

Wilderness Challenge



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Greetings from Tropical North Queensland

Happy New Year ... and welcome to our 2009 Newsletter bringing you up to date with happenings at Wilderness Challenge. But first I have to proudly note that this newsletter heralds the start of our **20th** year ... amazing!

As I think about the challenging year ahead I find myself reflecting on our achievements of the past 19 years. The company has grown from two Toyota Troopcarriers with a total of 14 passenger seats in 1990 to our current fleet capacity of 133 seats! Our 3,500,000 kms of tracks have crisscrossed the top of Australia, exploring, discovering and having fun with thousands of fellow adventure seekers. And there's never been a year when we haven't tried something new; equipment, itineraries, recipes, systems ... innovating and improving.

Along the way we've employed our family, nurtured the development of our guiding staff, contributed to the development of remote communities, won a coveted Australian Tourism Award and made lots and lots of people very happy.

Now, with the spectre of the dreaded GFC (Global Financial Crisis) ever present, I'm reminded that our past achievements occurred during the years of the Pilot's Strike, 1st Gulf War, the "Recession We Had to Have", September 11, the Millennium Bug, 2nd Gulf War, SARS etc. and we (all) not only survived but we thrived. So, without belittling the tragedy and seriousness of past and current events ... **"buck up little campers"** we can do it again.

As if to underline the last sentence, our first major decision in the face of the GFC and expected hit on tourism is whether or not to invest over half a million dollars on new vehicles - the much anticipated and much vaunted new NT model OKA (see story opposite).

Having read the story you'll see we're committed to a positive future providing the latest environmental technology, reliability, safety and comfort for our passengers.

Responding positively to the GFC we've introduced a shorter Cape York product, and conversely, resumed a favourite itinerary of mine. The new product (see story page 3) is a 5 Day Cape York **"Compact"** Drive & Fly camping safari which targets international visitors, who tend to have less time, but it may also appeal to Aussies who can save time, money and tick the Cape York box as well. The Cape York **"Advanced"** makes a welcome return this year having made way for last year's special **"Retracing the Kennedy Expedition"** safari (see story page 2).

Sadly, our succession plans have been put on hold which means that Di and I are back in the saddle for the time being. Samantha continues as our General Manager while Russell is not too far away in his new position as Manager, Savannah Way Ltd. Russ is responsible for the development and marketing of Australia's new badged **"Adventure Drive"** and reports to the state Tourism authorities of Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

So it's business as usual and quite frankly I don't know what I would have done in retirement anyway!

Wishing you all a great year ahead despite the many challenges that face us all. Why not think about a week or two in the wilderness, might just be the thing to re-focus on real values ... take care ...

Tom & Di



wilderness ...

Cape York

Return of Cape York **"Advanced"** - see page 3

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- New OKA NT Model
- Kennedy Expedition Retraced
- New short Cape York safari
- New Gecko species discovered at Jowalbinna
- Cape York **"Advanced"** returns
- Staff Stuff and Bits 'n Pieces

New NT Model



At long last the first of our new NT Model OKAs is just five weeks away. For those who haven't been following this "Blue Hills" saga, delivery will end a four year wait but I'm confident our patience will be rewarded.

The new NT model replaces the LT last produced in 2004. The NT has been designed to meet Australian Military specifications and complies with the latest Euro IV exhaust emission standards.

We have ordered the larger of two engines available which is a fully electronic, common rail 185 Ti Cummins, 4 cylinder diesel, direct injection, wastegated turbo charger with air to air intercooling, 1½ times more powerful but 4-5 dB quieter. The bigger engine will drive the all new 6 speed Allison automatic 1000 series gearbox ... should be a dream to drive.

Externally, the new NT and the old LT look very much alike but everything underneath is a totally new design using much stronger components. Inside the cabin, new air-conditioning systems, state-of-the-art seating and sound insulated flooring ... should be a dream to ride.

Can't wait!

Retracing Kennedy

One hundred and sixty years ago, ten men died in the wilderness exploring Cape York, their leader, Edmund Kennedy, among them. Only three survived; William Carron, William Goddard and Jackey Jackey, Kennedy's faithful Aboriginal tracker.

