



Cape York Prelude 2004

Cairns to Cairns

Day 1 – Thursday July 1 2004 (The Colbey's)

08:30 Trip leader Norm Baker, (minus Sue who had needed to make an urgent trip to the UK for family reasons), Paul and Shirley Kelly, Paul and Chris Colbey leave the Crystal Cascades Caravan Park in Cairns and head for Smithfield to rendezvous with Les and Eileen Butler, Geoff and Sonia Stephens and Tammy and Maddi.

First faux pa, Tammy was nowhere to be seen – she was waiting back at the Crystal Cascades turnoff, a misunderstanding re meeting point. Our other trip companions, Dave and Chris Read, 'phoned the previous night and told a sorry story. They had the "Defender-blues" en-route to Cairns and had decided to abandon the trip and have their Land Rover repaired in Cairns.

Norm wanted a punctual start as he planned to get to Laura tonight, a distance of some 350 km via the ghost town of Maytown. A quick photo-stop at Smithfield with all members in their Baker's Capers

T-shirts and we were on our way!

09:00 slight rain and foggy as we climbed the twisting steep road through the tropical undergrowth and tree ferns in the National Park on the way to Kuranda. Kuranda to Mareeba



was much less mountainous fruit-growing area and we met with a reasonable amount of traffic. We arrived at Mareeba at 09:50 to be greeted with an encouraging sign saying "all Peninsula Development Roads Open". Now we had a huge change in scenery with sugar cane, horses and cattle but still slight drizzle.

Mt Molloy provided the mandatory bakery-stop and a local assured us that Sunny Queensland was only 10 kms ahead. Morning tea was taken at the Rifle Creek campsite, which was well equipped with showers and toilets. A good spot to remember for free camping.

On the road again where we had a sudden lesson in the right-of-way rule applying to single-lane bridges when a huge on-coming road-train barrelled through our convoy.

By 11:00, blue skies were upon us. Mountains now all around, with rocky outcrops, small trees and scrub, providing evidence of good rains.

The mountain tops behind us now shrouded in fluffy grey cumulus nimbus clouds. Long-distance views from the 535m lookout as we cross the top of the range and descending the other side the smaller, sparser vegetation gives stark evidence of the lesser rainfall on the western side of the range.

12:30 and with the help of Norm's GPS and much map reading and conferring we find the hidden, narrow track leaving the bitumen and snaking away westward to

Maytown. We hit a bull-dust patch, which reduces visibility to nil for all but the leader, and the winding track gets very dusty and hilly. The convoy is now strung out over several kilometres.

We stop for lunch on a hilltop on the side of the road and as we crest a rise, we are greeted by the sight of a huge lake, making a very scenic setting. Smoke in the distance, during the afternoon we pass three scrub fires, eagles overhead waiting for small prey fleeing the flames.

We reach the Palmer River crossing which is a fair size and very rocky with quite large boulders. After "walking it", Norm crosses OK, followed by the others. Tammy became stuck on a rock at the entry. With Paul Kelly's help, all was well and soon we were all across.

As it was getting late, it was decided that we would make camp on the riverbank. We found a suitable scenic grassed area and set up our tents for the first night. Soon Paul Kelly had a big campfire roaring in the sandy creek bed which we all enjoyed at the end of our first day. It had been a long day and everyone turned in for an early night. Lots of bird-noise throughout the night and the Butlers had the pleasure of a group of plovers parking on their tent and pecking at the fabric all night long. Les found out what "hen-pecked" really means. When the sun came up we emerged to a cool, clear morning with our tents all wet with dew but with the promise of a clear, sunny day.



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Day 2 – Friday July 2, 2004 (The Colbey's)

After breaking camp, we resumed our journey to Maytown. At around 11:00 we arrived at this "ghost town" - just the remains of a few buildings and the Chinese cemetery. We looked around the ruins and had our morning tea before pushing on towards Laura. Just 75k and we should make it by tea-time. WRONG! The rarely-used track is very rough and the going gets tougher. At one stage, we lost the track in a dry creek crossing but after some scouting around, we took what seemed to be the most likely route. Tammy's Prado became stuck negotiating a deep, dry creek bed with a steep and rutted entry and exit, off-set from one another. Geoff provided a tow which solved that problem. Next, a long climb up a twisting track, very steep and slippery with loose shale and steep drop-offs each side. Wasn't Tammy's day! The Prado slid off the track just 100m from the top and perched on the side, way too close to the 400m drop off into the valley far below.

