

Cape Crusaders – Part 2

Sat June 10/2017 – 3,241km (2025miles) on the road

Travelling frequently to and from Hawks Nest during our working years we observed countless caravanners cruising up and down the freeway. We labelled such folk the '**Lucky People**'.

Whenever we spot a rig we would sigh to each other "Yeah, one day..."

So, barely away from Sydney one month the '*Big Smoke*' bubble has already become a distant memory.

Yet, reality is still sinking in: *How amazing... the 'Lucky People' – that's now us!*

First stop into Queensland is the **Nindigully Pub**. Right behind sits a beaut free-camp on the banks of the Moonee River. This pub is Queensland's longest running (established in 1864), famous for their monstrous burgers (5kg/feeds 10). Needless to say, we do not attempt... for lack of numbers!



Katherine can hardly wait to christen her brand-new yabby trap purchased at Lightning Ridge for \$9.95.

A sound investment as it will turn out. Dog biscuits of all things are the top bait to lure those tasty crustaceans, we learn from an 'old hand' fellow traveller.

A couple of days later we drive through St George and on to **Bollon**. The earth gets markedly redder as you approach this little western town. We hang out for two nights at nearby peaceful *Wallam Creek*.

Bollon was first registered as a town in 1879 and the original name came from the indigenous word '*Bolion*' meaning *stone axe*.

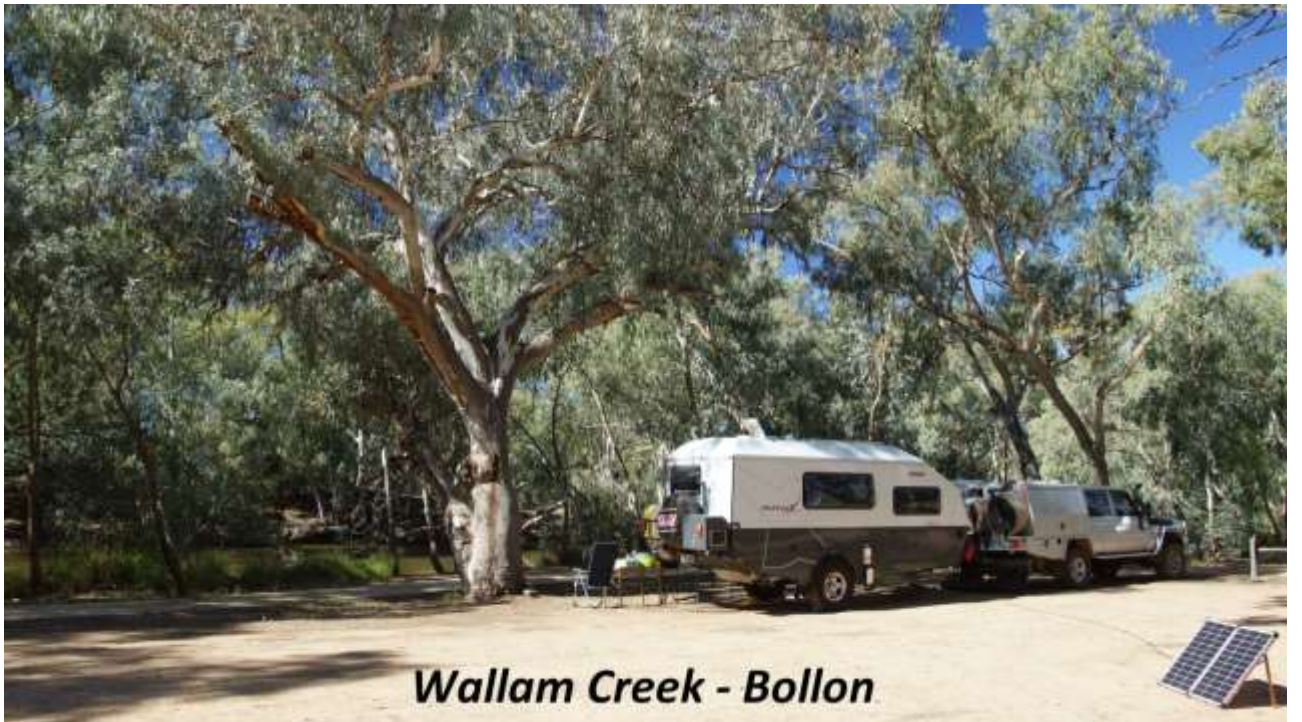
Katherine ecstatic about prospective dinner



