

Wilderness Challenge



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Greetings from Tropical North Queensland

It's a bit difficult being cheerful after all that's happened this past year, from Bali to the Canberra bushfires, Iraq and now the SARS scare. At the same time these troubling events are sobering and, in the end, can serve to remind us just how lucky we really are.

Still, I have to say we had a very successful year. Shortly after we put last year's newsletter to bed we moved the entire company operation from our home at Trinity Beach to a facility in the Cairns suburb of Portsmith, close to the city and surrounded by most of our suppliers. The move has proven to be an outstanding success. The facility covers 1300 sqm. Among a host of improvements, the installation of a new five tonne hoist has improved safety and working conditions for Rick. All in all, an extremely successful part of our development.

But the absolute highlight has to be winning the coveted Queensland Tourism Award. This win followed our fourth regional award win celebrated by most of our staff along with 600 others in Cairns - simply a fabulous night. The Queensland Awards attracted 1000 guests, Samantha, Russell, Di and I among them ... with fingers crossed! Saxon and our staff "held the fort" while we four carried the flag to Brisbane.

So ... after all the *extreme* excitement of "... and the winner is ... etc" can you just imagine how *stunned* we were when it was announced that we had also won Overall Best Entry, from 287 entries, and an advertising package worth \$10,000. *Yippee!* You can see all three "gongs" proudly displayed on our brochure's front cover.



Because of our state win we were automatic entrants in the Australian Tourism Awards. So, earlier this year we four and Saxon headed to Adelaide for the big night. Alas, we didn't win, the prize going to an Adelaide based backpacker tour operator. Never mind, we'll simply have to try harder this year.

We had a great response to our "Year of the Outback" special offer in last year's newsletter, and many guests doubled up, combining Gulf Savannah and Cape York safaris, while two

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intrepid Kiwi adventurers combined the Kimberley "Stockman" with the all new Darwin/Cairns "Drover". Well done Brenda & Dennis, what an awesome adventure! See our 2003 Special Offer inside.

On the family front, all are exceedingly well. Saxon & Greg are expecting their second child in September to join Hayden, now in Kindy and Greg has left the Navy to join the Police force.

Sam & Russ built "the pool of the century", Amy became a Girl Guides 'Sixer' and started netball while Oliver started big school and joined the soccer team, coached by none other than his dad.

Di and I have done 'not enough fishing' so we'll have to make an extra effort especially before our fourth grandchild arrives.

We sincerely hope everything is well with you, your family and friends. Thank you again for your support and encouragement.

Wishing you all a happy, healthy, peaceful and adventurous 2003.

Australia needs YOU!

Most people wouldn't realise that tourism is one of Australia's biggest exporters earning around \$71 billion, nearly 5% of GDP, rivalling our massive mining industry. Combined with domestic tourism this huge industry employs

551,000 (approx 6% of the workforce) with an inestimable economic flow-on effect.

For the past year or so Aussies will be well aware of the devastating effects the record drought has had on folk in regional Australia. Now our tourism industry is in serious trouble due to a parade of international events with major negative tourism impacts.

Observers say that the international situation will cause Aussies to stay at home thereby helping domestic tourism. Of course this will only translate if those that do stay at home actually take an Aussie holiday. This year, your tourism industry needs you, perhaps more than any other year since the crippling Pilots' Strike

of 1989. The signs are real; lower bookings and higher cancellations, airlines are reducing staff, tourism businesses are failing, jobs are being lost!

So, if you do decide to 'go to Australia' this year you'll support our tourism industry, save jobs, and redistribute money throughout our economy. And, if you happen to choose an Outback holiday you'll help outback Aussies as well. Last year our small company redistributed \$667,000 to outback communities through our purchase of fuel, food, accommodation and other services. We can make a difference!

(... continued on page 3)

Dinosaurs, Fossils and other ancient things

Many of our past guests have "done" all three of our extended safaris to Cape York, across the Gulf Savannah and through The Kimberley, either camping or accommodated. Requests keep coming for new adventures so we've put our thinking caps on and have come up with a couple of ideas, both of which have dinosaurs and ancient things as the centrepiece.

Many of our readers will have been fascinated by the "Walking with Dinosaurs" TV series in recent times without realising that Western Queensland is an extremely rich repository of Australia's prehistoric megafauna, one such relic being hailed as Australia's Best Vertebrate Fossil and the World's Best Pliosaurus record.

