

## **Cruising to the Kimberly**

**Author and Photography - Richard Windeyer ©**

### **Part 3 of 3 - Drysdale River Station to Sydney**

#### **Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> July - Mitchell Falls to Drysdale River Station**

Craig was away early and we followed some time later, taking it easy, back down the Mitchell Falls Road. We stopped off at a location just before King Edward River where we had been told there was some excellent aboriginal art and marveled at how distinct it still was compared to other examples we had seen.

We arrived back at Drysdale River Station mid afternoon finding Chris already there and booked in to the campsite and also booked in for dinner at the restaurant. The dinner was very nice being a selection of two soups, two mains and two deserts. I elected for the lamb shank and veggies followed by mud cake and ice-cream washed down with a nice red.

After dinner we adjourned to the communal fire and chatted to some bull catchers who had a contract in the area and also a truck driver taking a load from Broome to Mitchell Falls for one of the tour companies. We wished him well on that atrocious road.

#### **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> August - Drysdale River Station to Turkey Creek**

Packing up we left Drysdale River Station ensuring we had enough fuel to get us along the Munja Track to Walcott Inlet out of Mt Elizabeth station and then back to Mt Barnett.

The Kalumburu Road and Gibb River Road were negotiated without any drama and we arrived at Mt Elizabeth just before lunch time. Chris elected to leave his camper at the station whilst the others decided to carry on with their campers after advice from the station. We paid our fees for entry to the station and for also a maintenance fee for Bush Safaris to maintain the track.

Heading off we stopped at a lovely creek crossing for lunch and having fairly detailed track notes from Bushtrack Safaris with waypoints for various points of interest we stopped to view the 'Dulux Gallery'.

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We were told this gallery had been a recent failed experiment to continue the age old tradition of rock painting by a new generation of aborigines. Unfortunately the painting had been completed over some of the old art.



We negotiated the very rough Magpie Jump up and came across fellow travelers Peter and Denise in their Patrol ute towing a camper resting at a nasty angle in a huge wash away at the bottom of the jump up. With directions from Steve, I was able to snatch Peter out with a couple of pulls and he only had a couple of

dents down the side of his vehicle.

They told us they were friends of the camp hosts and were carrying urgent supplies of a dozen bottles of champagne. These were still intact much to their relief.

It was getting late so we set up camp at Turkey Creek just before dusk and our new found friends joined us. A quick dip in 2" of water in the creek before dinner was nice and invigorating.

### Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> August - Turkey Creek to Bachsten Camp

Breaking camp Steve found his two front shocks, installed new just before the trip, were leaking oil and Ross found his drivers side lower control arm anchor point bent. Steve tried straightening the control arm with a winch pull but was unsuccessful.



We stopped to view another art gallery which was original and also the Jameson Arch in the Caroline Ranges. Negotiating many sharp steep creek crossings we stopped at Pearson Creek for morning tea and then came down

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the Bachsten Jump up meeting another fellow traveler on his way out. He kindly waited until we were all down before heading up the jump up. Just before Bachsten Camp we spotted some more unmarked rock art which was very faded just before arriving at the camp for lunch. Most of us



elected to stay at this camp with its excellent bush amenities and do day trips whilst Chris and Carol moved onto Calder River so they were in striking distance of Walcott Inlet.

After setting up camp and whilst some had a nice shower I elected to have a quick dip at the swimming hole. Our camp hosts made sure we were happily set up supplying us with firewood for the night. This bush camp had been set up by Bushtrack Safaris for their tour vehicles and tag along's but was also available to other travelers at \$10 a person per night. The amenities were pretty good seeing as this was such a remote location. Bushtrack Safaris have their operation including Bachsten Camp up for sale after 20 years. If there is not a buyer the operation will be closed down and Mt Elizabeth will not maintain the tracks as they are on crown land.

We had a communal dinner of spaghetti pasta cooked in a large frying pan with everyone pitching in to help. This was followed by damper cooked over some hot coals from the fire in a Bedourie camp oven spread with either jam or honey and washed down with whatever took our fancy.

### Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> August - Bachsten Camp

Whilst Steve cleaned out one of the drawers in the rear of his vehicle which had a spillage of fruit juice and milk we decided to do the walk from camp to the Honeycomb caves about a kilometer away. On the way we viewed some nice rock art and a couple of well developed bower birds nests from previous



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seasons. The caves were amazing with slender pillars supporting a huge lump of rock overhead creating the roof of the honeycomb cave system.

