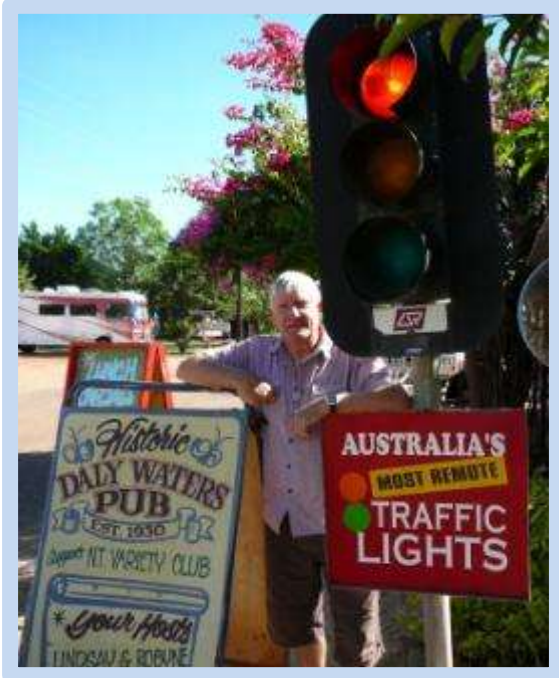


# Our 2010 Australian Outback Safari

*By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan*

*Newsletter Number Six*



Our last newsletter concluded as we pulled up to the ‘**Daly Waters Outback Pub**’. This pub has a huge reputation, and we were not disappointed.

Graeme saw that the traffic lights outside the Daly Waters Pub were red. These lights are reported to be the most remote traffic lights in Australia, (and they probably are) but these lights were not going to turn green before the sun rose! The adjoining on-sight camp ground was filling up fast. This 1930’s resting place, just west of the Stuart Highway, (275 km south of Katherine) drew like-minded travellers off the Stuart Highway for an evening of entertainment like no other. And by crickey – we were ready for some fun!

This rustic bush pub and its outbuildings looked like something out of the of TV show M.A.S.H, it even has a chopper up on one of the roof tops! At 4.30 we found seats in the beer garden with the evening getting off to a great start when we were invited to “toss the barmaid”.

(This toss of a coin gave us a 50/50 chance of free first round drinks) and sure enough Graeme came out smiling! Soon the place was buzzing with enthusiastic outback travellers tapping their toes to some classic tunes from a lively lady playing the Sax which set the scene for the evening.



An Aussie ballad singer cum laugh a minute bush comedian followed . He was accompanied by his rooster which he had trained to crow on command! The third act was a guitarist playing some popular Rock numbers – anybody not already up dancing already couldn’t resist the urge to get to their feet and party up big-time!

Going by the array of ‘autographed caps and brasieres’ hanging from the rafters of the bar, there have been many wild nights here in years gone by!



The **Daly Waters Pub** boasts being the oldest pub in the Northern Territory. This area was settled in 1872 when the Overland Telegraph station was established here, and thus formed part of the first communication wire across Australia.

Also, rich in aviation history, it was the centre for the London to Sydney air race of 1926. It then became a WWII air force base. The outbreak of war with Japan made Daly Waters a strategic air base.. The Pearl Harbour bombing in 1941 saw RAAF fly from Daly Waters to Java and back via Broome, bringing in evacuees and the wounded to the 100 bed hospital nearby. Apparently, the arrival of 6 aircraft every 15 minutes was not unusual.

Later this air base was used as a mail link to WA, then it became a stop-over for the first Qantas flights from Australia to London via Singapore. Eventually this airport closed in 1985, fortunately the hangars remain with memorabilia displayed, and the runway is in quite good condition – we ‘flew’ up the runway at speed in the Landcruiser just for fun!



From here we headed north up the Stuart Highway to Katherine. We visited the scenic Nitmiluk Gorge which has been carved over millions of years by the raging torrents of water which follow after the monsoon rains in the north.

The Katherine River winds through 12 km of the Nitmiluk Gorge and flows for 350km from Arnhemland to the sea.

We enjoyed a fantastic river cruise through four of the 13 magnificent deep sandstone gorges separated by rocks where we disembarked and rock-climbed upstream beside the rapids to an awaiting aluminium boat in the next gorge. Each of these gorges became even more striking and beautiful than the last.



The third gorge was huge and spectacular with beautiful rocky vistas. Graeme named it Australia's version of the Colorado River. We came ashore to walk up to view a 60 metre water fall and found a delightfully clear and deep swimming hole – free of salt-water crocodiles!