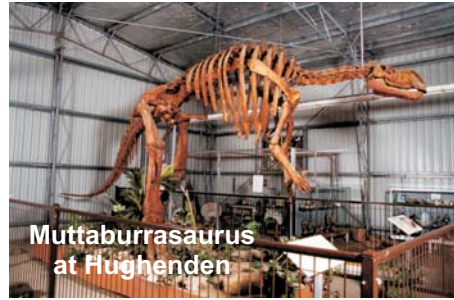


Richmond's Kronosaurus

About 120-100 million years ago much of central Queensland and parts of NSW and SA were covered by a shallow inland sea. Over time the sea receded to the Gulf of Carpentaria presenting today's outback landscape. The dried seabed is now called the Great Artesian Basin.

In these seas huge marine reptiles, Kronosaurus (13m), Pliosaurus (5m), Woolungasaurus (10m) and Ichthyosaurs (7m) once swam. On land, Ornithopods (7m), moving on their hind legs, roamed and grazed on prehistoric plants. The fossil remains of the marine creatures can be seen in Richmond while a Muttaborrasaurus, an Ornithopod, is displayed in Hughenden.

To the west lies the World Heritage listed Riversleigh Fossil Fields near Lawn Hill Gorge and an outstanding interpretive centre in Mt Isa, while further south near Winton, Lark Quarry hosts one of the world's most outstanding records of a dinosaur stampede.



But it's not all about old bones. There's Porcupine Gorge (our Grand Canyon), Lawn Hill Gorge, and since we'll be in the area the Wellshot Hotel, Waltzing Matilda Centre, Qantas Founders Outback Museum and the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame are all on the list. And, one of our other thoughts is to just keep heading west across the Plenty "Highway" to Alice Springs and "The Rock".

So ... have you got a map ready?

Option 1 - CAIRNS to ALICE SPRINGS: Cairns, Hughenden, Richmond, Longreach, Winton, Cloncurry, Riversleigh, Lawn Hill, Mt Isa, Boulia, Alice Springs plus optional local touring in the Red Centre.

Option 2 - CAIRNS TO CAIRNS: Cairns, Hughenden, Richmond, Longreach, Winton, Mt Isa, Riversleigh, Lawn Hill, Burketown, Normanton, return to Cairns with opportunities to visit Cobbold Gorge, Undara Lava Tubes, Chillagoe and other points of interest.

If you are interested it would help us to plan if you let us know your preferences:

- Option 1 or Option 2 (both 10 to 12 days)?
- Camping or Accommodated?
- Oct 2003, Apr/May 2004, Oct 2004?
- or any other ideas for that matter ...

A real bonus is our personal relationship with expert locals. Yes, you guessed it, Savannah Guides at Winton, Longreach, Riversleigh/Lawn Hill, Normanton, the "Gulflander", Croydon, Cobbold Gorge, Mt Surprise and Undara not to mention your own Wilderness Challenge Savannah Guide.

So, why not ring, write, fax or email and tell us your thoughts on what you would like.

'Savannah Way' opens new adventureland

A very welcome tri-state agreement has recently resulted in the badging of a new national tourist route spanning the country from Cairns to Katherine and on to Broome.

Similar in concept to western Queensland's popular Matilda Highway, the Savannah Way opens up a new adventureland in Australia's Tropical Savannahs. The new east/west route parallels Highway No.1 but is roughly 400kms to the north of the national highway route.

The Savannah Way's developing infrastructure is providing increased security and services for adventurers who want to visit such remote locations as Burketown, Lawn Hill, Bowthorn Station, Hell's Gate, Borroloola and the brand new Limmen National Park which my fishing mate Peter Boroughs and I researched in 1995.



Spearheaded by the Northern Territory's then Deputy Chief Minister, Mike Reed, the project's name was suggested at a Savannah Guides School at Hell's Gate in April 1997 (reported in our 1998 newsletter). Tourism Queensland has since played a major role with their NT and WA counterparts. Interestingly, Savannah Guides founder John Courtenay provided significant Research and Development guidance. Yours truly even suggested the new route's emblem!

Here at Wilderness Challenge we think it's a great idea which has the potential to inject economic assistance to the far north's outback regions. In fact we've been pioneering the tourist route for years by operating camping safaris across the epic region since the early 1990's, lauding its 'All Australian' natural and cultural treasures in many past newsletters.

Our popular Cairns to Darwin Camping Safari (10 or 14 days) is now available in an Accommodated format (13 days) with a bonus visit to Arnhemland. A shorter Accommodated itinerary (6 days ex Cairns) reaches out as far as fabulous Lawn Hill Gorge capturing other famous landmarks such as the Undara Lava Tubes, Cobbold Gorge, the historic "Gulflander" train and much more. Happily, the itinerary's Normanton/Cairns one-way fly sector eliminates the need to drive the 700 km sector twice. All three itineraries epitomise the real "spirit of the Outback" a popular 'folk lore' image claimed by many Australians.

