

## Australia 2009

## Kununurra to Darwin

## Leg details

**Date** September 6 - September 30, 2009

**Leg** Kununurra - Keep River NP - Gregory NP (Bullitta Stock Route, Humbert Track) - Katherine - Nitmiluk NP (Katherine Gorge, Edit Falls) - Pine Creek - Kakadu NP (Gunlom Falls, Jim Jim & Twin Falls, Yellow Waters, Jabiru, Ubirr) - Mary River NP (Shady Camp, Couzens Lookout, Hardys Track) - Batchelor - Darwin

**PDF**



**Leg map** (click to enlarge in separate window)



On Sunday, September 6, 2009, Simon arrives in **Kununurra**.

It is warm (as it has been in the last few days ....) and he appreciates the 37°C .... in Switzerland the summer had just finished and the snowfall level had dropped to 2000 m already .....

Susi is busy with her Opera House crab trap and tries to catch a Cherabin (freshwater shrimp).

A neighbour had offered to catch a Barramundi for us if we provide a Cherabin which seems to be loved by Barras.

But Susi has no luck: every time she goes down to the water the trap is empty.

So after dinner Simon, Ruedi and Susi decide to check one more time and head down to the boat ramp.

Susi has also brought a lamp to see if she can spot some crocodiles.

As we arrive at the place where the trap is in the water Susi turns on the lamp and gets a scare.

A large freshwater crocodile lies on the bank not even 10 meters away from her.

The croc gets the same scare and darts away.

Reacting to Susi's scared scream Ruedi and Simon just have time to get a glimpse of the strong body and tail of the croc before it disappears into the water.



A man at the jetty calls us over and shows us another large freshie that is just below us, not even 3 meter away.

He recommends that we should not approach the croc any further as even though they are freshwater crocs they can still attack if they feel threatened and their bite can be painful.

Simon is all excited, his first day in Kununurra and he already has seen a large crocodile.

We decide to head back to pick up the cameras and to come back as we will probably not see freshies that close too soon.

But first we check the trap .... it is still empty.

We wonder if the crocodiles would destroy the trap to get to the Cherabin in it or if they would have respect for the rather large dome .....

After a successful photo session we have a relaxed evening and another warm night with temperatures around the 24°C mark ... thanks for the invention of fans!

On Monday morning we get ready to leave Kununurra.

Susi goes down to the boat ramp to collect her trap and guess what, it is populated!

A large Cherabin sits in it!

As the fisherman Susi wants to deliver the Cherabin to is out fishing she leaves the animal with the neighbours.



On the way out of Kununurra we come past the Diversion Dam.

Even though it is the end of the dry season there is still plenty of water that is discharged into the **Ord River** from **Lake Kununurra**.

A large saltwater crocodile is lazily swimming underneath the weir.

We bear that in mind later on when we stop at the picnic area to take some pictures of the dam walls from below and are quite careful where we stand and how close we get to the water's edge .....

Then we continue on and turn off towards **El Questro**.

The dirt track is fairly corrugated.

We turn off towards **Emma Gorge**.

As Susi gets out of the OKA to take some pictures, Ruedi checks the front axles because he believes the leaf springs are rattling over the corrugation more than usual .... and finds one of

the screws which clamps the spring packet to the axle sheared off .....

The rest of the bolt is stuck in the axle housing.

We try to arrange a booking in a garage in Kununurra by phone but the OKA garage only has time on Friday and the other one wants to see the OKA first before committing to a date.

This means that we have to return to Kununurra instead of enjoying El Questro .....

Once in Kununurra we soon find a garage that will take a booking for us on Wednesday morning.

We go back to the caravan park and "our" site is still free, so we settle back in.

Our neighbour, the fisherman, has not yet returned from fishing and the Cherabin is still sitting at his door step in its bucket.

Ruedi starts preparing the OKA for the garage by removing all parts that would else have to be removed by the mechanics.

This way he can save a fair bit of labour time.

Then he has a closer look at the sheared off screw, jacks up the OKA and, thanks to the large amount of anti-seize that he and Paul applied when the axle was replaced in Melbourne in

March, is able to remove the screw without major problems.

As he also carries those screws in his spares he finishes the repair by himself and is able to put all tools away just as it gets dark.

This means that we will be able to cancel the appointment in the garage tomorrow.

The fisherman returns after dark and is impressed by the Cherabin. He had never before seen one.

But he is not going out fishing anymore as he is leaving tomorrow.

So Susi heads back to the lake to release the Cherabin.

After the experience with the crocodiles the other night Susi is careful and checks every possible spot, where a croc could be lying ... but there is none ....

The night feels a bit sticky with 21°C.

Well, we better get used to it. Warmer ones will come soon ....



On Tuesday, August 21, as Ruedi double-checks his repair, he sees that the front right pin that connects the leaf springs with the chassis has also collapsed and only one part of it is still

hanging in there holding the spring package in place .....

This could have gone terribly wrong.

If that screw had let go completely the right side of the axle would have instantly moved backwards.

Steering and suspension would have been severely affected and heavy damage would have been the result.

Wow!

Ruedi gets the spare (yes, he also carries those screws ...) and fixes it in no time .... and then he finally cancels the appointment in the garage!

We learn again, that we should always try to assess and fix the problem ourselves before calling for external help.

We could have staid at El Questro!

Enough work for today!

For the rest of the rather warm day we just relax in the pool and play around a bit on our PCs.

On Wednesday we have a quiet day with a bit of shopping, washing, hanging around in the pool .... (yes, it is hot again with 36°C).

In the evening we head over to Will and Britany, people we met at Parry's Lagoon, and have a lovely time discussion their "camper-in-building" (based on an Isuzu, not an OKA .....).

