

# TAGALONG TOURS OF AUSTRALIA



## ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

December 2019

## Another successful year, despite the weather

by Paul Stafford

Happy Festive Season,

We've put together a few thoughts and photos in this newsletter after a season that was filled with plenty of off road adventure. Amongst it all, our bush mechanic skills were put to good use, life long friendships were formed, and our travellers got to push themselves beyond what they thought they could do in their 4WDs.

After 11 years of running tours we've come to see mother nature's extremes as part of the adventure. This year we had four cyclones that crossed Cape York between November and May. This gave our Cape travellers plenty of creek crossing experience and brought the wildlife out to play including a cheeky croc that took up temporary residence at Gunshot Creek.

Cyclone Trevor created a torrent of water, that over a few months, made its way from the North down through the Channel Country isolating many towns including Birdsville, twice. The upside was that we got to discover new routes and tracks around the Central Deserts and there were many nights around the camp fire sharing stories likening us to Burke and Wills.

Thanks to all our friends who have shared their experiences with us through their kind messages and reviews on Trip Advisor. We get a lot of feedback from new customers saying that they decided to book with us after reading the positive and informative comments on Trip Advisor.

We look forward to catching up with our old friends again down the track and we are excited by the prospect of meeting new ones in the future.

We wish for more rain and favourable conditions for our friends battling bushfires and drought. Please stay safe.

All the best for a Happy Christmas and a Safe & Healthy New Year in the Aussie Bush.

Cheers, Paul & John.

[www.tagalongtours.com.au](http://www.tagalongtours.com.au)

## 2020 TOUR DATES

### SIMPSON DESERT

12 Day Part Catered Tours

01.05.20 - 12.05.20 E/W

15.05.20 - 26.05.20 W/E

07.08.20 - 18.08.20 W/E

### CAPE YORK

18 Day Part Catered Tours

07.06.20 - 24.06.20

05.07.20 - 22.07.20

02.08.20 - 19.08.20

06.09.20 - 23.09.20

### TRANSCONTINENTAL

29 Day Part Catered Tour

23.06.20 - 21.07.20

**Bookings through:**

**[www.tagalongtours.com.au](http://www.tagalongtours.com.au)**

**\*\*past customers get a 10% discount on bookings\*\***





# Cape York

## Still a favourite destination

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John conducted tours up in the Cape again this season in June, July, August & September. As usual, our booking numbers were strong as this is by far our most popular destination.

John finally got to hang his sign Dutchee's Lane, at Mt Mulligan, so from now on any travellers passing through the area will be able to see it. They might scratch their heads though trying to find a 19th century explorer by that name in the history books.

I'm sure that the group that were with him in June will still be drying out from what he said was his wettest camping trip in over 40 trips to the Cape.

The Old Telegraph Track was demanding in most of the crossings and winching was necessary for much of it. This was a direct consequence of the late wet season that we had up this way and from vehicles dragging water out of the crossings, making the exits very muddy and slippery.

Farmers and graziers were the beneficiaries of the big wet, but as we all know setting up camp in the rain and packing up wet gear certainly takes the fun out of the adventure a bit.

The other months were definitely much drier but unfortunately sections of the OTT were still impassable in parts. Our focus is always on safety and sometimes the best option is to use the bypass tracks around any obstacles.

In August, tagalongs Steve & Sue were a big help with this large group in some of the more difficult crossings. Their V8 Land Cruiser became a very capable tow vehicle in assisting John with getting the group through to Eliot Falls in record time well before dark. This couple were back in the action again at Seisia when their fishing charter got caught for a few hours at Turtle Head Island and they did not get back in until 9.30pm. However, they were forgiven by the group when they offered to cook up a fish banquet with their catch at Archer River Roadhouse a couple of days later.