So, why not come and visit the Gulf Savannah and the 'Savannah Way' - Queensland's accessible Outback - ex Cairns!

Special "Australia needs YOU" Offer

Save up to **\$500 per person** by receiving 10% off all 2003 brochured Tours and Safaris booked in Apr/May/Jun and paid in full by 30 June 2003.

CONDITIONS:

- Offer available only to Wilderness Challenge newsletter readers, family and friends.
- Not available in conjunction with any other offer.
- Quoto code "sanyo".

PS: If you do what Dennis and Brenda did last year you'll save \$1658!

**SAVE up to
\$500
per person!**

Finding your way around in the Plant Kingdom, #4

Many of our guests find the incredible diversity of Australia's plant communities a fascinating surprise. Last issue we diverted to explore the world of termites but now we return to the botanical world. Having discussed plants without seeds (#1 and #2), eucalypts, melaleucas, grassrees and boabs (#3) it only seems fair that we spend a little time on our National Floral Emblem, the Wattle.

The wattle belongs to the Mimosaceae family (Mimosaceae), its genus being *Acacia* (from the Greek "*akis*" meaning a point or prickle), and is represented in Australia by an amazing 900 plus species, the most diverse genus in Australia. *Acacia* also happens to be our grand-daughter Amy's middle name. The Cootamundra Wattle (*acacia baileyana*) is perhaps the most well known being the centrepiece of John Williamson's popular song of the same name. However, Australia's Floral Emblem is the Golden Wattle (*acacia pycnantha*). Its name, *pycnantha*, is again from the Greek 'pyknos' meaning dense and 'anthos' meaning flower, the combination referring to the dense clusters of flowers.

A fascinating feature of acacias is their foliage. The typically broad, lance or sickle shaped, leathery "leaves" lack a central vein and are actually modified flattened leaf stalks called phyllodes. A phyllode's physical structure loses much less water through evaporation than normal leaves, while the job of photosynthesis continues unabated.

The striking contrast of the wattle's flowers and "leaves" is said to be the origin of our nation's famous sporting colours "*the green and gold*". Strangely, while Australia has many unique plants such as the eucalypt, our Floral Emblem is native to many other countries, notably Africa. Indeed, following Federation the uniquely Australian Waratah challenged the wattle for the national title, the very strong contender being supported by South Africa who wanted to adopt the wattle as their own. History shows that *acacia pycnantha* won, the species being popularly accepted as our national flower for nearly 100 years. Amazingly, the species was not officially proclaimed Australia's Floral Emblem until 1988, our bicentenary year!

Australia's Tropical Savannas do not have any Cootamundra Wattle or Golden Wattle growing naturally but we've got our fair share of the remaining 898 plus species. You can see them on a Wilderness Challenge safari when the "*winter sun is shining*" and the wattles are in full, glorious bloom.

Come and admire our "Green & Gold"

PS: Catch up with #'s 1, 2 & 3 at our website.

★★★★★ "Private Collection" Remote Area Expeditions

Many of our guests who have travelled with us more than once will acknowledge we strive to improve year after year, be it with new or improved itineraries, equipment, training or customer services.

Last year our innovative urges lead us to new heights giving us the capability to address the developing five-star soft-adventure market for campers or non-campers alike.

Flagship of our "*Private Collection*" Camping Safaris is a 'state-of-the-art' off-road camper-trailer, particularly suited to northern Australia's rugged outback conditions, and very well appointed. Sleeping arrangements feature a queen-size bed and adjacent hard floor area all enclosed with fully zippered canvas walls and roof. Fly-screened, zippered windows are plentiful. A fully equipped stainless steel kitchen boasts a three burner gas range, sink and fridge/freezer. Tables and chairs, table linen and long-stemmed wine glasses complete the setting. Meals are first class, featuring premium Australian produce and selected wines.

Additional accommodation can be provided in an integrated annex or a separate safari tent with super comfortable mattresses.

"*Private Collection*" Accommodated Safaris always use the best facilities available in the location. A combination of hotels, bush pubs, cattle stations, remote roadhouses and wilderness resorts are used for a great variety of experiences, capturing the very essence of the Australian Outback. The legendary outback is rugged and very remote, each location adding to the adventure, fun and understanding of the region and experiencing first hand the living and working conditions of outback Aussies, past and present.

