

# Wilderness Challenge



Wilderness Challenge Pty Ltd PO Box 254 Cairns QLD 4870 AUSTRALIA February 2004

Phone: 07 4035 4488 Fax: 07 4035 4188 Email: info@wilderness-challenge.com.au Website: www.wilderness-challenge.com.au

## Greetings from Tropical North Queensland

**Happy New Year**, and welcome to a brand new newsletter and brochure telling you about the exciting new developments here at Wilderness Challenge ... and there have been quite a few!

Following the major move to our new facility at Portsmith in 2002 we revisited our marketing strategies and focused on our customer satisfaction goals. Now, our 2004 brochure has expanded to 16 pages with a 'new-look' reflecting our reinvigorated stance, including nine new and exciting Cape York itineraries, a totally revamped Gulf Savannah "Wanderer" safari and we also fine-tuned our Gulf & Kakadu "Overlander" & "Pioneer" camping safaris.

You may also notice that we've put our impressive credentials and awards on the front cover instead of 'hiding them under a bushel' on the back page and we've unveiled some outstanding customer comments about our Guides and our company which we've previously treasured only in-house. We've even boldly published the fact that a four year survey by the CSIRO (*Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation*) indicated our Guides' superior, unequalled performance (see brochure Pages 2, 3 and 4).

During 2003 I had the pleasure of meeting many of our customers departing or returning from safari. Each event was a great opportunity to get direct and immediate feedback as well as being able to keep in touch personally, since I have fewer chances to do so these days on-safari. Buoyed by these euphoric events my goal this year as Managing Director is to personally meet the majority of all our safari customers ... but there's more ... see Customer Survey Page 3.

Speaking of euphoria, last November, for the fifth time, we won the Regional Tourism Award and we are now an Inductee to the Tourism Tropical North Queensland "Hall of Fame".

We re-entered the Queensland competition also but the competition at state level is a lot tougher, especially in Queensland with its enormous quantity and quality of tourism product. So we mentally prepared ourselves not to repeat our 2002 win. But we were wrong ... **we WON!** Oh what a feeling! Now, we are automatic entrants in the Australian Tourism Awards to be announced in Perth on Friday 13 February 2004. Keep your fingers crossed!

Samantha and I will travel to Perth for the event and do some other work while we're there. One such visit will be to the OKA Motor Company where we hope to sign-up for two new OKA special purpose 4WD safari vehicles for the coming safari season. These two new machines will add to our new, soon to be delivered, Mercedes Benz 14 seat *Sprinter* which we will introduce on our Daintree, Cape Tribulation and Mossman Gorge rainforest Day Tours.

Early in March you may see us on television if you watch Channel 7's 'The Great Outdoors'. The TV show filmed our "Private Collection" over two days featuring our amazing camper-trailer, presenter Tom Williams and 'past passengers'

suppliers to bring significant and exciting change to our Cape York safaris. Many will know our past "Adventurer" Drive/Fly and Fly/Drive safaris were exactly the same, the latter being the reverse of the northbound safari.

Although different, each of our new camping itineraries has an even share of major icons while the essentials of Cape York are included in both. For example the "Discoverer" and "Explorer" both visit Lakefield National Park and the infamous Telegraph Track using different camp sites north and south, but we only visit Weipa going north and the Iron Range National Park heading south. The new structure begs for the two itineraries to be combined to

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Neil and Barbara. So, stay tuned to Channel 7 (see 2004 Brochure Page 3).

On the family front, the Keilys (Saxon {Sales}, Greg & Hayden) were blessed with a second son, Ronan, so keen to get here that he was born a month early. Greg graduated as a Police Constable following six months commuting to the Townsville Academy and No.1 son Hayden hit the Pre-school scene this year.

Samantha {General Manager} and Oliver bonded recently while Russell and Amy visited Yap in Micronesia for two weeks delivering tourism development workshops on the tiny island. And earlier, Russ made us all feel very proud when he received the 2003 Cassowary Award from State and Federal Environment Ministers in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the conservation and management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Meanwhile, Di and I are just great! We hope everything is well with you, your family and friends. Thank you again for all your support.

