

AN ANGLERS CAPE YORK

Our trip planned for Mapoon and possibly further North was fraught with problems. We had originally organised for four of us to travel North together in two vehicles and two boats mounted on the trailers. This enables us to plan equipment and camping gear evenly and efficiently between the two vehicles. Also with four people the costs per person are lowered. Plans were to be away for about three weeks fishing and sight seeing the Cape York area using Weipa as a base for all excursions.

As has been said many times before the best laid plans of mice and men often do not go smoothly, First we had one of our group drop out due to work commitments leaving only three for one or two vehicles. Another intrepid traveller offered to take the vacancy and all was well for a short time. He also had to bow out just six days before due to unforeseen family commitments. Again we were three. We had another couple wanting to travel with us as a safety net and this couple also had an off/on travel commitment up until the last minute and finally during the last couple of days before departure they geared up to leave with us. We had decided to use one vehicle for three of us and naturally only one boat plus of course our two friends and their boat on a heavy duty Ruhle railer.

My Discovery was chosen as the carrier as my trailer was already set up and ready to go. Doc's trailer was not quite finished to the stage where we could use it for three people. I had a quick trip to Weipa just a week before our planned departure to retrieve a vehicle and camper van for a very good friend of mine as he had some unforeseen medical problems and had to cut short his expended holiday and opted for major surgery in Townsville. I delivered his vehicle and trailer to Townsville for transport to Sydney and in so doing had a taste of the road conditions we were to encounter the following week. Departure time finally arrived and we set off with well and truly loaded with gear, the trailer with boat on top and discovery with people inside. First planned stop was somewhere around Mt Molloy however we were travelling well with the accompanying Pajero and made it to Laura before nightfall. We set up a very temporary camp and considered our problems for the ensuing three weeks given the lack of a full camp that we usually set up as well as the fact we were three to a 12 footer when fishing. Sleep came fairly easily and the next day saw us at Weipa filling up jerry cans of boat fuel and plastic water containers should the water supply at Mapoon be a problem. Weipa to Mapoon is a fairly easy 85 Km drive providing one takes it easy, roads are rough and have hidden potholes that can do damage to tyres and suspensions systems. Through Mapoon and a short couple of kilometres over soft sand and we set up camp.

There were several other fishing camps set up in the Cullen point area and the area is well kept with a good water supply in a tank near the entrance. A toilet is now also set up in the camp area. Water was always available at a well however the well was used as a toilet by some one who didn't know any better some time ago. The water tank was installed by the local community for the benefit of all campers.



The camp sites are plentiful with plenty of trees for shelter. We had no problems with any type of insects during our stay. The evenings were extremely pleasant, great weather, great company. We solved most of Australia's problems every night and some of the world problems as well.

Fishing was good the first couple of days with barra and good salmon in the creek across the bay. Sunday, two pro barra boats moved into the creek mouth and set their nets, Monday, no fish, A few bream and some small jacks. We decided to fish the shallow reef on the sea side of the point. Catch consisted of small spanish mackerel, trevally, several reef species mainly parrot fish about a kilo in weight. We were told night fishing was better on the reef however local knowledge was required to find ones way home through the uncovered reef so we figured we were there for the fun, not the danger.

As the high tides moved to the evenings salmon started to gather in close to the beach and we caught a couple from the beach using mullet baits. Quite exciting stuff, 5 kg of very fast salmon on light line and at night. The next day Doc sighted a croc about 3 metres in length off the beach and this put a stop to our nightly excursions on the beach and we moved to the boats for safety. This also proved to be better fishing as we could cover more area with baits and the catch was again very good. Filleting was a breeze on the makeshift table and we kept our catch numbers down to allow filleting before hitting the sack. Sharks also made their appearance at night and



made fishing slow for the unfortunate who hooked one. Camping costs are quite low at \$10.00 per vehicle per night and \$5.00 per person per week. The ranger comes around nearly every day to check on the camps and to see if everything is OK. Limited food stuffs can be purchased from the local store about 10Kms from the point. A phone is available in the council office during office hours six days a week. No alcohol is available as the local community is designated as "dry".

Fuel is also available however prices are high due to the high transport costs from the Weipa port. The ranger offers assistance should you require it and a medical centre has been recently built at the community.

Winds were on the increase and with our small boats travel over the open bay waters was becoming increasingly difficult. We decided to go back to Weipa and leave the trailers and boats and thence travel to Cape York in the two vehicles. The lighter vehicles would allow for easier travel over the rough roads. I never expected the roads to be as rough as they were. I have travelled over the Gibb river road, the Gunbarrel highway and many other gravel roads in western Queensland. None even came close to these very poor excuses for roads.

The corrugations were at times up to nine inches deep. Control of the vehicle at any speed was impossible and dangerous. We were told that there had been 25 head on collisions so far this year and don't doubt it. Speed and the atrocious road conditions were the cause. If you come round a corner and meet another vehicle, both hit the brakes and both lose control at the same time. We used UHF radio between vehicles and I feel sure this helped us during the nerve racking parts of the highway. There was considerable traffic on the road with organised 4WD tours and the local adventure tours. Though most were considerate of others, some travel much too fast for the conditions.



We did all the tourist bits and looked at the aircraft crashes, the water falls and enjoyed the river crossings. The road houses are worth stopping at as they hold a wealth of history



on the walls. Souvenirs are at every stop over. Fuel is fairly readily available and our biggest hop was 412 Kms from Weipa to Bamaga. Fuel is no longer available at the Jardine river ferry, and yes the ferry price is \$80.00, this is for the crossing and camping in the areas above the Jardine river. When one considers the cost of zero for the ferry over the Daintree, something should be done about this exorbitant cost.

