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TAGALONG TOURS

OF AUSTRALIA

Newsletter June 2009

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Cape York Trip

G'day folks,

I have just got back to Trinity Beach after my first trip up the Cape York Peninsula for 2009.

The weather was excellent with only a few showers falling on the Old Telegraph Track between Bramwell Junction and Gunshot Creek. My old friend Jim from Townsville, was my travelling companion and navigator for this trip, which we completed in 6 days. It was a bit of a rush, in order to check out the Cape for my Tagalong Tours that begin in July and go right through to September this year.

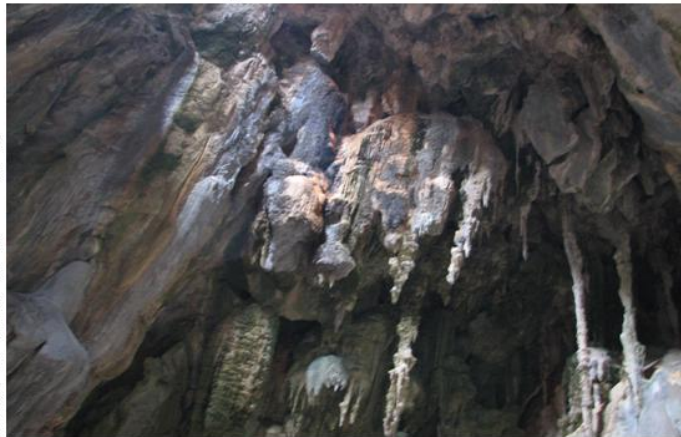
We first travelled to Chillagoe and identified the points of interest and sites that are included in the Tours. The town is pretty quiet these days with a small amount of mining taking place and now there is nearly a tar sealed road all the way from Mareeba. The few remaining kms of gravel road are in pretty good shape. There is plenty to see in and around Chillagoe with its cave tours and historic mining sites.

The track after Mt Mulligan and

Mt Mulligan overlooking the tragic mine site



Royal Arch Cave at Chillagoe



on to the Palmer River Roadhouse is pretty chopped up after the wet and desperately needs a grader over it to iron out some of the bumps. Mt Mulligan is one of the most spectacular natural landmarks on the whole peninsula. It overlooks the old town ruins and streets and nearby the abandoned coal mine marks the tragic spot where one of Australia's worst mining disasters took place on 19 September 1921. The cemetery contains the graves of many of the 75 miners who lost their lives that day. We proceeded through Lakeland up to Laura and once again, the road was pretty good with large sections now sealed for driver comfort and safety.

Laura is a sleepy little town in Quinkan Country that comes alive every 2 years when it hosts the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival. It is being held on 19th-21st of this month. It is a wonderful festival of dance, language and art celebrating Aboriginal culture in the area. You can learn more about it by visiting the website on www.lauradancefestival.com

We searched around some railway ruins from the old Laura to Cooktown railway line and found some old rail spikes that must be about 120 years old.

The next part of our journey took us up the Peninsula Development Road past Hann River Roadhouse, Musgrave Roadhouse and on to Coen. We stopped at Charlie's Gold Mine just before town and caught up with Charlie. After we got his thoughts on just about everything, from mobile phones to climate change, we headed north to find the Weipa turnoff and turned west to Weipa where we intended to camp for the night.

The gravel road into Weipa is very well maintained and we made good time, arriving to set up camp in the dark at about 1900 hours. Next morning we took off early

2009 Cape York Tour Dates

11.07.09 to 24.07.09

1.08.09 to 14.08.09

20.08.09 to 2.09.09

7.09.09 to 20.09.09

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and in a couple of hours we got to the mighty Wenlock River where a concrete bridge now spans, what used to be a very entertaining water crossing.

The old buildings at Moreton Telegraph Station are still well maintained and there is plenty of open space for camping. We were at Bramwell Junction in an hour at the turnoff where the Old Telegraph Track and the bypass track known as Bamaga Road head off in different directions.