Arriving back at camp Steve had finished his cleanup job and we packed lunch and headed for Wren Gorge. We had lunch before descending into the gorge for a swim in the large plunge pool below a lovely waterfall. There was some indigenous art in the vicinity.

Leaving the gorge we headed for the Calder River and the lily pond finding Chris had set up camp at this location and having caught some live bait had lines set hoping for a big one.

We headed back to camp and stoked up the fire for a communal roast followed by spotted dog made to a modified recipe. Refreshments in camp were getting light so we had to start rationing ourselves.

### Monday 4<sup>th</sup> August - Bachsten Camp to Mount Elizabeth

Chris arrived from the Calder River and we headed back to Mount Elizabeth station on this slow leg taking just on 7 hours for the 150km. We stopped for lunch at Turkey Creek for lunch. Ross had been off the fags for a number of weeks so to celebrate John made a large roll your own.



We arrived at the station just before dusk and set up camp. There were already quite a number of campers in residence but still plenty of room. We set a fire in one of the fireplaces using wood available from a huge woodpile in the campground and had individual meals.

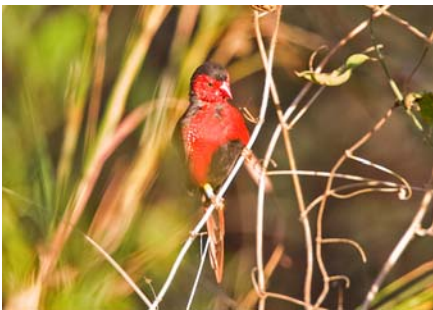
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### **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August - Mt Elizabeth to Mornington**

Breaking camp and heading off we stopped at Mt Barnett to fuel up and headed south turning off at the Mt House Rd for Mornington Wilderness Camp. We stopped at the start of the road at the communication booth to check on the availability of accommodation. Only 50 vehicles are allowed in at any one time and once the quota is reached each day any others are turned away.

We were in luck and proceeded the 80km of good dirt road to the camp. Campsites set off the road in the bush on Annie Creek with a good amenities block and a cafe within walking distance of our camp. The café did meals for the safari camp and anyone else who booked.



Birdlife was in abundance with crimson finches showing their brilliant plumage however the elusive Gouldian finch was not to be seen. Steve helped out a fellow traveler we had passed on the way in repair two punctures and we then had some refreshments at the cafe before dinner back at camp.

### **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> August - Mornington**

Whilst Chris and Carol headed off to Dimond Gorge for a canoe trip the rest of us headed to Sir John Gorge and I had a quick dip in this child unfriendly swimming area. Heading back to the vehicles we came across a small lizard that wasn't scared of us taking photos up very close.

We then headed for Cadjeput Hole for lunch and a swim in a section of the Fitzroy River which had nice shallow sandy banks and was great for the kids. Mid afternoon we headed back to camp to prepare another communal roast using the camp provided BBQ grill for heat.

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### **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> August - Mornington to Derby**

The trip to Derby was uneventful as we passed through the spectacular Leopold Ranges and finally hit bitumen before arriving in Derby just after lunch. We passed one of the many grass fires we saw on the trip.



We had planned to stay at Birdwood Downs just out of Derby on recommendation from a fellow traveler but found it closed due to the owners being out fighting bush fires.

Luckily Chris and Carol who had traveled ahead had secured accommodation for us at the Kimberly Entrance Caravan Park. We set up camp and headed out to the wharf for a look around before a very late lunch. Stocking up our depleted food supplies we then relaxed in camp for the rest of the afternoon.

### **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> August - Derby to Broome**

The short trip down the blacktop had us in Broome before lunch and we set up camp in the Palm Grove Caravan Park which we had booked 2 months earlier. We must have been lucky as we were told the park was already booked out for the following year. This park is popular as it is within walking distance from Cable Beach.



We had lunch al fresco in the café at Town Beach and did some more shopping before relaxing in camp for the rest of the afternoon. After dinner whilst the rest of the crew stayed in camp Ross and I headed to the pub for a few refreshments and listen to the band.

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**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August - Broome**

John and I were up early as we had booked our in cars for a service at the Toyota dealer who was within walking distance of the town centre. A tasty breakfast of bacon and eggs had us well prepared for the short walk to the local markets that had been set up around the courthouse. Much local produce and art was available for sale and we watched the crowd pass by.