*We joined our tagalong group in Cairns and set off on our 18 day Cape York adventure. WOW the whole trip was fantastic and exceeded our expectations.*

*Our guide, John, had been to the "tip" 42 times and tailored our tour for maximum adventure, comfort, scenery and safety and as we traversed the Cape we saw the best places to explore and camp.*

*The experience was about getting our whole group to the tip and back. This team feeling added to the sense of fun and adventure. We would sit around camp fires at night reliving the days fun, often sharing a meal together and always enjoying the time with everyone in our group.*

*We especially enjoyed the fishing charter at Seisia (with Jay from Cape York Fishing ), the couple of days spent at Elliott Falls and driving the southern end of the Old Telegraph Track. And of course getting to the tip was a great sense of achievement. It was also great fun celebrating our return from the tip at Bramwell station. Thank you John for everything!*

*We have highly recommended this trip to our friends, it is an adventure of a lifetime!"*

KINGFISHER1956 TRIPADVISOR SEPT 2019



## CAPE YORK

### 4WD TAGALONG SAFARIS

**CAPE YORK (18 Days)**

**SIMPSON DESERT (12 Days)**

**TRANSCONTINENTAL (29 Days)**

**GULF SAVANNAH (10 Days)**

**PH: 07 4057 4096**

**[www.tagalongtours.com.au](http://www.tagalongtours.com.au)**



4WD054-25



# Cape York continued...

## More reasons to tagalong

[www.tagalongtours.com.au](http://www.tagalongtours.com.au)

A special thanks also to Geoff for his assistance on the September Tour with some of the crossings on the OTT. His V8 Land Cruiser was a big help for John, managing some of the other vehicles through the Track. You gotta love those V8s.

John's wife Trish was his navigator on the September tour. They had a few anxious moments when their rooftop tent caught fire on the track to the Tip north of the Croc Tent. Several fire extinguishers from the other vehicles were a big help as was the bucket brigade using the water from a nearby creek. A big thanks for the quick action that saved the day and the tour was able to go ahead shortly after.

More and more sealed roads are appearing in the Cape each year especially on the PDR (Peninsula Development Road) to Weipa. This section is planned for completion by the end of 2019. If you are thinking of coming to see the unspoiled beauty of Cape York, do it soon !!

Mark your calendars because 2020 will be a huge year for Cooktown and Far North Qld as it celebrates the 250th anniversary of the landing of Captain James Cook and the HMB Endeavour. The ship was beached for 7 weeks for repairs in June 1770. There are many special events planned during next year and these can be seen on [www.cooktown2020.com](http://www.cooktown2020.com)

The famous James Cook Museum, majestically positioned on the hill overlooking Cooktown, is currently closed for renovations in preparation for the celebrations in 2020.

Also, the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival will be held between 3rd to 5th July next year. This is to align the Festival with the celebrations of the landing of Cook and his crew and the first Bama contact with white people.

There is no doubt the majority of our Cape York customers come to Cairns ready for adventure in their own 4WD vehicle. Occasionally though, we receive an enquiry relating to the availability of a fully equipped rental vehicle with all the necessary camping gear. In this case, we are pleased to recommend Bear Rentals to those folks who are looking to hire such a vehicle and their contact details can be found at [www.bearrentals.com.au](http://www.bearrentals.com.au)



PALM CREEK CAPE YORK



ELLIOTT FALLS CAPE YORK



THE TIP CAPE YORK



SEISA SUNSET CAPE YORK



# THE TRANSCONTINENTAL 29 DAYS TWICE

We had a big year putting together two Transcontinental Tours across the country from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean.

In May, there were 10 x 4WDs and 6 x Camper Trailers in the group. We left the most easterly point on the Australian mainland at Cape Byron in NSW and headed across the country to the most westerly part of the mainland at Steep Point in WA. The tour travelled across the top of NSW eventually arriving at Cameron Corner, which is the junction where the Qld, NSW, & SA borders all meet. We had been keeping a close watch on road closures all the way and as we got closer to Lake Eyre, it became apparent that our planned route to the north of the Lake was going to be blocked by floodwaters coming down from Qld after Cyclone Trevor in March.