*Wishing you a happy, healthy, peaceful and adventurous 2004.*

## Cape York revisited

Always looking to improve and meet customer requests we've developed new itineraries to enhance our guests' experiences of this great wilderness region at the top of Australia.

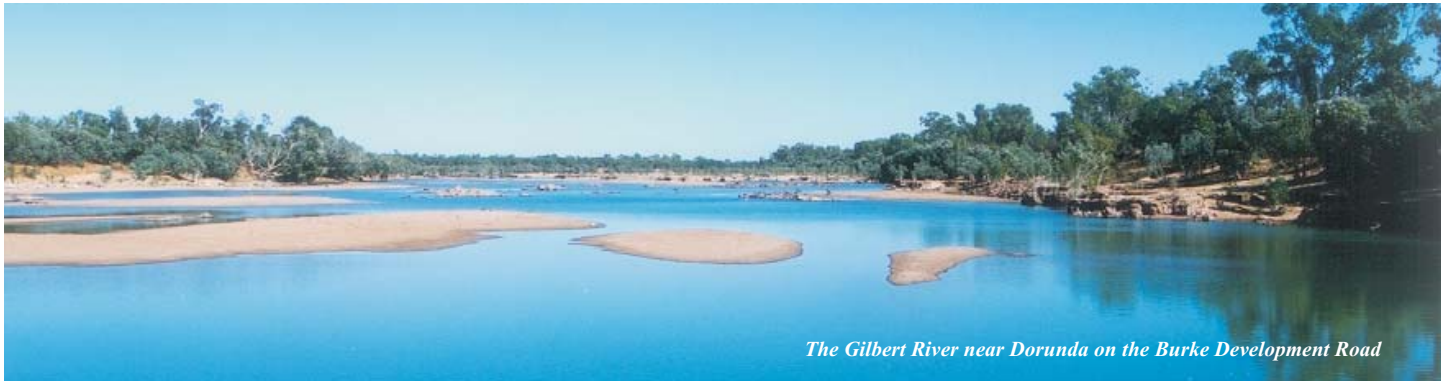
For many years we've operated our very popular 8 Day Drive & Fly "Adventurer" Camping Safaris but we are now able to take advantage of improvements in roads, infrastructure and new

make an enticing 14 Day All Overland safari which we've called Cape York "Complete".

*Continued on Page 3 ...*



Chili Beach  
Iron Range National Park



*The Gilbert River near Dorunda on the Burke Development Road*

## **The Gulf Savannah an exciting new adventureland where “all the rivers run” ... sometimes!**

Think of a great Australian river and most Aussies will name the Murray Darling system, with very good reason. But few will know that the Mitchell River of far north Queensland with a catchment area 1/15 the size of the Murray Darling can match its southern rivals in terms of flow “in a good year” with an annual mean discharge of some 12,000,000 megalitres!

The mighty Mitchell River rises in the Great Dividing Range just a short distance from Cairns near the Daintree rainforest’s Pacific coast. However, it flows west, collecting contributions from the Alice, Palmer, Walsh and Lynd Rivers as it continues its 560km journey across the base of Cape York Peninsula to the Gulf of Carpentaria, arguably a part of the Indian Ocean.

Others like the Einasleigh, Etheridge and Gilbert, and further west the Flinders, Leichhardt and Nicholson Rivers all collaborate to present the unique Gulf Savannah landscape. Unlike Queensland’s largest perennial river, the Jardine (at Cape York’s top), the mighty Gulf rivers can, and do, run dry during the winter months contrasting vividly with the massive amounts of water they carry at other times.

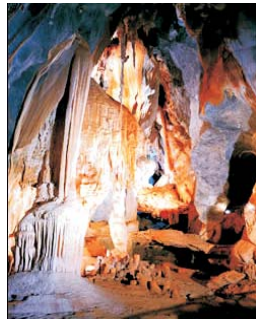
I promise you that the vision of a dry Mitchell River is awesome ... truly a land “*where the creeks run dry or ten foot high*”. (From *‘The Overlanders’* - Anonymous).