As we leave we all find that the temperature has dropped a fair bit, it is almost cool.

Well, no wonder, we see 20°C over night and it feels great under the blanket.

On Thursday morning, September 10, Heidi, Peter and Simon are back from El Questro and after some final shopping we leave Kununurra shortly after lunch.

The sun is burning down and soon we again reach the "usual" 36.5°C.



After reaching the **Keep River National Park** we stop at the **Cockatoo Lagoon**.

The water level is pretty low and as there is not much water left in the surrounding area either. Many birds have found some refuge here.



A Pied Egret (hopefully this is the right name for the bird ....) is having a bit of a dance.

There is no female in sight, but he might try to attract one from the other side of the water hole.

Next stop is the **Jarrnarm Camping** where we settle down for the night.

It is very sticky and the march flies give us a hard time, but a bit of insect repellent keeps them more or less away.

As the sun sets the Kookaburras start singing.

A group of four birds flies to a tree close by and give us a concert.

It is really funny to watch them how they all together lift their heads and warble their song into the darkening sky.

Then they stop, look at each other, raise their heads again and start the next song.

As it is too hot to go back into the campers we sit outside for a long time and watch the stars, satellites and even some shooting stars ..... and then Ruedi bites a piece of his tooth off on some chocolate!

But as this has already been done earlier in the year by Heidi we know that if there is no toothache, all we need is a bit of 400 and 200 grade sandpaper to grind the edges smooth and then it will be fine until we can have it fixed by a dentist .... no worries!

By the time we have had our showers and are ready to go to bed it is still over 30°C; the fan is in high demand again.

Thankfully during the night the temperature drops to beautiful 17.5°C.

On Friday morning we are woken up by the alarm clock.

Shortly after the sun has reached the camp we leave for the **Jarrnarm Walk**, an 8 km / 3 hours walk.



It is rather fresh and we hope that the heat of the day will not have fully kicked in by the time we come back to the camp.



The walk takes us through some very pretty hills that look very much like the Bungle Bungles.



In a sheltered area we find some Aboriginal art and also some interesting erosion.



It is a very pretty walk but by the time we come back to the camp it is hot and the march flies are harassing us again.

But after a shower they kind of lose interest in us ... it must be the sweat and salt that attracts them.



We head back to the bitumen and drive east on the **Victoria Highway**.

At a rest area we meet a young tourist on a bicycle who asks us if he can do the Gibb River Road with his bike .....

Next we pass a German traveller with a Suzuki without engine that is now drawn by two camels .... mind you, he has been on the road like this for the last 4 years!

Then we reach the **Gregory National Park** and stop at the **Big Horse Creek Camping Area** for the night.

Fulfilling one of his first duties on his "arrival check list" Ruedi raises his Australian and Swiss flag on the HF-antenna-cum-flagpole.

Soon after our arrival we see an old Toyota with a license plate "ZH 1".

They set up camp close by and we wonder if they are Swiss too .... ?

(Note to the non-Swiss readers:

"ZH" are the letters that are on all license plates of cars registered in the Canton of Zurich).

Sure enough they are .... with that license plate they almost had to be!

They had seen the Swiss flag on Ruedi's "flagpole".

After dinner they come over for a long chat.

It is hot and it is definitely more comfortable to sit outside and enjoy the few degrees less heat. By the time we go to bed the thermometer still shows 32°C ..... luckily it cools down later on and we get a bit of sleep, but only towards the morning the temperature drops to 22°C.



On Saturday morning Simon decides that it is time for a hair cut. "Hair stylist" Susi gets the machine out and goes to work ....

We continue to **Timber Creek** where we get fuel and some information on the Gregory National Park, especially on the Bullita Stock Route. Today Simon drives the Toyota. Let's see how he goes and also, what the track has to offer.



But first we have a look at the **Bullita Station** which has been turned into a great little museum giving insight into the life out here, the hardship and mother nature and its moods. Especially the letter written by Lyn Berlowitz after the flood in March 15, 1977, is impressive. [Click here to read it.](#)

Then it is time to start the Bullita Track.



Right at the beginning we have to cross the Humbert River for the first time.



It is the first water crossing for Simon and even though it is easy it is a bit of an adventure for him.



The track soon after becomes rocky and we also have to pay attention to the low hanging trees.



Then we reach the sign post #2 marking the beginning of the jump-up.



After an inspection and a bit of road-building by Peter we are ready to drive it.



Simon gets his instructions on how he has to tackle this track. Nevertheless it is still very demanding on poor Simon.



We now also understand why the Bullita Stock Route has to be driven in one particular direction! The jump-up could cause a lot of grief to vehicles if it was driven in the opposite direction ..... but the way we are heading it all is down-hill and we can let the vehicles crawl slowly down-hill over all the rocks and steps.



We continue on and reach **Spring Creek Yard**, a camp site just beside a small creek that actually is still running! The water looks beautiful and before long we are all in it. It is rather warm but there are a few spots left, where it is a bit deeper and a bit cooler too. Still, it feels great!

To have shade for dinner we place the table behind the OKA in the middle of the access track to the camp. We don't really expect anybody to come into the camp anymore but Murphy is present and just before sunset a Toyota approaches. But the driver just reduces the speed and very slowly drives past us on the grass. We tell Simon, that this is the way Aussies are, no worries! Had this happened in Switzerland the driver would have waited on the track for us to move the table and then driven through on the track, correctly but a pain in the b... for us. Later on Ruedi has a bit of a talk to some other people that also stay on the camp and also the driver of the Toyota which is also there. When the question comes to where people are from, the Toyota driver says "Bern" .... Ruedi thinks a bit and then asks "Swiss?" Yes, he is Swiss ... so much for Aussies and no worries ... Apparently Swiss people that travel through Australia have learned quickly and now also can be a bit less "by the book" ..... surprise surprise ..... In the evening the temperature drops quickly and we have an excellent night's sleep. Oh what a feeling! On Sunday morning after a refreshing night's sleep (18.5°C) Susi is in the mood for some driving.



