

Cape Crusaders – Part 3

Sun June 25/2017 – 4916km (3072miles) on the road

It was in the year of 1980 when I set foot onto Australian soil: My first overseas trip, my first jet travel. Five weeks I had up my sleeve and the mission was to “see Australia”.

After spending the first week in Sydney I had four left; raced up as far as Mackay like a rat up a drainpipe in a motorhome, head-on into an approaching cyclone (*‘Green-Kraut Chris’* hadn’t heard about the *wet season* and such possibility, eh!).

Duly turned wheels on the spot the first Mackay morning and pronto zoomed south were the sun promised to be shining. When departing from Sydney it dawned I had seen darn little of OZ (unwittingly bolting past all the best bits in the grand rush to “see Australia”).

Clearly, I thought, one must live in this place at least a little while to see some of it!

Twelve months later, after the Australian authorities had granted permanent residency in the believe this dental technician may be able to add some professional value to the land downunder, I touched down on Jan 1/1981... on a one-way ticket this time!

Thirty six years on, I have ventured about a reasonable amount from Darwin to Tassie, Cooktown to Perth and Uluru in between but obviously there are still a hell of a lot of white blotches on my map which beg filling in.

On the second of December 1984 it was “love at first sight” when I crossed paths with the *girl of my dreams*. By 1988 she, too, had fallen in love sufficiently to marry me!

Gladly, “first sight love” Katherine remains firmly at my side as we cross the **‘Tropic of Capricorn’** in her roles as *chief navigator* and *camp chef*:

We are now well and truly into the land of three-carriage road trains (53m long), vast flat wide open outback plains and arrow-straight roads.





Road roos: The Wasaroo

So far we spot **several species of kangaroos**, namely the Big Red (a nomadic migratory kind), the Wallaby and the Grey Kangaroo (both the latter roam only the area they are born in).

Though lately we identified another species: The **Wasaroo** - interestingly this prolific breed occurs in the colours of all other types observed previously. Wasaroos congregate by the thousands predominantly roadside (even mid-road) appearing to be sleeping (though often they are so mashed & mangled it's no one's guess they're not merely resting!).



First stop after Lara Station is **Isisford/Oma Waterhole**. A tranquil free-camp by the **Barcoo River**. We fish for Yellowbelly but no luck despite trying worms, shrimp and yabby for bait. Though Katherine has one other method up her sleeve: She charms the fisherman next door who caught a couple of fine fish earlier. Bob donates one specimen to our dinner cause – we gratefully accept the offer. The fillets, pan-fried with butter, garlic & white wine on the open camp fire turn out delicious: Our first taste of Yellowbelly – sweet and juicy indeed!



We spend three nights at Oma. No yabbies here but Whistling Kites circle above and a flock of **Apostle Birds** visit the camp. These cheeky squawky buggers travel in groups of twelve (hence the name) and appear completely fearless.



From Oma we move on to the mini-town of **Ilfracombe** 28km east of Longreach. We need to do some laundry and this is a practical pad to launch into Longreach (15min drive). Added bonus here is the free stand-up comedy (*aka bush poetry*) by the owners at 'happy hour'. The guys are absolutely hilarious!



Longreach makes an indelible mark in our books! Wonderful locals - lots to see and do...



An in-depth outback experience one would not want to miss. There we have the **Qantas museum** and **Jet Tour** followed by the **Stockmans Hall Of Fame** with accompanying show. We spend one full day at each completely absorbed by our fascinating Australian history.



QANTAS, the world's second oldest airline, was registered on Nov 16 – 1920 as '**Queensland And Northern Territory Air Services**' by Paul McGuiness and Hudson Fysh. Winton was the original birthplace but the company and operating headquarters were moved to Longreach in Feb 1921.



Above all, best experiences were the **Kinnon & Co Outback Pioneers** events.

First the **Thomson River Starlight Sunset Cruise** followed by a stockman's campfire dinner, barefoot bush poetry, a comedy skid plus a movie show. There are absolute tears of laughter, a bus load full of smiles and brim full tummies on the way home.