A thorough assessment of the situation and Norm asked Paul Colbey to drive back down from the top to Tammy's position and winch the Prado back onto the track. With Paul's Land Cruiser carefully positioned on the other side of the track and Paul Kelly controlling the winching operation, the Prado was winched to safety with Norm at the wheel. We all breathed a sigh of relief at a safe conclusion to what might have been a serious incident.

The track continued to be very rough with occasional huge rock steps both up and down the hillsides. The more under-body clearance the better in these conditions! Slow-going and Laura looking very doubtful today. It's getting late and we decide we'll have to bush-camp another night. It's been hard and slow and we've only travelled 50 or 60 kilometres all day.

The landscape we passed through was frequently changing from dry rocky ground with scattered gums to lush green patches with small trees and bushes, almost tropical-looking, then back to tall grass and bushland. Away in the distance, we could see a huge red plateau which we later found out was Laura.

Norm thought that the Jowlbinna station camp-ground was somewhere near by and after some scouting around we found the track to Jowlbinna. We eventually arrived at the camp-site at about 18:30 and found it to be surprisingly civilized. We crossed a creek and came into a large, flat grassed area with a big open-sided shed well-equipped with tables and chairs and a kitchen with a stove and various utensils and pots and pans. Unfortunately, there was no power and the water tank was empty. Over to one side there were some small huts, some of which had beds and mattresses which had seen better days, and there were basic toilets and showers (flush-toilets even!), but again, no water. There was no one else around but there were signs of recent occupancy apparently by a tour group.

We quickly set up camp and a friendly horse came to visit, looking for anything that might be offered. Norm's CDMA phone picked up an SMS from Sue in the UK, and then a call from Dave Read to advise that the Defender was well again and he would meet up with us in a day or two. Another early night as everyone was tired after the hard day. We didn't quite make Laura tonight – about 35k short.

Day 3 – Saturday July 3 2004 (The Butlers)

Was awoken to a lovely chorus from the birds, would have loved to have stayed in bed to listen to them but we had to be packed up by 8.30 am. We had a lonely horse that was very quiet, welcome us last night and he was back again this morning the poor thing needed a lot of attention we couldn't get rid of him. Sonia fed her some of her apple and had a friend for life. We had our trip meeting and were ready to go when the Kelly's had lost their car keys (and only on day 3), once they were found it was on the road again. We must admit that after the first 2 days of very rough and slow driving we were starting to wonder what we had let our selves into. Tracking on the GPS to Laura. On the way, there was plenty of dust; it just hung, as there was no wind to clear it. Very corrugated and sandy tracks. The main road turn off was just passed the Rodeo and racetrack grounds (the Rodeo and Races were held a week before, so we missed the last race.) The anthills in this area reminded us a lot of castles; they were grey with many spikes.



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At Laura, we all fuelled up and had a very welcome shower at the local caravan park at \$2 each. Feeling refreshed we all had ice-creams then drove out, to the Split Rock Caves Aboriginal paintings, where we climbed a lot of steps to view the art work. Back to the vehicles and on to the Hann River Roadhouse for lunch. The road being a lot better than what we had been travelling on the day before. After lunch, it was on to Coen where we made camp on the river, bush camping approx 5 km north of the town.



The Colby's electing to camp at the Coen caravan park as their inverter had failed and they required 240 volt power to charge their photograph equipment. Our numbers have increased to the baker's dozen as Chris and Dave Read have now joined us, having got their vehicle repaired at Cairns.

Day 4 – Sunday July 4 2004 (The Butlers)

Packed up and fuelled up we set off at 9am after everyone had regrouped at the river

campsite. The road was good until we turned into Mungkan Kaanju National Park where we found more dust and rough stuff. There are many different areas of anthills and grass trees, some being burnt out. We noticed some of the ants make a wave like pattern up the tree, but the termites' hills were all shapes and sizes. One area even looked like Mortician's (from the Munster's) garden.