She even feels up to the crossing of the **East Bairnes River**, a steep and very rocky crossing .....



.... and is pleased with the outcome of her driving. But then she's had enough and she turns back to her role as co-driver.

We deviate to the **Drovers Rest Campsite** but even though there is a large waterhole there no swimming is possible because of the saltwater crocs. It is a real shame.



We finish the track and head back towards Bullitta Homestead. We stop at the turn off to Limestone Gorge but decide that with 37.5°C in the shade is definitely not the right temperature for the Calcite Flow Walk. Tomorrow morning will be the better time.

At the homestead we are pestered by flies and also march flies. And there is no escaping into the water of the creek as signs warn about the saltwater crocodiles .....

After dinner just between the time when the march flies go "to bed" and the mozzies "get up" we take refreshing showers on the OKAs entry steps. Once again are pleased about how well our design works ..... all we need is a solution for the diffs, the bushes and the "overweight" .... but that will be looked at in Perth upon our return. It does not take long and the temperature reached comfortable levels. It actually drops to 17°C and Susi needs a blanket!

On Monday, September 14, we head back into **Limestone Gorge**.



The track goes past some **Tufa Falls**. There is no more water flowing in the creek but the pools must look stunning with water flowing over them.

At the **Calcite Flow Walk** parking area the track finishes. The last 2 km of the track have been washed away in recent floods.

It is already quite warm and the short walk up hill is enough to get the sweat running down.



Some information tables tell us all about the "Rillenkarren" and the limestone formations which are fossilised stromatolites. For more [details on the Limestone Gorge and all its interesting details please click here.](#)



The **White Waterfalls** are dry and the views into the valley are very nice.

We head back onto the main track then turn into the **Humbert Track**. The track is rather easy going with a few rocky sections and a few creek crossings, but nothing bad.

Then we reach the **Police Station Waterhole** and the descent into the Humbert River ..... Well, now things start looking a bit different ....



The crossing is very tilting .....



The Toyota goes first and manages well.



Ruedi has a close look and decides on the line he wants to take.

The sun is burning down and when Susi carries a rock over to fill a gap she almost drops it because it is so hot. By now the temperature has risen to 38.5°C in the shade.



As the OKA will be tilting too much Ruedi decides to lower air bags and tyres on the rock-facing side and inflate them fully on the water-facing side. It makes quite a difference as one can see in the picture above. Now he feels confident and the crossing can start.



With a bit of guiding from Susi, Ruedi drives the OKA through without any problems too. Surprise surprise .... but we don't mind.

It is a real shame that the Humbert River also is considered to be saltwater croc country and we cannot have a swim in the beautifully cool looking waters .....

Soon after we reach the border of the park and the end of the Humbert Track. Now the bull dust starts.

The whole width of the road is nothing but bull dust .....

Heidi who raves in the back of their Toyota (Simon is driving and Peter is the "driving-instructor") does not realise that. Only when she starts sneezing and coughing she realises that the bull dust is coming in through the back windows she had left a bit open for ventilation purposes! She is not happy at all about this as a layer of red dust is now settling all over the interior of their camper ....

We start looking for a spot for the night. All creeks are dry and so we settle on a large open space along the dirt road at one of the gates.

During dinner a car approaches the gate and slows down. A woman calls something and Ruedi walks over to find out what she is saying ... if we were in Switzerland or Germany she would tell us that does she does not want us to camp on her property ...

But it is the other way round, she excuses herself for having driven so fast and generates a cloud of bull dust! This is a perfect example to show Simon what we mean with "Aussies are different" .....

After a perfect night with 20.5°C we have a "Sunday"-breakfast on a Tuesday with the fresh bread Susi baked last night and some freshly baked scones from Heidi. The flies are held away by the fly cream from Alice Springs and we sit in the shade of the OKA (sometimes large vehicles for certain have their advantages). Simon gets the full "out-bush life" treatment with all the goodies .....



We continue on towards **Jasper Gorge** on the **Buchanan Highway**, a well maintained gravel road without bull dust holes and corrugation and with just a few rocky spots. It really deserves the name "highway"!

By 9 AM the temperature has risen above the 30°C mark and continues to climb to 37.5°C again.



We stop for lunch at the **Charles Crossing Campground**. There is still enough water in the waterhole for a swim.



As Heidi, Peter and Simon go for one last swim after lunch Susi watches another camper that has just packed up and is leaving the camp. He has problems with the soft sand, changes the gear to reverse and for what ever reason puts his foot a bit too strong on the gas. The vehicle shoots backwards and by sheer luck loses contact with the ground on two wheels which brings it to a stop just 20 - 30 cm before it would have overturned and rolled down the embankment!

The young driver jerks the 4WD in and tries to drive up the sand bank again but the vehicle does not move, just the wheels that are in the air turn like crazy. The driver gets out of the vehicle and checks the hubs ... they are locked ....

Hmmmm ...

By now Peter comes back from his swim and has a look under the vehicle.

Quickly he spots the problem:

The front drive shaft has fallen off and is turning in the air.

The young man is pretty frustrated, he had wanted to go into the Gregory National Park for some 4-wheel-driving.

