

# Wilderness Challenge



February 2006

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## Greetings from Tropical North Queensland

*Happy New Year ...* and welcome to our 2006 Brochure and Newsletter to bring you up to date with happenings at Wilderness Challenge.

You might recall that last year's newsletter told you about our winning tourism's Oscar, an Australian Tourism Award, and of our induction into the Tropical North Queensland "Hall of Fame". Well, without wanting to be presumptuous, there are no such announcements this year since Hall of Fame inductees are not eligible to enter in the same category for three years so we decided to take a break from the State and National awards processes as well. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of exciting developments to report to you.

One very significant event was that son-in-law Russell Boswell (Sam's husband) joined the company as Director of Marketing following many years of involvement on a part-time "family" basis, not forgetting that Russ and I were the company's first guides way back in 1990. Russell's return means far more focused attention on our marketing and sales activities. Russell's post graduate studies in marketing at Monash University and his significant involvement in the tourism industry at local, state and national levels are perfect for his new role at Wilderness Challenge.

As it happens Russell didn't escape too easily from his previous role of 7 years as Coordinator of Cairns TAFE's Certificate III in Tourism (Guiding) course. Principals of Cairns TAFE decided to out-source the guiding components of the nationally recognised course and Wilderness Challenge was selected as the sub-contractor (see story page 2).

We continued with the upgrade of our fleet adding two new Mercedes-Benz 4WD "Sprinters". Although a lighter 4WD vehicle they boast a rear "diff-lock" which, when combined with an electric winch, gives them very good capability. The addition of bull-bar, dual batteries and roof rack saw them operating on our Cooktown and Gulf "Wanderer" Accommodated Safaris very successfully. Guests benefited from sedan-style ride, genuine reclining coach seating with armrests, comfortable leg room ... and only 13 people!

A third safari kitchen-trailer 'complete with rose-wood trim' completed the upgrade of our safari trailers providing unrivalled camping facilities according to many observers. Unfortunately, the two new OKAs we had on order did not materialise but we hope to take delivery of these later this year.

On the marketing front, Tom attended "OzTalkNZ" in Auckland in March and Russell followed-up with an August visit. Samantha joined "Queensland On Tour" on a whirlwind three week European trip visiting agents in cities of the UK, Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria.



Sam in Paris on the Champs Elysses

On the domestic side, for those who visit the Caravan & Camping Shows, look out for Peter Seaward in Brisbane, Saxon in Sydney and Tom in Melbourne this year. Drop in and say hello ... the lolly jar is sure to be there!

We were honoured and thrilled to take Channel Seven's "Queensland Weekender" crew of four on safari again last September. The 8 Day safari to Cape York, camping all the way, followed their recording of our 9 Day Gulf Savannah "Wanderer" Accommodated Safari in 2004 (see story page 3).

Personally, I enjoyed a few camping trips myself and it was great to be out in the bush again. An early season Cape York trip was as adventurous as it was enjoyable and provided excellent training for three guides, Shawn, Mark and Tom-Tom. The timing of my Kimberley trip saw Di and I celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary "on-tour" with a great bunch, including three

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"past passengers" Bev, Hugh and Dorothy, Di's sister and brother-in-law, Mo and Pete, and fellow guide Lisa, whom many of our readers will know from their past travels. Then came the "Queensland Weekender" Cape York trip and to round it all off a private trip to Cape York with friend and guide extraordinaire Scotty Templeton to research new remote locations and experiences to offer our guests in the future (see Cape York re-visited story page 2).

In between we sold our property at Trinity Beach, the birthplace and nursery of Wilderness Challenge, and moved to nearby Kewarra Beach. And, in amongst all that I managed to pursue my new-found adventure pastime, scuba diving (see Diving Debut story page 2).

Meanwhile, the family continues to thrive, grandchildren growing, developing skills and making their parents and grandparents feel proud. As an aside, I think I've created a monster having introduced 11 year old Amy to birdwatching. Hardly a day passes without a call to record a new bird, and I remember fondly the day I bought my first bird book when I was 12.

All in all a fantastic year, knowing that our entire team provided memorable, enjoyable and meaningful holiday adventures for many hundreds of our guests ... makes us feel proud.

But I've saved the best for last ... the most exciting news of all is that Russell and Samantha have decided to carry on the family business by buying a significant share of the company. Di and I are very pleased and proud of their decision knowing that our combined work, including Saxon's, over the past 16 years will be carried on with the same focus on quality and customer service. **Congratulations** and warmest wishes to them and to our entire team!