Total flexibility is the key. Choose from a menu of safaris or we'll design a **special itinerary just for you** to anywhere for any period - simply tell us your interests. Singles, couples, or a family can enjoy exclusive and comfortable wilderness experiences in accommodated or camping formats, or a mixture of both. Whether it's birdwatching, wildlife, photography, fishing, botany, geology, archaeology or simply relaxing and enjoying stunning landscapes, we have the expertise, the equipment and highly skilled guides to meet your heart's desire.

"Australia ... exclusively"



Australia needs YOU!

(... continued from page 1)

In his introduction to the outstanding "*Discovery Guide to Outback Queensland*" Herb Wharton* throws down the gauntlet: "*A journey to the outback has the power to instill the true meaning of belonging and identity. Every Australian should make an Outback pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime and swear allegiance to the landscape, to the soil, to our mother earth*".

So ... how about that "*once in a lifetime*" holiday this year? You can stay in Australia,

take an Aussie holiday, make it an Outback holiday, pick up Herb's gauntlet, save some jobs, help your fellow Aussies in the Outback **and** have a great holiday!

Now that's what I call win, win, win, win, win ...

If you like, Wilderness Challenge can help you achieve all the above!

Why not do it this year ... Australia needs you!

* **Herb Wharton** is an aboriginal drover, horse breaker, rodeo rider, life member of the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and author of "*Cattle Camp*", "*Yumba Days*" and "*Unbranded*".

Staff Stuff ...

- Scott Templeton received probably the best accolade I've ever seen. This is hard to beat! *"We have taken many trips around the world and have met many guides during our travels. Scott is one of the best, if not the best guide we have ever met."* Congratulations Scotty!
- Jim Fitzgerald wasn't too far behind with: *"Our day with you was amongst the top days in our 30 years together (which was what we were celebrating)"* Well done Jim.
- Mark Norman and Scott Templeton were accredited as Savannah Guides Roving Interpreters and Evan Tandy achieved Savannah Guide status.
- Evan Tandy was elected to the Board of Savannah Guides.
- Chris, Daniel, Geoff, Jean, John, Rhonnie and Rick W all continued to provide outstanding support and experiences for all our guests.
- And the Company too: *"a standard of excellence I have not seen from any other operator throughout my extensive travels in Australia over 16 years"*.
"a business that is carefully planned, extremely well managed and increasingly successful."
"... competence, enthusiasm to please, and eye for detail that this company demonstrates..."
- A hearty welcome to Mark Norman and Steve Gordon who have joined us following Certificate III and IV Eco Guide training at Cairns TAFE
- Jim Fitzgerald "semi" hung up his guiding boots when accepting the role of Operations Coordinator. Apart from day to day operations control, Jim is Workplace Health & Safety Officer and training coordinator since he is also a certified Workplace Assessor.
- Many of our past guests and agents will know Lisa Weare who has worked with Saxon and Sam in administration for three years. Lisa is leaving that role to become one of our tour guides. A burning ambition for many years, Lisa completed her Heritage & Interpretive Tourism Certificate III course three years ago, has attended three Savannah Guides Schools and has now been given the opportunity to become our first female Guide. Congratulations and good luck Lisa!
- A warm welcome to Melanie (Mel) McDowall who joins us in the office on 22 April.
- Rick Lang completed his 6th year with Wilderness Challenge. It only seems like 10 Rick!

Congratulations to everyone!



Rick at one with his hoist



Saxon, Lisa & Sam at our new office



Celebrating our Queensland Tourism Award win

bits 'n pieces

- We've replaced our camping mattresses with state-of-the-art 100mm thick self-inflating velour covered mattresses and fitted sheets.
- Tom stepped down from the Board of Savannah Guides after serving for four years as President.
- Russell who has served three years on the Savannah Guides board was elected President.
- Russell was also elected President of Guiding Organisations of Australia (GOA) a new Federal, State and Territory Tourism Commissions initiative to provide a representative voice for the plethora of guiding groups across the country.
- Melbourne's Scotch College returns for their 9th year. Jeff Watson again leads the Year 10 group of 22 crossing the tropical savannahs between Cairns and Darwin, including Kakadu National Park, as they did last year.
- A parting thought ... like many others, I often knock back the offer of a plastic bag at shops. You know the "would you like a bag for that (birthday card, or two batteries) Sir?". I simply say "No thanks, there's enough plastic bags lying around already". Twice, I've heard the person behind me say "No, I don't want one either thanks". Just think ... if all our newsletters were read by only two people and we each knocked back one plastic bag every month that would be ... let's see ... 96,000 less plastic bags!

The entire team send their very best adventurous wishes to you all.

A small favour ...

We hope you've enjoyed our newsletter and brochure. When you're finished, don't throw them away - recycle them by passing them on to your family, friends and neighbours or to your local Travel Agent ... please!

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