Last October, five descendants of the 1848 expedition retraced their ancestors tracks. Richard Boyle (Great Grandnephew of Kennedy), Tony, Jim & Jennifer Pryce (Great Grandsons & Granddaughter of William Carron) and Patrick Goddard (Great Grandson of William Goddard) some accompanied by their partners, were joined by seven other Kennedy followers and a film crew of three. Tim Daniel, trip historian, Dean Nulty and myself made up the guiding party.



Day 1 at Kennedy monument, South Mission Beach

We started from Cairns lunching at Kennedy's first camp at Kennedy Bay, near South Mission Beach, where the "Tam o'Shanter" and HMS "Rattlesnake" landed the party on 24 May 1848. At day's end we camped at Camp VI having visited Camps II and III at the mouths of the Hull and Tully Rivers. By now we were beginning to get a good feel for the difficulties which faced Kennedy, but we were to witness far worse. It took a month for Kennedy to get off the beach being thwarted by swamps to the west behind the sand dunes. The ships had left long ago and the party knew their salvation lay in Albany Passage, 1000 kilometres away.



Swamps stopped progress to the west

Already exhausted from crossing rivers and swamps and cutting cart-width track through dense rainforest, Kennedy abandoned all three carts and loaded as much as possible of their supplies onto their 26 remaining horses.

After six weeks the party was still only 50 kilometres from their landing place, the steep rainforest clad ranges were yet to be crossed and the expedition was in serious trouble.

Kennedy crossed the ranges on 10th August reaching the Mt Garnet area on the 25th. We camped at Mt Garnet on our second night having been stunned by the difficulties Kennedy's party had endured.

Next, we camped near Camp XXXIV on Emu Creek Station where Richard left a bronze plaque, noting the visit of our group, in the care of station owners Don & Liz Crossland.

Progress north was now relatively easier and by 2nd October their 61st Camp was close to Princess Charlotte Bay. Our 6th camp was near here at Hann Crossing. By 13th October the party reached the area where they had planned to meet with HMS "Bramble" but being two months late Kennedy abandoned all hope of a rendezvous and continued north.

The party was now back on the coast facing similar hardships to their first few weeks and by 10th November they reached the vicinity of Weymouth Bay. Kennedy now had to make a most difficult decision. Carron's narrative describes; "**Mr Kennedy, here, finding from the weak state of some of the men, that it would be impossible for us to reach Cape York before our provisions were exhausted, resolved to form an advance party, consisting of himself, Jackey, Costigan, Luff and Dunn.**" This meant that the weakest eight were to stay here, at Camp LXXX, and wait for help.



GPS guided walk to Camp LXXX

On our 8th night we camped at Chili Beach in Iron Range National Park. Excitement was high as we made preparations to helicopter in to Camp LXXX next morning. We landed on a small boggy clay pan, the closest clearing to our target. When all had arrived we set off through the mangrove swamp and then thick scrub for 1½ hours, guided only by GPS. The exact location of Camp LXXX is unknown but we are confident we were within a few hundred metres having done exhaustive research.

Emotionally charged, the deeds and sufferings of Camp LXXX survivors Carron and Goddard were saluted and those who perished here; Edward Carpenter, Thomas Mitchell, John Douglas, Edward Taylor, Charles Niblett and Thomas Wall, were not forgotten.

After leaving Camp LXXX Kennedy's small group of five continued north but within two weeks Kennedy had to leave Costigan, Luff and Dunn due to their poor condition. This was near Shelburne Bay where they were to wait for help. We visited a monument which overlooks this place en-route to our 11th camp.

Kennedy and Jackey Jackey continued for several days to the mouth of the Escape River, then: "**There is Port Albany, Jackey - a ship is there - you see that island there.**"

Tragically, within sight of their goal, they were being tracked by "**a good lot of blacks**". The next day "**a good many blackfellows came behind in the scrub, and threw plenty of spears, and hit Mr Kennedy in the back first**" and again in the thigh and the right side and Jackey was hit above the eye. Soon, Jackey asked, "**Mr Kennedy, are you going to leave me?**" He said, "**Yes, my boy, I am going to leave you; I am very bad, Jackey.**"



Richard and Dean near where Kennedy was speared

We helicoptered into this desolate area pondering Kennedy's tragic fate and Jackey Jackey's loyalty and courage. Again, the exact location is unknown but our research indicated we were in the immediate area.