## **Dinosaurs, Fossils and other ancient things**

In last year’s newsletter we proposed a new safari in response to requests for new adventures. The theme centred on Queensland’s rich mega-fauna relics, between Cairns and Alice Springs, camping or accommodated. We had a good response, but timing and opportunity limited ‘the numbers’ so we couldn’t operate.

We promised we would ask again this year to see if we could entice more adventurers. So, if you think such a trip sounds interesting, give us a call and we’ll send all the information to you.

But it’s not all about wet or dry rivers. The Gulf region is blessed with some of Australia’s most amazing geological features. Consider an ancient coral reef from the Devonian Period, 400 million years ago, that is now perched 350 metres (1100ft) above sea level and 200kms inland from Cairns at Chillagoe. Today, this ancient reef presents limestone caves of exquisite beauty to explore and its metamorphic form gives up marble of world renown.



The Atherton Tableland’s volcanic history is well evidenced by its scenic crater lakes and ‘The Crater’ National Park, while at Undara the world’s longest and largest lava tube system was born a mere 190,000 years ago.

A further four hours away at Cobbold Gorge, you can cruise silently amid 135 million years old Hampstead sandstone and see Archer Fish shoot down insects with jets of water spurted from their grooved palates.

At Lawn Hill Gorge, you’ll marvel at the beauty of this amazing oasis surrounded by a semi-arid landscape while nearby at the World Heritage listed Riversleigh Fossil Fields you’ll learn about Australia’s mega-fauna of 30 million years ago.

You’ll cross the “Plains of Promise”, where huge marine reptiles such as Kronosaurus, Pliosaurus, Woolungasaurus and Ichthyosaurs once swam, on our way to visit a more recent historic icon, that of the ill-fated 1860 Burke & Wills expedition’s most northerly camp, #119.



You’ll travel into outback cattle country along the remote Burke Development Road to experience the raw but engaging lifestyle on a remote operational cattle property and Hunting & Fishing Lodge at Dorunda Station and mix with real outback folk in Karumba, Normanton, Burketown, Croydon, Georgetown and Forsayth.



Connect directly with our pioneer heritage when you board the historic “*Gulflander*” train to cross the Norman River where explorer Ludwig Leichhardt once walked. Ride the unique “*Savannahlander*” train to the precincts of Tyrconnell Historic Gold Mine where you’ll hear the haunting rhythmic thumps of an antique ten head stamping battery crushing rocks to release their prize of gold.

All in all, a fascinating journey through time across an amazing landscape formed by unimaginable geological forces, sculptured by wind and water, harvested for thousands of years by Aboriginal peoples and harnessed in more contemporary times by pastoralists, fishermen, miners and now tourism.

You can see the region’s mighty rivers and experience the amazing Gulf Savannah with Wilderness Challenge, a Savannah Guides Master Operator, on our 9 Day Gulf Savannah “*Wanderer*” Accommodated Safari.

## **Gulf & Kakadu “Overlander” changes**

Years ago we travelled between Borroloola and Matranka, crossing the remote Limmen, Cox and Towns Rivers and visiting Roper Bar, almost along the same track as explorer Ludwig Leichhardt in 1848. When access to the “Lost City” in the Abner Range near Cape Crawford became available by helicopter we re-routed to take advantage of the opportunity. As a result we have since travelled to/from Mataranka via Daly Waters and the Stuart Highway.

Earlier, in 1995, a fishing mate Peter Boroughs and I researched another “Lost City” on Nathan River Station and we were awestruck. Earmarked then to become a National Park, it came to fruition last year as the Limmen National Park, and we were there to check it out.

This year we’ll return to the original track via Roper Bar so we can visit the new Park and enjoy these spectacular natural formations.

