

OUTBACK ADVENTURE

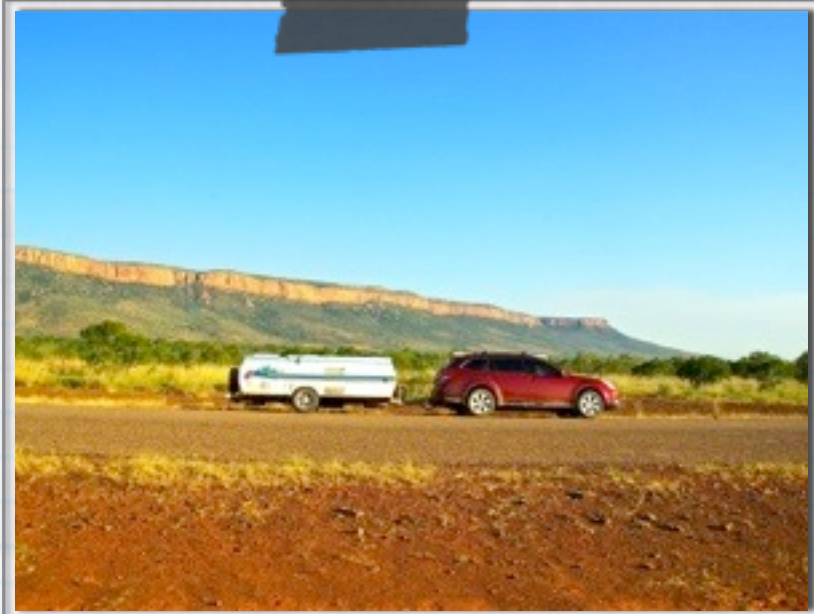
NOWAK TRAVELOGUE | APRIL, MAY | 2012

El Questro to Katherine

It was time to leave El Questro. The idea was to leave early and try to get to Katherine to camp. I set the alarm for an early 5.30am start. That's when the sun comes up. We duly woke on the alarm and set about having breakfast and getting the van ready. The broilga's kept singing and dancing during our cleaning up process. The sun did not rise when it should have. I checked my phone alarm. It was now 4.30am. 4.30am!!!! Because there was no internet available the phone stayed to NT time (1.5hrs difference). The alarm had actually gone off at 4bloodyam! Would you believe it?

Needless to say the sun finally did rise - just as we left. The drive through the river crossings was fun and the absence of vehicles on the dirt road meant less dust. We stopped numerous time to take photos. At one point we could see the dust of a vehicle coming towards us in the distance. It took almost 10 minutes before it passed us.

The trip to Katherine took 6 hours.



The Argyle Diamond Mine

The story behind this mine is one that would make a great film script. The simple facts were that two junior Rio geologists accidentally found 2 diamonds in a creek near the present Argyle mine site. The area was leased by Ashton Mining, a rival company. Their lease had only 2 years to run, so the geologists were told to keep quiet. Ashton started to suspect something was up about 6 months before the lease ran out. Apparently one of RIO's men told a woman he met (who

happened to be a geologist for Ashton), that he was in the diamond business. Ashton were thus justifiably wondering where the diamond haul was. To put them off, Rio's CEO sent a diamond mining team to nearby El Questro. It worked because the day Ashton's lease ran out, Rio Tinto snapped up the lease. The rest is history. Thanks primarily to the richest diamond deposit in the world, Rio Tinto is today one of the world's largest mining companies.



LIGHTENING BOLT We were told that the white flash in the hill side was made by lightening during a recent "knock em down" storm. It must have been some lightening bolt - the gash it made is 3m deep. That's what happens when the hills are made of iron.



TRAVELING LIGHT? We are amazed at the sheer size and large number of big caravans up here. Our little AVan is puny in comparison. When your rig (car + van) is worth in excess of \$150k you should have no worries about the price of fuel (up to \$2.09 per litre) or fuel economy (between 18 - 27 litres per 100kms).



WILDERNESS? Its 58kms on a dusty dirt road to El Questro. A number of river crossings make the trip all the more interesting but we question whether this place should be called wilderness. The first thing you see is a resident helicopter. It also has a road grader, repair shop and restaurant. Maybe that's just self sufficiency.

