

Cape Crusaders – Part 7

Sat Sept /2017 – 12,436km (7,772 miles) on the road

Heading east from Weipa we continue our return from the Cape. Connecting with the PDR again (Peninsula Development Road/Cape's main arterial road) we pass the road sign pointing left and north to Seisia/Bamaga. There is a distinct urge to aim the rig back to the Tip again (such fond memories!) but one must resist and continue the dash south.

One night at **Coen**, after filling up water tanks we decide to take the proven detour via Port Stewart again (same as on the way up) to avoid a particularly bad stretch on the Peninsula's main drag (PDR) The detour turns out to be even better than before as graders have made significant progress to iron out the few rough patches that had existed.



We pass **Magnetic Termite** mounds by the hundreds. These particular Northern Australian residents build tall, flat mounds with sharp, blade like ridges which always align north-south. They can reach heights up to 4m, 3m wide on the S-N and 1m thick on the E-W side.

Despite their name these insects have no magnetite in their DNA nor do they use a compass; they build their mounds this way for temperature control within: At midday zenith a minimum of the mound's surface is exposed to the sun's heat.



A change of diet from fish to a different type of protein presents itself in passing...



Turns out, we still have tons of Weipa fish in the freezer so we, reluctantly must let this opportunity pass.

At **Laura** we finally (and sadly) exit Cape York in a plume of dust. When first nearing the Cape weeks earlier, traffic returning from there is easily identified: Cars, trailers, vans... all smothered in red dust from one end to the other!

We too, now carry this badge of honour, thoroughly initiated by the Cape: It will be some time yet before the last remnants of red dust are purged from body's orifices, toe nails, truck and trailer's nooks and crannies.

A sign at **Palmer River Roadhouse**, the first stop *'below the Cape'*, reminds us: The Tip already lies some 900km behind. How huge is this country...!

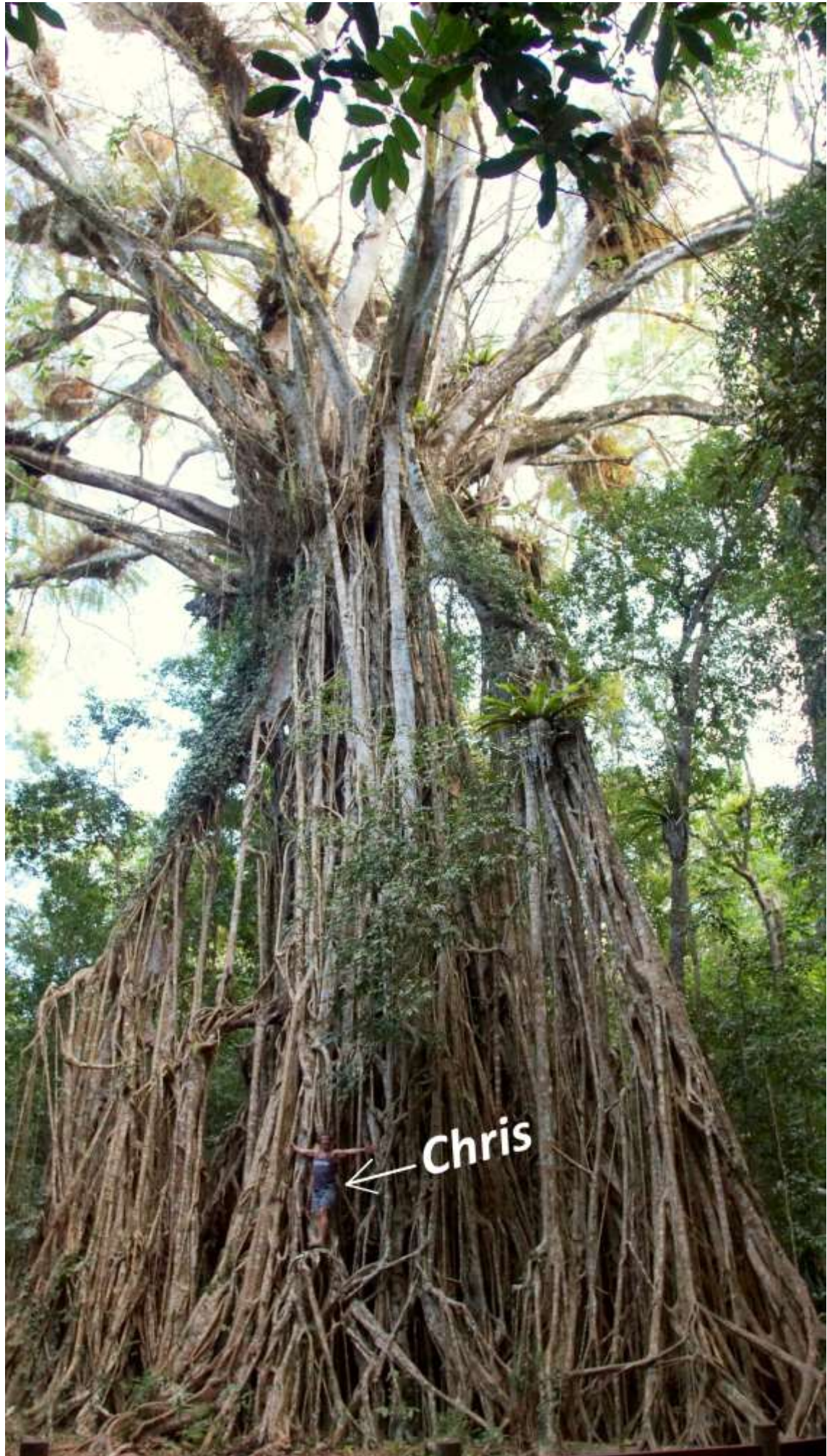
We are headed for the **Atherton Tablelands**, famous food bowl of Queensland. Seldom have we seen such fertile, rich soil. Some say, *"drop a needle into it and you'll grow a pitchfork"* – meaning just about anything grows here – in overabundance.