Tom & Di

Wishing you all a fantastic 2006!

# Cape York re-visited

You would think that travelling up and down Cape York about 100 times would be enough for anyone and that there was nothing new to see or do ... but you'd be wrong! Cape York is a wilderness region the size of England and that pointy bit at the top of Queensland is not only huge but holds a multitude of opportunities to come face to face with nature!

First-time visitors usually only travel to more accessible sites and to "must-see" features like Cooktown, various National Parks, Weipa and of course the "Top of Australia" itself, thereby capturing an overall "big picture" appreciation of Cape York Peninsula.

But I've been dreaming of a new safari, an *Advanced Cape York Safari* that takes guests further afield to explore new country and seek new experiences. You see, many of our loyal "past passengers" keep asking for new adventures having already "done" all our extended safaris. I've thought of venturing outside of the Tropical Savannahs but there's so much more to do in our own amazing backyard.



Picture:  
Tom Warnes

*Making the first set of footprints alongside those of a saltwater crocodile is an awesome experience.*

## Our Guides become Teachers

Wilderness Challenge is now delivering the Certificate III in Tourism (Guiding) course in a new agreement with the Tropical North Queensland TAFE College.

It's a very practical course, featuring field trips to natural areas and other tour operators around the region, and theory lessons in our newly built Training Room at the Wilderness Challenge base. The practical skills provided are applicable to many guiding and general tourism roles.

Our Guides Evan Tandy, Dean Nulty and Mark Kelly have completed their Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment and are teaching the program. It's a great opportunity

This new Cape York safari is for those who may have been there before but are seeking a deeper, more intense, experience of this magical wilderness.

And why not? Thousands of people re-visit other holiday places, perhaps many times, so why wouldn't they return, just once, to one of the world's most wondrous wilderness regions ... especially if guaranteed absolutely exhilarating natural experiences, in great company, with great naturalist guides.

We'll "walk-a-wild-river" or two, search for the endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot, hunt at night for the fabled Green Python and Spotted Cuscus, share a campfire with friends, fish for barramundi and saratoga and be the first to leave our footprints ... somewhere!



Picture:  
Scott Templeton

*The fabled Green Python*

We probably won't visit civilisation much except to restock fresh food and fuel ... but we'll still enjoy the same Wilderness Challenge standards of comfort and safety.

We're putting the final touches to what looks like a 12 to 14 day camping itinerary right now with the inaugural departure of this [special safari](#) in October 2006 with an indicative price of \$2795 per person Twin Share.

*Cape York - Advanced Safari ... interested?*

FREECALL 1800 354 486 or email us at:  
[info@wilderness-challenge.com.au](mailto:info@wilderness-challenge.com.au)

to book, or register your interest, and get final details of itinerary, price and departure date!

One departure - limited seats ... *don't miss out!*

for them to develop their careers while sharing their expertise with people wishing to start a guiding career and current guides seeking new qualifications, or a refresher.

The strong emphasis on training within our own team now has a new dimension that can only continue to raise our professional standards. We've been researching new topics and resources, chasing answers to obscure questions and building our in-house library substantially.

It has all been tremendous fun, and the most rewarding aspect has been seeing our first graduates move into new guiding roles with cruise companies, Japanese tours and other safari operators. One star student, Ossi Wallenius, has even joined our Guide Team.

Here's to the Tour Guides of the future!

## Diving Debut

Thirteen months ago I hadn't scuba dived in my life and now I'm hooked having just completed my 30th dive. Living proof that it's not too late for over 60's boys and girls to experience a totally different world of high adventure, I've notched up three deep dives, three night dives, a couple of drift dives, fed the famous Potato Cod at Cod Hole, photographed my first shark and met some really great people, of all ages.

Over the years we've taken many visiting divers on safari to show them the terrestrial side of Cape York after they dived the Great Barrier Reef. What about the reverse for you? Why not extend your adventure holiday up north and "jump in" before or after your safari?

You can get PADI certification in only 5 days with **ProDive** in Cairns and have great fun along the way. Or you can enjoy a fabulous day trip, snorkelling or scuba diving with **Poseidon** from Port Douglas. On Poseidon you can even try an "introductory dive" to see how you like it - what a great opportunity! For a really special diving and cruising experience you can join luxurious "*Spirit of Freedom*" for 4 or 7 unbelievable days aboard one of Australia's largest and most stylish live-aboard dive ships. Check out their websites:

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

[www.poseidon-cruises.com.au](http://www.poseidon-cruises.com.au)

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

I can recommend all three very highly!



