



## TAGALONG TOURS 2020 NEWSLETTER

### Our 2020 Touring Year

by Paul Stafford

We started the year with a very encouraging booking schedule for our Cape York, Simpson Desert, and Transcontinental Tours.

It's always an exciting time at the start of the season. Once the bookings are in, we get busy preparing tour information kits, finalising tour stopovers and communicating back and forth to satisfy the latest National Parks' requirements. Much of our time is spent chatting by phone or email with our Tagalong adventurers about their 4WD modifications and preparation and planning for the trips.

But of course in late January Covid hit and our plans started to fall apart. As the country started to shut down, we had to cancel more and more tours.

Our customers, many of whom were hoping to tick a 4WD adventure off their bucket list, couldn't leave their home state and had to reluctantly put their trip on hold. This was very disappointing as we know how much advanced planning and additional expense people put into getting ready to tackle our remote adventures.

At the same time of the National Park closures, Indigenous Communities were closed across the country, ferry services and borders also closed up shop, making it impossible to run our tours.

As July rolled around, we started to see places reopening and we still had a few determined travellers. They were lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and with them we mapped out revised tours and negotiated for COVID permits across the various state borders.

Just making it to the start line was an adventure in itself this year. What the tours lacked in numbers, they made up for with fun, camaraderie and plenty of memorable stories to tell for years to come.

We've shared some of these stories and plenty of photos from the 2020 season through this newsletter.

We can see a silver lining in 2021. More people are keen to explore outback Australia and next year is shaping up to be our biggest and best touring season yet. If you want to join us in 2021, book in quick and we promise you'll experience an adventure of a lifetime.



Sunrise in the Simpson



Sunset in the Cape



# CAPE YORK

## AUGUST TOUR

At the very time we heard that we could get back into the National Parks and Communities in the Cape, we also heard that the Queensland border was closing to all Southerners.

The August tour group only had a few days to get into Queensland before the borders closed. It was a huge relief when we received the last text message telling us that all of our customers had made it in time.

As everyone arrived to start the tour, it seemed that fate had other plans for one of our regular Tagalongs, Chris. His vehicle wouldn't start on the morning of departure. Thankfully it was only battery trouble and with a little help from roadside assist he soon joined the tour.

Great fun was had by all on this tour especially at Eliot Falls where the "seniors" swimming competitions were very popular.

## SEPTEMBER TOUR

The September tour delivered fun and adventure to a happy group of travellers who revelled in their Cape York experience.

The fishing at Seisia was fantastic and Ellie caught a 55cm Mangrove Jack. The fishing guide Jay was so impressed, he took several photos of the catch for his own website. This fed the whole group at Seisia that night & lunch the next day.

There was another notable hiccup - tour leader John and his wife Trish almost lost their tour group!



Tip of Cape York

## More from the Cape...

It would have been fun to have been in radio range around Musgrave Roadhouse when the group under strict instructions from John on how to find the Hann Crossing camp site, headed off in the wrong direction deliberately as a stitch up.

He was waiting for the unleaded fuel pump to be serviced at Musgrave and had to hurriedly get on his radio to tell them to turn around.

When John and Trish finally arrived at Lakefield National Park campsite they were relieved to find everyone had made it and that the camp site was all set up. When they got out of the car the group were in stitches laughing as they told John it all been a set up and they had planned the whole thing. John and Trish agreed it was hilarious and said "What a bloody fun group they were".

## TOURS in 2021

**For information about our tour schedule  
please visit [www.tagalongtours.com.au](http://www.tagalongtours.com.au)**



Palm Cockatoo Cape York



Eliot Falls Cape York



# SIMPSON DESERT

Sadly we had to cancel our early Simpson Desert and Transcontinental tours but were eventually able to run a West East Crossing in August, although things didn't always go to plan.

Before the tour could even begin there were many conversations with the South Australian police in order to get permits for our NSW customers to be able to cross into SA and then head north into the Northern Territory. The SA Police were extremely helpful and each one of our customers was glad to get their permits to be able to head to Alice Springs for the start of the tour.

It was quite a sight for me to see all the huge V8 Supercar Transporters parked up at Camooweal where they had to wait for several days waiting for their permits into the NT to be granted.

Unfortunately, we had a couple of late scratchings for the tour. One was due to vehicle problems that occurred on the way to Alice Springs across the Plenty Highway and another due to the Northern Territory closing its borders suddenly in early August. This resulted in a Brisbane couple, who were on their way to Alice Springs, having to sadly turn around and head back home. The frustrating thing was, the NT opened their border about a week later to Brisbane people.

While we were in Alice Springs a day prior to departure, a massive storm crossed in a south east direction with much thunder and lightning. It dumped around 40mm of rain on Witjira National Park and Simpson Desert Regional Reserve, with the South Australian Department of National Parks immediately closing both. It also created flooded tracks at Dalhousie Springs and about 40 people were stranded there for 6 days, unable to get out due to the conditions.

We had to delay our Alice Springs departure by a couple of days while we waited for Witjira National Park to be opened. Eventually we made our way down to Kulgera on the Stuart Highway where we had to stay another 2 days waiting for the Rangers to open the National Park and the Desert. Once we got the green light, we headed off to Mt Dare for fuel and were underway. We crossed the Desert via the French Line and found the dunes in very good condition, no doubt due to the lack of 4WDs in the Desert this year. This was probably due to border restrictions and because the Big Red Bash and Birdsville Races had to be cancelled due to Covid.



Big Red Simpson Desert



Wild Camels Simpson Desert



Mt Dare Unimog Recovery Vehicle



Birdsville Hotel



Red Sand Simpson Desert



## The Simpson continued

On the first night in the dunes, we were treated to another spectacular thunder and lightning storm with not much rain, but a lot of wind trying to blow our tents over. We even had some hail, can you believe, but not much thank goodness. Somewhere near the Erabena Junction, my Land Cruiser broke a front coil spring. A satellite phone call to the Birdsville Roadhouse confirmed they had another pair in stock, so that repair job was arranged for three days hence when we would be in Birdsville. A lot of banging and clanging occurred for the next few days getting through the Desert dunes, but we eventually crossed over Big Red and headed into town.

We were surprised to be greeted by a team of 4-5 Queensland Police officers as we approached town and after plenty of discussions about permits, place of departure etc., we were cleared to head into Birdsville. Not really sure how many vehicles came into Queensland via the Simpson!!!

Our itinerary after leaving Birdsville included heading south to Innamincka, but after a few hours struggling in very boggy conditions, we decided to turn around and get out of the mud and head for Windorah instead. We made our farewells in Charleville completing an eventful couple of weeks.



### RIP Cobby Bob

Sadly, in July, we lost our good mate from Old Andado Station, Cobby Bob. He was involved in a vehicle rollover on the Finke – Kulgera Road in the Northern Territory. After spending a short time in the Alice Springs Hospital, he passed away. His stories and bush poetry entertained our groups at Old Andado whenever we camped there. Thanks for the memories Cobby Bob, you were certainly one of a kind.

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



Dalhousie Ruins S.A