The Walkers Crossing track and the Warburton River track were closed so we had to look at another option which would take us around the bottom of Lake Eyre. This meant turning south at Innamincka and travelling down the Strzelecki Track to Lyndhurst and then making our way up the western side of the Lake to Farina, Marree, William Creek and Oodnadatta.

This detour was around 300 kms longer but we really had no other option. The up side was that it gave 17 of our travelling colleagues an opportunity to enjoy a scenic flight from William Creek over the flooded expanse of Lake Eyre.

We had a few problems with vehicles, with trailers, with fridges and with roof racks but the adventure and overall memorable experience of such a journey was well worth the effort. On this trip we didn't escape the occasional wet weather either with heavy showers at Wiluna and Hamelin. In fact, at Hamelin Station there was such a downpour that three of us had to camp in the shearing shed there to try and stay dry. We were told that the equivalent of their annual rainfall had fallen in 24 hours.

This caused the closure of Useless Loop Road out to Steep Point the following day and this was devastating news for us after travelling 6850 kms on our journey across the continent. However, we waited another day and fortunately the heavens cleared, making a day trip possible without trailers, out to Steep Point and Thunder Bay. The blowholes were really pumping hard that day with the sea spray shooting 10 metres skywards. Everyone was awestruck with the views of the Zuytdorp Cliffs rising 200 metres out of the Indian Ocean. These were named after the Zuytdorp, a Dutch ship wrecked on the cliffs in 1712.



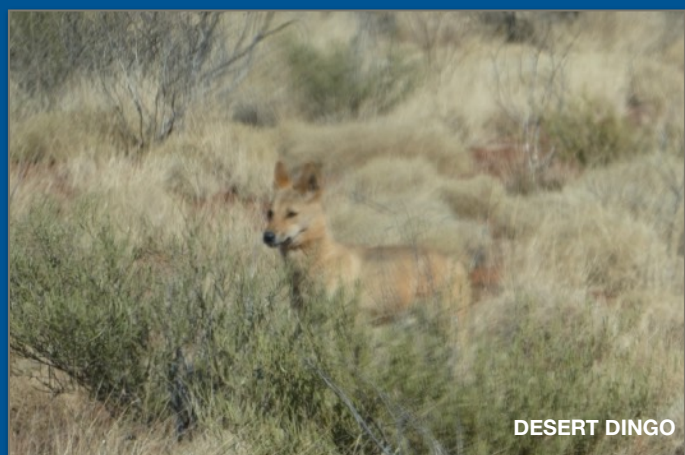
CAPE BYRON LIGHTHOUSE NSW



TRANSCONTINENTAL HOTEL RUINS FARINA SA



CAMERON CORNER QLD, SA, NSW



DESERT DINGO



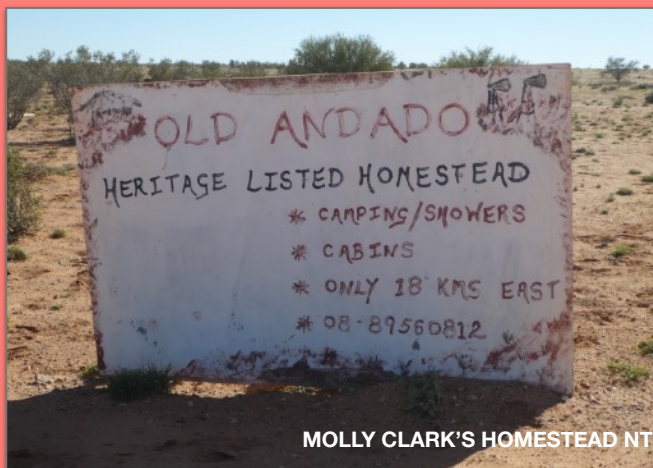
# THE TRANSCONTINENTAL 29 DAYS TWICE



KATA TJUTA NT



WILD CAMEL WA



MOLLY CLARK'S HOMESTEAD NT



ANCIENT ROCK FORMATION NT

Great friendships were formed on this tour despite the dramas. In fact, it's these situations that bring out the best in everyone.

