

Cape Crusaders – Part 4

Thu July 13/2017 – 6049km (3780miles) on the road

Adels Grove/Lawn Hill - Boodjamulla National Park – one of the best so far!

We score a prime spot right on the river bank with water views AND enough sunlight to keep the solar panels happy. A bit of a rarity down in the shady 'Grove' part of Adels camping area.

From here we set off exploring Boodjamulla National Park on several bushwalks.

On one, '*Wild Dog Dreaming*', we bump into a ten thousand strong (or so) colony of fruit bats.

All busily flapping their wings fanning their overheated bodies as daytime temps hover around the 30C+ mark this far North; even in winter. The stench in the air is somewhat interesting to say the least!

A river cruise reveals the grand glory of **Lawn Hill Gorge** where we also spot our first '*Freshies*' – Freshwater crocodiles. We swim here regardless as these narrow-snouted predators cannot chew their catch because of the shape of their mouths: They are forced to swallow their prey whole which means we shouldn't be on their menu 😊





*Camp Matrix - Adels Grove
absolute water front*



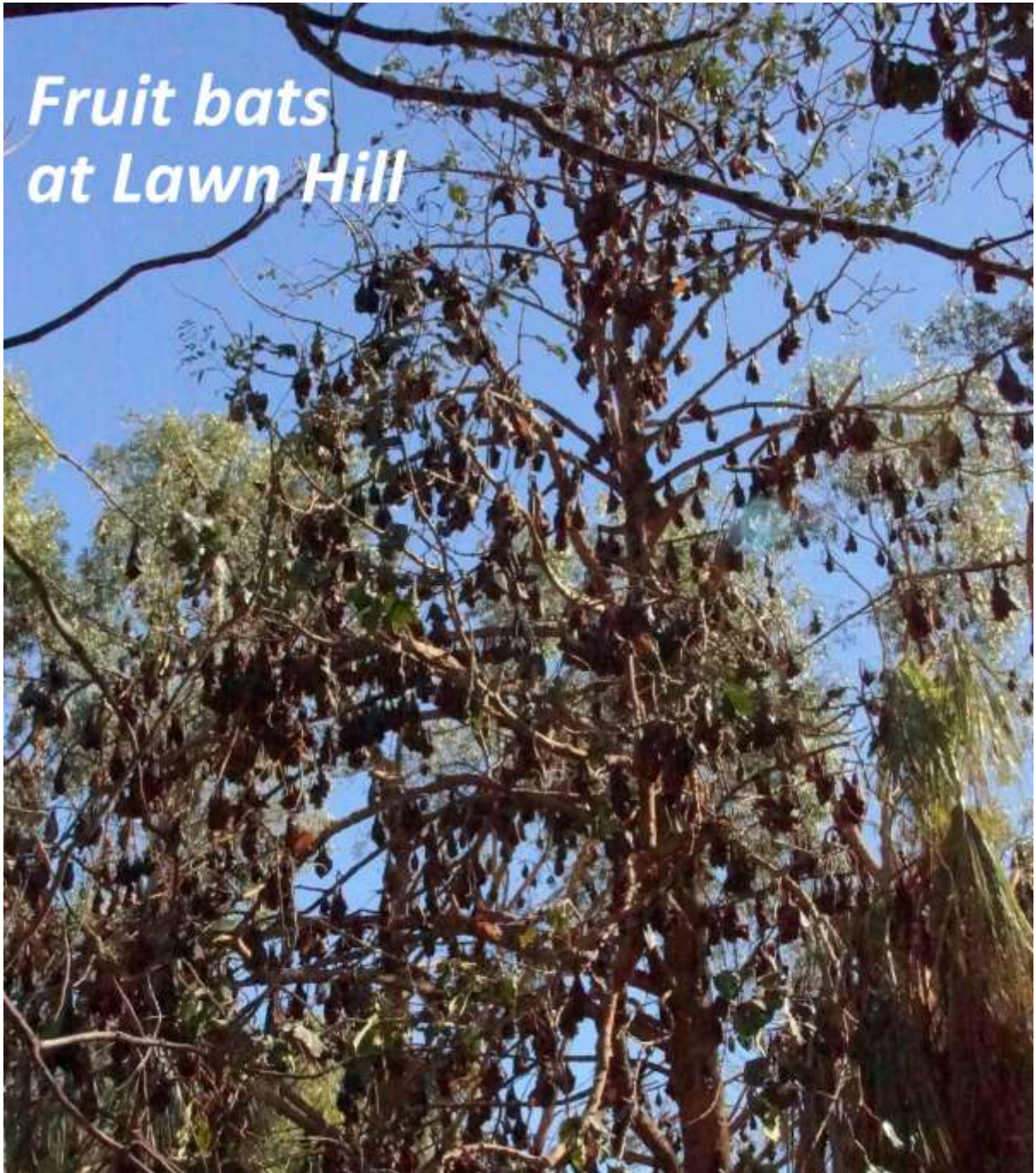
*Grooving
at the Grove*



Note the narrow pointy snout!

