

Wilderness Challenge



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February 2007

Greetings from Tropical North Queensland

Happy New Year ... and welcome to our 2007 Brochure and Newsletter to bring you up to date with happenings at Wilderness Challenge.

2006 was another very successful, dare I say **wow**, year although we and many others in Far North Queensland got off to a slow and very wet start. No doubt all our readers remember the two devastating Tropical Cyclones "Larry" and "Monica" which crossed the North Queensland coast on 20 March and 19 April. Unfortunately, as a result, we had to cancel our first few safaris to the Gulf Savannah and Cape York but that was a small inconvenience compared to those who live in and around Innisfail and on Cape York Peninsula. Nevertheless, once we got going, the first few departures certainly experienced some very adventurous travelling conditions. Full marks and thanks to the Federal and Queensland Governments and Main Roads, Cook Shire Council and many Cape York residents for rebuilding over 1000 kms of the Peninsula Development Road and other remote access roads to Bamaga and Lockhart River.

On the marketing front, Russell beat the bushes in the UK and Europe for four weeks before attending "OzTalkNZ" in Auckland in April. On the domestic side, we showed our wares at the east coast Caravan & Camping Shows again and for those who visit these shows look out for Peter Seaward in Brisbane, Saxon in Sydney and

Colin Driscoll in Melbourne this year. Drop in and say hello ... the lolly jar is sure to be there!

We were very pleased and proud to play a significant part in the training and development of twenty three new guides who completed their Certificate III in Tourism (Guiding) at Wilderness Challenge. You may recall that Wilderness Challenge is the provider of this course on behalf of Cairns TAFE. Over the years Wilderness Challenge has employed ten graduates of this important tourism education program. (see *Training Tomorrow's Tour Guides* story on page 3)

A very exciting event was our inaugural Cape York Advanced Safari, a long time dream of mine which I aired in last year's newsletter. The special slow-paced itinerary invests time in experiencing Cape York's unique wilderness and fabulous wildlife. What a buzz! (see *Cape York Advanced Safari* story below)

But wait, there's more. Just when I thought it was safe to get the fishing, diving and golf gear out we embarked on a brand new adventure, that of a major diversification and development for Wilderness Challenge. In October 2006 we took over the operation and management of Jowalbinna which will see the company enter the tourism hospitality sector providing accommodation, camping and meals at a fixed

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site. (See *Jowalbinna Rock Art Safari Camp* and "*Quinkan*" Rock Art stories on page 2).

Meanwhile, the family continues to thrive with grandchildren growing too fast. Birdwatcher Amy has started High School, Oliver distinguished himself as Queensland's top Grade 3 mathematician, Hayden completed his first year in "big school", turned seven, and is now allowed to eat Poppy's peanuts and Ronan graduated from Toddlers to Kindergarten.

All in all a fantastic year, knowing that our company provided memorable, enjoyable and meaningful holiday adventures for our many hundreds of our guests, once again underlining the true professionalism and dedication of our fantastic team ... makes us feel proud.

A huge thank you to all our customers, suppliers, champions and staff for your continuing support.

Tom & Di

Wishing you all a fantastic 2007!

Cape York "Advanced" a real BUZZ!

What a buzz! I have to say I've experienced and shared hundreds of trips and special moments over the years but our inaugural Cape York "Advanced" Safari surely tops the list.

"The concept was brilliant ... to casually wander and see the rarely seen. Cape York Peninsula at its best and in a very relaxed style." Doug, Victoria

It was a special itinerary, designed primarily for those who have been to Cape York before. It specifically omitted the usual Cape York destination "icons" which are naturally a must for most first time visitors. This itinerary travelled "off the beaten track" to "see the rarely



seen" and may also appeal to nature lovers who have not visited Cape York before.

Finding and photographing the rare Green Python (*Morelia viridis*) was definitely a

highlight but not a single day passed without a string of very notable experiences.

Consider our first day encounter with the rare and endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot, the tranquillity of a balmy two night camp beside a remote "wild river", and the ladies having a turn winding in very large Sooty Grunter - three from three casts - and returning them to the river.