After the Cape's wilderness experience we feel somewhat at a loss at first but soon find our feet ticking off a bunch of tourist activities like cheese tasting, picturesque waterfalls, hidden lakes, rare birds (the Gouldian Finch), finding the elusive platypus and spotting tree kangaroos.





We encounter this absolutely massive strangler fig... a whole eco system in its canopy!

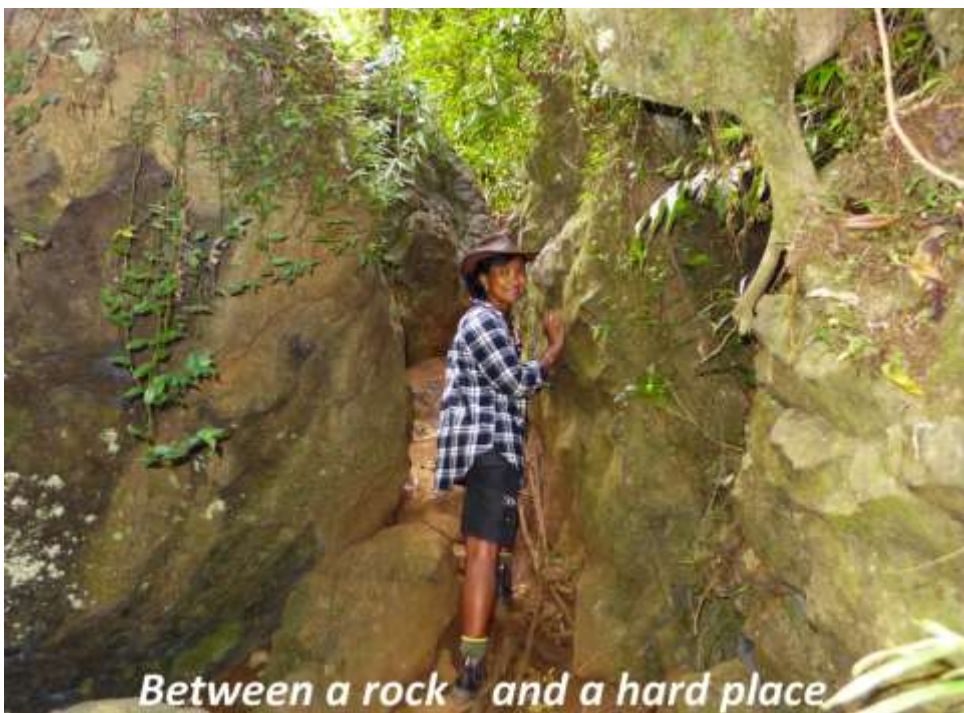




Cathedral Fig Tree



Atherton wilderness



Between a rock and a hard place

Finding water falls

The area of Mila Mila is the centre of tropical QLD's dairy farming



Enough is enough... we are itching to get back to the bush! Fog and rain has hit Atherton (that's why things grow so well here!); high time to head west where the sun shines. We decide on the Kirrama Range Road, a bush track which runs 230km from the town of Kennedy on the Bruce Highway through to Mt. Garnet. **Not suitable for caravans** means little to our Matrix right now although the real test should come later close to Mt. Garnet. When we arrive at half way point of **Blencoe Falls** there is a sign stating '**Road Closed**'. We push on regardless... an earlier check with authorities confirmed the 'all clear' to Mt. Garnet. (They omitted to tell us about a new bridge under construction, **a piece of road missing altogether!**)





Blencoe Falls, one of the most stunning in Australia:
The Blencoe Creek plunges 90m to the pool below, before cascading a further 230m to the base of the gorge.

From there the water races to the croc infested Herbert River which runs out to the Coral Sea near Hinchinbrook Island.

On the way to the Falls' lookout we run over an **Optimistic Termites'** mound site smack-bang in the middle of the track. Wonder, if someone's ever told them about differential's clearances? Despite termites' best efforts these mounds will surely be decapitated and levelled at 'maximum allowable height' by one of those menacing diffs. Poor sods – though full points for trying!





Our run on Mt. Garnet comes to an unexpected and abrupt halt in the middle of a construction site some 40km from target...



There is no way known to man we'd drive almost 200km back to the coast so close to destination!



There is no designated river crossing as such - just a river to cross!

The Germans say *"Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat, dann folgt die Tat"* – ***"With time comes wisdom, then follows the action"***





... who needs a bridge anyway?



Mission accomplished!



One hairpin turn away from rejoining the road!



Time for a well-earned beer at the Innot Hot Springs Pub...



