

OUTBACK ADVENTURE

NOWAK TRAVELOGUE | APRIL, MAY | 2012

Kakadu

We are camped in Jabiru on a shady, grassy site, in the heart of Kakadu. It is extremely pleasant with its great big pool and easy access to many sites that are close to the main road. Jabiru itself is a purpose built town that services the nearby uranium mine at Jabiluka. It is very small and unremarkable. A number of the sites we wanted to see, such as the Jim Jim Falls and the Twin Falls are only accessible by 4WD tour. However because of the prolonged wet season, many of the tours are not yet running. We took this risk by coming so early. Most of this vast aboriginal owned land is not visible by any means other than air.

So, in order to see the area, we decided to take a flight. The views were spectacular. Unfortunately so was the color of my face. I only had 15 minutes before it hit me. Air sickness is something I suffer from occasionally. At least Heather got to enjoy the views.

The major feature we saw was the Arnhem escarpment. We flew along its western edge. It is up to 300 metres high and is 2500 million years old -- so old in fact that it predates animal and vegetable matter and therefore no fossils have ever been found in the rock. The rock features went on and on. We viewed numerous waterfalls coming off the escarpment. The lowlands, were amazingly dry looking. We expected to see masses of water holes.



Magela Creek crossing

Road Open Ahead?

Many major roads here have clear signs indicating if they are closed or not. Our "pretend" 4WD does not have the clearance compared to the bigger 4WD more common here. When we noticed that the Magela Creek crossing was open we decided to drive on and take a look. OPEN can mean many things but to us it was definitely CLOSED.



TOURIST WARNING With so many overseas tourists and drunk Australians on the road, the Transport Department obviously wants to make sure we all remember which side of the road to drive on.



CROGS AGAIN AND AGAIN? At every water hole, at every creek crossing, at every billabong, the signs tell us not to linger around. Normally we would stop and have a break where there is a creek. Not here in the NT.



BRUMBIES What a strange sign to see in Kakadu. Where did they come from? Maybe they are survivors of the many failed expeditions of the 1800s!

RANGER MINE



URANIUM

Local aborigine tradition acknowledged that some parts of the land in Kakadu made them sick. In 1953 white man confirmed why this was happening and in the 1960's a number of small mines were opened in the National Park.

In 1970 three huge deposits of uranium were discovered and the controversial Jabiluka mine was the first to open despite major demonstrations and conflict. It is no wonder there was trouble when you fly over the site and see it located slap bang in the middle of a sensitive National Park.

The mine area was removed from the park, and all hell broke loose. The mining company compromised and started a dialogue with the local landowners - the Mirrar people. The first pit closed recently. A second pit has been opened up.

The Mirrar people supposedly have the final say on how the mine will be conducted. Lets see what will happen in the future.



LILLY PADS BY THE MILLIONS

We visited the Mamukla wetlands early this morning. We saw an extensive wetland covered by lillies and lotus flowers. The lotus pads grow very large and die off in the dry months. It was a beautiful scene. It was interesting to watch the birds (locally called Jesus birds) that walk on these pads looking for insects.

The Japanese have recently completed major research on these plants with amazing results. The tops of the leaves are waterproof and can hold water (aboriginals used them as water carriers). The structure of the leaves have been used to stop dust from attaching to space suits. The fibre in the stems is long and sticky and has been extracted and made into cloth similar to silk - but lighter and stronger. The underside of the leaves is currently under investigation because of their ability to block out the sun;