Passing through Cabbage tree creek there were a lot of Palm trees, arriving at the Rangers station we filled in our registration forms but couldn't leave any money, as there were no fees displayed. Stopping for morning tea at a shady spot, we moved on to Langi lagoon, travelling through grass that was at least 4ft (1.3mts) high, at Night Paddock Lagoon we stopped for photo's as it had a lot of lilies on it, but also looked a lot like crocodile country. We had planned to camp at Langi lagoon but the camp sight was not suitable as it was very small and covered with tall grass, so we moved on. We stopped for lunch, with Norm. The Kelley's going off in different direction to find a camp sight. Norm found his way back, and then over the radio we hear "you'll have to come and get me" the Kelly's were lost. The grass was that thick it was difficult to find the track. Norm went out and

retrieved the lost nomads and the decision was made to move onto the Archer River Crossing, where we set-up our camp on three levels. Some being brave enough to have a water front view. Others overlooking the water front views and the chicken camps **WELL BACK FROM THE WATER FRONT**. Once camp had been set up there were repairs to be made on the Butler's Pathfinder, the very rough roads had vibrated off the nuts holding the roof rack side rail. With the help from Norm and Paul Kelly the problem was soon sorted out and with spares provided by Jeff Stephens and moral support, supplied by the rest of the group, the problem was soon repaired. The Nissan was running on Toyota parts. As the day was quite warm, the brave decided that the water looked inviting so they went for a swim. We can now report that no crocs were sighted, but the rush of getting in the water, one bathing beauty was seen to be wearing his bathers inside out. Being lost earlier in the day had nothing to do with it, and its only day 4. At the end of the day, we enjoyed a campfire with some very nervous campers doing a bit of croc spotting. The batteries on a lot of torches will need to be charged tomorrow.



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Day 5 – Monday July 5 2004

(The Stevens')

Left Old Archer Crossing at 8.40am after Norm, Shirley and Paul went for a swim in the lagoon.

Les and Eileen are our new trip leaders today. We had a short stop at Langeys Lagoon, but it was nowhere near as nice as our chosen campsite.

Back on the main road again and on our way to Weipa. The road was full of dips and busy with semis and road trains. Out of the blue, there were huge boulders in the paddocks and then they just suddenly disappeared – strange! We stopped at Archer River Roadhouse for lunch – some having an Archer Burger (spectacular meal and only \$8).

Only 2 hours away from Weipa now and pretty good road conditions, 80 – 100 kms, what a change.

The terrain was very interesting – natural scrubland; burnt on one side of the road and not the other.

We even passed a cattle muster on the roadside. Just outside of Weipa, we regrouped with Norm taking over again as trip leader. Unfortunately, we were separated in the caravan park. We all went for tea at the Albatros Hotel. It was quite an epic to get there – we almost got lost – but once we arrived, what a surprise. The hotel had quite a Bali feel – timber decking, gums, palms and a big bar area opening on to the deck.

A lovely way to finish the day.



Day 6 – Tuesday July 6 2004

(The Stevens')

Looks as though the oil leak in the Kelly car may in fact be cracked front diff housing. Fortunately, the car was able to be repaired today. We decided to do a tour to the Andoon Bauxite Mine, with half the group doing the am tour and the other doing the pm tour. The bus took us on a tour of Weipa first. The town is totally run by Comalco, and the fuel is tankered in from Indonesia.

We crossed a 1.2km single lane bridge (longest in the southern hemisphere) over the Mission River before we reached the mine. The mine operates 24 hour/day 365 days/year.

An interesting tour, then we finished off by having a swim back at the caravan park.



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Day 7 - Wednesday July 7th 2004 (Rix's)

Left the Weipa Caravan Park at 0845 but had to wait for Norm to fill up with fuel, because he didn't do it yesterday unlike all us responsible members of the crew. Dave Read had battery problems & had to be jump-started. Geoff & Paul Kelly stayed at the caravan park while he got sorted out to make sure all was well.

I had to travel with Norm for being too annoying for Tammy to handle. His music wasn't so bad after all.

We had a quick photo stop at Moreton Telegraph Station Les & Eileen lost their sand flag again; not too far along the way & Tammy lost hers as well.

