

Northern Territory Trip

The initial plan was to leave on Monday however little things kept cropping up and we finally left on Friday in early August. First stop was Hughenden for a couple of nights to relax and get things working in the van. As usual we forgot a couple of items and we decided to get the missing bits in Mt Isa after our first few days on the road. Hughenden van park has been substantially improved from our last trip through a few years ago. The new managers have put quite a bit of effort into the park and that made our stay enjoyable. We visited Porcupine Gorge during the day and though the road had not improved the Nissan coped quite well with the rough conditions. Lunch at the pyramid then back to town for a restful nights sleep.



We heard there was a major rodeo taking place in Mt Isa so we decided on a short trip to Richmond to see the newly renovated van park overlooking the new Richmond Lake. An overnigher proved quite cold as the wind blew over the water in the lake. The park is certainly impressive and a site at the lake edge is very much preferred.

The rodeo had finished and we traveled on to the Isa staying at the argyle park at the eastern end of the town. Two nights stay allowed us to do some washing using our new lamair washing machine.



It turned out to be quite a talking point with some of our neighbors.



We had heard so many stories about the so-called horror stretch from Mt Isa to Camowéal that I had little sleep the night before we left. The van park driver had told us there was over 100Kms of bad narrow road and the rest fairly good. One of the park dwellers had suffered some damage to their vehicle when a road train had clipped them and didn't stop. The truck driver probably didn't realize

he had been in an accident.

I cannot see how any government could allow these monsters to travel over the same roads as normal vehicular traffic. A semi with his normal trailer plus three more on the back becomes a vehicle weighing around 160 plus tonnes and when they move slightly across the road the following trailers start to sway and that's when the trouble starts.



Surely the costs of railing this amount of tonnage would be lower than sending it by these monsters. If it's not then the government should lower prices to get these things off the road. Savings in road repairs would more than compensate any lower costs of rail.

Anyway back to the horror stretch. We had a great run with no problems with the road as the amount of narrow road totaled about 70Kms and I was in good condition with no bad shoulders. The longest section of narrow road was about 28Kms with a total of close to 55Kms of narrow stuff. We were able to get off the road and back on without any worries about the tyre walls etc. A large road crew is working on the road and it should be all upgraded within a year or so. We covered the 188Kms in a little over 2 hours.

We fueled up at Camoweal at \$1.19 per litre for diesel. Over the border and we expected fantastic roads as everyone said once you get over the border the road is great, wide smooth, straight. Let me tell you this is not quite the way it is, the roads are good however they are showing signs of wear. Quite a few lumps and bumps, certainly wide enough for you not to worry about the road trains.



We stayed at Barkley downs and ate at the restaurant. No complaint from either of us and the serving of apple pie and ice cream was certainly truckie size. Amenities were quite acceptable and sites easy to use with nearly all sites being drive through. The diesel ran all night however we didn't hear it much as we were not alongside the power shed and we hit the sack early and slept soundly till morning.

The next section of the western part of the trip was uneventful and we fueled up at the three ways. We

did fill up at Barkley downs before we left and found our usual 6 to 7Ks per litre had dropped to about five, and that was with a tailwind. Our next fill at the three ways had us back to about 6.5Ks per litre so maybe our speedo had a hiccup or maybe the pump was out a bit.

We continued to Banka Banka as suggested by others on the caravan forum and were pleasantly surprised by the facilities. No power but the hospitality and slide show certainly made up for the lack of power. The amenities were first class and well maintained. We will stay for two nights on the way back if possible. Remember to arrive early to get a spot.



The following morning we headed for Mataranka for a few days to visit the hot springs and surrounding countryside. We visited the Elsey graves mentioned in the book "We of the never never" and also the re-created Elsey homestead at Mataranka. The re-creation was used in the movie and was relocated at Mataranka homestead after the movie was completed.



The hot springs were a bit of a let down as the flying foxes had moved in. Estimates of between two and four million foxes were resident at the Mataranka

homestead. The van park was relatively free of the foxes especially at the rear of the park. The spring's boardwalks were covered in droppings, as was the usually crystal clear water. Most tourists continued to use the springs and put up with the 'problem'.

(We stayed at the Territory Manor)

Our little Lamair was again put into service at the excellent Kathrine low level van park as our clothing supply was getting a bit low and we planned on staying in Kathrine for around three nights. We booked on the two hours trip up the gorge and were quite impressed. A bit of walking was involved getting from one gorge to another as the water had dropped from flood levels and the big aluminum boats could not get through the gaps. The accompanying commentary by the guide and skipper was excellent. We also had need of stocking up on food supplies and the local supermarket had everything we needed. Our plastic electric jug had also failed and we purchased a replacement stainless steel unit from one of the local electrical stores.



We had planned on visiting butterfly gorge at Douglas Daly however others told us the road in to the gorge was horrendous and vehicles had suffered damage even at 15Km/hr. Being so far from home we didn't want to do any damage to our tow vehicle so we bypassed Douglas Daly.

We continued to Bachelor and stayed at the big 4 park for the next two nights.

