

## **COOKTOWN Far north Queensland**

**Just came back from a short trip to Cooktown. We spent about 14 days on the road staying at various places just to get away. That's why we purchased the van in the first place.**



**Traveled to Kurramine beach and stayed at the Big4 park for the first night and ended up spending a second night there as well. Great place to relax , enjoy the bird life and walks on the beach. I wish the beaches were flatter, walking on a slope gives me shorter legs on one side. They come good when I walk back to the van so it's not really a problem. We did find a few coconuts on the beach which was by the way totally deserted.**

**Don't you just love North Queensland?**

**Absolutely perfect weather as well.**

**We hooked up and drove through Cairns to Port Douglas Big4 park just south of the actual port. It's a bit off the main road but very quiet and peaceful. Lots of birds calling day and night. We had a resident Curlew in the garden bed next to the van, He just sat and went to sleep for most of the day. Night time we could hear him calling in the usual eerie voice. We spent three nights at the Port enjoying the markets and the exceptional eateries with great views of the harbor. We traveled to Newell beach to visit friends for one day and found their tropical retreat a real picture. Right at the mouth of the river and within a few steps of the boat ramp. What a great place to live. We stayed till late and drove back to the park in the dark. Next time we plan on staying longer as there is room for our 18 footer in the back yard.**



**The park at Port Douglas was a bit hard to leave however we wanted to visit Cooktown and see where the famous Captain Cook landed to repair the Endeavor. I do actually have the journals of Cooks travels published by the Hakluyt Society in 1968. It does have a extensive explanation of why Cook decided to enter the**



**Endeavor River to do repairs on the vessel. The road to Cooktown first goes up the range to the Mount Molloy turn off where we turned right on to the northern highway. Mt. Carbine was the next town or should I say hotel as there is only a small van park and truck stop with attached hotel to be seen.**

**Mechanical repairs can be done by the local service station. The mine has long since closed and very few people live in the town now.**

**Onwards to Lakeland for a pit stop in the hotel grounds. Had a cuppa and stretched out legs having a look around the area. Quite a nice van park that would be nice to stay in for a day or two however we wanted to get to Cooktown before nightfall and there was only a few K's to go on the new highway.**

**Great road, certainly better than the last time I was in this area, about 1981 if my memory serves me correctly. Quite bad dirt roads both from Lakeland and via the coast.**

**It is still a bit of a hard drive, 4WD only if you come up the coast road. There are two very long steep hills to negotiate and 4WD low range is recommended by those who do it often. Try in high range and you may get stuck half way up the hill. Take it from one who knows and had to help someone who ignored our warning.**



**We passed the amazing black mountains that have now been declared a sacred site and now no one can access the rocks or climb the hills. Some amazing stories are written on the signs at the lookout. Great place to stop for a short rest as the road deteriorates a bit from here on in to Cooktown. We stayed at the Big 4 park and I must say it is very good, excellent grass sites and expert assistance to reverse into the allocated site. Amenities are great though only**

**a few were open as the park was not all that full. I guess it lowers the work load of the staff if the number shower facilities are limited. The navigator washed a few of our travel clothes and hung them out on the ample line space.**

**We decided on a takeaway for the evening meal and found an excellent Italian cook in the main street. Proved to be a great meal and well worth the short drive into town.**

**Next day we decided to do the tourist thing and went for a drive round looking for the museum first. The museum is set up in the old convent and there are many items from the mining era**



**as well as Cooks ship the Endeavour. There is the recovered anchor from the ship in an enclosed room with several drawings of the ship to illustrate. I could not believe the size of the anchor in particular the timber piece that ensures the anchor is well embedded in the ocean floor. There is also a piece of the tree that Cook tied the ship to when he entered the river. A recovered canon that was thrown overboard to lighten the ship is also on show. It is a must to see the museum and be shore not to miss it if you ever get the chance to travel to the deep north of Queensland. There is also another museum mainly about the growth of Cooktown during and after the gold rush days, all very interesting.**

We saw most of the attractions around the town and spent several days touring. The botanical gardens is also a must see as far as we were concerned. The gardens have been restored and restoration is continuing complete with a new visitors building and reception area.



A visit to the local cemetery is also worth the time as there are some quite historic graves including Mrs. Watson's grave.

*While Captain Watson was at sea in October 1881, Mary Watson fled the island with her baby son and Chinese servant Ah Sam after an attack by members of the Dinggaal aboriginal clan.*

*The unfortunate trio escaped by floating away in the big steel pot used for boiling the beche-de-mer but died of thirst and exposure. It took 4 months for the pot - and their remains - to be found washed up on a small island to the north. Mary Watson's diary found with it makes for harrowing reading.*

A grave of a woman known only as the Normanby woman is there as well. Her story follows.

***Mystery & intrigue surround the origins of the "Normanby Woman" buried in 1886. During the Palmer Gold Rush, travellers had sighted a fairskinned woman living with Aborigines. Enticed from the camp and captured by the police, she was washed, dressed, fed and put on a horse bound for a new home in Cooktown.***

***Aborigines attacked the party and the woman was injured falling from her horse. Interest ran high and curious people were charged one shilling to view the "Normanby Woman". She died in Cooktown Hospital refusing all food. Whether she was European or fair skinned Aboriginal, or died of a broken heart has been the subject of speculation with no one sure where the truth ends and folklore begins.***

We left Cooktown vowing to one day return to look further into our Australian history.



A good days travel with the Compass in tow saw us move into the very well set up Big 4 park at Atherton. Again the intrepid tourists headed off to see some of the sights. Probably the most visited attractions are the two lakes and we managed to venture on to one of them on board a tourist boat with a well trained Captain to tell us all about the lakes and how they came about back in the volcano days. Other attractions

**included the curtain fig and Crater Lake. All worth seeing over a period of three days or so.**

**The attractions are well setup and a far cry from my earlier visits many years ago when we had to find them ourselves by walking through the rain forest. Well made walkways are now the norm and very well maintained as well.**

**We parked at Lake Tinnaroo for one night and enjoyed a walk round the lake foreshore opposite the van park. Sites were somewhat difficult to negotiate due to the steep rough entry as well as badly leveled parking space. Vans were stacked very close to one another. Facilities quite good but need an update.**

**We had to get back home so we left Atherton and traveled back down the Gillies highway and stayed at Cardwell for the night before heading home.**

**Trip took about 14 days of quite leisurely travel, simply a must do for anyone living close to the north. Great people and great drive.**