*The best of both worlds*

You can also scuba dive when on our Cruise & Drive safaris with **Coral Princess Cruises** or **Captain Cook Cruises** (see our brochure pages 10 & 11), but you'll have to be a Certified Open Water Diver first.

So why not combine all the adventure and fun of an outback safari with the luxury and romance of a tropical cruise. An irresistible cocktail of campfires and snorkelling or diving, termite mounds and brilliant coral reefs, rich red bush tracks and shimmering turquoise waters ... *the best of both worlds.*

## Newsletter in Colour

This newsletter (and others) is on our website in PDF format. You can see the Green Python (*Chondropython viridis*) in full colour if you visit [www.wilderness-challenge.com.au](http://www.wilderness-challenge.com.au)



**F**our hundred years ago the small Dutch ship “*Duyfken*” (Little Dove) brought Captain Willem Janszoon and his crew to Australia’s shores in the Gulf of Carpentaria near Weipa. His mapping of the region is very significant in our history because it is the first known recorded chart of the Australia coastline.

This was also the first meeting of indigenous Australians and Europeans, with 9 of the crew of 20 being killed before the tiny 28 metre (78 feet) vessel turned back to the Indonesian island of Banda. The indigenous people of Cape York still talk about the “*Duyfken*” in their oral history.

This year marks the 400th anniversary and one of our special group charters later this year will be commemorating the first European landing on Australian soil.

The Victorian College of the Arts and Das Arts College in Amsterdam have chosen Wilderness Challenge to take them from Cairns to the Weipa region. The art students from Melbourne and Holland will focus on the meeting of two

cultures, visiting rock art sites and learning about traditional practices en route, and with the Mapoon community near Weipa. Together they will produce various artistic works, some of which will feature in the 2006 Melbourne International Arts Festival.

It promises to be an inspiring tour for the students, the Mapoon community and the lucky Wilderness Challenge guides assigned.

### only one story

But this is only one story in the rich, heroic and sometimes tragic history of the exploration of northern Australia.

Consider Ludwig Leichhardt’s amazing 15 month, 5000 km journey (1844-45) from the Darling Downs to Port Essington across vast expanses where white men had never been.

Think about “Kennedy of Cape York”, his death and the tragic loss of 9 of his party while exploring the Peninsula between Cardwell and Cape York, a 7 month, 1000 km journey (1848). Ponder the heroic acts of loyalty and bravery of Jacky Jacky his faithful Aboriginal friend.

Imagine a 1000 km return journey into the interior from Victoria River (NT) to search for a non-existent “inland sea” before crossing Australia to Brisbane, a combined distance of almost 8000 km in 16 months (1855-56). This was the feat of one of our greatest explorers, Augustus Charles Gregory whose name lives on in The Kimberley’s iconic Boab tree (*Adansonia gregorii*). It was named for him by a member of

his party, the famous botanist Dr Ferdinand von Mueller. Further east, the Gulf country’s Gregory River, Augustus and Gregory Downs cattle stations also carry his name. Another famous Australian, artist Thomas Baines, was there as was Joseph Elsey the young doctor who died in his early 20’s and gives his name to Elsey River, and of course Elsey Homestead of “*We of the Never Never*” fame.

### before Burke & Wills

Curiously, these extraordinary stories are less well known than the more celebrated but ill-fated Burke & Wills expedition (1860-61) although they were arguably each more valuable to our nation and in Kennedy’s case, more tragic.

There are a host of other stories, about the naming of Australia, of the Jardine brothers epic 13 month cattle drive, of Alexander Forrest and Frank Hann, of John McDouall Stuart’s three attempts to cross Australia, thwarted first by Aboriginal attack and then by “a bunch of trees” (*Acacia shirleyi*) - unbelievable!

Contemplate these amazing feats of endurance, loyalty and bravery 150 years ago without the comfort and safety of today’s air-conditioned 4WD vehicles, satellite telephones and ice cold beer ... then think of the feats and survival skills of the Australian Aborigine who lived in this landscape for tens of thousands of years!

*Come with us ... to explore, to discover, to have fun ... and to learn about our wonderful heritage ... in outback classrooms where these stories were written!*

## Wilderness Challenge on the Telly ... again!

It’s probably fair to say that Channel Seven’s “*Queensland Weekender*” crew and Seven’s viewers enjoyed the televising of our Gulf Savannah “*Wanderer*” safari last year because they returned last September to record our Cape York camping safari northbound, returning to Cairns on a Great Barrier Reef cruise with Coral Princess Cruises, just like our “*Escape*”, “*Seafarer*” and “*Mariner*” Safari & Cruise itineraries on page 10 of our brochure.