Stayed the night at Branwell Station; Australia's most northern working cattle station. We went wandering to find the creek; a waste of time. We found a dry creek bed, which led to some grotty water, so we decided against the swim. Sat around the campfire for a communal feast

Day 8 - Thursday July 8th 2004 (Rix's)

Left Branwell Station at 0830 as usual, heading for Elliot Falls. Les & Eileen were packed up by 0730 & didn't even get a gold star!

Paul Kelly packed up all ready to go & discovered that his car keys were wrapped up in the tent. Stopped for morning tea



along the Old Telegraph Road Where there's a nice creek & waterfall, it's very pretty. The Dalhenty River! We all went thru Gunshot Creek except Les & Eileen, probably the only sain ones here. Tammar (Tammy) got stuck on top; but got thru very well after that first little hitch. Damn! We wanted to prove she could do it no fuss.

Norm went down the middle track, which was very narrow & quite steep. I went in his car & it wasn't as bad as it looked! No one did the real steep one, because it looked like suicide. Norm lost one of his taillights on the descent. I don't think anyone else had any hassles. We all had a swim in the river before catching up with the Butlers along the way.

The road was really corrugated all the way from Gunshot to Elliot Falls but we all survived. We arrived around 1700, the place was very busy but we found enough spots for all to set up camp.

Dramas for the Kelly's, they had a loose front wheel bearing. Paul worked on it for a few hours.

He was able to tighten it up thanks to Dave Read & his mobile tool company.

Day 9 - Friday July 9th 2004 (The Kelly's)

Packed the camp up & went for a walk to Twin Falls for a photo shoot & a swim before heading out for another day on the road. Arrived at Canal Creek where there was a lot of discussion as to best attack the crossing. All I could think about was, I hope our wheel bearing was OK. Phew, all thru OK, Sam Creek was next & proved a bit more of a

challenge on the exit. Paul guided everyone over Cypress Creek crossing. Well almost successful, only one vehicle



damaging a tyre, on a protruding bolt head. Into the Jardine National Park for a bit of a look, & we had lunch on the edge of the Jardine River. Took a photo of the last telegraph pole next to the river. The rough roads were starting to take their toll.

The reads left us & went straight for Bamaga to have their uni joint looked at. The rest of the group arrived at Bamaga for a fuel stop & a well-earned ice cream. This is when the wheels really started falling off. We had alternator problems, the Colbey's lost all power, which turned out to be a fractured fuel line caused by a broken shocker, and then Tammy lost her brakes. By the time, we reached Punsand Bay it was dusk. No vacancies, so it was lucky we had pre booked. Tonight; only 5 vehicles. The manager wanted to see our note for being late. By the time we had set up camp, had a well earned shower, an easy tea, it was time for bed.

Day 10 - Saturday July 10th 2004 (The Kelly's)

You beauty; a rest day; & a well-earned sleep in. Did some washing while the men did some maintenance on their

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vehicles. Booked a trip to Thursday Island for Monday & walked back to the tent along the beach. The water looked so enticing, but it was a no go area, a 5 metre croc was seen here just 1 week ago, so off to the pool for a swim for us. Meanwhile the Reads had managed to rejoin the group, vehicle mobile again. Tonight, Norm, Tammy & Maddy went to the restaurant for the Seafood Buffet while the rest of the group had lamb roast. Knowing how lonely Norm must be feeling by now, Carlotta (a blow up doll) was waiting patiently in his sleeping bag for him to return.



Day 11 – Sunday July 11th 2004 (The Reads)

Took some great photos of the sunrise this morning across Punsand Bay. With our Bakers' Capers T-shirt on, cold champagne, we headed off to the tip of the Cape. Nice drive along a sandy track thru the rainforest. Only a 30-minute drive to the car park at the Cape, then a pleasant walk to the tip. Either along the beach or over the rocks.

What a great feeling to be standing at the tip of Australia. Took lots of photos & toasted the tip with our champagne. There was suggestion that the ladies should do tops off at the



tip (or is that tips out at the tip), but there were too many people around. Paul & the Reads went back to camp to do some repairs to their vehicles. I went with Norm & the rest of the gang to Somerset where there is a memorial to the Japanese fishermen. We went



down onto the beach for lunch then went looking for oysters; but they were too hard to get off the rocks. Came back to camp along the beach, had a quick stop & look around the Croc Shop. Finally got around to having our fish for dinner.