Among our haul of 113 bird species were Star Finch, Eclectus Parrot, Palm Cockatoo, Large-tailed Nightjar, Magnificent Riflebird, Trumpet Manucode and Pacific Baza. Our list was made more notable because we missed a dozen or so

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Jowalbinna

ROCK ART SAFARI CAMP

TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND • AUSTRALIA

Wilderness Challenge's exciting new venture is a safari camp in the heart of "Quinkan" rock art country at Jowalbinna, near Laura. Just about all of our team has been busy refurbishing cabins and camping areas at the camp, and we've all fallen in love with it.



"Jowalbinna" means "Dingo's Ear", a reference to the red bluff at the entrance to the property. The Safari Camp is nestled in the valley of Shepherd Creek, a picturesque green eucalypt forest surrounded by red sandstone escarpments. The creek provides beautiful, safe swimming and there are peaceful self guided

walks along the bank and through sections of remnant rainforest.

It's the rock art however, that makes Jowalbinna unique. The small property contains a great concentration of art because it was a good place for Aboriginal

people to live, with permanent water and abundant food resources, and its landscape provided ample inviting surfaces plus the ochres required for painting to occur. There are several inspiring sites accessible on tours with trained guides to tell you about traditional people, archaeological studies, local stories and all that is known of this fascinating art.

Meanwhile back at the Safari Camp the fun includes boomerang throwing, art activities and some very nice tucker at the Dingo's Ear Café. Needless to say our own children have had a great time helping us set this up! The wildlife is prevalent, especially birds (we are over 50 species and still counting) and agile wallabies.

Our Cape York safaris, both camping and accommodated, will stay at Jowalbinna from 2007, a wonderful addition to these itineraries. We are also launching a new tour, the 3 Day Rock Art & Rainforest Safari. It visits a tree planting area for cassowary conservation, then a rainforest waterfall walk with Aboriginal women before two nights in Jowalbinna's cabins. A comfortable bushwalk to rock art is

included as well as a stop at Laura's Quinkan Cultural Centre.

Jowalbinna also welcomes self-drive visitors. It's less than five hours from Cairns, including 36 kilometres of good four wheel drive track through Olive Vale Station from Laura, and works well in a trip with Cooktown or Lakefield National Park. We have campsites, 12 cabins, toilets and showers and there are meals available.



Exciting future events at Jowalbinna will include an Artists Workshop featuring well known local artists; Archaeology Workshop revisiting the site of a 1989 dig, and Conservation Volunteer work on rock art sites and walking tracks. Please contact us if you'd like to be informed about these events when their details are available. Jowalbinna also has its own website at www.jowalbinna.com.au

We hope you can make it to Jowalbinna to share its unique character with us.

"Quinkan" Rock Art

The Laura sandstone area in Cape York contains Queensland's most extensive collection of Aboriginal rock art. It ranks alongside the Kimberley and Arnhemland escarpment as Australia's most important rock art regions. UNESCO rates the Quinkan region as one of the top ten rock art areas in the world.

These eerie images were painted using fingers or basic brushes, some over 20,000 years ago and others within the last century. Their white pipe clay and ochre in iron rich red, orange and yellow have bonded permanently to the sandstone like the spirits they described.

Ancestor and hero figures including the Quinkan spirits dominated local beliefs and can be seen in the rock art. The evil or mischievous Imjims are rounded figures that travel on their knobbed penises or breasts at night, up to half a mile in one hop.

Tall, thin Timaras are good spirits who protect children. Tommy George, a local elder, says "Timara is boss of everyone. White man too. He showed the ancestors how to get food and gave them that sugar bag from the bush bee."

Totem figures include crocodiles, echidnas, lizards, emus, yams and kangaroos. Each totem animal or plant had an ancestor from the Dreamtime with associated stories and laws.

Sorcery or purri purri paintings often show a person upside down so his spirit can't get out. An enemy might have been cursed with songs during a dramatic ceremony at the time of painting, or plentiful hunting and love magic spells cast.