“*Queensland Weekender*” host Dean Miller had doubts about co-host Taryn Onofaro’s affinity with camping but she and producer Tiffany Storey turned out to be naturals. Cameraman Mark “Sluggo” Deadman made up the “gang of four” and all played as hard as they worked.

Travelling in late September was perfect, with warm to hot days, cloudless skies and cool nights. The swimming was fantastic and we had the whole Cape almost to ourselves as most visitors travel in July and August.

The camping safari ended, and we all boarded the ferry to Thursday Island before a fantastic Coral Princess Cruises tropical cruise to Cairns. I was fortunate enough to be on board with Di to enjoy this wonderful experience.



*Taryn & Dean working hard!*

The safari and cruise sectors went to air as two half-hour specials on consecutive episodes of “*Queensland Weekender*” on Channel Seven’s Queensland network. If you would like to see the camping safari sector, give us a call ... we would be happy to send you a DVD of the show.

A huge thank you to our friends and suppliers in the Cape who supported the whole affair and to our guide Tom-Tom and reservations coordinator Mel who both helped me on the trip. Our early bookings for this safari suggest it was quite an enticing piece of television!

*Browse our brochure or visit our website to discover the 11 different ways we have to see and enjoy a Cape York experience.*

*On page 2 opposite is the 12th!*

## Email ... instant communication!

We’re flattered, honoured and thrilled to receive so many telephone calls, letters and emails relating to our newsletters. Some inform us of their change of address (amazing), some to check if they’re still on our mailing list (when we’re late) and others to simply say hello and thank us for keeping in touch.

It’s suddenly dawned on me that with the wonders of modern technology we don’t have to restrict ourselves to annual communication.

**Email us ...** tell us what you’re thinking, tell us what you would like us to do next, ask questions you think we may be able to help you with, questions about flora and fauna or other stuff ... or simply say hello!

Conversely, if you **let us know your email address** we can keep you in touch with our latest developments and in particular any special programs or special offers we have.

For example, this newsletter has current information on *Opera in the Outback* (page 4), a special ad hoc opportunity to travel with Bill Turner to the Iron Range National Park (page 4) and of course the story on page 2 about the *Advanced Cape York Safari*.

*Keep in touch ... email us!*

# Staff Stuff ...

If you're good at reading between the lines you'll know that I'm immensely proud of our guiding team. They work alone in remote areas and are required to have a multitude of diverse skills. As well as being naturalists well versed in history, geography and geology they also have to be mechanics, diplomats, entertainers and first-aiders ... and camping guides get to cook also.

Here, I want to take the opportunity to recognise not only their knowledge, passion and commitment to their profession but also their contribution and loyalty to Wilderness Challenge. **Daniel Piat, John Hogan, Evan Tandy, Lisa Weare and Rick Wenden** collectively boast 32 years with the company providing a fine example of dedication and loyalty to our newer guides **Dean Nulty, Shawn Huddy, Mark Kelly, Tom (Tom-Tom) Treasure and Ossi Wallenius**.

*Thanks "guys" ... here's to all of you!*

You can see most of their pictures on page 3 of our brochure. They'll all be on our website soon along with a short biography.

If you're wondering what happens during our slower time, here's what some have been up to: **Dean** and **Shawn** tackled Mt Kinabalu in

Borneo as their end-of-season relax, while **Evan** headed to South Africa's game parks. While **John** was "house-sitting" a guesthouse in Cooktown, **Rick Wenden** enjoyed a Canadian winter and thrill-seeker **Mark** buzzed hot-air balloons aboard his ultralight! **Lisa** is unfortunately "relaxing" in bed having been seriously trampled by horses near Charleville where she is recovering ... get well soon Lisa.

But behind every great guide is a great support structure of systems, equipment and people.

In the office, Mel and Saxon prepare for every departure then "mother" them all with regular pulse-taking contact along the way.



Meanwhile, one-man super-mechanic **Rick Lang** attends to all aspects of our fleet; mechanical, air-conditioning, electrical, body-work, spray painting, gearbox overhauls, the list goes on ...

*Rick with a well earned beer at our Christmas party*

So here's to the "backroom gang", **Melanie McDowell, Saxon Keily, Rick Lang** and of course **Sam** and **Russ** who worry about everything else ... *thanks!*

## Opera ... in the Outback!

Imagine ... you are under the stars in a stunning bush location, champagne in hand, attired appropriately in formal wear and thongs, with the voices of some of Australia's finest opera singers carrying into the night. This is **Opera in the Outback**, an increasingly popular event held at the Undara Lava Tubes each year. This October, Opera Queensland will present two different programmes:

**13th Oct:** A musical journey with Rogers & Hammerstein's hits from Show Boat, Carousel, The King and I, Oklahoma!, The Sound of Music and South Pacific.