Day 12 – Monday July 12th 2004 (The Reads)

Up early this morning for a quick breakfast, we had to be on the beach by 0730 to be taken out to the ferry ready to leave for 0800 to Thursday Island.

The trip over took around 90 minutes. We had 3 hours to look around before our bus tour.

Norm & a few of the group went to Horn Island for a look

at the WW2 outpost & memorial, while we stayed on Thursday Island with the rest of the gang. Geoff was chapping at the bit to have a wander thru the shops. Morning tea was taken at one of the local café's, bought some grog then off on our 1-hour tour that culminated in a 30 min walk around the WW2 Fort. Great view from atop the highest point on the island. We had lunch behind the Rainbow Hotel, great food & great service. The return trip was rougher but still enjoyable, with the waves coming over the front of the boat. On the way, we stopped at Captain Cook's memorial, up on the rocks before heading back to Punsand Bay. Sat around the campfire for dinner, then the rain came sending everyone off for an early night in the sack.

Day 13 – Tuesday July 13th 2004 (The Colbey's)

We awoke to an overcast day with a little rain. Today's plan is for a day-trip to Bamaga and Seisa. We packed up camp & headed for Seisa to have the alternator repaired. About three or four of our group needed repairs to vehicles and headed for "Top End Mechanics" in Seisa. The rest went with Norm on a tour of the area, including a visit to an aircraft wreck from WW2. Tammy & Maddy came with us to have their brakes looked at; the Colbey's' went to catch up with friends.

Once Tammy's' car was ready I went with her & Maddy for morning tea which was a



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hamburger & Cappuccino, \$10 – (we had had no breakfast). Then we went to the supermarket to stock up enough for another week. With the alternator fixed, we were able to do some sightseeing. Norm took us out to see the WW2 wrecks & out to Bamaga Airport. We could hear the pool calling us so we headed back to camp, put the tent back up & headed off to the pool. Camp oven Chicken Cacciatore & rice was the menu for tea tonight. We had not long finished eating when the rain came belting down. We ended up sitting under Norm's awning catching the run off in three "John Wayne" "kettles before giving up & going to bed.

Day 14 – Wednesday July 14th 2004 (The Colbey's)

Time to turn South and start the long trip back to Cairns. We've decided to return down the Telegraph Track rather than take the Bypass road, which is reported to be very corrugated. Whilst the Telegraph Track will probably be slower, it will be more interesting and not as hard on the vehicles as the constant corrugations would be. We depart Punsand Bay at 8:30 with fine weather and head back through Bamaga. When we arrived at the Jardine River crossing, we found that the ferry's winch had broken down and the ferry had to be towed from each bank. On the northern side, a large grader was pulling the ferry across and a Toyota was doing the job on the southern bank. The driver told us that it should be fixed "in a few days". Soon after, we left the main road and joined the TT a few

kilometres south of the Jardine. As before, it was slow-going with rocky out-crops and deep ruts in the narrow track. The first major water crossing, Nolan's Brook, is reasonably deep with some large holes in the middle. We "walked it" as usual, and decided to skirt around the eastern edge of the crossing to avoid the biggest holes. There was a fair amount of traffic heading north lined up at this crossing, and after two or three of us had negotiated to the south bank, the rest of our group waited to allow some of the north-bound traffic to go through. What followed was a good example of what not to do at an unfamiliar water crossing! A Hilux, towing a heavy camper trailer, charged straight through the middle of the crossing and promptly fell down a deep hole where it stalled. While his mate (who had already crossed) tried to attach towline under-water, the Hilux seemed to be slipping in deeper until the water was above the wheel arches and a young girl passenger was calling out that the seats were under water. Eventually, the line was secured and the vehicle was towed out to the other bank. When they opened the door, a "water-fall" came gushing out! Cypress Creek came next with its narrow and rough log bridge. This was where Paul C had fractured a new tyre on the way up, but we all crossed without mishap. We negotiated Cannibal, Mistake and Sam Creek before arriving at Eliot Falls where we again camped for the night.

