Cape York Trip - Sat 1 July to Wed 10th August 2006

PART 2 - Cairns to Cape York and Return - Tues 12 July to Thur 27 July

Wed 12th July - Cairns to Daintree

We awoke to an overcast day with the weather prediction being showers. After breaking camp and heading north to Port Douglas with Richard leading the showers turned to rain. We detoured into Port Douglas and a short stop at Mossman Gorge which found us in heavy rain. We had a dismal walk to the gorge where the river was flowing fast.

Arriving in Daintree village early afternoon after driving in rain and drizzle we were thankful we had booked cabins. Steve had arrived the night before and Craig and Colin arrived a bit later and were also able to take cabins. The Cape York party was all together for the trip ahead.

We all had dinner at the café across the road and while the kids watched TV we had a bit of a chat about past trips. We agreed to get away about 8.30am to beat the tour companies to the Daintree Ferry.

Thurs 13th July - Daintree to Cooktown

When we woke in the morning it was still raining and after breakfast we set off for the Daintree Ferry and the Bloomfield Track with Craig leading.

As it was so miserable we only stopped off once at Noah’s Beach before reaching our first river crossing. The water was gushing over the wear above door sill height.

Craig went first without any drama and we all followed. There were a number of smaller creek crossings and then we came across a larger one with a rocky bottom.
Craig went over first with no drama and then a foolish fellow in a Territory who was waiting took off. Unfortunately for him water flooded his air intake and he stopped in the middle of the river. Craig came back to try and pull him out but the snatch wasn’t long enough. Richard reversed back and towed him out with a snatch attached to the tow bar. When the fellow opened the door to get out there was a gush of water as the vehicle emptied out.

Steve who was a mechanic suggested to the fellow to remove his sparkplugs and try to dry out his engine. Time was pressing on so we left this fellow and we traveled on. Although the road was wet it wasn’t really muddy and we stopped for lunch at the Lions Den Hotel.

It was still wet and windy so we decided to go into Cooktown to find cabin type accommodation. Some of us booked into the Big4 whilst the rest stayed in accommodation opposite. After having a look around town we all did our own thing for dinner and retired. If this was the dry season what would the wet be like?

Fri 14th July - Cooktown to Musgrave Roadhouse

Awaking to a wet and windy day we decided to press on with Colin leading. After a good stretch out of Cooktown the road became dirt and we had to slow down. The conditions were a mixed bag with well graded sections and some rough sections with a couple of easy creek crossings.

We stopped for morning tea near one of the crossings and then continued on, stopping at Old Laura on the way to look at the old homestead and then detoured into Laura for lunch.

Richard found his front number plate was only just hanging on so removed it.

Mixed conditions found us at Musgrave Roadhouse early afternoon where we set camp.

The skies were still overcast but the rain had eased off much to our joy and this allowed some of the guys to dry stuff off. There were quite a large number of travelers heading both north and south. Only one of the amenity blocks was open so the ladies had to share with the men.
Surprising how many guards were posted. Most of us had dinner at the roadhouse and after a chat we retired.

Sat 15th July - Musgrave Roadhouse to Morton Telegraph Station

The day dawned overcast again with threatening showers. We inspected the vehicles and Craig found he had lost a bolt out of the suspension however was able to find a temporary replacement at the roadhouse. Richards’s water reservoir was dry and needed topping up while Paul needed to top up his oil.

We had breakfast broke camp and got away about 8.30am heading for Coen with Paul leading. On the way in we saw the areas that had been damaged by water and photos posted on the ExploreOZ site. The repair crews have done a remarkable job in fixing the road and they were now making permanent repairs to the temporary ones.

Arriving in Coen around morning tea time we had a cuppa and a look around.

It was then back on the road again to Archer River Roadhouse for lunch where an Archerburger (hamburger with the lot) was the order of the day.

We crossed the Archer River which was only axle depth and passed a Nissan Patrol that had been washed off the causeway early on in the season. The road from Archer River to Weipa is maintained by Comalco and was like a highway however it deteriorated dramatically after the turnoff to Morton Telegraph Station our destination for the night.

Crossing the Wenlock we arrived about 4pm and set camp. This is a great camping area with plenty of flat grassy ground and reasonable amenities just near the Wenlock River Bridge. We cooked our dinner separately and then had some refreshments and a chat. Richard got out the bullroarer and glow sticks and put on a show and the kids then took over. We retired when the station generator was turned off at 10pm. We found it easy to tell the time as the empty fuel drums contracting in the cold chimed throughout the night.
Sun 16th July - Morton Telegraph Station to Cockatoo Creek

We awoke to a foggy morning which heralded a fine day.