We spotted a turtle sunbathing on a rock on the water's edge and a young fresh water croc'. Fresh water croc's are generally harmless to humans.



<< The very dangerous 'Salties' or Salt water crocodiles frequent this water, despite it being so far inland. These cylindrical traps are set to catch them so that they can be relocated elsewhere. They are a huge threat, not only to humans, but also other wildlife.

The nearby trees were alive with rowdy bats and these black flying foxes hang from branches high up in the forest canopy. These large spooky creatures are nomadic, the females return each year to give birth.

Approx 50% of the newly born never reach adulthood, but those that survive can live up to 20 years in the wild.

This enjoyable and relaxing half day river cruise provided each of us with the opportunity to either swim or just sit around chatting over a tasty afternoon tea served by the crew.



After returning to Katherine we refuelled and restocked our pantry. With a population of just over 11,000 the shopping was reasonable, although alcohol was hard to buy! In order to help the large

local Aboriginal population curb their excessive drinking issues, severe restrictions have been imposed. E.g. Daily purchase limits, photo ID requirements and very short liquor store trading hours. Many local and government initiatives are supporting various efforts to help this long running problem.

We visited a new building site not far from town and were somewhat amused at the signage at the front of this property and could not resist taking a photograph. We weren't quite sure how "P.C." some would consider this sign, but it was large and bold for everybody to see. >>>



Whilst in Katherine the modern sleek and luxurious rail train 'The Ghan' arrived in town. A vast contrast to the historic 'Old Ghan' we saw at the museum in Alice Springs! This train journey from Adelaide to Darwin is renowned as one of the world's great train journeys. Discerning travellers

can experience 'a transcontinental adventure in the comfort and sophistication of Platinum Service. A three day, two night journey from the fertile countryside surrounding Adelaide to the rusty hues of the red centre and into the tropical splendour of the Top End'. A one way ticket costs up to \$5,319.00 (Australian \$) per person.

We met the train as it pulled into Katherine. This stop-over allows the passengers time to take in a four hour Katherine Gorge tour.



Travelling north, we had intended exploring the numerous 4WD tracks of Litchfield National Park from south to north enroute to Darwin, however when we arrived at the start of the track we discovered a heavy padlocked gate stating "Road Closed". The Daly River, normally just a trickle at this time of year, was quite high and swift.

<<<It certainly washed the dust out of the wheels, brakes and suspension! After this crossing we found a wonderful solitary camp sight.

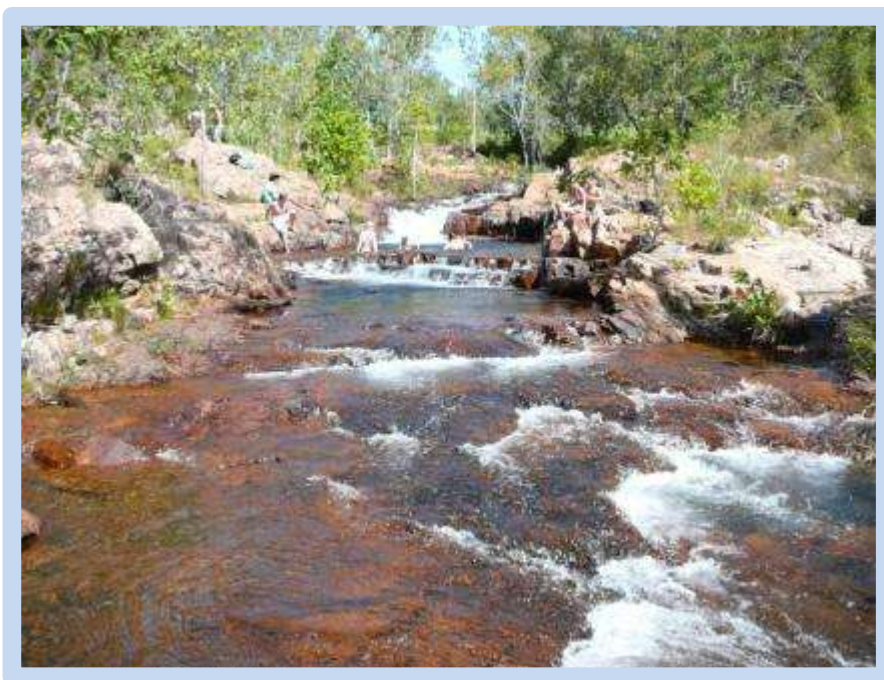


We are frequently amused by some of the signage we come across. This sign left us wondering what type of park it was, and there was no one else there to compare with! Do we enter this “Nature Park” ‘starkers’ or what? >>



Our idyllic camp site complete with plentiful firewood and a little fresh water stream beside it, and no other campers for 100km !