Towards lunch the crowd thinned as the Broome Cup which is the largest social event for the year was on. Our cars were ready around lunch time and we headed for the museum finding it closed because of the cup.

We had lunch at Town Beach again before heading out to the wharf and



Ganthaume Point to look around before heading back to camp to prepare another communal roast.

I dropped in to say G'day to Bob and Bev who were ex Triple Diamond members and were staying in the same caravan park for 3 weeks. We all walked over to Cable Beach to watch the sun set whilst the roast roasted.

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> August - Broome**

We had a look around China Town and the Pearl Luggers before heading for the museum but found it closed again. After lunch again at Town Beach we ran into a couple of guys who had just come to town for work. William was a surgeon and Duncan a aircraft maintenance engineer. Duncan was from Papua New Guinea and told us some interesting stories of his home town in the highlands.

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Driving down to the north section of cable beach for a run along the sand we returned just as the camels were being prepared for the evening ride. We returned to camp and booked dinner at the café for the group with Bob and Bev joining us.

### Monday 11<sup>th</sup> August - Broome - Cape Leveque

Ross had previously booked his vehicle in for a new windscreen after a small chip had run right across the glass so we left Broome around 10am. The run to Cape Leveque was pretty good with only 80km of dirt out of the 200km.



We stopped off at Beagle Bay and visited the Catholic church which has an alter encrusted with pearl shells. Arriving at Cape Leveque around lunch time we set up camp on powered sites in a sheltered area on the point which was around 500 metres wide between both sides of the ocean.

The afternoon was spent looking around the immediate vicinity which was very picturesque. Some of our group booked sightseeing plane flights whilst we booked a tinny for the next day. A fellow traveler, Alan, who had been in camp for 6 weeks returned from a days fishing and offered us a quarter of a 23kg



Spanish Mackerel. It was accepted with gratitude and Paul put his butchering skills to good use by filleting the large fish.

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We enjoyed the fish for dinner and it was very tasty and watched an amazing sunset from the cliffs adjacent to camp with whales silhouetted on the ocean transfixing us. One of our group had heard there were some 600 whales in the vicinity of Broome as this is the most northern point of their journey from the Southern Ocean.

### **Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> August - Cape Leveque**

The morning was spent lazing around camp prior to Ross heading off for his plane flight. John had been bumped to the next day.

We rendezvoused with Eric the hire boat owner at the boat ramp. He was on Kimberly time and was a hour late.



We had received a heads up on where to fish from Alan and headed out to the mark we were given trolling lures. Looking for feeding birds we didn't spot any.

Heading south we passed around an island which was named shark alley, because if you hooked up a fish the sharks would get it before you could land it. Still we had no luck so we tried bottom bouncing and didn't catch anything.

Returning back north we spotted a flock of feeding gulls and headed for the boiling water. I got a strike and whilst the others pulled in their lines the 20kg braided line tore off the spool at a tremendous rate. I applied the drag but could not halt the fish and it kept going braking the line.

We saw plenty more schools of fish however could not get across them fast enough to get a hook up and headed back to shore empty handed. Luckily we had a communal roast to make up for our lack of fish.

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### Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> August - Cape Leveque

A lazy day was spent in camp with fishing and swimming. I couldn't catch any fish so unable to beat the fish joined them with goggles, snorkel and fins. There were many tropical fish swimming about and some soft coral which was very colourful.

Another fisherman returned home with an 18kg Cobia (Black Kingfish) so we again had fish for dinner which again was generously donated to us. A group of bike riders who were on a charity run from Cairns to Broome arrived and a side of the fish was given to them.



### Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> August - Cape Leveque

Whilst Steve and family and John took joy flights we headed to One Arm Point. After obtaining our permit we drove down to the boat ramp and noticed the entrails of a turtle which had been slaughtered washed up on the



shore. A number of Lemon and Reef Sharks were milling around in the shallows having had a good feed. A Brahminy Kite was also retrieving its share as were other sea birds.

Heading for the hatchery where fish and sea life were on display in tanks we viewed the specimens.

A couple of workers were polishing Trochous shells for sale having procured some of them from customs after they had been confiscated from Indonesian fisherman illegally fishing in Australian waters.

We headed back to camp and I had another swim and snorkel followed by coffee and pastries at the café.