We give him a good push onto solid ground so he can make his way back to the bitumen.



We continue on into **Jasper Gorge**.

Even though it is slightly overcast ever so often the sun shines on the walls and we can enjoy their pretty red colour.



When we reach the Victoria Highway again we turn east towards Victoria River.



We stop at the **Old Victoria River Crossing**.

Sadly camping is not allowed at this pretty spot anymore.

We have a closer look, if the track on the other side of the crossing leads somewhere.

But it stops right after a few trees so there is no sneaking out onto a small track and staying there for the night.

The next possibility for a night's stop with the possibility of a swim is the **Sullivan's Campground**.

But when we reach it there is a sign that it is not advised to swim in the waterhole as the quality of the water is not good anymore.

What a shame!

We decide to stay here even though the camping is close to the highway and the traffic can be heard quite well.

After a short shower which today is not really refreshing we head to bed and try to find some sleep.

Luckily our ventilator moves the air around in the camper as there is no breath of wind outside, the air just sits there, hot and sticky. ... by midnight we still have some 28°C ....

Then the wind starts blowing a bit and it feels a cooler.

Great!

Then the wind stops again and after a few minutes it starts blowing from exactly the other direction.

In no time the temperature has risen by 2°C to over 30°C again ... by 2 AM we still see 30°C on the thermometer .....

This is the first really hot night and only thanks to the fan we can get at least a bit of a rest ....

On Wednesday morning we all get up really early.

By 6 AM the temperature still is at 26°C and as soon as the sun comes up it starts rising quickly.

Simon wants to go hiking on top of the escarpment but we decide that it is too hot for such activities and let them go on their own way.



We continue on and stop at **Katherine Campbell Springs**.

This would have been the next campground with water.

But here too there is only the bit of water that comes out of the spring that feeds the waterhole and that is just not enough anymore.

So we continue on to **Katherine**, go shopping and then head up to the **Nitmiluk National Park**.

What a pleasure to see the nice new pool area!

So for the rest of the day we do a bit of washing and minor maintenance at the OKA and in between we enjoy the water and the spa.

That's a much better way to live through days with 38°C!



A bit later on we head down to the river.

We are not surprised to see that the temperature in the sun is supposedly around 50°C today.

The river is very pretty and looks inviting ... except for the large crocodile trap on the other side of the river ....

Even though swimming is permitted in the river we decide that we will have swims in the pool only.

On Thursday morning we wake up to "cool" 22.5°C.

It is a perfect day for the boat trip and Peter, Heidi and Simon enjoy it.

We continue on with our work .... and even though it is "only" 36.5°C we find it appropriate for multiple visits to the pool and spa.

During the day we see the OKA from Wilderness Challenge arrive and wonder who is driving it.

But the driver is busy with his clients so we postpone a visit to tomorrow.

In the late afternoon we head up to the lookout for the sunset.

Even though the walk is only 400m long a sign recommends not to forget to take some water with along.

This sounds like a plan and we take some aperitif with us.



On the way we can watch some young wallabies and their mums.

[Click here for a short movie](#) (file type: .wmv, size: 1'631 KB) on how a young wallaby calls its mum.



Although this walk is short, the climb up the escarpment is steep and the cold water is quite welcome.



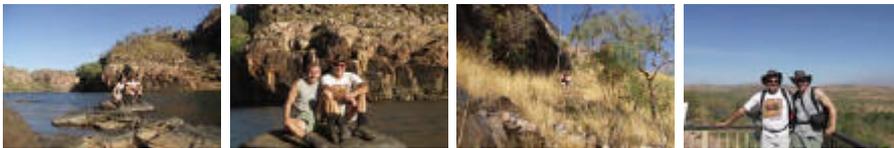
Because of some controlled burnings the air is filled with smoke and we can enjoy a colourful sunset.



On the way back the bats are out and have a feed at the blooming Eucalyptus.

On Friday, September 19, Ruedi and Simon want to hike the **Windolf Walk**.

At 6:30 AM they leave the camp ground to beat the heat.



The trail leads through rocky outcrops on top of the escarpment to Pat's Lookout overlooking the first gorge.

From there they descend to the river where Simon goes for a swim ..... It is too cold for Ruedi .....

By 10:30 AM they are already back and soon Simon can be seen relaxing by and in the pool ..... Isn't life great?

On Friday after another pleasant night with 21.5°C we pack up and get ready to head back to Katherine.

Ruedi has a quick chat with the Wilderness Challenge Driver but he has no news regarding the new OKAs that should have been delivered to Wilderness Challenge in Cairns by now.



A bit later on the way out we spot the Wilderness Challenge OKA on the side of the road and a red faced driver on the phone .....

Ruedi stops and offers his help.

Colin, the driver, explains that he cannot get any diesel into the engine but luckily the garage has time for him .... if only he could get the vehicle to the garage!

We offer to tow the vehicle 20 km into town and Colin accepts.

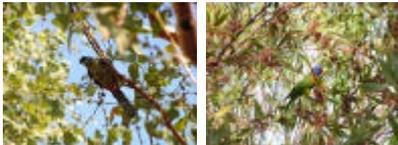
Well, let's hope all went well and you had a safe trip back Colin.

See you in Cairns next time!

After some shopping and a swim in **Katherine Hot Springs** we head north to **Lelyin (Edith) Falls**.



The campground has been extended since we were here in 1995 but otherwise all is still as it was then .... the rather cool water too!  
Susi does not stay long in the water!



She rather chases birds with her camera ..... here a Northern Rosella [Platycercus venustus] and a Rainbow Lorikeet, red-collared form [Trichoglossus haematodus].