GIBB RIVER ROAD



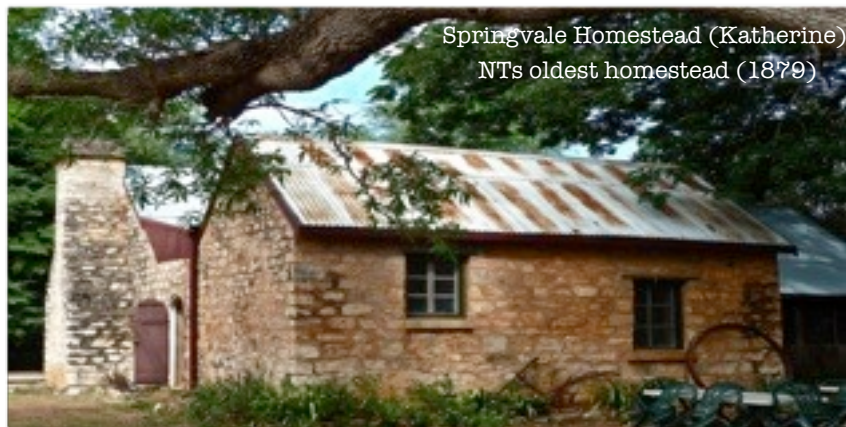
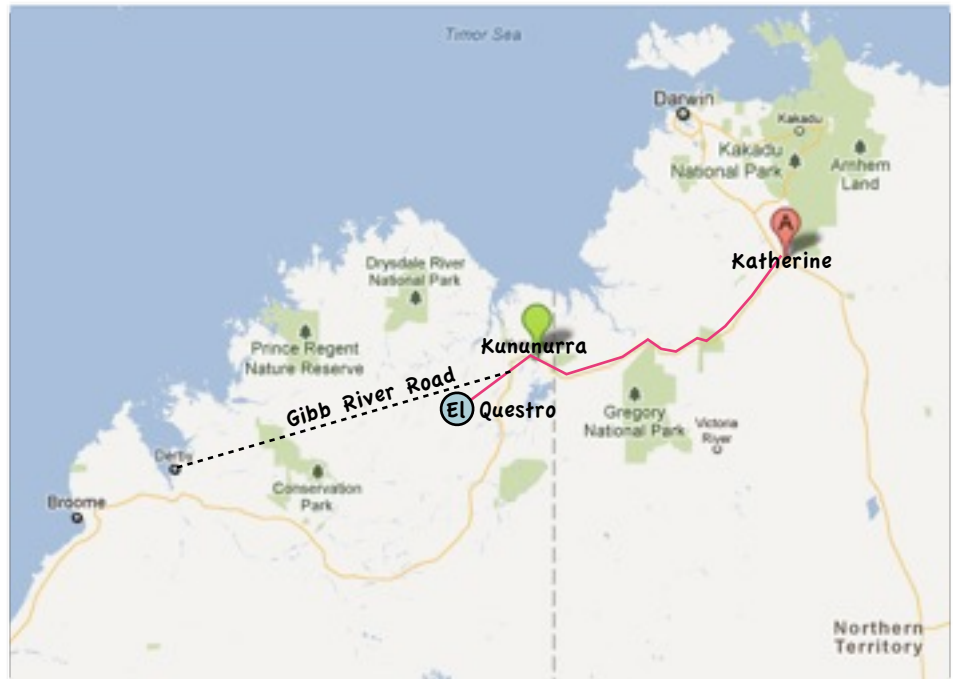
RIGHTS OF PASSAGE

We traveled only a short 58km on the Gibb River Road. That was enough for us.

The bone shattering corrugated dirt road was rocky in parts and dusty the majority of the way. Interestingly there was a stretch of bitumen near the Emma Gorge Resort turnoff. Meeting vehicles coming the other way meant billows of fine clay dust and flying rock spray. Heather and I cringed each time we saw dust coming towards us in the distance. Not everyone slows down for a shiny red Subaru. Its hard to see through the dust cloud so everyone drives with their lights on, especially when the sun is low on the horizon.

Many 4WD enthusiasts drive the Gibb River Road as a badge of honor. You hear lots of horror stories and disasters. Unless you successfully traverse this wild road you have not experienced the worst the Top End offers.

Well I have driven a tiny portion of it and that is more than enough for me.



Springvale Homestead (Katherine)
NT's oldest homestead (1879)



Pentecost River crossing