We stayed at the Seisha caravan park. Great place, right on the beach, kiosk, licensed restaurant, clean facilities and magnificent views. If only one could get a boat up there without the problems that would no doubt be caused by the roads. There is an opening for someone with hire boats at a reasonable price. Make them expensive and the project would fail very quickly.

We travelled the last 33Kms to the tip parking area and walked the remaining 400 metres to the most northern part of Australia. We took the photos but didn't buy the shirt. We all felt pretty good that night and naturally celebrated with a few sherberts. Next day we headed south to Weipa for a well earned rest.

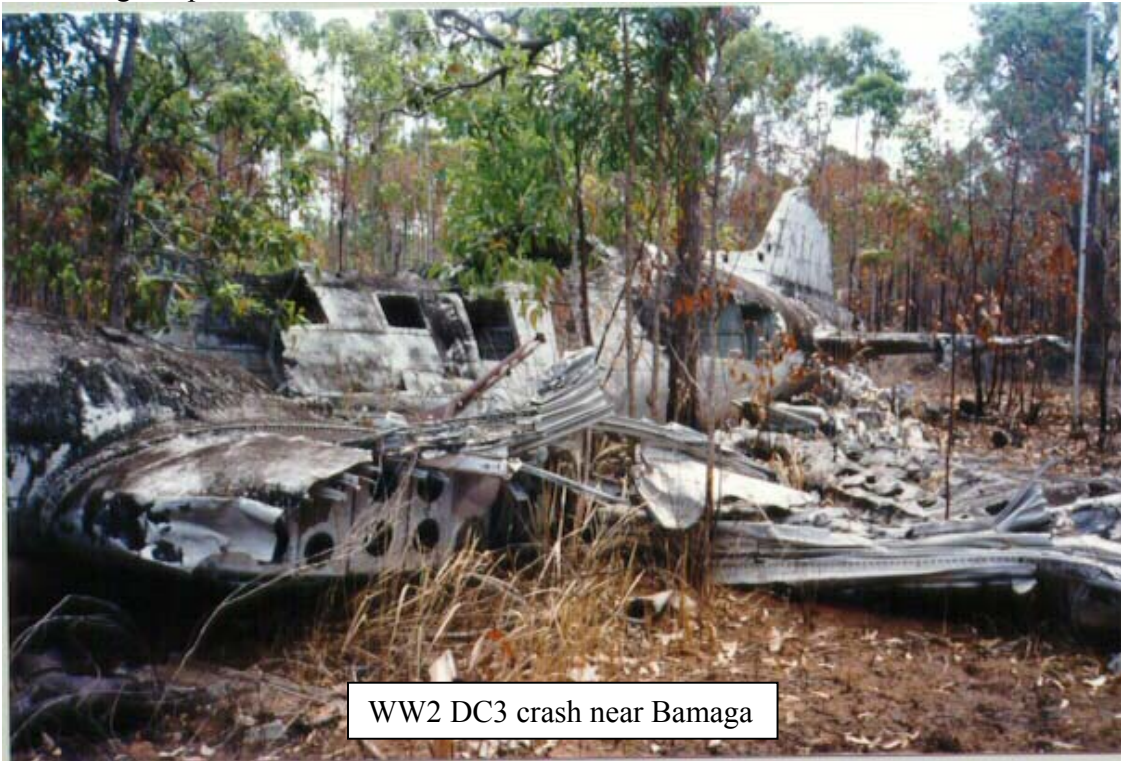
The return trip was not without incident. The Pajero suffered a problem with the front end and broke one of the bolts holding the top wishbone on to the chassis. The other bolt was severely bent and had to be broken to get it out. We borrowed two bolts from the towbar and bolted it up again for the trip into Weipa. We didn't know if the towbar bolts were high tensile so we travelled with some caution the rest of the way. There were of course no guarantees on the alignment after the temporary repair. Arriving at Weipa we replaced the bolts with high tensile and fitted Keith's two half worn spares to the front to prevent excess wear on his new Kelly's should the



alignment be out to a large extent. The opposite side wishbone was also checked for tightness before embarking on the home trip.

Checking out of the excellent Weipa caravan park we headed south for Lakefield National Park. Turning left at Musgrave station after filling up with fuel. The park was alive with wild life considering it was well into the dry season. Wild pigs were of course the most prevalent with wallabies next on the list. We camped near Lakefield station on a couple of lagoons about 5 Kms from the station. Very pleasant spot with well kept lawns and gardens. Water supply and toilets on site. No barra except for a couple of year old fish of about 300mm in length. We unfortunately saw signs of set lines hanging from the trees along the banks, this probably caused the lack of fish. Lots of wild life around the lagoons with a local colony of nesting Burdekin ducks. The scrub turkeys follow you around looking for hand outs. The few nights we spent here were very enjoyable, I for one will go back. I had the opportunity to talk to a couple of the Cook shire council people who were at the camp site doing a trip to the tip. I mentioned I would like to talk to the person responsible for the road conditions and no one answered.

The final part of the journey was uneventful with an overnight stay just south of Cairns. We arrived home safe and well early the next day and looking forward to a decent bed and a long sleep.



WW2 DC3 crash near Bamaga

My advice for those wishing to travel to the Cape is as follows. Get to Weipa either by aircraft or our own vehicle and hire a 4WD from the local car hire firm and do the rest with the hire car. The costs of fuel and the vehicle hire when divided between all participants should be fairly reasonable. Take lots of care and don't hurry, please take your time and enjoy the sights. Look after the vehicle and it will look after you.