There are many images of people, few with a nose and none with a mouth. Mortuary paintings

portray the dead, and post-contact images recall the end of traditional life for local Aboriginal people.

Quinkan rock art is an amazing insight into life in Cape York in another millennium. It has been the subject of archaeological study, children's picture books and treasured oil paintings, and is now accessible.

See "Jowalbinna Rock Art Safari Camp" above for ways to visit one of Australia's great cultural treasures.



Training Tomorrow's Tour Guides

We have always been proud of our safari guides for their professionalism and genuine talent. Now some of them are even teaching tour guiding to local students.

Wilderness Challenge has a strong partnership with the Tropical North Queensland TAFE College, under which our senior guides deliver the region's tour guide training course. After six weeks of classes, workshops, field trips and assessments with Wilderness Challenge, plus four TAFE workbooks and a Senior First Aid Certificate, students can obtain their Certificate III in Tourism Guiding, the nationally accredited and industry recognised qualification for tour guides.

The program includes visits to leading tourism companies and venues including Cape Tribulation and the World Heritage listed rainforest, Green Island, Kuranda, the Botanic Gardens, Cairns Tropical Zoo, Yarrabah Aboriginal Community, conservation groups

and walking tours. We even built an air-conditioned training room in our workshop! The industry interaction connects students to many operators and provides valuable career opportunities.

The course commences each February and October in Cairns and is open to anyone looking to move into this exciting new career. Please contact our office if you'd like any more information.

Teaching has been a great experience for Evan, Dean, Mark and Russ, and more than a little fun! They have watched new guides grow and kept an ongoing eye on their own technique as mentors. There have been plenty of great characters among the students. Our own Evan, Dean, Shawn, Mark, Tom Tom and Ossi are all graduates of this course.

Wilderness Challenge also runs substantial in-house training on a regular basis, so tour guiding best practice is always on our minds. This is one of the reasons why a CSIRO survey of Daintree day tour passengers a few years ago clearly identified our guides as being well above average, providing a richer experience and an all round better day for our passengers.

Retracing the Kennedy Expedition

Most of our readers will relate to the accompanying picture and remember that Kennedy's 1848 expedition to Cape York ranks among Australia's most tragic with the loss of 10 lives, Kennedy's among them. Only William Carron, William Goddard and Jacky Jacky, Kennedy's faithful Aboriginal tracker and friend survived to tell the tale.

Major Tim Daniel, protégé of Major Les Hiddens "*The Bush Tucker Man*", developed a passion for Cape York's early history when he was a Wilderness Challenge Guide. His research since those days has resulted in him contacting two descendants of the ill-fated expedition.



Richard Boyle, Great Grandnephew of Kennedy, operates a sheep property near Christchurch New Zealand. Richard recently trekked for two weeks with Tim and his pack

donkeys over 220 kilometres of Kennedy's track locating 8 of 14 original camp sites on this section. Tim and Richard were amazed at the accuracy of Kennedy's latitude readings which matched to within a second of Tim's GPS.

Great Grandson Tony Pryce, a direct descendant of survivor William Carron, the expedition's botany collector, lives in retirement near Bowral in the Southern Highlands south of Sydney. Tim and wife Jane recently visited Tony who showed them a treasure trove of correspondence, and newspaper clippings that were collected by his grandmother (Carron's daughter) regarding her father's life and the Kennedy Expedition.

Next year marks the 160th anniversary of Edmund Beasley Court Kennedy's expedition to explore Cape York Peninsula and we are collaborating with Tim to retrace Kennedy's 1848 Expedition in 2008. Both Richard and Tony have expressed great interest in joining us which surely adds a poignant element to this special adventure.

Preliminary plans start our modern day expedition at Kennedy's Camp #1 at Tam O'Shanter Point near Cardwell south of Cairns, where Kennedy's party was put ashore. We'll follow his path as closely as possible and we want to include several walks over the very ground the expedition trod.

While the trip has an obvious history theme we will not ignore the many other special cultural and natural features Cape York has to offer.