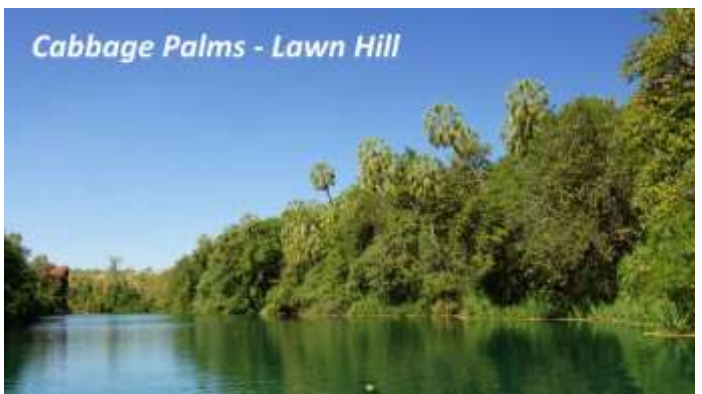
A well fed freshwater croc - approx 4m long

*Fruit bats
at Lawn Hill*



*Fruit bats
at Lawn Hill*





This is the **furthest point West** of our whole expedition – we will be heading a little further North from here to meet the Gulf of Carpentaria and then cut East from there!



Early morning hike at Boodjamulla National Park - Lawn Hill



Lawn Hill Gorge

We have a resident *Willie Wagtail* in the Grove – he combs our camp all day (*we must have landed on his patch!*). His forage is interrupted only by the occasional stoush with a *White Browed Robin* who also claims this territory his. One night a junior *Tawny Frogmouth* dives into camp for a surprise visit.



Willie Wagtail



White Browed Robin



Tawny Frogmouth on the hunt at Adels Grove

Katherine produces her first cheese damper to complement a delicious chicken & white wine stew.



Firing on all cylinders the next morning:



In the Grove I notice a sign on the back of another van: SLOW MOVING VEHICLE.

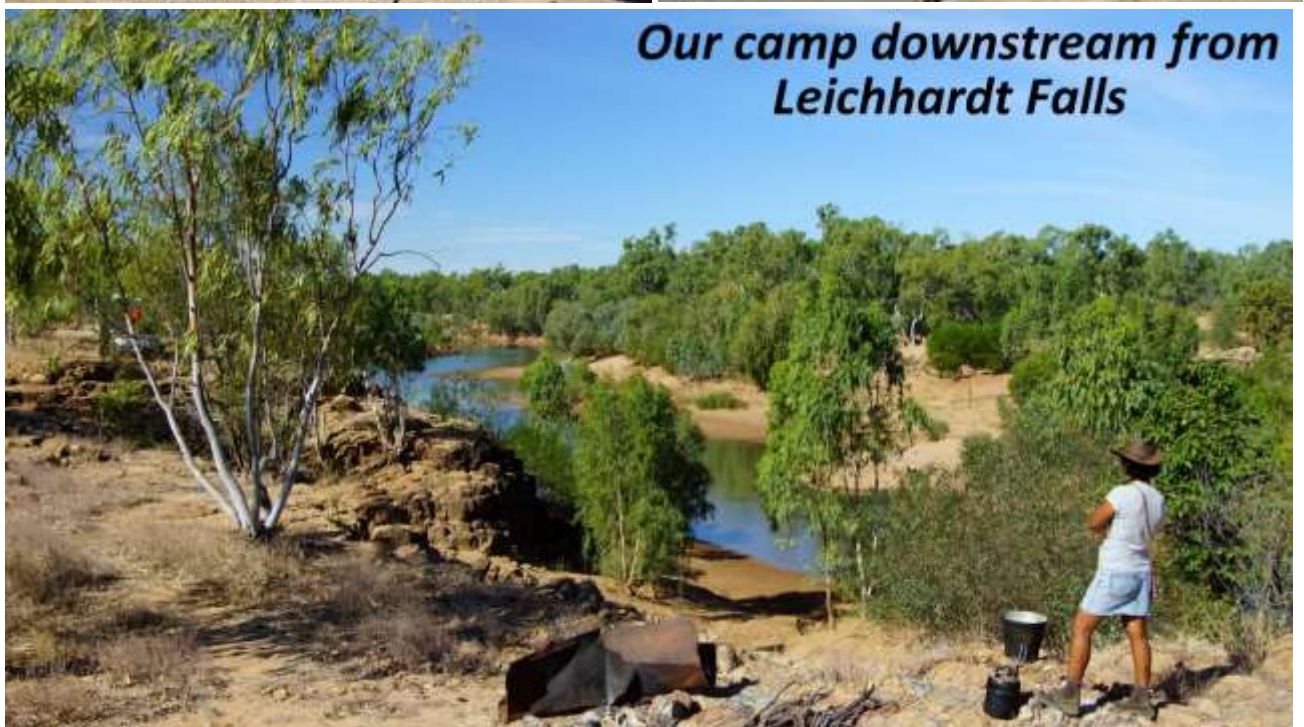
Wondering at first sight what it means I step around the rig to investigate. The obvious is instantly revealed – tow vehicle is a 'Chamberlain' tractor: AUSTRALIA IN SLOW MOTION INDEED!



