

# OUTBACK ADVENTURE

NOWAK TRAVELOGUE | APRIL, MAY | 2012

## Katherine Gorge(ou)s

We have heard so much about Katherine Gorge we were really keen to see it. We even bought along our blow up kayak so that we could paddle up the gorge (and other well know waterways up this way).

Now, heat is something we are used to but, we forgot how hot it can get in the middle of the day. 39c out in the sun is debilitating. We arrived in the hot afternoon and after booking our camp site and a tour to the second Gorge (there are 16 in total) we expired to what shade there was with the kangaroos and birds. This is the end of the wet season and the Katherine River, through which the Gorge flows, was murky and inhabited by salt water crocodiles. The fresh water crocs are not a problem but all canoes are banned until June 1st. Evidently the "salties", as the local call them, are very very dangerous and will eat anything (especially blow up kayaks because they usually contain humans). So we viewed the first two gorges by tour boat and learned all about the plants and animals and how the local aborigines lived here in the past.



## Agile Wallabies

The predominant kangaroo in this part of the world is the Agile Wallaby. It's face has a more protruding forehead than the wallabies we see around our place in Ormeau. We are told they are strong swimmers and it's major predator is the crocodile. They seem to love watermelon and gathered around our van making coughing and rustling noises all night. Luckily they don't sing karaoke or understand words like "piss off!"



**MUD CASTLES** The color of white ant nests change according to the soil. Mostly they are red. but we have come across lovely light brown ones. The mud sets really hard and, from a distance, the many formations look like a ragtag army on the march.



**ANYONE FOR A SWIM?** We rode our bikes to this waterhole, a lovely quiet place where years earlier outback tours stopped for a swim. The crocodiles waited in vain for our entrance into the water. Tourists don't come here any more. I wonder why?



**PEACOCKS** These three turned up outside our van and fussed around us. Because they were not prepared to wave their flashy tails we did not give them any food. We hate it when animals simply want to use us.



## BIRDS



This place is amazing. While we relaxed in the shade of our camp tree we looked up and gradually noticed 5 different bird species sitting above us.

A beautiful blue winged



kookaburra, grey mottled bower bird, blue cheeked honey eater, red collared lorikeet and the usual crow. Meanwhile down at our feet were a herd of kangaroos.



When we threw out our watermelon skin all hell broke loose. All we needed was a crocodile or two to make the day complete.



## Danger beneath the water



### TOURIST GEMS

The price of things is a little more expensive around here. It was \$5 for an ice cream, as was The Australian newspaper. \$40 for a powered camp site and diesel is \$1.90 a litre. Years ago once Katherine was cut off from Darwin by the wet season it was many months before anyone got through - people had to manage on their own. When we saw the height line of the recent water that went through the gorge (18m up the sides of the gorge and 3m through Katherine township itself) we understood how inhospitable this country must have been. The threat of invasion by the Japanese spurred the government and the American army to quickly build bridges over the many rivers up here and to lay solid bitumen roads south to Mt Isa. Lucky for us all round.

Katherine Gorge and the surrounding land was successfully claimed by the local aboriginal tribe in late 1980s. It was then leased back to the government but managed by a 15 person board made up of 8 indigenous people - all women. The museum is very informative - it shows how the aborigines survived, how they used fire to improve the land, how the women helped the early settlers thrive in a difficult time and how the local plants and animals developed into a strong ecosystem. This place has grandeur, a long history and its bloody hot!! Tomorrow we aim to get up very early before the sun rises and go for a 4 hours round walk to the third gorge. The afternoons are for relaxing with the kangaroos and birds in the shade.