Our first serious water crossing on the OTT was at Palm Creek, where a 1.5 metre drop-off had terrified some earlier travellers who turned back the 4 kms to the Junction. They then headed off via the bypass road to the Cape. We negotiated our way across, with an older Toyota following us through. The 3 young fellows in it were new to the Cape and they appreciated our experience and the company of another vehicle. Ducie Creek had a deep hole in the middle of it and the water came up over the bonnet on my Toyota, proving that we should have walked it first.



Paul Stafford
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Page 2

Thank goodness for my Safari Snorkel as water and diesel engines are not good friends. The crossings at North Alice Creek and the Dulhunty River along with Bertie Creek and Gunshot Creek were all reasonably stress free, but Cockatoo Creek provided its usual difficult time as it has deep potholes in the middle of the creek. A thorough walk through inspection is recommended for every crossing of Cockatoo. Another 2 vehicles followed us across as we had UHF radio communication via a hand held radio that Jim carried with him. There were several other crossings that were successfully negotiated and after we crossed over Bamaga Road, encountered Canal Creek and Sam Creek, we then headed west to the bypass road. Arriving at the Jardine River, we obtained our ticket and crossed on the ferry, with another hour we were in Bamaga.

Our camp for the night was at the Seisia Holiday Park, right on a delightful beach looking out across Torres Strait. Unfortunately there is no swimming due to the ever present signs, warning of crocodiles. Punsand Bay is as beautiful as ever and the Tip remains a must do destination for all true 4WD enthusiasts. Frank Jardine's old homestead at Somerset is just an overgrown patch of bush now, although 3 brass cannons and a flagpole still guard the original front entrance. It is a beautiful spot with clear views across to Albany Island. We met a Horn Island couple camped on the beach, who had flown over for the long weekend in a chopper.

Our journey south across the Jardine River on the ferry was mostly uneventful, although the ferry driver's lunch break held us up for half an hour. This is truly "wait-a-while" land.



Old Cannons in front of Somerset Ruins

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Seisia Beach on Torres Strait

Our next stop was a place on the east coast of the Cape called Captain Billy's Landing, where Comalco had built a landing ramp for their operation in the Heathlands. It is a very beautiful place to camp but the south easterlies sadly blow nearly all year round.



Captain Billy's landing on East Coast

The return trip south included us calling in to Fruit Bat Falls, probably one of the most photographed sites on the whole peninsula.

The falls are truly beautiful and a swim is always refreshing and everyone stops here for a dip and a photograph.

A few more hours on we eventually arrived back at Musgrave Station where we refuelled and headed east to Lakefield National Park. This 4WD track is rough in places and we drove to Hann Crossing which will be a stop-over point for my tours. Apart from crocodiles there is plenty of bird life here and many beautiful lily covered lagoons. Definitely no swimming though, the "logs with eye-lids" are everywhere in this park.

Our camp for the night was at historic Old Laura Station, where we camped near the Laura River under a big old mango tree with a crackling fire for company. The old homestead was established in the 1870s to supply beef to the Palmer River goldfield. It was a peaceful night except for a roaring and snorting "mickey bull" that came crashing into our camp. I had to chase him off with my torch light and a lot of yelling and stick throwing. Jim slept through it, oblivious to my "act of courage".

There are numerous camping sites in Lakefield N.P. as it is the second largest park in Queensland. There is a Rangers' Station at the old Kalpowar homestead where information is available.

Next morning, we headed down Battle Camp Road over the range of the same name and on to the sealed road into Cooktown. About 6 kms before that, we crossed Isabella Falls, a good spot to stop and have a dip or a cuppa.

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The Cooktown Discovery Festival was winding down when we hit town but there were still many tourists around in holiday mode.

The last part of the journey across the Bloomfield Track through Wujal Wujal, was the roughest part of the trip and after 6 days of non-stop bush driving, our patience was wearing a bit thin. Low range was required a few times on this track and then we were back into civilization at Cape Tribulation, a really lovely place. Across the Daintree Ferry and 100kms later we were back in Trinity Beach, with a dirty and dusty Toyota, glad to be home.

Fruit Bat Falls



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