientist



Skinny Bugger



Mother Goose

On the way to the National Park we giggle all along – on the way back we stop to take the pics!

Next destination - **Lightning Ridge**.

We had planned to stay here for two nights at the 'Crocodile' van park but this town quickly gets the better of us. What an ugly, quirky yet fascinating place! We promptly add a third ...then a fourth night.

Not only did we have one of the best meals ever (rack of pork) at "Bruno's", the local Italian restaurant, we also make sure we get our daily soak at the artesian baths!

Nearing L.Ridge, giant emu **Stanley** greets you. He was supposed to be placed at Birdsville (seems logical) but due to some bureaucratic *nonsense* road blocks it never happened.

Instead, local volunteers from the Ridge were tripping over themselves, vowing to make it happen and built the bird out of old VW Beetle parts, painted on the rust and there Stanley stands proudly - outside their beloved town: Duly facing towards... Birdsville... of course!

The next evidence of Aussie ingenuity sits right across the road from Stanley at the roadside rest area. Has anyone ever wondered how to illuminate a bush dunny? Well, shine your headlights into mirror 1...



The welcoming landmark of Lightning Ridge



Lightning Ridge of course is best known for its opal crazed occupants. The landscape looks like a mass of mole hills created by gem obsessed punters. It also presents the largest junkyard (the 'ugly' bit) we have ever seen. It has always been kind of an Aussie status symbol to have a rusting wreck of some kind in your yard but L. Ridge takes the cake: Rust riddled wrecks of mining gear worth millions decay at every corner. Left over from fossickers gone broke in the attempt of making it 'big'. Interestingly, the annual lease for a claim is only \$135 per annum – not likely the reason for going bust.

L. Ridge really is a living museum. The digging rush continues to this day though it is said only ten out of a hundred actually scratch a living out of opal. From those ten only ONE will make his fortune! Countless have come, tried their luck, traded their possessions for mining equipment and lost the (p)lot.

Rusting wrecks abound - witness to luck lost



It is said, 2500 inhabitants are registered at Lightning Ridge but 4000 actually collect their mail. Such a perfect place to drop out and disappear.! We meet a number of unusual characters (the fascinating bit!).

Like mad Italian **'Amigo'** who built himself a castle (he wanted to copy the one he remembered from his home town in back in Italy; though his version never got completed). Instead, he resides behind it in a makeshift shack. There are numerous warning signs on his claim: Erected to fend off the ever pesky visitors. To no avail – the more signs went up the more visitors came!



			<p>Amigo's motto! (below!)</p>
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Amigo's mail box: Think "pigeons"!



Amigo's actual dwelling ain't no castle – Lightning Ridge is full of such places!



One discovers camps from the earliest settlement days...



"Bodel's Camp"



PO... still inhabited today!

...and wonders 'where to' from here?



Finding the local attractions is made easy simply by following the four different '**tourist drives**' marked out by car doors in four different colours - pick your tour (red, green, yellow or blue) and track along the car doors hung off trees, rocks and stakes - ingenuity at every turn:





Anyone tempted to visit unique Lightning Ridge (strongly recommended) must not miss going underground of course. Some mines are open for visitors notably the '**Chambers Of The Black Hand**'. This mine is famous for its internal sandstone carvings. The owner, once run out of opal, put his hand to carving up the sandstone walls with little more than a butterknife. The results are so remarkable visitors come from far afield to see for themselves the artistic transformation of a former working mine into an underground gallery:



Not to be missed: A side tour to the nearby opal mining town of **Grawin**:



Hilton Pub - Opal mining town of Grawin

Grawin: Where the burgers really are better!



Healthy fare / Hilton Pub / Grawin



Grawin - Club in the Scrub



Lightning Ridge sun set



Meanwhile we have escaped across the border into Queensland:



Watch this space... more soon!

Greetings from Chris and Katherine



"TheNotSoGrey Go-Mads"