# Finding your way around in the Plant Kingdom, #5

Many of our guests find the incredible diversity of Australia's plant communities a fascinating surprise. Our past newsletters have tried to provide a very simple pathway through the Plant Kingdom to arrive at those plants which comprise the majority of our vegetative landscape. First, we discussed plants without seeds: algae, fungi, lichens and liverworts in 1999, progressing to ferns and introducing plants with seeds: angiosperms & gymnosperms in 2000. Our 2001 newsletter looked at some plants which typify our northern landscape including Eucalypts, Melaleucas, Grass-trees, Boabs and Ant-plants. We diverted in 2002 to discuss termites, which also dominate our northern landscape but returned in 2003 to focus on Acacias (wattles) and our National Floral Emblem, the Golden Wattle (*acacia pycnantha*).

This year a special Family, 'The Proteas' (*Proteaceae*) gets our attention because it contributes greatly to the landscape we instinctively recognise. You'll connect immediately when some very familiar names are presented here. The Protea is essentially a Southern Hemisphere family predominating in South Africa and Australia. Here, the family is represented by 46 genera and about 1100 species.

## Customer Survey: Your opinion valued.

In my introduction on Page 1, I mentioned that I had farewelled or greeted a good many of our customers before or after their safari holiday and that all these events were very pleasant indeed. There's little doubt that those about to go were full of positive anticipation while those returning were very pleased (thankfully) with the great experience they had just enjoyed.

Either way, being realistic, such a euphoric atmosphere is not always conducive to absolutely objective feedback.

So, we have randomly selected a sample of 2004 customers to try to gauge 'post-euphoric' opinion about their experiences with Wilderness Challenge. If you find a Questionnaire enclosed with this newsletter along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope (Australia only, since our stamps are not valid overseas) I do hope you will reply since we value your opinion highly.

We have a very positive track record of listening to our customers, so please tell us what you think. Evaluate our performance and give us a hand to continue to be at the cutting edge of nature and culture based tours and safari holidays across Australia's Tropical Savannahs.

Among its genera are *Telopea*, one of its species being the famous Waratah (*T. speciosissima*), floral emblem of New South Wales, while other genera such as *Grevillea*, *Banksia*, *Macadamia* and *Hakea* are well known to most Aussies.



Golden Grevillea (*grevillea pteridifolia*)

The *Grevillea* is a predominately Australian genus with 362 species, the Silky Oak (*grevillea robusta*) being the largest and its striking timber grain highly prized for furniture. In northern Australia the Fern-leaved Grevillea or Golden Grevillea or Kimberley Christmas Tree (*grevillea pteridifolia*), meaning winged foliage, can't be missed, especially in winter

when it is in full glorious bloom and rivals the wattle for the mantle of "The Green and Gold".

Western Australians have 80% of the *Banksia* genus' species (60 of 76) the group that gave us the 'Bad Bad Banksia Men' of May Gibbs' "Snuggle Pot and Cuddle Pie" fame. The *Banksia* is endemic to Australia and was named for Sir Joseph Banks who journeyed here with Captain Cook in 1770. In the north, our most populous species is the Tropical *Banksia* (*banksia dentata*) from the Greek meaning (the leaf) "having a toothed margin". The plant was used ingeniously by Aborigines to 'carry fire' when the burnt core of the dead and dried 'bottle-brush' flower smouldered for many hours as it was swung gently to and fro while its carrier walked through the bush.

So now we've introduced you to some the Families, some of the Genera and some of the Species that make up the vast majority of the flora of our famous Aussie 'outback' landscape ... the one we take so much for granted.

Why not come along with us to enjoy, appreciate and learn more about our natural flora heritage? It's fabulous!

You can catch up on 'Finding your way around in the Plant Kingdom #'s 1, 2, 3 and 4 by visiting our website at:

[www.wilderness-challenge.com.au](http://www.wilderness-challenge.com.au)

## Cape York revisited ...

... continued from Page 1

The Iron Range National Park is the exciting new inclusion on the "Explorer" and "Complete" camping safaris which follows an upgrade of facilities at the Park's Chili Beach camping ground.

The National Park protects the largest remaining area of lowland tropical rainforest in Australia and is renowned for its birdlife and wildlife, many being endemic. Eclectus Parrots, Palm Cockatoos, Magnificent Rifle Birds, Green (Condra) Pythons and Spotted Cuscus, to name just a few, make this their home. While in the area we also visit the tiny outpost of Portland Roads and walk in the rainforest to discover relics of a bygone era hidden in the jungle. Views of Mt Tozer and the historic Batavia goldfields en-route provide an added bonus.

