

## **Bob & Sue Dal Santo**

When we and the Wicklanders set off in April, we travelled to Queensland via Cowra, Dubbo, the Warrumbungles and Moree, then via Dalby to Rainbow Beach, where we did a tour of Fraser Island. We travelled up the coast, staying at Bundaberg, the Town of 1770, Rockhampton, Mackay, Airlie Beach (from which we went on a Great barrier Reef adventure cruise), Townsville, Innisfail and Cairns. We used Cairns to do a 10-day Cape York tour and experienced the Kuranda Scenic Railway and Skyway. In Cairns we caught up with Anne Meade and Hazel Gibson. From Cairns we visited Atherton and the many falls and other attractions of the area and then on to Mt Surprise where we visited the Undarra lava tubes. Next stop was Normanton and Mt Isa, bypassing Lawn Hill due to very wet weather. From the Isa we headed for Darwin, via Barkly Homestead, Daly Waters, Mataranka (visited the thermal pools) and Kakadu. We stayed at Cooina at Kakadu NP where we took in the yellow water cruise, the sunset at Ubirr and many of the awesome views of the area. We spent about a week in Darwin and caught up with the Hays who were staying in the same park and we crossed paths again at Litchfield Nat Park. From Litchfield we travelled to Katherine, visiting the gorges on a cruise.

We are now about half way through our great adventure and are currently in Kununurra, the gateway to WA and the Kimberleys, and the land of the (great bulging) Boab tree, having travelled over 7,000 km with our van and an extra 3,000 by car only on tours (i.e., about 10,400 km with our car alone). We have been in Kununurra for a week now and have had a flyover/4WD tour of the Ord River Scheme, Lake Argyle, the LA Diamond Mine and the Bungle Bungles (where we flew over and drove into various gorges in the Bungles) and a flight over the Kimberleys. The Kimberleys flight took us over the Ord River and Wyndham, various gulfs and spectacular falls (King George and Mitchell), landing at Kalumburu Catholic Mission and Aboriginal community, also viewing a WW2 bomber wreck near there, and landing at Drysdale River Station for lunch, flying back over various ranges, and El Questro Station resort. We covered some magnificent coastal scenery in beautiful weather. Tomorrow (Fri) we will be going on an all day Lake Argyle and Ord River boat cruise.

On Saturday, we head out for Broome via Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Derby. You will recognize some of these places and those above in news reports regarding the Aboriginal communities. The situation regarding Aborigines, and the problem with alcoholism, is quite in your face in place like Katherine and Kununurra.

The highlights of our adventure so far have been Cape York and the Undarra Lava Tubes in Queensland, Kakadu and Litchfield Nat Parks and Katherine Gorge

in the NT and the Kimberleys in WA because of the beauty of the changing landscape. There is so much beauty and tranquility to explore in these places that it would take many years to do so. Our tour, albeit having crammed a lot in, has given us just a taste of what there is to explore.

Although we have had a great time, there have been some challenges for both the Wicklanders and us. At the Warrumbungles, Wicklander's 4WD had a nail placed in the sidewall of a tyre (by someone?) and one of their caravan tyres blew out on the way to Narrabri where we had both repaired. When pulling out onto the road near Mackay, Bob managed to clip a wooden light pole with the switch mechanism end of the van's pull-out awning, which was repaired at Townsville together with the replacement of the tank water pump (the caravan repairer did so, the same day I rang). Early into our trip we received notice of a recall on the valve attached to the car LPG tank, which I also managed to get seen to in Townsville. Our van gas regulator failed in Mt Isa, which I was able to replace before we stayed overnight at a free camp. On our first stop at Katherine on route to Kakadu, someone put a 4 cm hole in the front of the Wicklander's' van and bent our van's towel rail, while the vans were parked near town.

As you could imagine, fuel prices in the Outback are quite high compared to prices at home (up to \$1.79 for petrol and \$1.09 for gas, with diesel a bit cheaper than petrol). This has resulted in the savings from my conversion to LPG not being as great as it would have been at home because in many places the price differential between petrol and LPG is a lot less than at home.

On the whole, we have been happy with the standard of the caravan parks and camps we have stayed at and the prices charged, taking account of the local conditions, remoteness of the area and the prevailing weather.

*Sue & Bob*

*Thur, 19 July 2007*