On the way to Leichhard Falls we stop over at **Tiranna Road House** (27km South of Bourketown) for two nights. We camp on their property a kilometre down by the Gregory River (same river as Adels Grove) all by ourselves. The waters are jam packed full with Red Claw yabbies. Two night with traps out scores us two momentous yabbie feasts. No complaints whatsoever from the camping gourmets!



Leichhardt Falls are next – as expected there is no water flowing at this time because of the dry season. Not often does one get to wander about a dry fall of such size to witness the massive rock wash outs usually hidden beneath the torrents. A huge concrete slab that must weigh several tons lies buckled about 70m away from the causeway – ripped up and drifted off by the current. Hard to imagine water of such force in full flow at the height of the wet seson (Nov to April)!





Leichhardt Falls was named after German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt who vanished without trace on his third expedition from East to West coast in 1848. To this day it is unknown how he met his fate.

When finding the riverside camp at Normanton an awful dustbowl we cruise right on to **Karumba** two days ahead of original plan. Despite warnings, one *must have a prior booking arrangement this time of the year*, we find accommodation without one in what turns out to be the most supremely located van park in town (part of Karumba Lodge Hotel) with water views across the main channel and a cooling breeze. It should be noted, we have now entered “saltie” territory – the land of the saltwater crocodile. Local advice is to stand three meters back from the water’s edge when fishing – not sure if that is enough - will hang back more than a mere 3m. And definitely no swimming anywhere around!



Crocodiles inhabit this area – attacks may cause injury or death - nothing left to guess here!

Karumba welcomes us with a wonderful sunset over the ocean. Nice to smell the salt again after so many weeks away from the coast. A kilo of fresh local Gulf prawns (\$24) adds to our *happy hour* delight!





We book a fishing charter in quest to rustle up some fresh finned friends for a dinner feast.

The **Gulf of Carpentaria** only gets *one-tide-a-day* (similar to the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Mexico or the Persian Gulf): The tidal energy runs from West to East coming from the Indian Ocean but hardly any of this energy manages to push through the narrow 200km gap between Cape York and Papua New Guinea. So, the Gulf is in effect a closed body of water.

Put simply, imagine a first wave going through a bath tub, bouncing off the back wall and running 180° in the opposite direction colliding with the second in-comin wave thus negating its thrust.

It is said, occurrences like this produce some of the best fishing opportunities on the planet except in our case where all the large fish were gone! Although tiddlers were 'on the bite' all day we only score a few big enough for the dinner plate. Just as we pack up our tackle and head back to shore a five-metre Tiger shark cruises leisurely past our boat checking us out: No surprise the larger, smart fish headed for the hills (or a safer reef) that day – at least we didn't have to swim home with that monster!



The outing is a most enjoyable experience nevertheless; just fabulous to be on the water again, sniff the breeze and taste the salt after many weeks of landlocked travels.