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After dusk Alan returned with two good sized Mackerel, one weighing at 28.5kg. He was again very generous again giving us a good sized portion. We had fish for dinner again.

### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> August - Cape Leveque to Mary River**

Bidding farewell to Cape Leveque and Chris who was staying on, wishing we had time to do the same, we headed south and out the back road to the Great Northern Road. This road was an excellent dirt road and saved us 150km as we didn't have to travel back to Broome.



Heading for Fitzroy Crossing we decided to push on stopping at Mary Pool for the night. John decided to continue on for Halls creek wanting to pick up a day.

### **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August - Mary River to Top Springs**

Braking camp early we headed for Halls Creek turning off down the Duncan Highway rather than the Tanami Road due to the condition of the vehicles.



The section of road through Old Halls Creek and Palm Springs was very picturesque and much better than the Tanami having done it the year before. We pushed on through Kalkarindji which was closed for Saturday afternoon and onto Top Springs stopping at the roadhouse to camp. Dinner was enjoyed at the hotel

together with a few refreshments.

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### **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August - Top Springs to Barkly Homestead**

Away early again after bacon and eggs at the pub we traveled on good dirt to the Stuart Highway coming out near Dunmarra where we stopped for morning tea at the roadhouse. Heading south we turned off at Three Ways and along the Barkly Highway to the Barkly Homestead where we set up camp and enjoyed their roast pork for dinner.

### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August - Barkly Homestead to Mt Isa**

Away early again for a short run to Mt Isa so Steve could have his exhaust system repaired by the fellow who originally installed it we arrived around lunchtime and set up camp. Whilst Steve had his exhaust done we restocked with fresh supplies. The rest of the afternoon was spent lazing around camp.

### **Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> August - Mt Isa to Longreach**

An early start saw us heading for Longreach via Cloncurry and Winton on the blacktop. We passed numerous road trains and road kill of all descriptions. Mostly roos but also birds feeding that had been too slow to take off. There were quite a few wedge tail eagles amongst the casualties. We stayed at the Gunadoo Caravan Park and cooked our own dinners.

### **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> August - Longreach to Cunamulla**

Steve and Ross decided that they would keep to our original schedule of arriving home Thursday so we decided to push through to Cunamulla. We traveled via Barcaldine, Blackall and Charleville. At Barcaldine we had morning tea at the bakery and Steve and Paul reckoned the sausage rolls were some of the best they had tasted. We were stopped in our tracks by a herd of cattle on the stock route.



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We stopped for lunch at the Woolscourer at Blackall and had a look around also stopping at the black stump. Arriving at the Cunamulla Caravan Park before dusk we set up camp. Dinner around the campfire was cooked by a local identity on an old wood fired stove. Dinner consisted of chicken soup followed by slow cooked roast lamb chops and veggies finished off with apple crumble ice cream and custard and all for a reasonable price. I had a chat to Bob (Bobo from the ExplorOZ forum) who was staying at the caravan park with his wife who was a doctor working temporarily at the hospital.

### **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August - Cunnamulla to Orange**

Steve and Ross got away at about 4am announcing their departure with a blast on Steve's air horns and we returned to sleep only to wake up early for our own departure via Bourke, Nyngan and Dubbo to Orange. We treated ourselves to motel rooms at Orange, our first proper bed on the whole trip and had pizza for dinner.

### **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> August - Orange to Home**

We were away early again heading into a southerly cold front with the possibility of snow predicted later in the day on the mountains. Under darkening clouds we crossed the mountains into light rain which increased steadily the closer we got to home. This was our only rain on the trip apart from a couple of drops near Darwin. We arrived home just before lunch.

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### **Epilogue**

Our route covered some 16,000km over 2 months with no serious damage to vehicles sustained. Many minor and running repairs were required to all the vehicles.

Thanks to Paul for obtaining most of the meat including all the roasts and also cooking most of them. Steve and Craig also contributed by helping out on the mechanical side. John did his bit by providing a number of bottles of port. The rest of us helped out where we could.

The Kimberly is another iconic destination that is a must for the 4WD enthusiast and although most of the trip could have been done in an AWD or 2WD some of the remote locations and river crossings would have stopped a low clearance vehicle. Most of the two day stopovers could have had an extra day to see everything at the destinations however regular single day stopovers and some longer ones broke the monotony of driving every day. We found two months from the east coast is probably the minimum time to do this area justice. My next big trip being the Canning Stock Route in 2009 is in the planning stage.