Richard led off and headed for Bramwell Junction where the OTL proper started. At Bramwell Junction we stopped for some refreshments and Craig took the lead after we were told drowned vehicles on the OTL were being recovered on a daily basis.

Our first test came at Palm Creek where there was a steep muddy drop-off into the creek with a fairly steep exit.

We all got through without any drama. A couple more crossings found us at Dulhunty River where we had lunch.

After lunch a couple of easy crossings found us at Gunshot Creek.

We were lucky to find that an easier side track had been created although it was very boggy.

We all got through OK however Paul needed some assistance and bent a sidestep in the process. Previous travelers with a sense of humor had nailed up a sign on the opposite bank ‘Gunshot Spares’. There were mufflers exhaust pipes and all manner of things automotive which had either fallen or been ripped of vehicle attempting the more challenging almost vertical creek entries.
We kept going and came to Cockatoo Creek which was rocky with some holes and required a detour up river before crossing although Colin just charged straight across the middle.

After we were all through OK we decided to set camp as it was late afternoon. We found a nice flat area just off the road with a track down to the creek where we had a relaxing swim.

Dinner followed and we gathered for a chat before retiring.

**Mon 17th July - Cockatoo Creek to Twin Falls**

Breaking camp after breakfast at a reasonable hour we planned to get in early to Twin Falls because of the crowds. We arrived around lunch time finding many of the camp sites already taken and set camp.

We all had a swim in the magnificent falls at this location. There are actually a number of different falls to pick from with Twin Falls being the most popular.

After the swim we had lunch and then some of us had another swim.

Just prior to dinner Richard completed a vehicle inspection and found his radiator leaking big time. He had a look and found a fan blade has dug into the radiator core. Steve had a look and couldn’t believe it. It was dusk and too late to do anything however Craig gave Richard a plug tablet to try the next morning. Unfortunately this didn’t work.

The army pulled in with about a dozen vehicles and trainee drivers and we found out the lead 100 series had had a slow speed head on. The Andersons hosted the evening chat and fire.
18th July - Twin Falls to Bamaga/Seisa Tues

We got away early for this section of the OTL which had many and varied creek crossings. This in conjunction with Richard having to refill his radiator every 10ks or so made a slow trip. We all put on blinds apart from Craig at the last crossing at Nolans Brook which was fairly deep. A party traveling south who had just crossed the creek informed us that a Jackaroo who had crossed the previous day had gone across in the wrong spot, floated almost rolled and hydraulic’d his motor. This crossing was the last one before the Jardine River ferry crossing. We later found this vehicle at Loyalty Beach waiting to be put into a container and shipped back to Melbourne.

At the ferry crossing Richard phoned the NRMA for advice on a vehicle repairer and was given the name of Cape York Repairs and Spares in Bamaga. He phoned them and arranged for an inspection on arrival.

We arrived at 4pm and the inspection was bad news, the radiator was not repairable and would need replacing. A phone call was placed to order the new radiator for the next day if we were lucky.

Driving on to the Seisa Caravan Park Craig and Richard decided to stay and the others moved on to Loyalty Beach. Richard just wanted to set camp after a grueling day nursing the vehicle while Craig was looking for a cabin. Craig managed to get one for the following two nights. Craig and Richard set camp had dinner and a chat before retiring. The others all set camp at Loyalty Beach.

Wed 19th July - Seisa

We all met after a late breakfast for a trip out to the tip of Cape York in yet more rain with Richard traveling in Colin’s vehicle. After a tour of Punsand Bay Resort cut short by a heavy downpour we traveled on to the Cape York parking area where we alighted for the 1 hr return trip to the tip via the ridge line, sunshine at last. On reaching the tip marked with a small sign we contemplated on our own thoughts and took the obligatory photos.

Returning via the beach Richard phoned the mechanic and found the radiator had been delivered so it was a dash back to the caravan park to get his vehicle to the mechanic by 3pm. There was a tour bus with a broken spring and a
Pathfinder with a broken diff already being worked on. Richard left his car and Craig gave him a lift back to camp.

We all had tea at the Seisa caravan park as it had a café. Richard and Craig had booked a tour of Thursday Island the following day and the others were doing their own thing. We also agreed that the east coast would be miserable due to strong winds so altered our itinerary to stay and extra night in Seisa where we would all camp at Loyalty Beach.