Our new-look 7 Day Drive & Fly "Frontier" Accommodated Safari now visits Weipa and we fly between Horn Island and Cairns. A cruise to Thursday Island is part of the itinerary and we've added a tour of "TI" as an extra bonus.

Another exciting development is the brand new Luxury Expedition Yacht "Oceanic Princess" which comes into service later this year. This is a real bonus for intended travellers to the Cape, now being able to combine a luxury Great Barrier Reef cruise with a first class safari. The new "Seafarer" combines the "Discoverer" camping safari with a southbound cruise while the "Mariner" cruises north and follows the "Explorer" camping safari south to Cairns.



Luxury Expedition Yacht "Oceanic Princess"

Similarly, accommodated guests can combine the "Frontier" safari sector with a cruise in either direction making up the all new "Escape" and "Getaway" itineraries.

So now you can have the experience of a lifetime 'any which way'. Camping or Accommodated, Driving and Flying, Driving and Cruising or All Overland in this fascinating wilderness region at Australia's top. It doesn't get any better in this part of the world!

Email excerpt: "I'm now back in the rat-race of Sydney. I'm sure life will return to normal soon enough but what a contrast to the peace & serenity (& warmth) of the Cape York Peninsula." Lynne, NSW

### "Oceanic Princess"

Length:	63 metres
Beam:	13 metres
Displacement:	1200 tonnes
Speed:	14 knots
No. of Cabins:	38
No. of Passengers:	76
Built:	Cairns, 2003/2004

# Staff Stuff ...

● **Rick Wenden** must be bribing his passengers, he received so many accolades last year. I'm very pleased for you Rick and for the company, but mostly for our guests. Just one read: *"He excelled on all counts, was patient, extremely knowledgeable, fun, eternally good natured and made everyone feel so comfortable together and safe."* Congratulations Rick, you've made a lot of people very very happy.

● Not to be outdone **Geoff 'Bagpipes' Harris** weighed in with *"The courtesy, attention and professionalism shown by Geoff was exemplary"*, and *"... your most valuable assets are people like Geoff ... we felt safe, comfortable and relaxed ..."*. Just two examples of letters we received about Geoff. Well done Geoffery!

● *"I am still talking of my wonderful camping holiday through the Kimberleys ... I think due to our wonderful guide, cook, mechanic etc., **Evan Tandy**."* And in Cape York *"... simply had a marvellous time ... Evan was an exemplary guide, cook, historian, etc., He really made the holiday tops."* Great stuff Evan!

● **Lisa Weare**, who completed her first season as a guide, with *"Lisa was an interesting and sensitive instructor, a very careful driver, and altogether a great tour guide ... we commend you for your No.1 female guide, and a job well done."* Well done indeed Lisa!

● *"What a marvellous (Daintree) day. It's very understandable why you have won so many awards! **Daniel (Piat)** is a great guide and we enjoyed his company very much."* Daniel, you've done it again ... thanks!

● **John Hogan, Steve Gordon** and **Lisa** were all nominated for a Cairns Tourism Association Award (John twice) for "Outstanding Customer Service". Congratulations 'guys'.

● **Chris O'Connor** had a quiet safari season being pre-occupied with another passion, but he chimed in when needed. Thanks Chris.

● Meanwhile, in the office: *"Firstly thank YOU for all your assistance ... your personal service definitely supports your company's reputation for service excellence."* Well done **Saxon**, ably and continuously supported by **Melanie**, who also completed her first season, **Rhonnice** pounding the pavements and of course at the helm expertly, GM **Samantha**.

● Once again **Rick Lang** kept the wheels turning, no small feat considering the rugged and unforgiving country our safari equipment is subjected to. However, our re-equipment program of one new Mercedes Benz and two new 4WD OKAs for the coming season should provide Rick with some well earned respite. Thanks Rick, really appreciate your dedication.