In August, we ran the second of our Transcontinental Tours, this time with a smaller group but with plenty of enthusiasm, nevertheless. This tour was affected by the same problems with floodwaters coming down from the Channel Country. It truly was a flood of grand proportions this year in the outback. We had to use the Strzelecki Track again down the eastern side of Lake Eyre and do the loop around the bottom of the Lake, rejoining our planned itinerary on schedule at Dalhousie Springs.

The Gunbarrell Highway was as punishing as ever during our journey through this part of Western Australia, but at least it stayed dry.

I managed to puncture a tyre on the way out to Steep Point and fortunately my tyre pressure monitors gave me the news before the tyre completely shredded. I quickly put some air in it and tried desperately to get to the sign at Steep Point before it had to be changed. No such luck so after 2 tours across the country without a puncture, I had to change that tyre about 2 kms from the Steep Point sign. So near but not close enough !!

In early September, we were blessed with magic calm weather for the camp site down on the beach at Shelter Bay. A little bit different from the conditions out there in June.

Our travelling colleague Shane from Melbourne, who is an MCC (Melbourne Cricket Club) member, passed up his AFL Grand Final tickets to come with us on the tour. We applauded his dedication to the cause, and we hoped we were better company over the 6850 km trip than 100,000 screaming footy fans.

We learnt that our host at Cameron Corner for the last few years, Fenn Miller, had sadly passed away at the end of August. Our condolences to Cheryl and family.

Next year, we have brought forward the dates of our Transcontinental Tour to June / July as the weather across the country is usually better then. As well as this, the tour group will arrive in WA in late July and can take advantage of a winter / spring option travelling north to the Kimberley in the cooler months.

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# ENJOY THE REAL OUTBACK WITH US

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MADE IT TO THE TIP OF CAPE YORK



FINKE NT



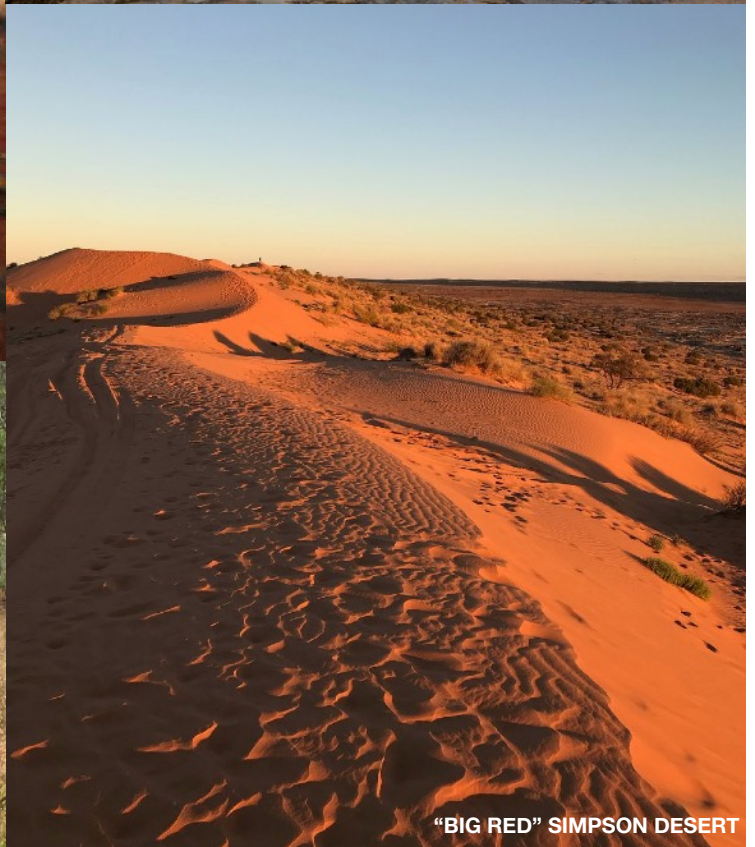
BLOWHOLES & ZUYTDORP CLIFFS THUNDER BAY WA