Again the temperature during the day reaches 37.5°C but now the humidity has risen too.

It is not as pleasant anymore as it was at Nitmiluk NP.

During the night the temperature doesn't drop fast either: by 1:30 AM we still see 29°C on the thermometer .....

On Sunday, September 20, we get up shortly after dawn and get ready for the **Lelyin Walk**.



It leads us uphill and soon we get the first views of the waterfall.

The dragons are out in force too, warming themselves in the sunlight in the middle of the walking track.



Then we reach Top Pool and Simon has a swim.

His memories of this trip will be water ..... in form of sweating and swimming.



Some orchids and other flowers bloom along the river.



There are also some other interesting thing to look at like this tree and its amazing roots.



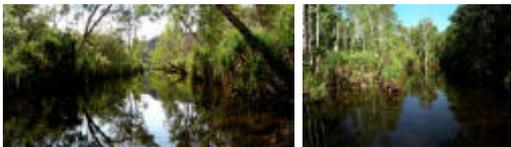
The next few lookouts give some views out into the country and also back onto the waterfalls.



Ruedi finds himself a comfortable spot for a break .....



... while Susi is chasing interesting looking moths.



The end of the walk leads through some pandanus and the crossing of the river. It is a very peaceful and pretty setting.

Then we pack our campers and move over to the day use area so we can go for a swim as long we want without getting into a conflict with vacating the sites by 10 AM .... the ranger is already present in the camp .... The swim is again very refreshing in the cool water.

Then it is time to move on, Kakadu National Park is calling. We decide to stay at the **Gunlom Falls Campground** and reach it in the late afternoon. The waterfall looks pretty dry compared with our last visit in 1995 .....



..... 2009 ..... 1995 .....

It is muggy and the temperature has reached 38°C ... looks like this is going to be another warm night for the ones without a fan .....

As we are finishing dinner we hear a sound as if some wind gust were approaching. It gets closer and closer and suddenly we are in the middle of a small and very warm storm. Leaves are whirled up in the air, the neighbours candles in the dinner table are blown out, it is almost like a whirlwind. After a while the wind quiets down again but the temperature stays high .... and it stays like that all night, at 6 AM in the morning we still have 26.4°C ....



On Monday morning we hike up the short but steep track to the top of the **Gunlom Waterfall**.



The rocks have some very pretty patterns, one can only wonder how they have been formed.



A trickle of water still runs through the chain of pools.



The pools invite for a swim and the small gorge definitely has to be explored too.  
It's a great place!

Then we head on towards Jabiru and stop at the **Bukbukluk Lookout**.

Here we realise that we still have the problem with the power system.

The voltage reading goes wild and varies from 13.2 - 13.6 V, instead of a steady 13.8 - 14.0 V.

So Ruedi starts testing all the relevant connections on Alternator, starter motor and batteries.

But even after all connections to the back-section have been removed the readings still are all over the place.

Well, at least we can say for certain that it has nothing to do with our solar system!

Once we reach **Cooinda** Ruedi wants to continue his checks ..... but only after a swim in the pool .... by now the temperature has reached 39°C and it is humid.

The night is warm (deepest temperature 26.5°C ..... just after dawn ....) and also quite muggy.

It is a bit early for this kind of weather, according to the locals, but what can you do but sweat .... and take every chance of a swim?

On Tuesday morning we head down to the boat ramp at the **Yellow Water Lagoon** to meet the "Rangeress" for a guided walk.



Clouds are still covering most of the sky and even though it is only shortly after 8 AM it already feels hot and very sticky.  
We see a few birds but no crocodiles give us the honour of showing themselves.



Along the walk we pass some grass where hundreds of small frogs live in.



We also get a closer look at the pig trap.

The damage done by the pigs takes years to be fixed by nature.

So pig management is one of the prime tasks rangers have in this area.

After the walk we are all sweaty and hot and are happy to hop into the pool again and cool down for a while.

On the way out of town we stop at the **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre**.

The information is well presented and quite interesting.

Then we leave Cooinda and soon after turn into the track towards Jim Jim Falls.



The escarpment is impressive.

We have only seen it from the plane in 1995.

We stay at the **Garnamarr Camp**.

During dinner a Stone Curlew comes for a visit.

Now at least we know how it looks like after having heard his "song" so many times.

It is way after midnight when the temperature drops below 30°C .... and on Wednesday morning we already wake up to 26.6°C.

We leave early as we want to climb on top of the Twin Falls.



Right after the camping the track changes to a 4WD-only track, rocky at times and with sandy sections.

It takes us 30 minutes to the Jim Jim Falls turn-off.



Then we have to cross the river and it is another 30 minutes to the **Twin Falls** parking area.

As we study the local map we see that the walking track actually leaves from the car park and not as we had expected from the end of the gorge.

So we quickly change our plans and start hiking up-hill.



We are lucky as during most of the climb some clouds are blocking the direct sun light and keeping the heat away from us.



After some pockets of forest we reach the lookout and get some views out into the valley and also of the gorge.



Even though the river is dry the rocks and some left-over water still make it a very attractive place to explore.



Then we reach the edge of the water fall and the views are just stunning. We can just wonder how this must look when water is tumbling down into the gorge! And the sound!!



Then we continue for another 200 – 300 meter to reach the water. It is a great feeling to paddle around in the warm water (it can just cool us down a bit, it must be close o 30°C warm ...). The hike to the top of the Twin Falls in the heat is quite demanding and one has to carry enough water to avoid dehydration. Then it is time to head down again and take the boat trip into the gorge.



It is a very nice gorge.



