

OUTBACK ADVENTURE

NOWAK TRAVELOGUE | APRIL, MAY | 2012

Land of Waterfalls

We left Darwin and decided to experience Litchfield National Park. We were advised by many travelers that Litchfield, named after the famous explorer who discovered much of the far north, was much better than Kakadu (or Kakadont as it is also called). It is supposedly less touristy and a little more inspiring. At first, before we realised Litchfield's makeup, we were a little underwhelmed because we expected to see large bodies of water and lots of birds. But by the end of our time here we now understand that it is actually quite different to Kakadu.

The park covers a large section of the Tabletop Range. A large number of waterfalls cut through the escarpment. Cool rock pools and refreshing water holes are found at the foot of the waterfalls. The surrounding forest is surprisingly dry looking, but has an understory of hardy palms. We went on a walk very early this morning, to the top of the Wangi Falls. Like Katherine Gorge, it was a treat to go early in the cool of the day and to enjoy the solitude before the rest of the day trippers arrived



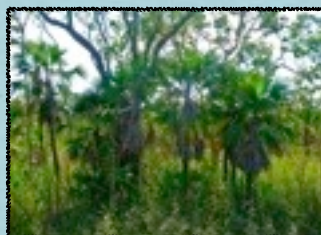
Cool Burning Off

During the last couple of weeks we have seen many fires along the side of the roads. The aborigines have been doing it for centuries - burning the tall grass while the weather is humid. The grass fire only spreads a short distance. What is missed is burned later. Its a deliberate policy to ensure there are few wild fires in the drier times. The land recovers quickly -- as evidenced by the mass of green shoots only a short time after the fire. Animals such as the Black Kite are quick to pick up tasty morsels during the fires

as insects and small lizards/mammals try to escape. Plants such as the pandanus and small palms survive the fires and the tall trees are not touched. It was interesting today to see large numbers of big birds circling above the smoke.



CROCODILES Evidently the salt water crocs were almost wiped out by the 1950's but after protection was declared their numbers have grown steadily. That is one way to ensure that the National Park is not disturbed!



PANDANUS One of the reasons why this plant thrives up here in the north is that it is one of the few plants that can survive bush fires and soggy feet plus very dry conditions. Pandanus and other small palms, make up most of the understory in forests here.



MOSQUITOES We have come across lots of mosquitoes but what we did not know is that there are almost 50 different species. Its hard to work out what species they are after they are smashed and mangled on Siggy's feet and arms.

TERMITES

SKYSCRAPERS

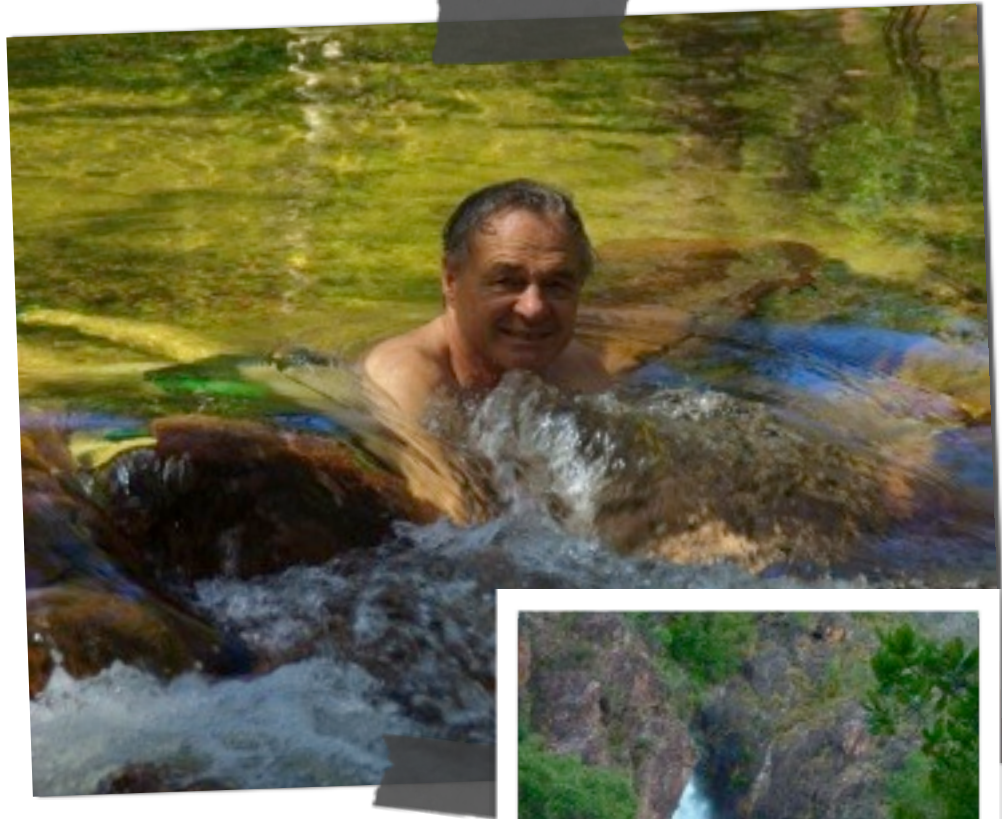


The tiny ecosystem engineers of the Top End build mud castles that are very imposing. Two types were pointed out to us today. As their name suggests, the cathedrals, build skyscrapers with multiple turrets all buttressed together. The magnetic species, on the other hand, build mounds that are tall and spiky at the top but are more like tombstones - thickest on their east and west axis and very thin on their north south axis - like a fin.

In both cases the reason why they build this way is for climate control. The cathedrals move to a turret away from the sun's heat when it gets hot while the magnetic's limit the amount of sun's rays hitting the mound during the day like a fin would. Either way both types were very impressive.



Rock Pools



APRIL - END OF THE WET SEASON

The Top End receives a lot of rainfall. And it shows. Many trees on the edge of streams are bent over from the rush of water from recent rains. The waterfalls are full on. The countryside is lush and green. 1500mm a year is a lot of water. Although April is the end of the rainy season it is also known as the season of spectacular storms. By 4pm, after a day in the mid 30s, and the air thick with humidity, the thunderstorm activity begins. The evening sky lights up ending with a light shower that blows away the humidity. But only for a short while.

There are 6 seasons up here. The dry season is hotter but not as humid. The mozzies and midges migrate to southern Asia I guess.