**14th October:** La Traviata, a passionate and enduring favourite.

You can come along with us for both concerts, scenic touring and fun along the way, very comfortable camping and all meals for just \$668. You'll even mingle with the artists at the After Concert Dinners in the Undara restaurant. The tour departs from Cairns on the morning of October 13. This is a fabulous experience and great fun ... don't miss out!

*And for Jazz lovers ...*

May 5-7 will see the first **Outback Jazz and Blues Festival** at the Undara Lava Tubes. Headline acts and tour details are being confirmed as we write, so stay tuned for what will no doubt become another classic outback weekend!

For details call us, **FREECALL: 1800 354 486**

## bits 'n pieces

■ **John Hogan** was upgraded to Savannah Guide status while **Shawn Huddy** and **Tom Treasure** were accredited as Savannah Guides (entry level) Roving Interpreters.

■ **Evan Tandy** continued as a director of Savannah Guides Ltd and was re-elected Vice President. Congratulations Evan.

■ **Rick Wenden** ably assisted by **Dean Nulty** built a new training room at our base.

■ The Gas Pipeline coming through Cape York from New Guinea will thankfully avoid all important sites and habitats. There will be no impact on safaris.

■ Channel Seven re-ran the two half-hour episodes of our Gulf Savannah "**Wanderer**" safari this month - they must have liked it!

■ **Evan** was promoted to Operations Manager. Congratulations again Evan.

■ **Sam** has been invited to Sydney to join a group of leading women in the tourism industry meeting with Tourism Australia's Managing Director, Scott Morrison. Well done Sam!

■ **Russell** is also working as Project Manager for Guiding Organisations Australia and the Commonwealth Dept of Industry, Tourism and Resources to develop a national accreditation scheme for Tour Guides, due in May 2006.

■ **John Hogan** has been lobbying local authorities to conserve Burke & Wills Camp CXIX, their most northern camp near Normanton. Many Gulf Savannah passengers will remember this historic site.

■ Melbourne's Scotch College returns for their 12th year but Jeff Watson has hung up his boots. This year Year 10 students will venture from Cairns across the Gulf Savannah to Kakadu and Darwin. Many thanks to Jeff for his work, support and friendship over the years.

■ Gary and Sue of Lotus Bird Lodge bid bon voyage to "Conan" the 3 metre "saltie" crocodile who went for a late dry season walk overland to a larger water hole ... he'll be back!

■ Our guide team helped coordinate the Cairns based Savannah Guides School last November.

■ **Evan** worked with the Wet Tropics Management Authority on monitoring sensitive visitor sites in the World Heritage Area.

■ Di & Tom, Sam, Russ, Amy & Oliver and Saxon, Greg, Hayden & Ronan escaped to Lotus Bird Lodge for a three day end-of-season relax with owners Gary and Sue, ex Punsand Bay.

## Stop Press

### For Wildlife Enthusiasts

An exclusive Wilderness Challenge tour has four seats available for wildlife enthusiasts. Bill Turner, previous head of the Denver Zoo's Education Department, now takes tours around the globe to find rare and endemic species. From July 20-25 he is escorting a camping safari to the Iron Range and surrounds in Cape York. The itinerary includes a flight from Cairns to Lockhart River, a visit with local indigenous artists, two days in Iron Range National Park with a local wildlife researcher, a search for the endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot and vulnerable Red Goshawk in Lakefield National Park. The safari cost is \$2300. **Call** or **email** as soon as possible if you'd like to join us!

### West of the Great Divide ...

As happens almost every year our "western run" safaris are in high demand since we operate only two of each during the year.

There are still seats left on the Gulf & Kakadu "**Overlander**" and also on its accommodated version the "**Drover**". Both itineraries travel **The Savannah Way** across the Gulf Savannah between Cairns and Darwin, in either direction, so you can choose where to start or finish. Similarly, there are only a few seats left on the Kimberley "**Complete**" camping safari and the "**Stockman**", an accommodated version. If you want a pick of the dates call soon.

Many Queenslanders who recently saw the "**Queensland Weekender**" TV shows have booked already so we're encouraging everyone else to check our brochure or visit our website. Can't let the Queenslanders have all the fun ...

*Call now ... it's definitely not too early!*

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