The short walk to the end of the gorge leads over a pontoon. So far the rangers removed the crock every year after the wet, but since the crocodiles are territorial, they return back to the same place every year during the wet. Meanwhile they learned what a crock trap looks like and in turn cannot be caught anymore. Since the rangers cannot get the crocodiles out of the river anymore swimming is too dangerous. To give people a chance to cool down some showers have been installed along the walk way.



Below the almost dry waterfall there is a pretty pool with an even prettier sand beach ... but a large sign is a reminder that this is saltwater crocodile area ... what a shame. Well, we will have to for the showers on the pontoons then!

As we wait at the jetty for the boat to pick us up we realise how hot and humid it is in the gorge. The sweat just comes out of each pore of the body and we are soaked as if we just had a shower, mind you, a hot one!



At the jetty we spot an interesting bird's nest. Amazing how they can craft such a thing!



Next stop is **Jim Jim Falls**, but they are dry too.  
By now the temperature has risen to 36°C again and it is really humid.

A large crocodile trap in the billabong reminds us again that this is no place to go for a cooling swim even if we wouldn't mind it at all.  
The north must be one of the most frustrating places of Australia, hot, humid and infested with crocodiles and marine stingers prohibiting a cooling swim in the water that is so abundant here!

All we want now is a shower and a bit of shade.  
So we decide to head back to the camp and do exactly that.

It gets even muggier.  
During dinner the wind picks up and we feel some water drops ..... but it is the wind that blows water from the sprinklers to the table.  
A bit later the wind dies down, changes direction and starts blowing even stronger.  
Again the wind brings water drops ..... but this time there are no sprinklers in the area where the wind blows from .....  
Simon decides that he will only put the rain cover over his tent if it "really" starts raining and as it is not the time of the year (yet) for rain ....  
After some more water drops our neighbours decide that they will put their covers over their tents ....  
We can hear some quite strong winds coming towards us.  
When it reaches us Simon's tent is actually lifted off the ground a bit.  
The water drops intensify and now even Simon is convinced that it may be good advice to cover his tent.  
Susi gets her washing of the line too, even though it has not yet fully dried.  
Better to have half-dry clothing than soaking wet one!  
We even have some time to clear the table before the rain really starts falling.

Later on a thunder storm rolls over the camp, the thunder echoes from the surrounding rock walls.  
The temperature drops quite quickly.  
This will be a pleasant night for once (the temperature actually drops to 23°C!).

On Thursday, September 24, we have a bit of a sleep in.  
Even though the temperatures have risen to 25.5°C over night it still feels nice and cool.  
The flies on the other hand are a real pest.



We leave Garnamarr and on the way to Jabiru stop at the **Sandy Billabong**.  
The campground has some nice views and is just a few meters from the water's edge.  
A fence has been put up to protect against the crocodiles ..... hmmm ..... we would still not dare to sleep in a tent here!

Then we visit the **Bowali Visitor Centre** and watch all the videos they offer.  
We are pleased to get the chance to watch "The Big Wet" again, that we watched here in 1995 when we were here with René and Marianna.

As we want to hike Nourlangie Rock tomorrow and for that have to get up early we decide to camp at Burdulba.  
But when we get there we have to see that it is for tents only .... so we move over to the not so pretty **Malabanjbanjdju Camp** where we stay for the night.



Susi and Simon go on the **Iligadjarr Walk** and come past some drying up billabongs.

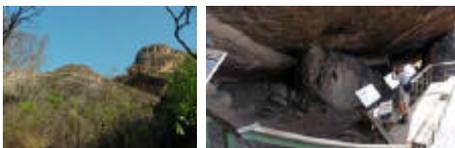


The Lotus flowers are just closing for the night but still look pretty in the late afternoon sun.  
Some kites are not shy at all and watch us as we walk past them.

In the evening the mozzies are out in force and they are fierce.  
We quickly discuss tomorrow's plans, have a quick shower on the door steps and then head to bed.  
The temperature drops to very comfortable 22°C ... nice!

On Friday morning the alarm wakes us at 5:30 AM.  
It is still dark but we want to leave at 7 AM to head over to **Nourlangie Rock** for the 6 km long walk.

We leave the Toyota on the car park of the **Nanguluwur Gallery** and shelter and then drive over to the car park of the **Anbangbang Gallery**.  
The gates are already open even though we are 30 minutes too early. We pack our backpacks and start the **Barrk Bushwalk** (Barrk is the Bininj name for the male black wallaroo, *Macropus bernardus*, a stocky dark-coloured member of the kangaroo family. Djukerre, the female, is smaller and lighter in colour).



It first takes us to the **Anbangbang Shelter**, a large overhanging rock with paintings on the ceilings and walls.  
Aboriginal people have been coming home to this shelter for about 20,000 years.  
The cool breezes and deep shade would have been a relief after the heat of the lowlands.

We continue on to the Incline and the **Anbangbang Galleries**.



As stories about these ancestors are retold, important information about traditional Aboriginal land and laws is passed through generations.  
For example, the spectacular electrical storms, which occur here every year, are a reminder of Namarrgon, the Lightning Man story.

For more [details of the rock art and the stories please click here](#).



Next stop is the **Gunwarddehwarde Lookout**.

The rock walls are already in full sunlight.

But the views into the valley are more or less non-existent as the humidity looks more like rain than anything else.



We reach the steep section.

By now the sun is out in full force and it is very humid and we sweat like there is no tomorrow.

Finally we reach the top and are rewarded with a great view of the rock wall.



We pass through some interesting sandstone formations.



Sometimes it is a bit difficult to figure out where the track goes through ...



... and some rock hopping is involved in his walk.  
It makes it really interesting and a bit challenging.

Then we descend into the valley again.