View over channel from Karumba Lodge Caravan park

In the 'good old days" **Karumba Lodge Hotel** was famous for its *out-of-hand* brawls on weekends. There are two bars in this establishment: The **Animal Bar** and **Suave Bar**. The first was for workers, dekkies and other considered *riff-raff* while the second was reserved for ship's captains, officials and their ladies. At the **Animal Bar** anything movable used to be firmly bolted down: Chairs, tables even ash trays so not to be used as weapons or missiles in aforementioned regular brawls. Bar staff were issued with shields so they could protect themselves from irate patrons. All part of genuine Australian history, not as refined as some but certainly colourful ☺☺ Rest assured, things have calmed considerably since and the caravan park is a fine facility well worth a stay. We last five nights here...



Bar OPEN



Bar CLOSED



We remind ourselves of our actual *"Cape" mission* as our direction is meant to take us East for the first time. Though, rather than following the easy Savannah Way (bitumen) directly East, we choose the Burke Development Road (challenge) instead: Many days off-the-grid, 560km of gravel and bulldust. It means a large detour and our most remote travel so far - no amenities – no fuel – no radio range. The first leg stretches north, from Karumba to Dunbar, before we turn due east for Chillagoe. Stop over No.1 on route is by the picturesque **Gilbert River**. If we wonder at first whether this challenge is worth the trouble, G. River answers us with a resounding 'YES'!

It is here where we make crucial contact with some very important fellow explorers.

First "family members" Chris and Carmen. They just picked up their brandnew van from AOR (Australian Off Road - same brand as our's) which means *'same wave length - instant family friends'* ☺ We decide we will try to reconnect in a few weeks time and tackle the Cape together!

Second, meet Brian and Joy, all the way from Eden. Not only is Brian an ex-trawlerman he also teaches us the tricks of the trade catching Barramundi from a bridge (100lbs line/triple hook). Many of you might remember, it was one of Katherine's 50th birthday wishes: **To catch a Barramundi.**

Well, the three year wait is over as KJ duly pulls her very first Barra from the waters of the Gilbert under a full moon at 9pm. Needless to say, she is ECSTATIC!

Earlier that day we trap a *Sleepy Cod* in our yabbie trap: Nothing can stand in the way of a delicious seafood dinner!





Notice the big belly on this Cod – It is actually a very large cooked prawn lodged in his stomach, seemingly fresh and undigested, snatched from someone's line and gotten away with. I recover this prawn, Katherine recycles it for bait and ironically bags her big Barra with it!

We travel on for a one-night stay at a swamp filled with thousands of water birds. A monitor sneaks around the bushes nearby and dozens of Road Trains shower us with bulldust on the way to Walsh River, our final stop before Chillgoe.



Gould's Monitor or Sand Goanna

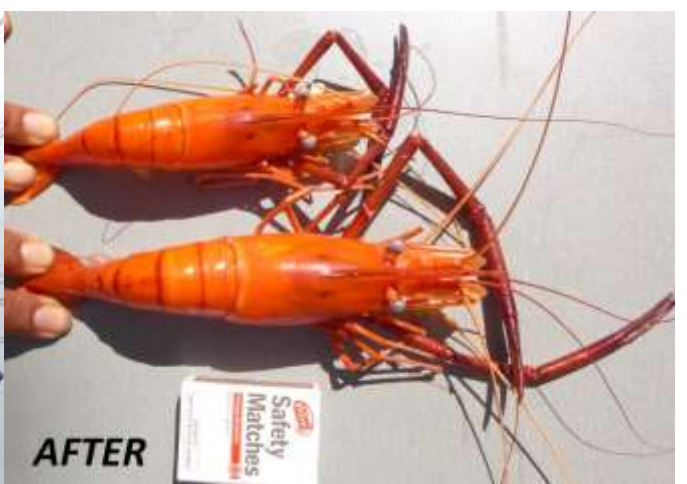


*Whistling Ducks
take flight
above our camp*



Road Trains and bulldust





Our diet is substituted with bush tucker as usual





Walsh River morning



Walsh R. sunset



Exploring Walsh River surrounds



Outdoor living has become second nature by now. To conserve water supplies we supplement with river water for showering and dishes. Solar panels bump up the batteries and we cook a lot on the open fire to curb LPG gas usage. This way we can be off-grid for extended periods until we need to restock food and fuel supplies (we can carry 225l/diesel – 385l/water – solar power: 330Watt).

Coming up... THE CAPE

Watch this space... more soon!



"TheNotSoGrey Go-Mads"

*Greetings from
Chris and Katherine*