After burying Kennedy, Jackey Jackey made his exhausting escape reaching the still waiting "Ariel" on 23rd December. "Ariel" set sail with all haste for Shelburne Bay but their search for Costigan, Luff and Dunn was fruitless. Sailing south they anchored in Weymouth Bay on 30th December to rescue the eight men waiting at Camp LXXX. Little did they know that six had already perished.

Lead by Jackey Jackey, Dr. Vallack, a member of "Ariel's" rescue party, describes; "**Jackey, with greater excitement than before, exclaimed, 'See two white fellows sit down, and camp.' On the side of the hill, not two hundred yards from us ... two of the most pitiable creatures imaginable were sitting down.**" The rescue party made a hasty escape as many Aborigines were threatening. "Ariel" immediately set sail for Sydney with Carron, Goddard and Jackey Jackey on board.

In May the next year, Captain Simpson of HMS "Freak" re-visited Camp LXXX, led by Jackey Jackey. Many items were found but most significantly they recovered the remains of Niblett and Wall to the ship. "Freak" sailed to the Escape River to search for Kennedy's body but was unsuccessful. The amazing Jackey Jackey later led a party and recovered some of Kennedy's charts which he had hidden during his escape.

The "Freak" sailed on to Albany Passage and the ship's company interred the remains of Thomas Wall and Charles Niblett on Albany Island's highest hill. Capt Simpson records; "**Poor Jackey was much affected, and could not refrain from tears.**" On our last full day together we visited Albany Island and walked to that very same place.

So ended our adventure and this very short treatment of one of Australia's most gallant and tragic feats of exploration.

PS: See page 4 for additional information.

Jowalbinna delivers a new prize

The momentous announcement arrived in an email of gross understatement typical of Conrad and Megan's unassuming demeanor.



"Finally you hear from us. I've been waiting for our paper describing the new gecko to be published. Well, that happened today so here it is - the **Quinkan Velvet Gecko (Oedura jowalbinna)**! The paper is attached and you are all in the Acknowledgments at the end. Thanks very much again for all your help! You will see that throughout the paper the species is written as **Oedura jowalbinna sp. nov.** The 'sp. nov.' bit on the end is Latin for '**new species**' and is always written behind the new species name in the description paper."

The email was accompanied by "the paper", 16 pages of scientific gobbledegook along with graphs, charts, tables and photos, all evidence to support their claim of a new discovery. I can tell you they impressed the hell out of me!

The discovery was made in Jowalbinna's wild sandstone escarpment country when Conrad and Megan revisited in November 2007, following their first visit a year before. And yes, you guessed it, since it was a gecko, the find was made in the middle of the night.

Cape York "Advanced" is back!

Great news for birdwatchers, naturalists and adventurers who are looking for something different: exciting but relaxing, challenging and rewarding, informative and interesting. Our Cape York "**Advanced**" safari is all those things and more.

This special safari makes a welcome return after a one year lay-off having made room for the "*Retracing Kennedy*" safari last year.

Previously we operated only one departure each year but due to increasing interest we have planned two trips this year. They will run at the end of the year for several good reasons.

Late in the dry season birdlife and wildlife concentrate around remaining waterholes, and migratory bird species have started their annual visitation. The winter showers have finished and the weather is settled; it's getting a lot warmer but the swimming is fantastic. It's springtime; birds and wildlife are mating as the monsoon approaches. And, at this time of year there are very few travellers so we nearly get

Conrad and Megan would leave on dusk to access their target locations previously researched using topographic maps, Google Earth and much more, I would imagine. Then they would "bushwalk" to and from their target, in the middle of the night using a GPS and torches ... it's hard enough in the middle of the day! One night they were so exhausted after a twelve kilometre walk they did not return to camp, sleeping in the bush until morning.



Hats off and congratulations to Conrad and Megan for their knowledge and dedication. And of course congratulations to **Quinkan Velvet Gecko (Oedura jowalbinna sp. nov.)** for being recognised at long last!

Jowalbinna is full of surprises .. why not come along and discover Jowalbinna for yourself.

You can join one of our 3 Day Safaris from Cairns or Port Douglas which depart twice a week between May and November. Or you can drive yourself. You'll need a 4WD vehicle and you can camp or stay in one of Jowalbinna's comfortable bush cabins and dine at the Dingo's Ear Café.