By now it is close to 11 AM and the ground reflects the heat with no pardon.

Luckily we have taken our long sleeve shirts with us (soaked in water) and now we can put them on.

The dry air dries the water off the shirts and keeps them (and us) cool.

Great.

We reach the **Nanguluwur Gallery**.



It feels great to just sit in the shade and have a bit of a look-around while we cool down a bit.



The paintings found in this gallery have been created over many years, some are quite old and some, like the sail ship have only been created after 1880.

From the gallery it is another 1.5 km to the car park.

We are glad that we decided to do the trick with the 2 vehicles.

Already the thought of having to walk another 5 km in this heat makes us sweat.

Once back on the car park we split up as Heidi, Peter and Simon want to visit Ubirr Rock and stay for the sunset.



We head into **Jabiru**, then drive up to the **Cahill's Crossing** to watch the crocodiles.

We reach the crossing just as the incoming tide changes and the water starts running out again.

They crocodiles we can spot are large.

Then the action sets in.

First we can watch a crocodile chase a fish onto the sandbank, head after it and gulp it up in no time.

Next we can watch a crocodile jump out of the water for a good meter chasing a large fish.

We are impressed and decide to come back again tomorrow.

We drive over to the **Merl Campground** where we stay for the night.

At dusk the mozzies start a feeding frenzy ... and guess who their preferred food is ....?

Tropical Strength Personal Insect Repellent does not work anymore, we have to change over to the 40% DEET Bushmann Spray .... and Susi seems to be allergic to it .....



On Saturday morning we go back to the Cahill's Crossing and can spot two more crocs. Then, while Simon is on a walk (the other ones somehow don't really fancy walking that much in the humidity we already have ....) we go shopping and internetting. Then we drive over to **Mamukala**, a large wetland. Thousands of Magpie Geese have gathered here.



Here some interesting details about the cycle at Mamukala:  
*"The end of the dry season is a critical time for Magpie Gees: food is hard to find and competition is high. Mamukala becomes an important haven when the receding waters are shallow enough for the Magpie Gees to feed on the thousands of spike-rush bulbs. They bob head first and use their stout, hooked bill to dig 10 to 15 centimetres into the mud retrieving the succulent bulbs.*  
*As the water evaporates completely, the mud bakes rock hard in the fierce tropical sun. The Magpie Gees can no longer break through the hard surface and so they return in their thousands to breeding grounds. This timeless act of arrival and departure is repeated in a predictable annual pattern.*  
*For hundreds of years Aboriginal people took advantage of this pattern and Mamukala was a traditional hunting area during the months the Magpie Gees came to feed. Today they have decided not to hunt in this area so that the wetland and its wealth of bird life can be enjoyed by park visitors.*  
*In the monsoon season creeks spill into the floodplains covering the area with a vast blanket of water. Much of this water comes from Nourlangie Creek and the many smaller creeks from the woodlands. During times of really big flood, the South Alligator River breaks its banks. It spills huge amounts of water, up to three metres deep, over the entire plains."*



There are also many Jabirus, some of them with their young ones.



Even though there are signs with the names of the birds we give up and just sit and watch. Every so often a whole flock of birds takes off and we just stand in awe and watch. It is amazing that even though they have to share the lagoon and there is not much space for each of the animals there is no fighting. Somehow they all get enough food and seem to be quite happy as it is.

After a few hours of bird-watching we continue on to the **Two Mile Campground**, where we stay for the night. The amount of mozzies is amazing so we set up the mozzie-tent and enjoy the freedom of not being stung by mozzies for the rest of the day and evening. At dusk the local Kookaburras are in great form and give us a long concert.

On Sunday we enjoy an extended breakfast in the Mozzie-tent and enjoy the fly- and mozzie-free zone for a bit more.

Then we pack up and drive west on the **Arnhem Highway**. At the **Mary River National Park** we deviate north and drive to **Shady Camp**. We had been told that there are plenty of large crocs to be seen there ....



So we head to the crocodile viewing area and are not disappointed ... they are all over the place! There is also a very informative display there. [For more details on saltwater crocodiles please click here.](#)

We decide to head over to the other side of the lagoon.



The lagoon is created by a barrage wall that also acts as causeway for the farmer to access his property on the other side of the Mary River. The crocodiles don't seem to take note of humans walking past them on the barrage wall just some 10 - 15 m away .... or should it be the other way round, humans use the barrage wall even though the crocodiles are only 10 - 15 meter away .....



And some of them are huge. One which is called "The Boss" is at least 4.5 m long and peacefully lies in the sun warming itself.



The birds don't seem to really worry about the crocodiles either.



Simon and Susi cannot get enough and spend most of the afternoon croc spotting. Later in the afternoon some large crocodiles make their way to the bank of the river and have a bit of a rest. We stay for the night and at dusk Little Corellas and Sulphur Crested Cockatoos scream their heads out.

It is already Monday, September 28, only 5 more days left for Simon. After a pleasant night with 22°C he feels fresh and is up early spotting crocs again.



They are out in force on the other side of the viewing area basking in the early morning sun. Soon we are all down at the waters edge.

There are at least 13 crocs within say 50 meter of us, some of them submerged just showing their heads some fully exposed on the little elevations in the water.



The other animals don't seem to worry about the crocodiles at this time of the day and get really close.

But eventually we have to leave.

We want to do some 4-wheel driving further south.



We stop at the **Rockhole** and **Couzens Lookout**.



The lagoon is known to be an excellent fishing spot.

Then we start the **Hardies 4WD Track**.

At the beginning it leads through dry wetlands.

Except for the bull dust there is nothing special about it.