REMOTE CAMPSITE GIBSON DESERT WA



JOHN MARKING HIS TERRITORY



"BIG RED" SIMPSON DESERT

*Transcontinental 4wd crossing from Byron Bay NSW to Steep Point WA. Fantastic 29 day crossing with a group of 18 fun travellers/10 vehicles. Paul did a great job of keeping everyone on the move to meet the scheduled bookings even though flooding of Cooper Creek and Warburton Crossing forced a detour down around Lake Eyre instead of crossing the Simpson Desert. The up side was flying over the lake when full of water. I looked for months to try and join a group to do this trip as my wife was unsure of travelling in the outback and remote areas on our own. Tagalong is an excellent way to see the real centre of Australia with the security and fellowship of an organized tour. 10 points to Tagalong.*

TRANSCONTINENTAL ALAN S MAY 2019 TRIPADVISOR



# OUR SIMPSON DESERT TOURS

## The weather gods played havoc for 4WD'ing

Unfortunately, the Simpson Desert crossings in April had to be cancelled due to the flooded Diamantina River completely isolating Birdsville for months. This meant that we were unable to get into the Desert for our east west crossing. As well as that, Eyre Creek was flooded, so we were unable to get past it if we wanted to attempt a west east crossing. The only option would have been to leave from Dalhousie Springs in South Australia and travel east as far as Eyre Creek and then head back to Mt Dare for fuel. As this was a difficult, if not impossible task with the amount of fuel required, a decision was made to cancel the tours in April altogether.

The floods provided great relief for the drought ravaged graziers in the region and the Desert was definitely greener for our June west east crossing. Eyre Creek remained flooded for months and we had to use the 70km detour to the North in spite of putting pressure on the fuel capacity of the 4WD vehicles on the tour. It was an experience to be remembered, when our vehicles had to ford Eyre Creek with the water level about tyre height. Fortunately, the water crossing had a stony bottom, but this was a sight more common in the Cape than in the Desert.

We had to travel the French Line with its 1100 sand dunes, as the extra 100 km option South along the Rig Road was ruled out given the additional distance already required around the Eyre Creek detour. Cooper Creek was also running pretty well with a healthy flow after the floods and there were plenty of wildflowers in various parts of the Desert. As we left Birdsville, we crossed the bridge over the Diamantina River and it still had a good flow of water in it after the floods a few months earlier.

This particular tour group consisted of all Toyotas, so reliability wasn't an issue, although my Land Cruiser unfortunately broke a couple of rear leaf springs on the way. This required a small repair job in the middle of the Desert, but I made it back to Cairns okay.

The cooler temperatures at night were low single digit numbers, but during the day, the flies were in plague numbers again and fly nets were the order of the day, every day.

You can never really capture with words the sense of awe and beauty that comes with a Simpson Desert Tour. We all take hundreds of photos of sunsets, camels and the ruins where pioneers who came before us lived and worked. Every trip is a different experience and there's nothing like the silence and the millions of stars at night to remind you of how far away from home you've travelled.



### BE A CLEVER TAG-A-LONG

A poem by guest Jill Fitz July 2019

*If the Simpson Desert is  
calling you*

*Then there is one thing you  
must do.*

*Get Tag-a-long Tours on the  
phone*

*Put your kit together and off  
you roam.*

*Across the Gibber Plains  
Where it's stoney and rarely  
rains.*

*Sliding in the desert dust  
Keeping the foot down is a  
must.*

*Out in the back of beyond  
New friends you'll be fond.  
You'll hear stories of Burke  
and Wills*

*And drive up eleven hundred  
dunes just for thrills.*

*It's the ride on the dunes  
Deep into the afternoons  
That you will remember  
forever*

*So...go tag-a-long tours if  
you're clever.*

**Tagalong with us in 2020**  
**[www.tagalongtours.com.au](http://www.tagalongtours.com.au)**



POEPPPEL CORNER QLD, SA, NT