The town of Bachelor was originally the mining town for Rum Jungle uranium mine and after it closed the town remained and has become the center for the Litchfield national park and a center for aboriginal education. The amenities in the town are excellent with plenty of small shops and motel/hotels. We stayed at the Big Four caravan park and were very happy with the facilities in the park. The bird feeding at 6pm should not be missed and the number of lorikeets and other species that appear is simply amazing. The noise they all make you will never forget.



We spent two days traveling throughout the national park including the 10Km drive to



the lost city over some quite bad corrugations and lumpy surfaces. The drive was worth it anyway and I took quite a few digital pictures. Don't miss any of the falls and in particular Wangi and Tolmer falls, both quite a view. Next day we were in Darwin at the relatively new Hidden Valley caravan park and booked in for the week saving quite a few dollars on the daily rate. The park is excellent with great ensuite.

The car needed a wash badly and I did that small task the first day. Washing again and the clothes line at the rear of the ensuite is a really good idea and saved having to walk to the lines to hang out clothes. That's one good idea that other van parks should think about.

We visited the aircraft heritage display and saw the B52 bomber. It just takes your breath away how big the thing really is. No camera is capable of taking in the whole thing in one picture. There is a full story with pictures of how it arrived in Darwin and how it was transferred to the resting place at the center. The tail section had to be removed to get it in the building. Other interesting aircraft include a spitfire and tiger moth as well as some older parts of military aircraft. Much history of the attack of Darwin by the Japanese in 1942 is displayed and videos of the attack are played for visitors. An entry fee of \$11.00 is quite reasonable. Many souvenirs



are available for purchase at reasonable prices and much cheaper than the usual tourist rates.

The markets at Mindil beach were full of the usual junk jewelry and imported clothing plus some good food cooked while you wait. We had dinner there and we watched the sun go down over the ocean with several hundred others. As an east coaster we have never seen the sun go down over water.



Three weeks and still in Darwin, lots of things to see and do. We had decided to do the tourist thing for the top part of the Arnhem highway using our van park as a base. Travel is easy and quite quick as the highway is good and traffic is fairly sparse.

Most of the attractions would be better in the wet season however travel is difficult during those months so one has to do a bit of imagining here and there. The wild life park should not be missed as it takes all day to see it all. Also a trip to Mandorah either by road or ferry is well worth the effort.



A few things we noticed about Darwin was the traffic and how it flows. The roads are fairly high speed even when near the city. Actual speed signs are few and far between and speed tax collection vans are used every day. The road signage is also lacking a bit, lots of signage for attractions however the actual street names are often hard to

find. Most motorists travel at reasonable speeds on the open road ie. about 110K/h. One thing you will notice is they seem to want to be first and will always pass you and then continue at the same speed as you anyway.

Darwin surrounds the airport and as such few places miss out on the aircraft noise. The first few days of your stay are the hardest then you don't notice it as much. The 1.00am 747 takeoff disturbed me the first couple of nights. Prices for most attractions are reasonable and seniors card is widely accepted. The wharf precinct is great and food/prices excellent, be early as parking is a premium.

We initially decided to go to Kakadu for about three nights however after the first day we had a rethink. There is just so much to see a few more days will not go astray. Rangers

are at most sites and give short talks on the sites and the inhabitants. We tripped around the national park each day viewing the various tourist spots. The aboriginal paintings were a bit of an eye opener. The history is depicted in many different ways and the talks by the resident rangers is well worth a listen. I don't think I have done that much walking for some time and at the end of a long day my muscles ached. We did the tour of the Ranger mine and the tour guide certainly knew his way around the plant. The tour is well worth the money and the time. We found the Aurora van park in good condition and almost empty with a great selection of sites. The pool and other facilities are in great condition. \$25.00 a night for a powered site.



We had planned to visit a couple of tourist sites on the way out however as no water was falling over any of the falls we figured it would be lots of time and fuel spent maybe some other time.

Fuel prices had risen substantially in all the small towns since we went through a few weeks ago so we filled regularly to try and even out the costs. Banka Banka was fairly full when we arrived for an overnight stay and we slept well even though a diesel generator in a fifth wheeler was running

alongside for a short time.

As we had stopped at a few places on the way out to Darwin we travelled further each leg on our way back. Barkley homestead was again an overnigher as was Mt.sa and Hughenden. We arrived back in Townsville late Sunday afternoon and decided to leave the van on power for the night and start the unpacking in the morning.

We averaged about 6K/Litre or between 16 and 17 L/100K with the van on the back. We spent mobs of money but we had a great time. Total distance travelled about 10,000Kms for both in tow and vanless.



Changes I have decided to make for the next trip include a power point for ease of laptop use rather than having the power cord running in the navigators way.

Putting our sullage hose in plastic tubing as we had it in our Coromal.

Extra sullage hose inlet for the washing machine.

Changing the water filter to another cartridge type and using our ceramic filter cartridge from our home system whilst on the wallaby.

Purchasing a satellite system to get better more reliable TV viewing.

Plus a few other mods will make life more enjoyable next time.