This unique opportunity will run in October 2008 but we are calling for expressions of interest now to assist with our planning. So, if you think you would like to join us simply:

FREECALL 1800 354 486 or email to info@wilderness-challenge.com.au

Cape York "Advanced"

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more common species. One very pleasing aspect of our birdwatching activities was that the whole group became avid "twitchers", one having since joined Birds Australia. Simple lessons on how to use binoculars and a bird book opened willing eyes to a rewarding new pastime.

"... another perspective of Cape York ... remote wilderness areas ... to look for rare birdlife and wildlife". Joanne, Victoria

The safari visited the Cape's remote wilderness areas to focus on its flora, fauna, cultural and geographic features. The intention was not only to visit new areas and have fun but also to learn and enjoy new and perhaps unique experiences. One such activity involved a GPS guided walk to explore a nearby "tree swamp" discovered using topographic maps and Google Earth while researching the trip early last year.



The innovative itinerary was slowed intentionally by the inclusion of three two-night camps, and two accommodated nights. The two-night camps were more relaxed and allowed quality time in feature-rich areas while the location of one night camps allowed for relaxed starts the following day. One accommodated night at Moreton provided mid-safari respite, while the last night at Resort Bamaga allowed all to relax and celebrate.



We have again committed two guides to this special itinerary to enhance personal attention, increase guiding interaction, allow time to focus on individual special interests and to add an extra measure of safety in these remote areas.

We're planning only one departure this year on 1st October. Let us know if you are interested and we'll send you a detailed itinerary and price ... but be quick!



Staff Stuff

It's no secret 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 recognise not only their knowledge, passion and commitment but also their contribution and loyalty to Wilderness Challenge. **Daniel Piat, John Hogan, Evan Tandy, Rick Wenden** and **Dean Nulty** collectively boast 33 years with the company, a fine example of dedication and loyalty. And while we're on the subject we'll be celebrating **Rick Lang's** and **Daniel Piat's 10 years** while **Saxon** will clock up her 8th year and **Mel McDowall** an amazing 5 years - how time flies!

You will have read elsewhere in this newsletter that we've been very busy at Jowalbinna with a core group of 5 or 6 making repeated visits on a 7 days in, 3 days out basis returning to Cairns only to replenish food, beer and building materials and to transport utilities (generators, fridges, stoves etc). Work has been feverish but we've also taken time out to explore this new playground. Can you imagine being with a bunch of Savannah Guides exploring new territory? Great fun!

The fun has also been shared with family and friends, the kids Minna, Estha, Amy and Oliver in particular have had a fantastic experience. Di has had three visits, one with sister and brother-in-law Maureen & Peter from Canberra, a special part of their Christmas visit.

Some Cape Yorkers might remember Steve & Stacey Gordon who also visited to lend a hand. Somehow I don't think it will be their last visit.

Farewell to Rick and Marge

Truly the end of an era for Wilderness Challenge as I announce that Rick Lang, super mechanic and friend, will be leaving us shortly to relocate to Brisbane where he will join his mother, daughters, grandchildren and great grandchild.

Rick has steered us through a decade of vehicle maintenance on a fleet that has worked in some of the toughest country in Australia. A measure of his skills is the variety of vehicles in our fleet which over the years included Toyota Landcruiser "Troopcarriers", Arkanas and Kontikis (stretched Toyota Landcruisers), OKAs, Toyota GXL Landcruisers, Mercedes-Benz Sprinters and a Rover Rancher ride-on lawnmower.

The little red Rover Rancher played a big part in Rick's working life with us. Whenever he got infuriatingly frustrated with something or other in the workshop he would mow the lawn for an hour or so for some "brain in neutral" respite!

But now the rains have come and we will not be able to get in or out of Jowalbinna for a month or two. Nevertheless, the work continues since we have left Dean there for the duration of the wet season. Only a week ago Evan and I said goodbye to Dean as we drove out through some very sticky country. The three of us had earlier transported enough food, fuel, books, CDs, DVDs and brand new quadbike and satellite phone to keep him in good shape for six to eight weeks. Strange, he won't even get to read this until long after you have. Good luck Dean ... keep your head down!