**Money pinned to
'bras for auction' -**

**A novel Aussie
fund raiser idea
for the
Breast Cancer
Foundation!**

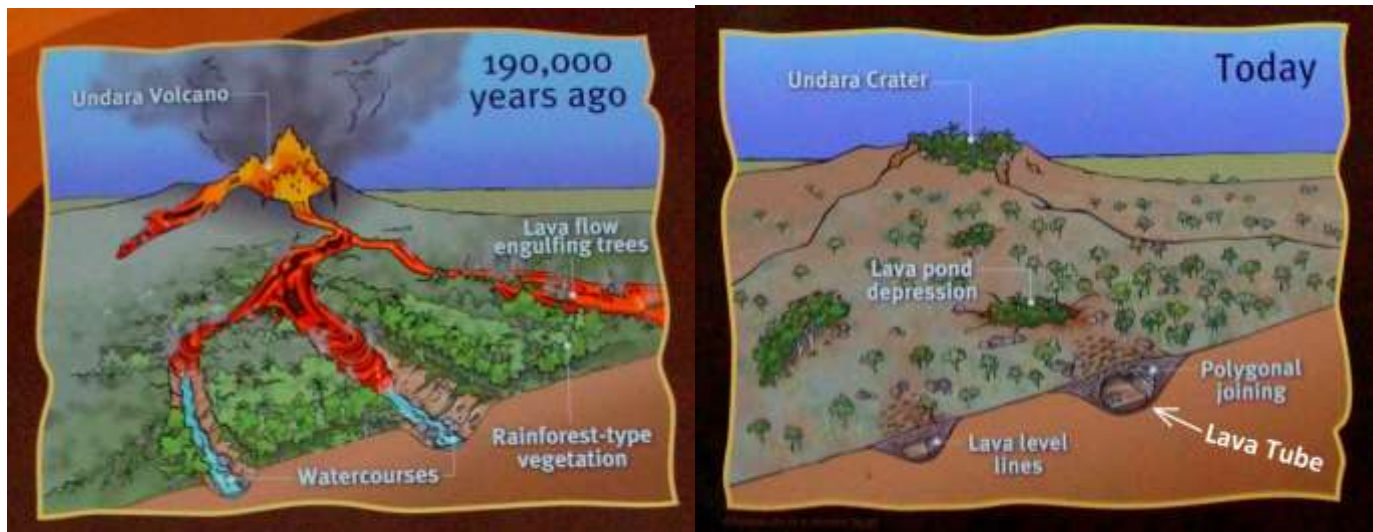


Beer can aeroplane

On route to the **Undara Lava Tubes** we stopover at yet another Station called **Pinnarendi**. Not to be missed under any circumstance if travelling through here so we are told. Indeed, their pizzas are out of this world and the coffee (locally grown - from Mareeba) is the best between Melbourne and Thursday Island! **Ron and Nadine** run a cattle station but have expanded into tourism like so many other stations across Australia. This is their first season and they have already made a name for themselves in the gourmet food world around here. Indeed the word is out - the day we leave a dozen keen customers fly in for lunch with their small planes: Ron and Nadine have their own airstrip just around from the homestead if anyone is tempted...



Undara is well known for its network of lava tubes, over 160km and the longest in the world. Many of which have collapsed with time and can therefore be entered. Volcanic activity around here has been quite recent (in geological terms - 190 thousand years ago). The volcano is deemed 'dormant' (not extinct) so could technically become active again. Before it does so we enjoy exploring the tubes...



Cobbold Gorge Nature Refuge is next. These 30m deep sandstone cliffs, barely 2m apart in some places, lie on private property and have become a major attraction since creation of the Refuge in 2009. Water levels remain constant even in the dry season at an average depth of 9m. In the wet season enormous amounts of water gush through the gorge raising the surface level an additional 15m.





Cobbold Gorge facilities



A little winter swim at Cobbold



Cobbold air in winter: 33C warrants a cool off

Unique to Australia: Signs in bathrooms (and pubs) never cease to entertain. We covered the subject of ‘dunny frogs’ in an earlier report but here we have a bunch of snakes thrown into the mix to liven up the daily call of nature. One can only guess the anticipation our overseas visitors must be feeling 😊



On the way across the Dividing Range to Ingham near the coast we must not miss Australia's tallest waterfall with a vertical free drop of 268m: **Wallaman Falls**





The trek to the bottom carries a dire warning stating “*people have died here*” but we manage!

WARNING ACHTUNG 警告

Be prepared for a difficult walk

Djyinda walk—
3.2km return (allow 2 hrs)

Only fit walkers should attempt this walk. **People have died here. Others have suffered heat stress and heart conditions walking this track. It might look easy but it becomes steep and rough halfway down.**

Enjoy the view and walk safely:

- Be prepared for the long, hot walk back up the stream bed.
- Take care not to slip on the track's rough, uneven surface.
- Stay well hydrated at all times.

Only fit walkers should attempt this walk. People have died here. Others have suffered heat stress and heart conditions walking this track. It might look...



Well prepared, we emerge unscathed from the treacherous trek to the bottom of Wallaman Falls 😊

At the coastal town of **Lucinda** we view this impressive loading jetty (longest in the Southern hemisphere!): It carries a conveyer belt (and a road!) hauling sugar to cargo ships 5.6km off the coast, destined mainly for China and Canada.