A rare opportunity to live for an evening this truly iconic part of Australia's history!

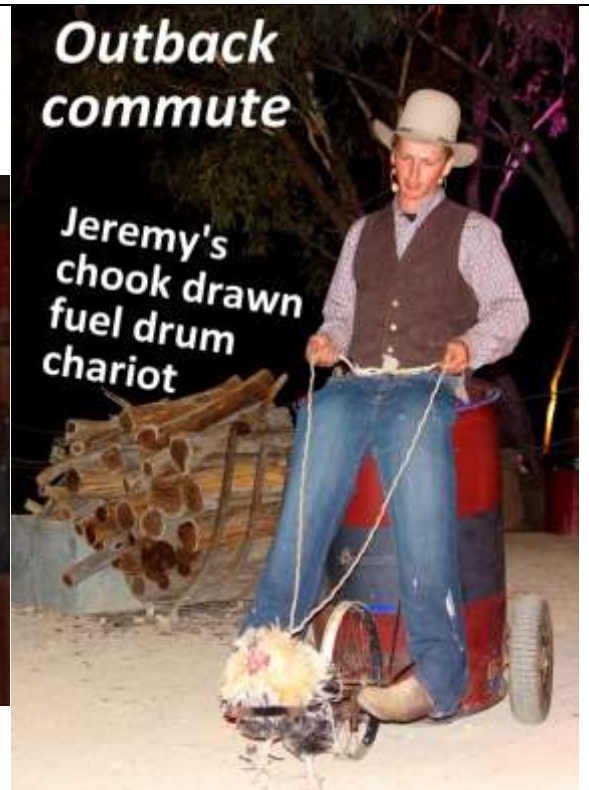


**Bush poetry and slapstick skids
by Kinnon & Co**



**Outback
commute**

Jeremy's
chook drawn
fuel drum
chariot



Second most memorable event is the **Cobb & Co Stagecoach** ride complemented by the **Harry Redford Oldtime Tent Show**. Lane and Jeremy take their coaches to a full gallop along the original mail route to Windorah: Like a storming ride in a Wild West movie!

The hilarious slapstick tent show afterwards is full of mayhem and animal antics. Very much what folk back in the pioneer days would have experienced. To top it off, Kinnon & Co screen a classic bush movie in an old bush theatre complete with rustic wood-frame canvas recliners and popcorn.

What a wonderful way to step back right into another world for a time!





*Outback ingenuity:
Lane's post coach ride
Honda blower de-dust*





It must be noted, the Kinnon & Co operation was created by a local farming family who had to reinvent themselves due to the gripping drought in Far West Queensland. They run a working sheep and cattle property which has not made any profit for six years because of the harsh current situation. You will get to hear their story – they would be “no longer on their land if it wasn’t for the tours”. ***We are pleased and glad our patronage supports another Aussie farming family!***

Living on the edge at Kynuna

If the Wasaroo hasn’t surprised you earlier let me introduce you to the **Green Dunny Frog**. Not sure if this amphibian is endemic to Kynuna, even a new species, but it surely keeps a low profile. It took some effort to even glimpse one, let alone collect photographic evidence of its very existence. The rim-dwelling *Green Dunny Frog* rather keeps a low profile and I would have entirely missed it had not a fellow traveller alerted me to its existence.

Thus I investigate: A first flush – no movement! The mysterious subject remains firmly lodged in rim hideout... for grim death (*well versed in avoiding contact with No2 business at all cost – my guess!*). The second flush produces sight of a leg and the third plops *Dunny Frog* into the Blue Harpic pool. Well sanitized, I assume, though unperturbed he clambers up the slippery Caroma porcelain cliff to reclaim his rim hideout... joining his pal who was spared the Harpic “once-over” as I discover: *Green Dunny Frogs* seems to cohabit in pairs as my mirror probe reveals!





Trailer Trash Brolga

Then we have this fella, wetland-less due to the raging six-year drought; once respected Brolga have chosen in large numbers to become Trailer Trash begging for handouts in van parks.