Simon is driving the Toyota so we all hope for some interesting sections.

The **Clarkes Crossing** is dry and sandy in some spots but causes no drama.

We pass through some forest-like sections where the trees hang a bit low even for the Toyota, so a bit of "re-organizing" of branches has to be done ...



**Hardies Crossing** is quite pretty, but the crocs can be seen in the water, so no swimming!

After the crossing the track leads through some bad erosion.

It becomes interesting and every so often also a bit challenging.

It is good fun.

Then we pass a few billabongs.

Some of them still have water and geese and other birds gather around them.

Soon after we reach **Mary River Billabong** and the end of the track.

We continue north on the Arnhem Highway and on our way have to drive through a bush fire.

Smoke lies on the road like fog and the flames are still visible at the side of the road .... again something new for Simon.

Then we reach the **Stuart Highway** and head south.

As it has been another hot day with 37°C (we should be used to it by now one would think ...) we decide to drive to the **Rum Jungle Lake** and have a swim and stay for the night. Sadly they have converted it to a day use area so we stay at the next caravan park for the night.

After a beautiful cool night with only 17.5°C we wake up to a bird concert once again.

Soon we are ready to leave for the Litchfield National Park.

After finishing filling water Ruedi encounters the problem again that even though the rear tail shaft is turning the OKA does not move an inch.

Hmmmm ..... that sounds like the rear diff has given up on us again .....

Not much we can do.

We tell Heidi, Peter and Simon to finish their trip and we will see them again in Darwin in 3 days.

Ruedi gets in contact with OKA and gives them all the details.

OKA decides that we should drive back to Perth in 2WD and should there be a problem, they will send a truck to pick us up.

The diff could have lasted 5 more weeks because it was due for replacement then anyway .... but I was not meant to be that way.

So we tackle the task of replacing the front and back lockers as we already did once this year ..... sometimes it is a pain when history repeats but at least after the experience in Tasmania we now knew what to do!

One must always find the positive sides in things .....

When Susi goes to the office to extend our stay by one day she comes past the news paper .... on the front page there is an article about Shady Camp!

Here the full text:

*"Don't say you were not warned about croc menace*

*It was the quick and the dead, literally, when the crocs came out for a feed at this popular fishing spot.*



Newsbreaker Ian Vigar of Adelaide River took this photo of a 3m saltie having some lunch with his much bigger mate at Shady Camp last Sunday.

The crocs were seen queuing up for a feed at exactly the same spot where the NT News has run a series of pictures over the past few months showing anglers taking their lives into their hands by wading on the barrage wall.

Parks and Wildlife crocodile management ranger Tom Nichols said an extensive survey conducted in the Shady Camp region in 2007 along 41km counted 523 salties - equivalent to almost 13 crocodiles every kilometre.

"At any given time there was a dozen crocs around," Mr Vigar said of his latest visit to Shady Camp.

The 3m saltie managed to grab his fish before its bigger, and grumpier, friend got the chance to snatch it.

"The big black one in the front of the photo, he's a big bastard," Mr Vigar said.

"He's huge - 4.5m minimum. He's the boss croc. If any other crocs came up he would just snarl at them and they would jump."

Mr Vigar said the crocodiles were moving back and forth across the flooded causeway.

"They just sit there and wait for the fish to come into their mouth," he said.

"They caught several while I was there. It was nature at its best."

But the man-eaters' presence was not enough to stop a few fishermen entering the water.

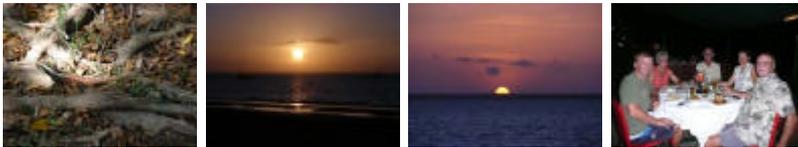
"There were these four clowns climbing into this dinghy," Mr Vigar said.

"The back end of the boat was level with the water. We were all laughing at these blokes.

I'm surprised it wasn't in the news that four blokes were taken by a crocodile. They were completely bloody stupid."

After finishing our swapping of lockers we have a quiet afternoon.

On Tuesday we drive to Darwin and find ourselves a quiet Caravan Park which is not easy as most of them are along the main road into Darwin, with lots and lots of traffic!



There we are joined by Heidi, Peter and Simon again and head down to Mindil Beach for the sunset.

One of the bands playing at the markets is eMDee (Mark Hoffmann and Lukas Bendel), performing with drums and didgeridoo.

Click here to have a look at it in a short movie (file type: .wmv, size: 3'850 KB) on their music.

It is also Simon's last dinner in Australia ... at least for this year!



A few days later our friends Petr and Reni arrive in Darwin.

Due to our broken diff we cannot off-road with them as we had planned, but we take them out to Shady Camp to show them the crocs.

And they are there like mentioned in the news paper report .... waiting for the fished to cross the barrage .....

We head down to Alice Springs and stop at all the nice spots.

Luckily the temperature has dropped a fair bit making the trip enjoyable.

In Alice Springs it is time to say goodbye to our friends .....

We have the front diff checked by our mechanic and after he finds it to be in top condition we decide to travel to Perth on the Great Central Road or "Outback Highway" as it is called these days.

We hear that it has rained near Leonora and wonder about the condition of the dirt road.

But the graders are out in full force and we find an excellent road, no corrugation, no problem ..... just plenty of pretty flowers along the road ....



We make it safely to Perth and once again our OKA has behaved like you expect an off-road vehicle to behave ... even if it has its hiccups every so often, it has never let us down and always brought us home safely.

And this is the last journal of this year!