Thurs 20th July – Seisa

Craig and Richard were up early to catch the ferry and after an hour found us on Thursday Island. A short bus trip around the island to see the sights including the museum and we were then left to our own devices for a few hours before the return journey.

Richard contacted Mark (Wheelerdog) from the Overlander forum who had only just moved to the island and arranged to meet him for coffee and lunch. Mark showed Richard around a bit more and then had coffee where they ran into Craig. Craig went for a walk around the shops and Richard and Mark went to meet Mark’s wife for lunch. Mark took us to an out of the way place where the locals ate so it was a reasonable price. Craig bought a pearl for Margaret at a reasonable price.

While Craig watched over his kids in the park Richard had a schooner at the Federal Hotel. It was then time to return to the boat for a rough trip home.

Richard phoned the mechanic and was relieved to find his vehicle had been repaired at the ballpark quoted price.

Craig dropped him off and he picked his vehicle up and returned to camp. Whilst at the mechanic another 100 series was there having the front diff replaced. The others told us they had been out to Jacky Jacky airfield to look at the plane wrecks and found them all.

Fri 21st July – Seisa

Richard rose early to the sound of a cargo boat being loaded at the wharf and strolled down for a few early morning photographs. A lone fisho was casting a
lure. All of a sudden his line tightened and he hooked up, then another. Another fisho turned up and was hooking them as well. It was on!

Richard went back to his tent and got his rod which he had used the previous day without luck. By the time he got back the original fisherman had eight. Richard cast and hooked up after the second cast and dragged in a nice Trevally. He cast again and hooked up a second time ending up with two nice keepers.

The fish went off the bite as quickly as they had come on and it was great fun while it lasted.

Craig and Richard packed up ready for the move to Loyalty Beach that day. They planned to drive up the east coast beach to Somerset and then join the others in the afternoon for a trip to Mutee Point to look at the old WWII installations near the mouth of the Jardine River. Steve decided to stay in camp. On the trip to Somerset that Colin had done the previous day Colin mentioned a low branch. Craig found it and as it also had vines hanging off it which Craig caught he dragged the whole tree onto his vehicle. After some bush saw and axe work the tree was cleared and we continued on.

It was very disappointing to see the amount of rubbish washed up on the beach.

After lunch we headed off to look around Mutee Point and we found the old radar installation and gun trenches we were looking for.

We then headed back to Loyalty Beach where Craig and Richard set camp.
Richard phoned Sam at Weipa Auto and Electrics from ExplorOZ to organise an oil change and Colin arranged a full service. We all watched in awe as the sun set over the sea.

We had dinner with Richard cooking one of his Trevally but he found it pretty tough not knowing the secret recipe. We had a chat around the camp fire and Andrew found a large cane toad and dispatched it to its maker.

**Sat 22\(^{nd}\) July - Seisa to Morton TG Station**

A late start got us away for this leg. The road was excellent with few rough corrugations but none of the horror corrugations Kevin had been warned us about.

We traveled to the original Jardine crossing finding the water level high and continued on crossing on the Jardine River ferry.

Steve was leading and Richard following. Steve radioed a van approaching on a narrow sandy section. It appeared in front of Richard on a sharp curve and locked its brakes swerving into some deep sand. Richard slowed to a halt. The van was stuck fast and Craig had to snatch it.

We stopped at Fruit Bat Falls for lunch and Richard had a quick dip.

Continuing on we stopped for afternoon tea at Bramwell Junction. Steve was disappointed he could not restock with beer as it was only available for those camping. We reached Morton Telegraph Station late afternoon and set camp prior to having dinner and a few refreshments, sharing them round.
Sun 23rd July - Morton TG Station to Weipa

We got away at a reasonable hour for the short section to Weipa via Battavia Downs. Good road conditions quickly found us at the turnoff to Batavia Downs where the road deteriorated.

There were two creek crossings. The first one up around the wheel arches where Richard tied off the fan to stop it spinning and the second shallow with a steep slippery exit. Back on the main Weipa Road it was like a highway and we arrived early afternoon. We had booked sites at the caravan park the previous day which was just as well as it was fairly crowded and we had some lunch.

The afternoon was spent around the pool while Paul took James to Weipa hospital to have his wrist X-rayed. We all ordered pizza for dinner and sat around tables joined communally together had a few refreshments which we had restocked and we then retired.

Mon 24th Mon July - Weipa

We had an easy day just lazing around camp. Colin and Richard had their vehicles serviced. Colin’s rear diff breather had come off and his diff was full of water so the oil was changed. Paul took James to the hospital to have the X-ray examined. The break had healed well and the plaster finally removed. Craig and Paul did mine tours with their families during the day. We had dinner then a few drinks.