Katherine's first Blue Cray yabby at Nindigully



Katherine retrieves her yabby trap



Wallam Creek - Bollon

We hear about a station stay called 'Charlotte Plains' which lies near the Bollon to Cunnamulla road. It has an artesian bore gushing out 43C day and night. There are many farm stays springing up all over these days as struggling farmers diversify in order to make ends meet by opening their properties to paying travellers. C. Plains' bore was sunk deep into the artesian basin to 1842ft (561m) in the year 1892 and produces 512000 gallons (approx. 19 million+ ltr) per day. It has never been turned off!



Good news for us – this stopover is a gem:



We start the day with a hot bath at sun rise and... finish the tough outback way with a sunset soak.

Simply flick the lever on the fat fire hose and fill the tub with piping hot water in a mere minute – GRAND!

Plenty of bird life keeps us entertained including an emu family wandering through camp fossicking for tasty morsels on the bone dry grounds.





The **Cunnamulla Show** is on and we don't miss the chance of watching the 'pig races', a sheep shearing competition and witness a very serious camp oven cook off. Of course we meet the local folk which are always entertaining. They have time out west for long yarns any time of the day; we are taken aback how friendly and welcoming country people are.

Snake man shows off his fine selection of Australia's deadliest snakes. We learn, if bitten, a compression bandage is best measure to slow the flow of toxins through the body. Also there is no need to kill a snake after a bite - doctors are said to be lousy snake identifiers: Instead, they will take a swab to determine which anti-venom needs to be administered.



Katherine gets a heads-up lesson from camp oven expert **Laurie** for stew and damper recipes.

Outback tramp '**Bushie**' keeps busy with any job that comes his way – at the show he is in charge of keeping the ovens stacked up with 'Gidgee' wood coal – best means of maintaining heat for hours.





It should be noted, instead of the planned fast run north we find ourselves hopelessly side-tracked, most times way off the originally planned route. We are rather zig-zagging our way through Far West Queensland following fellow caravanners' tips... detouring left and right. One of these tips is the **Eulo mud baths** – apparently not to be missed under any circumstance: So, we must try!

Ian and Nan run this delightful **fountain of youth** that makes one feel *“not a day over 21”* in 1 ½ short hours. Rejuvenating indeed and highly recommended (*glass of wine and nibbles included!*)





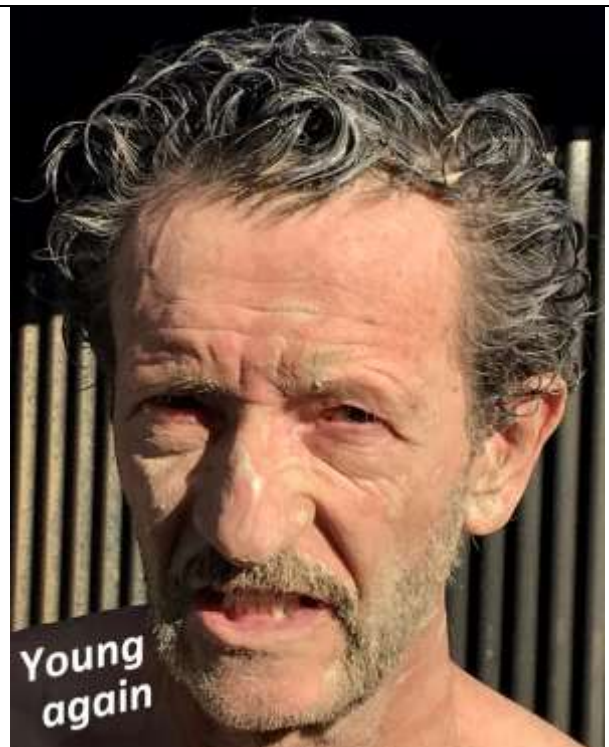
Bring on the Eulo mud experience



Eulo mud bath



Fountain of youth found!