Day 15 – Thursday July 15th 2004 (the Kelly's')

After packing up again, it was off to Fruit Bat Falls for a morning swim & Photo shoot. Then it was back on the road again to Branwell Junction, stopping first at Cockatoo Creek for morning tea. Took the by-pass road to miss Gunshot & crossed the Dalhenty Greek which has a great camping ground. We arrived at the Ducie River crossing to find a rather large convoy heading up the Cape waiting to cross in the opposite direction. We all made the crossing successfully (of course, all pretty experienced by now) had lunch. Paul used the break to check the wheel bearings & give the track time to clear a bit before heading off again to Branwell Junction for fuel & for half the group hot chips & a hot dog or a pie. Just a short drive into Moreton telegraph Station to spend the night, lots of nice green lawn to pitch the tent on for a change, & a nice hot "Donkey" shower. No booze on sale here (BYO) but the Barra & Chips went down well followed by a drumstick for desert, \$29 for the two of us.

Day 16 – Friday July 16th 2004 (the Kelly's')

Today we are up & at it again, Chillie Beach here we come. Some how we missed smoko & by the time we reached the Pasco River it was lunchtime. The whole thing looked a bit challenging, so while we waited for vehicles to come across from the other direction we all had lunch. I rode across with Norm so I could take some video of Paul making the crossing. It had a very steep a rocky descent to the entry point



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& a sandy steep accent on the exit. Other than, the odd creek crossing there was nothing challenging about the rest of the drive, the sections thru the rainforest were fantastic. What a pretty spot Chilli Beach is. There is a great camping area next to the beach, which looks just, like somewhere in Fiji. Great toilet facilities, but the wind just doesn't let up. What a pity!



Day 17 – Saturday July 17th 2004 (the Butlers)

We all had a well-earned sleep in this morning and were packed up for a late start at 9.30 am. One of our group left his frypan out overnight (I think he drives a Land Rover) to be cleaned by the visiting animals, and found they did a very good job. Once packed we were on the road through the rain forests to Portland Roads. Portland Roads now days is a very quiet place and we all agreed it was close to heaven, but in it's early days was a major port, supplying the gold fields. In 1938, a jetty was built but was allowed to fall into ruin and was demolished in the late 1970's. The picturesque bay today is now a resting place for fishing boats and yachts. Even the Orb spiders have time to build large webs as was seen between the plants. On the road again and Norm picked a stop in the rain forest for our morning tea stop among the 100ft high trees and ferns. Further on we had lunch on the side of the road and after checking our maps we were on our way again. The Pascoe River was somewhat easier to cross at this crossing. Passing through the Batavia gold fields, we were on our way to the Archer River Roadhouse to camp for the next 2 nights. Some of us decided that the highly recommended Archer special hamburgers were the way to go for dinner. A campfire was lit and we were all able to relax after travelling all day.

Day 18 – Sunday July 18th 2004 (the Butlers)

Sunday is a day of rest for everyone to have a sleep in and take it easy. Some of the group decide to backtrack over yesterdays drive and explore the ruins of the Batavia gold fields, while others tried their luck at fishing at a sandy spot recommended by the barman at the Archer River Roadhouse. They practiced their casting with no luck with the fish, but they did hear the fishing stories, they were there yesterday. After lunch, it was a walk to the river for a swim. Our trip leader decided to launder his money; it was a quick splash to grab the floating note as the river was flowing under the bridge rather fast. While we were swimming, Land Rover Dave was seen coming back over the bridge towing a large twig to be used on the campfire. As it had been a rest day, the camp oven came out and every one enjoyed a camp oven dinner. That night the fruit bats were very noisy.



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Day 25 – Sunday July 25th 2004 (the Kelly's)

we would all go out to dinner just one last time, the Red Beret Hotel was close to the caravan park that would do. The food was good, the atmosphere great & we all had a good time revisiting the highlights of the sojourn. Tammy & Maddy were staying for an extra 4 days so Maddy could do a 4-day dive course. How sorry we all felt for her. After reminiscing for a few hours, it was back to camp into bed & look forward to the next leg of our adventure, the trip home via new territory & the Birdsville Track.

THE END