As this was the last night we would all be together as Colin and Steve were heading for Chili Beach and the rest of us were heading into Lakefield NP. A surprise 55th birthday party was put on for Richard complete with a birthday cake and musical candle. We then all retired.

Tues 25th July - Weipa to Lakefield NP

We broke camp about 9am and after fueling up and obtaining further supplies headed for the Archer River where an uneventful journey apart from an oversize vehicle found us having an early lunch. The river had dropped significantly and was now below the road level.

Pushing on to Coen and then Musgrave Roadhouse we turned off for Lakefield NP. On the way in Craig who was leading disturbed a flock of hundreds of black cockatoos whose cacophony set the air alight with noise. We pulled into a camping area on Salty Creek only to discover that the two guys who arrived 5 minutes before us found a fair sized croc sunning itself on the causeway. This
and the fact that we saw wild pigs within a stones throw was enough to encourage us to search out another campsite for the night.

We eventually set up camp late afternoon on the North Kennedy River at the Hann crossing where the banks were steep and rocky so hopefully not suitable for crocs.

We had dinner a bit of a chat and checked for any red eyes of crocs and retired.

**Wed 26th July - Lakefield NP to Atherton**

We awoke to another fine day and checked our limbs and found none missing. Following breakfast we got away for a run through some of the lagoons in the park.

It wasn’t long before we lost Paul. He stopped for some photo opportunities and Richard didn’t wait at the junction that he and Craig had turned off. Paul went down the main route trying to catch up and was out of radio range before we realised what had happened. We retraced our tracks and followed in hot pursuit finally getting into radio range and then catching him.

We dropped into Red Lily lagoon and this habitat of birds made the Lakefield detour worth it. There was a myriad of birds in amongst the large red flowering water lilies and it was a site to behold.

We took many photos and then continued on to White Lily lagoon which had many white water lilies but not much bird life. Calling into the Kalpower Campground we found this the pick of the campgrounds in the park with grassy sites and good amenities.

Leaving the park we continued on to Laura where we said goodbye to Craig and we had lunch. We traveled onto Lakeland to refuel and found Craig finishing lunch. Richard came across Ivan from the LCOOL and ExplorOZ group and found it was his 100 series that had broken the front diff. They had a bit of a chat with Ivan telling Richard he had broken the diff on the return trip across Nolans Brook when he had lifted a wheel.

It was time to move on and good blacktop found us fairly quickly turning off at Mt Molloy to Mareeba and Atherton. We hadn’t booked anything in Atherton and thought cabins would be a nice break but couldn’t find any in town. The tourist
information centre was able to book cabins at Lake Tinaroo Holiday Park just down the road. We booked in relaxed had some dinner and sat down to plan the next day and then we retired.

Thur 27th July - Lake Tinaroo

After a great night’s sleep and some breakfast we got away just before 9am for a circuit of Lake Tinaroo with Richard leading. We stopped off at the dam wall and looked over the spillway then traveled to Platypus Point which juts out into the lake. There was light drizzle and the road which was dirt was very greasy.

Although we saw timber felling machinery in operation we didn’t meet any logging trucks. We stopped at a crater lake for a look and then the Cathedral Fig before heading for Lake Barrine where we stopped at the lake and Richard purchased a red cedar bowl. We also had a look at the two huge Kauri trees.

We the headed for Malanda and Milla Milla where we had pies from the bakery for lunch. We had a quick look at Milla Milla Falls which are very picturesque

and then headed back through Atherton to Tolga and stopped at the woodworking factory but were disappointed at the prices. Heading on to Mareeba we visited Coffee Works where we had a tasting of coffee, tea, coffee liquor and chocolate. We were a bit disappointed with the coffees however found the tea, coffee liquor and chocolate excellent. We all came away with a purchase or two.

On the way back we stopped at the war museum which is an impressive private collection of war relics. Whilst there Richard phoned Colin and found he and Steve were at Mareeba buying supplies. We traveled on to Atherton where we met them and agreed to meet for dinner at a Chinese restaurant Richard had been too a few years previously.

Richard and Paul did some shopping while waiting for the others to book into their caravan park. We had a very nice Chinese feed and a few drinks again toasting Richards’s birthday. We also agreed on a plan-of-attack for the next day to meet at Maccas at 10am the next day for a short run to Innot Hot Springs via Herberton and Ravenshoe. We then returned to our respective caravan parks.