We entered Litchfield National park via Batchelor, 100km south of Darwin. Batchelor is home to the Rum Jungle Uranium mine, one of the greatest economic influences in the Top End.

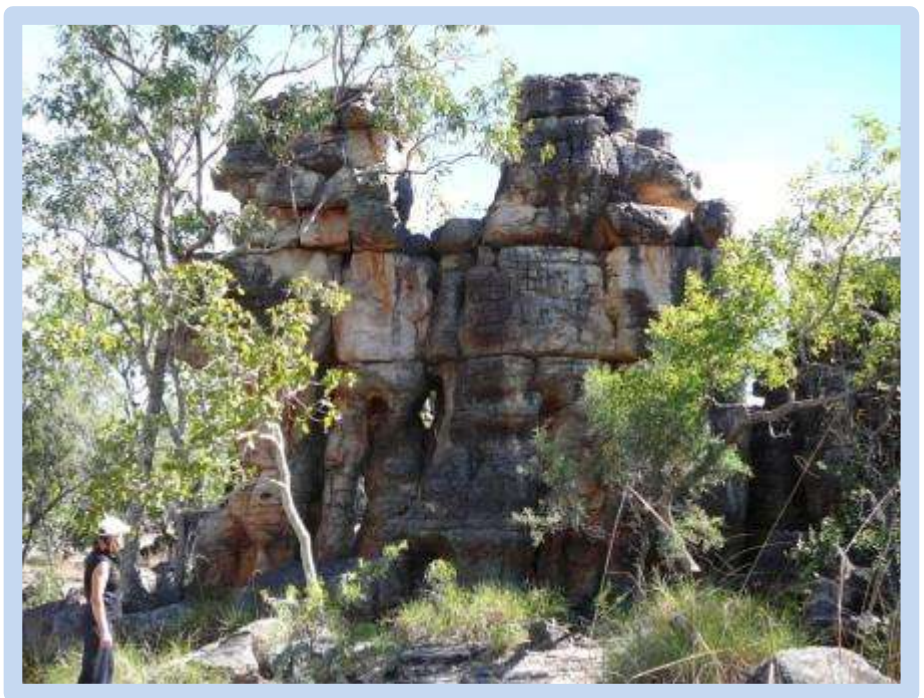


Litchfield is one of The Northern Territories most spectacular parks. It has a huge sandstone plateau with magnificent waterfalls and pockets of dense monsoon rainforest and tropical woodlands.

<<<Although much of the park was cut off by floodwaters, we found the Buley Rock pools and the stunning Florence Falls very busy with swimmers enjoying these croc’ free waters.



We took a 4WD track to discover **'The Lost City'**, a 10km flat but very rough track through the bush to these impressive natural freestanding sandstone blocks and lofty pillars created by natural erosion leaving narrow pathways and sandstone walls with gaps, holes and 'windows'. One is given the impression of entering a long-lost city in ruins. >>>



<<< The **'Table-Top Swamp'** nearby was filled with water-lilies reflecting as they stood amongst these white barked trees glistening in the sun. This tropical, serene and beautiful pool is home to lots of little wallabies, Emus and a wide variety of birdlife.

We camped at Wangi Falls, perhaps Litchfields most popular attraction. Huge volumes of water cascade from the high sandstone rocks to a large pool beneath which is surrounded with a lush monsoon rainforest (but no swimming here!) "Salties" are plentiful here.

We enjoyed walking along lush, shady tracks through this monsoon rainforest which was alive with colourful birds, and many other critters that thankfully stayed out of sight! (Oops – did we mention snakes!)



Leaving Litchfield the following morning we soon arrived in Darwin, the Capital city of the Northern Territory. We booked into The Hidden Valley Tourist Park which is very close to the Hidden Valley Motor Racing Track where the exciting V8 Supercars were due shortly. This is the biggest event in the Northern Territory, being heavily sponsored by the Northern Territory Government! It was time to take a break from bush bashing, mud flinging and remote camping. During the next two weeks we intend to explore the city and take in 3 exciting days of Motor Racing.

The sea air at Darwin would also be a novelty after having spent the last 3 months travelling exclusively inland!



Well, that's it from us for now.

In the newsletter that follows we will bring you details of our wonderful stay in sunny Darwin, together with our experience at the V8 Super Cars.

Wishing you all the very best,  
**Graeme & Megan**