Check it out at www.jowalbinna.com.au



There's no traffic when and where we go!

the whole place to ourselves. In fact we may go a day or two without seeing another person.

This safari does not pretend to be a hard-core birdwatching trip but we will spend time seeking Cape York's renown bird species. Likewise we'll try to find wildlife not usually seen such as Spotted Cuscus and the fabulous Green Python. We'll also try a GPS guided walk and do a bit of fishing. All of this between bouts of swimming in crystal clear streams or simply relaxing.

With a maximum group size of ten and two senior guides it's a great way to experience the nature of Cape York for the first time or to enrich your previous visit.

See page 11 of our brochure or visit: www.wilderness-challenge.com.au

Bloody clever mates revisited!

You might recall I introduced a couple of my "bloody clever mates" to you last year. Well, one of them has really gone and done it now!

On Saturday 24th January at the Tamworth Festival, "bloody clever mate" Colin Driscoll won the 2009 Golden Dampier Award. As Col tells it; "*The final was on Saturday in front of 1500 people, and I just nailed it!! So now I am the very proud owner of the title of '2009 Tamworth Original Bush Poetry Champion'*" His poem; "Memoirs of a Sheep".

As a postscript, Col is a "Past Passenger" of ours and over the years I had the pleasure of taking him and Jenny to Cape York, across the Gulf Savannah to Kakadu and Darwin and through The Kimberley, long before he started writing and reciting. Col subsequently guided in Kakadu, The Kimberley and at Uluru himself. In 2007 Col guided our Gulf & Kakadu "Drover" Accommodated Safari from Cairns to Darwin. Who knows, he may return to share some of his award winning poetry and special experiences with Wilderness Challenge passengers again.

If you would like a copy of Colin's new book and CD package you can email him at:

outnaboutoz@netconnect.com.au

His email address says it all!

Cape York now accessible to more visitors

More visitors to Far North Queensland can now take advantage of a shorter, less expensive trip to Cape York. In just 4½ days they can experience Cape York's highlights and save hundreds of dollars.

The new 5 Day Drive & Fly camping safari will suit visitors who have less time or perhaps a smaller budget. Although shorter they will not miss out on Cape York's ancient rock art, giant termite mounds, swimming in crystal clear creeks and waterfalls, camping in the wilderness, Torres Strait's tropical shores or standing at the Top of Australia.



Swimming at Twin Falls - magic!

Many might prefer a longer trip but for those who don't have enough time this could just be the answer!

See our brochure, page 8, or visit our website.

Staff Stuff

Another challenging but successful year made possible by a great bunch of guides "in-the-bush" and a super professional team at our office in Cairns. Here are some staff snippets which are indicative of their year.

● Welcome aboard to **Martin** and **Wes** and welcome back to **Mark**. Martin spent his first season in Cape York while Wes went west on our Gulf Savannah "Wanderer" safaris and fitted in a few trips to Jowalbinna also. It was great to see Mark back with us, returning to Cape York where he guided with us in 2002 and 2003.

● **Alex** had a great year out in the Gulf Country guiding our Gulf "Wanderer" program and chimed in on several trips to Jowalbinna as well. Alex likes the Gulf so much that she is spending "The Wet" at Gregory, between Burketown and Lawn Hill National Park. Most Aussies will know that the Gulf region has had

record breaking rain and floods this summer. As we go to press we wish Alex a safe return to "The Dry" and Cairns.

● "**Deano**" carried another training load in Cape York, ventured west to pick up our Kimberley "Complete" and returned to Cairns via our Kakadu & Gulf "Overlander". Along with Tom, Deano experienced all the adventure and high emotion involved in "Retracing the Kennedy Expedition".

● **Tom-Tom** guided our Cairns to Darwin "Overlander" where he met up with Tom to train in The Kimberley region, after which he went solo. Back on the east coast, Tom-Tom returned to guiding in Cape York and the Gulf.

● **Colin** crossed between Cairns and Broome, via Darwin, a couple of times and when not travelling from east to west he changed to north and south in Cape York Peninsula.

● It was great to have **Darren** back in Cape York after his illness and we have a much bigger program planned for him this year.

● **Rick** chimed in on our Cape York "Frontier" accommodated safaris and covered an extended stint at Jowalbinna late in the year.