● Jean Defferrard retired after 25 plus years guiding in the far north. There's not much that Jean didn't know about the natural world up here but the good news is he passed it on to many Wilderness Challenge Guides. Thanks Jean, and congratulations on your retirement.

● Sadly, Mark, Steve, Scott and Jim have all moved on, Scott taking up the Department of Primary Industries position in Coen. Mark

moved back to Airlie Beach for family reasons, Steve to pursue his aviation passion and Jim for a change of lifestyle. Our best wishes go to all.

● A hearty welcome to **Dean Nulty** and **Simon Cross** who join our Guiding Team this year. Dean has lots of experience in the bush and is now enrolled in the Certificate III Eco Guide course at Cairns TAFE. Simon is a Savannah Guides Roving Interpreter looking for a change of scenery. He joins us from Darwin based Odyssey Safaris.

● Daniel Piat and Rick Lang both chalked up their 7th year with Wilderness Challenge while Lisa, Evan and Geoff will tick over their 4th year soon.

● And the company enters its 15th year ... unbelievable!

*Congratulations to everyone!*

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

## What will they think of next?

If you would like to receive this newsletter in full colour, email us at:

[info@wilderness-challenge.com.au](mailto:info@wilderness-challenge.com.au)

and we'll email a PDF (Portable Document File) right back to you ... it's that easy.

## Stop Press

There's been an early rush on all our "western" safaris this year so if you've been to Cape York and you're thinking of another adventure holiday you should decide fairly quickly if you want to travel with Wilderness Challenge. We only operate one or two of each of these safaris each year so they tend to fill up early.

There are a few places left on our Gulf & Kakadu *"Overlander"* and *"Pioneer"* camping safaris and also their accommodated versions the *"Drover"* and *"Jackaroo"*. All four itineraries cross the country between Cairns and Darwin, in either direction, so you can choose where you would like to start or finish.

Our Kimberley safaris have again proved popular with only four places left on the accommodated *"Stockman"*. There are still plenty of places on either of two Kimberley *"Complete"* camping safaris but if you want a pick of the dates you should try to call early.

Even if you are planning for 2005 it would be a good idea to let us know as soon as possible.

## bits 'n pieces

■ Our new 100mm thick self-inflating velour covered mattresses and fitted sheets were a big hit last year.

■ Samantha and Saxon visited suppliers and inspected new facilities on a whirlwind visit to Cape York and Thursday Island.

■ Russell was re-elected President of Savannah Guides for a second term.

■ Evan Tandy continued as a Director on the Board of Savannah Guides.

■ Russell continued as the Chair of Guiding Organisations of Australia (GOA), a Federal, State and Territory Tourism Commissions initiative providing representation for the plethora of guiding groups across the country.

■ Melbourne's Scotch College returns for their 10th year. Jeff Watson will again lead the Year 10 group through The Kimberley between Darwin and Broome.

■ Wilderness Challenge and Tom were used as an example of a successful business in the new edition of the book "Your Home Business" by Helen Chrystides due for release in February.

■ Tom and Di with UK friends Paul & Pam researched the new Gulf Savannah itinerary on a four day 'busy' trip through the remote areas of the region.

■ In a first for Australia, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission introduced a 'Tour Guides Award' last year. Wilderness Challenge staff and management are very proud of the *"Wilderness Challenge Workplace Partnership Agreement"* that was developed and written in-house. We're proud because the AMWU and Senior Industrial Relations Inspector both congratulated us on an outstanding Certified Agreement.

■ Twenty six 'past passengers' travelled with us for a second or third time last year.

■ Take care ... stay safe.

### *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!

**Wilderness Challenge Pty Ltd**

PO Box 254 CAIRNS QLD 4870  
AUSTRALIA

**Phone: 07 4035 4488**

(International: +61 7 4035 4488)

**Fax: 07 4035 4188**

(International: +61 7 4035 4188)

**FREECALL: 1800 354 486**

**Email: [info@wilderness-challenge.com.au](mailto:info@wilderness-challenge.com.au)**

**Website: [www.wilderness-challenge.com.au](http://www.wilderness-challenge.com.au)**