Young again

Feeling not a day over 21 – Do we look it? – The verdict is up to you...!

Behind Eulo we find an idyllic camp spot on the **Paroo River** just west of this three-horse town which is teeming with bird life.



Paroo River camp

Albeit, the Paroo comes up with offerings of a tasty kind as well:



Along the travel way we find out what happens to live stock ravaging rascals:



Dingo done dead

Charleville is next where were the diet abruptly changes from 'surf' to 'turf':
Try this mean mother "Tomahawk Steak" – well worth a detour!



E. Star is a delightful stop where Katherine learns from Brazilian backpacker 'Denise' how to bake the perfect damper in a camp oven (D. won a recent Charleville damper competition).
The proof is in the pudding (or damper) as they say ☺☺!



We have had some pretty cold nights along the way – temperatures are frequently hitting the 'below-ten single digit nasties' in some close shaves with actual frost: Minimum so far 0.1C.
Though no reason for despair; our trusty Germany diesel heater keeps us swimmingly toasty when the thermometer plunges way beyond the comfort zone.



Lara Station Wetlands is another very appealing farm stay just south **Barcaldine** that also has a hot artesian bore pouring out 63C of magnesium-rich clear water which is very well drinkable. Early morning, sunset or *night-under-the-stars* bath sessions are a welcome routine. Sunrise time is particularly divine as one soaks in the 39C hot pool after a quick dart from the van in bathers through cutting crisp morning air (7C).



The Great Artesian Basin is one of the largest artesian groundwater basins in the world and underlies approximately one-fifth of Australia. It extends beneath regions of Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Basin covers a total area of over 1.711,000 square kilometres and has an estimated total water storage of 64,900 million mega litres (one mega litre is one million litres = half the water in an Olympic swimming pool).

Ironic really when much of the land above the artesian basin is absolutely bone-dry, even desert, sitting on an ocean of water.

The areas we travel through have received only 10mm of rain in the first six months of this year.

Much of the bore water found in the Outback has a slightly sulphuric smell to it (which eventually dissipates if the water is left standing open in the fridge). Though much to our surprise, we learn the tap water of **Barcaldine** is one of the best found in all of Australia.

A sample of it was supplied to last year's IXOM Water Test competition and won BEST TASTING TAP WATER IN QUEENSLAND 2016. Subsequently, a further sample was supplied to measure up against the best tasting tap water of New South Wales: The QLD/Barcaldine water beat it, too!

Needless to say, we dump all our previously collected liquid stores from our tanks and do the great refill at Barcaldine showgrounds (for free!).

Our stay at Lara Station Wetlands adds to the list of highlights.





Sadly, station owner 'Jo' was forced to run the station single handed. Jo and her husband Michael were fed up with working in the mines (operating equipment) and decided on a sea change: They bought Lara Station, a sheep and cattle farm. Though, running livestock didn't turn out all it promised to be in this drought stricken harsh land. So, Jo came up with the idea of utilizing the property's hot artesian spring: Turn it into a tourist attraction! Michael resisted the idea at first but eventually agreed to her plan. A lot sweat and money was poured into the project.

Most tragically, **Michael died in a helicopter crash** the day before the very first Wetlands visitors were supposed to arrive. Jo halted the operation for only three weeks then, despite adversity, decided to push ahead full steam.

In her first year 750 visitors turned up; twice that number showed in the following year. And this season the figure is set to double again as ‘word of mouth’ is getting out far and wide. **Jo**, a classic Aussie battler bouncing back full of energy and bright ideas, is a wonderful inspiration to us – **what a remarkable lady!**



If anyone passes this way on the road from Blackall to Barcaldine:
Pay a visit to Lara Station Wetlands (don't miss the farm tour of the old homestead)!

Watch this space... more soon!

Greetings from Chris and Katherine



“TheNotSoGrey Go-Mads”