● You might remember **John**, who "hung up his boots" last year. Well he returned (surprise, surprise) to do some Gulf Country training and Jowalbinna trips.

● Visitors to Jowalbinna were looked after by **Bev & Trev** and **Graeme**. Living and working seven days a week in a remote area during a busy tourism season ain't easy. A huge "thank you" for holding the fort during 2008.

● In the workshop, **Ray** was outstanding keeping the wheels turning. Now he's looking forward to getting his hands on the new OKAs.

● **Mel** had a busy year coordinating trains, boats, planes, accommodation and meals for all our safaris and looking after reservations with **Monique**. A fantastic job ladies, thanks.

● Sadly, Monique and Evan left us to take care of family needs. We wish them every success and happiness.

● Finally, profound appreciation to Sam and Russ. In these troubled times, tourism is not immune. Russell's new employer is the richer for his experience and energy and Wilderness Challenge will need Sam's experience to tackle the challenges which lie ahead.

Retracing Kennedy Additional Information and Acknowledgements

◆ Peter Niblett, a descendant of Charles Niblett who died at Camp LXXX and later interred on Albany Island, happened to contact us prior to our trip. Unfortunately, Peter was unable to join us but I wish to thank him for the information he provided and his good wishes. Thank you Peter.

◆ Greg Westacott of Portland Roads was particularly helpful in securing the makeshift "helipad" at Portland Roads.

◆ Simon (pilot) and Yvonne of Cape York Helicopters did a fantastic and safe job.

◆ Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service supported our goal of visiting Camp LXXX. Ranger Pip Schroor accompanied us.

◆ Rosie, Chris and son Leigh of Savannah Productions, supported by Australian Geographic, filmed and photographed the whole event. Intention is a story for Australian Geographic magazine later this year. A documentary is in the making which hopefully will find its way to TV networks and outlets such as Discovery and History channels.

◆ Rosie is putting up a website which will be available at end February. Check it out at: www.kennedyretrace.com.au

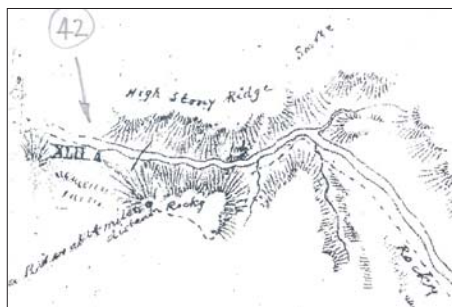
◆ Many thanks to Ray and Margaret Mitchell for their time, support and knowledge in planning the Tully region segment.

◆ Other Participants: Ann Pryce, Judy Pryce, Jim Venis, Luci Harding, May Bartley, Lesley Bryant, John & Tarlie Alcock, Ray & Margaret Mitchell - many thanks for your support.

◆ My thanks to Tim Daniel for his historical research, knowledge and help before and during the trip.



Descendants Pat Goddard, Jenny, Tony & Jim Pryce and Richard Boyle at Camp LXXX



Portion of Kennedy's charts recovered by Jackey Jackey - Mitchell Library, Sydney



Tom, Tim and Dean celebrate

Recommended reading:

- William Carron's Narrative of Kennedy's Cape York Expedition: ISBN 9 780646 276083
- Kennedy of Cape York - Edgar Beale

bits 'n pieces

■ We started the year by discovering a 1 in 50 years flood had hit Jowalbinna during our wet season absence. A huge clean-up followed plus recovering machinery back to Cairns for repairs. A huge 'thank you' to staff and friends who helped in the mop-up.

■ Our new **3 Day Rock Art, Rainforest & Cooktown** safari was recorded in June by "Queensland Weekender", a Channel Seven (Queensland) weekly, half-hour tourism program. It was great working with presenters Dean Miller and Taryn Onofaro again and with producer Karen Hanna, presenter Chris Parsons and cameraman Steve McFie. The "Queensland Weekender" team had previously recorded our 9 Day Gulf Savannah "Wanderer" and Cape York camping safaris.

Don't Forget!

- Keep your chin up!
- If you are going to take a holiday, why not take it in Australia ... Australia needs you!
- A Wilderness Challenge holiday will provide employment and distribute money to Aussies in remote regions through our purchases of fuel, food, accommodation and other services.
- Take care ... our very best wishes ...

FREECALL 1800 354 486 NOW

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