Winton is next on our route. A bit of an uninspiring town – except it's all about dinosaurs here. Big attraction is the 'Dinosaur Stampede': An area the size of a football field with over 3000 footprints from fleeing saurs of sorts.



95 million years ago several dinosaur species roamed the West: *Sauropods* (giant log-neck plant eaters), *Theropods* (carnivores with and arsenal of dagger-like teeth) and herbivorous *Ornithopods*.

The plant eating *Kunbarrasaurus ieversi* is the most complete Mesozoic dinosaur ever found in Australia. Armour plates were in their life positions, even gut contents were preserved!



Much anticipated **Julia Creek** turns out to be a tiny overcrowded (overrated) waterhole – attraction “nil” were it not for the passing steam train heading for the 150 year celebration of nearby **Cloncurry**, our next stop.



Katherine is keen on the Cloncurry Show but it, too, turns out a bit of a flop apart from the fireworks (bearing in mind, anyone who's ever seen the Sydney Harbour Bridge New Year's Eve extravaganza is likely spoilt for life!). On the upside, for future reference, on the way through we discover a tranquil free-camp 53km west of Cloncurry: **Corella Dam/Clem Walton Park**.

Approaching Cloncurry we leave behind the vast flat plains for a while and enter the hilly country of the rather attractive Selwyn Range. We also find our first termite mounds. These belong to the **Spinifex termite**: One of 350 species found in Australia. Out of those, only six are found to be feasting on man's dwellings. The Spinifex t. doesn't; they eat Spinifex grass and other types of vegetation. Their mounds can be up to 7m high and although often called "white ants" termites are actually more related to cockroaches than ants.



We always find station stops attractive for crowd avoidance and seeing parts of the land inaccessible otherwise. **West Leichhardt Station** 40min east of Mt Isa is one of those finds.



A lazy 500 square mile cattle station owned by Ron (75 yo). He decided to open his property to the travelling public. Not for monetary gain but stimulation. Ron is alone (apart from staff) and appreciates visitors' company; he is chuffed and thanks us when we tell him we've been watching for hours the helicopter muster run by two of his hired new-age aero-cowboys. The job: Corraling a 1000 head of cattle into nearby holding pens.



The farm runs 7000 cattle at present but can support up to 15000. Though, the current number apparently is most “easily managed”. We learn, Ron loses about 500 calves a year to feral dogs causing ½ a million dollar loss per annum. The dogs have been in plague proportions and they shoot and heli-bait as many as they can to control numbers.

West Leichhardt Station is a suitable spot for launching runs into **Mt Isa**, location of the famous zinc, lead and copper mines. The purest forms of lead and copper anywhere in the world are found here. A chap by the name of John Campbell Miles discovered lead in 1923 while travelling through the region. By the end of that year 118 mining leases were pegged out and on Jan 19 - 1924 *Mount Isa Mines Ltd* was established by acquiring all the surrounding leases.

Today mainly copper is mined and sold on world markets; it is said extensive deposits have been found that may last up to 300 years (one of them apparently directly under the current smelter!).

The Mines Ltd. established a picturesque dam for the Mt Isa's freshwater supply: Lake Moondarra – surface area 2,600 hectares (catchment area 111,500 hectares). 20 different species of fish inhabit its waters, the prized Barramundi amongst them. L. M. even sports a water ski club. So, no wonder one sees trailer boats being towed about in the middle of bone dry country.



In 1942 Mt Isa was found to be vulnerable to Japanese attack and an underground hospital was hastily hammered out from solid rock in 15 weeks. Thankfully it never needed to be used before the war ended in 1945.





**Mt Isa
Underground Hospital**

We also learn, Mt Isa is the largest 'city' district in the world: 44000 square kilometres – the size of Switzerland!



Leichhardt Station sunset

Adels Grove coming up...

Watch this space... more soon!



"TheNotSoGrey Go-Mads"
Greetings from Chris and Katherine