Meanwhile, back in Cairns we're focussed on the season ahead. Rick is busy preparing the fleet for another year, Evan and Russ are getting ready for new Certificate III students and we're eagerly awaiting new additions to the fleet in another Mercedes-Benz and two OKAs. In the office Mel and Saxon are busy taking bookings and contemplating a new reservations system for Jowalbinna.

All in all it's business as usual but with a hint of new challenges and new opportunities ahead for all our staff, none the least of which are Russell and Samantha who start their second year as Directors.

Di and I offer our sincere thanks for a great 2006 and very best wishes for the 2007.

Don't Forget!

- **Cape York "Advanced" Safari:** Only one departure in 2007- **book now!**
- **2008 Retracing the Kennedy Expedition:** Expressions of Interest as soon as possible.
- **Kimberley safaris:** A few seats left.
- **Gulf & Kakadu safaris:** A few seats left.
- **Jowalbinna:** If you or your family and friends are visiting Cairns why not suggest a self-drive visit or book on our new 3 Day Rock Art & Rainforest accommodated safari.

Unfortunately for Rick (and us) he will miss the introduction of the long awaited new OKA which promises to be a beast of a machine, strong as an ox but with all mod-cons including a six speed automatic gearbox. I wonder if Rick might make the occasional visit to Cairns later this year?

It might be of interest that Di and I met Rick and wife Marge before we moved from Sydney to Cairns in 1990. Marge happened to be the real estate agent who sold us our Trinity Beach house. Interesting, they are both ex touring coach crew and first taught me how to cook using a campoven. Some years later Rick had the good sense (and we had the good fortune) to join Wilderness Challenge.

Thanks Rick and Marge for all your support and dedication over the years and our very best wishes for a wonderful time with your family in Brisbane ... we'll all miss you both!

bits 'n pieces

■ **Evan Tandy** and **Yolanda** have announced they will become proud parents in July this year. Huge congratulations to all three!

■ **Dean Nulty** was upgraded to Savannah Guide status while **Mark Kelly** and **Ossi Wallenius** were accredited as Savannah Guides Roving Interpreters. Congratulations guys!

■ **Evan Tandy** stood down as a Director and Vice President of Savannah Guides Ltd following four years service on the Board.

■ **Dean Nulty** was elected to the Board of Savannah Guides. Congratulations again Dean!

■ **Rick Wenden** ably assisted by **Dean Nulty, Shawn Huddy, Tom Treasure, Rick Lang** and **Evan Tandy** carried out major repair works at Jowalbinna. Thanks guys!

■ **Russ & Samantha, Steve & Stacey Gordon, Peter & Maureen Dechaineux,** Dean's girls **Minna & Estha,** the Boswell kids **Amy & Oliver** and **Di** all contributed greatly to Jowalbinna's transformation.

■ Channel Seven re-ran the half-hour episode of our Cape York safari again in January. Thanks Channel Seven and the "**Queensland Weekender**" team for your support.

■ Wilderness Challenge was a Finalist in the 2006 Premier of Queensland's Export Awards - Cairns Region.

■ Saxon's husband **Greg Keily** blitzed 'em by being named "Rookie of the Year" at the REIQ (Real Estate Institute of Queensland) Cairns Zone Annual Awards. Greg's company, PRD Nationwide, also recognised his achievements with a national Gold Award. Congratulations Greg! If you're thinking of investing in Cairns real estate you know who to call!

■ Forty two past passengers travelled with us again during 2006, ten for the 3rd time and one for the 4th time.

■ Tom is enjoying mowing the pocket handkerchief size lawn at their new Kewarra Beach home compared to the 3 acres at Trinity Beach. And just as well since he's spent so much time away on-tour and at Jowalbinna.

■ Di has held the fort yet again but has busted out of Cairns and been to Jowalbinna with the gang three times.

■ Melbourne's Scotch College couldn't "get the numbers" last year but the boys are back this year with a trip to Cape York.

■ And last but not least, we're planning for the arrival of two new OKAs for the coming season!

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