At **Ingham** it is time again for 'dinner out' – this place is said to be 'full of Italians' (they came here in the early days as cane cutters). Therefore it should not be too difficult to find a decent meal and indeed we score... or they scored... so scrumptious were my 'gnocchi' and Katherine's 'duck' we book our table twice in two consecutive days. Our fears are confirmed - we are putting on weight...



Stellar dinners to be had here – join hosts Rick & Tracy at Enrico's Restaurant

Ignoring the weight issue - Ice cream for morning tea on the way to Townsville



Townsville is next on the list for a 'blast of the past' with Gina and Udo (he suggested the Frosty Mango as a must...!) who've been living here for three years. Our friendship goes back some 40 years in history, back to the *snow ski instructor* days in Germany. Udo and wife Gina are two of a number who, following my suggestions in the early eighties, chose to immigrate to OZ and built a successful career in the land downunder.



Katherine suggests a day trip to Magnetic Island is a must.



Kapok trees are widespread in Far North Queensland and we also find a good number of these on Magnetic island.

Their flowers signify the dry season and are edible.

Katherine always keeps an eye out for bush tucker and is keen to try...



We feel lucky to be able to finally swim in the ocean.

Horseshoe Bay has a netted area that keeps sharks, crocs and stingers at a safe distance. The water is a very pleasant 24C and we thoroughly enjoy the 'dunk' which has been sorely missed on our travels so far. When you see pictures of blue skies and pristine waters it is easy to forget that you can't enter the wet element in most places (some inland creeks exempted) no matter how big the temptation: One could fatally become part of the food chain around these latitudes!

Skies are now getting too overcast in Townsville for us sun lovers so we hastily move West again. The firmament duly brightens up, it is getting hot again and some rehydration called for: No better place for a 'coldie' than the Prairie Hotel Roadhouse on the *Savanna Way* just before Hughenden:





The next bush camp follows 68km north of Hughenden in a National Park: **Porcupine Gorge** - A vast 27km long chasm in dry savanna country. Through the centre runs Porcupine Creek, a tributary of Queensland's longest river, the Flinders. The creek provides a permanent water source to wildlife and a host of birds. The gorge is 120m deep and was formed 200 million years ago.

It hasn't rained here for six years (!) but despite the crippling drought there are number of waterholes remaining, many holding sizeable fish and deep enough for a refreshing dip (croc free – they haven't ventured this far... yet).



Porcupine Gorge



Porcupine Gorge



Porcupine Gorge cool down



Porcupine Gorge



Porcupine Gorge - Blantyre sandstone wash out erosion



**Prickly
river bed
beauty**

**Porcupine
Gorge**



Porcupine Gorge's own gorgeous 'David'

The most exciting part at the Gorge was encountering some new friends not previously spotted anywhere:

Meet **Rufous Bettong** otherwise known as Kangaroo Rat. This peculiar fellow, a marsupial, is neither rat nor kangaroo but a quirky combination of both.

Its forelegs are tiny and only used in slow propulsion or to pick up feed. Otherwise the Bettong hops just like a kangaroo using its long tail for balance.

The Rufous' large back feet are kangaroo like in shape.

The rest of the body and colour is that of a rat, though the size of a large cat.

We couldn't help throwing them a few pumpkin seeds to keep them interested long enough to take pictures.

Every night they showed up very much to our delight 😊😊



Rufous Bettong



Rufous Bettong



Not shy at all!

Back feet shaped like a kangaroo's



"TheNotSoGrey Go-Mads"

***Greetings from
Chris and Katherine***

Post Script:

We recently learned about the loss of a dear friend at Hawks Nest who lost her battle with cancer during our absence. In reflection on her life we like to thank all our precious readers, family and friends alike, for being part of our lives. We feel very blessed to have you and to be able to share our experiences with you while we still have the opportunity.