

# OUTBACK ADVENTURE

NOWAK TRAVELOGUE | APRIL, MAY | 2012

## Mataranka

Imagine luxuriating in a small stream shrouded by pandanus and tall fan palms. Crystal clear aqua water, white sandy bottom. Heavenly. What we did not realise is that 30 million litres of 34C water flows through this stream each day. The water wells up from underground and thermal pools like this one in the Elsey National Park, feed the Roper River. The Roper is known for its fishing and crocodiles. Luckily the Mataranka thermal pool is protected from crocs.

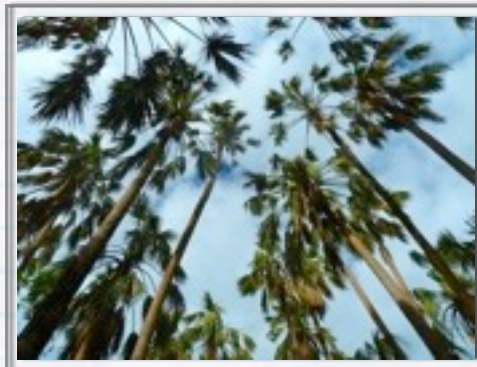


We are camped overnight here at Mataranka after a long 500kms drive from Tennant Creek/3 Ways. Tomorrow we aim to be at Katherine River Gorge where we hope to spend around 3-4 days.

The area between Mt Isa and Tennant Creek is called the Barkly Tablelands. Mostly its flat with a few little rises where you can admire the surrounding countryside which goes on forever. There are few tall trees. Every 200kms or so we come across an outpost/settlement/petrol station.

## Are We There Yet?

Where does the Outback start and end? And the Top End? What about the Channel Country? Who knows? The endless expanse of flat



countryside from Charleville to Cloncurry gave way to more interesting, hillier landscapes around Mt Isa only to give way to more flat land from Camooweal to Mataranka. Suddenly it became more tropical. At the Roper River we were surrounded by palms. By then we ha driven 3200kms.



**CROSSING THE BORDER** We have never been in the Northern Territory. After we snapped this sign the road was little better and even had a white line along the edge to improve safety. The road verge continued to be only minimal.



**SPEED LIMITS** We were told that there were no speed limits in Northern Territory up until last year when 130kph limits were introduced. We both had to double take when we saw our first one. Auto pilot here we come!!



**WHITE ANTS** Their nests are everywhere and seem to get progressively larger the closer we drove to Darwin. The red earth mounds jut up starkly against the yellow and green shades of the grass and trees. Many different shapes and sizes - mysterious and eerie.

## CHANNEL COUNTRY



Most of us know, or have heard about, the famous Lake Eyre in the Simpson Desert. It's a large dry lake in the middle of Australia. In the last 2 years, due to the huge rainfall, Lake Eyre is now full with water. As we passed over the major rivers here we saw signs that we were entering the Lake Eyre basin. We now realise the extent of the huge river systems that drain into Lake Eyre. Most of these rivers are very shallow and only flow after very heavy rains. The Balloo, Cooper, Thomson, Diamantina and others form wide flooded channels in the wet which take months to flood into Lake Eyre. These systems are called Channel Country.



## The Rough Outback



### TOURIST GEMS

The first live kangaroo we encountered tried to jump into our campervan! Heather made sure it did not take our cache of jelly beans and proceeded to lecture it about the perils of crossing the road. Every kangaroo we have seen to date has been dead on the side of the road. Great for the black kites and crows but not good for the kangaroo population. This particular kangaroo listened very intently to what Heather told it and we know it understood everything.

We spend a few moments at the waterhole just before the sun went down. We witnessed a pair of white bellied sea eagles on a nest nearby. Brilliant. Early tomorrow, before we head off to Katherine Gorge, we intend to ride our bikes to the water hole down the road and see what we can see. No bird is safe now that Heather has a copy of the "Field Guide to the Birds of Australia" and binoculars - every living thing that flies will be identified and thoroughly catalogued.



# Big brother



Ghost gums show up starkly against the sky.



Look left, then right, then left again before you cross the road safely.



Flat country indeed.

