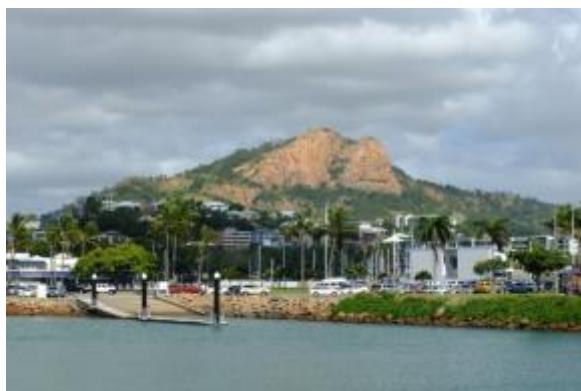


Lorraine's Blog

Having spent a week dodging Cyclone Debbie, we arrived safe and dry in Townsville.

Our time in Townsville was short – less than two weeks but we packed in quite a bit in that time. Our house sit was in the suburbs, beside the beautiful Ross River, which gave us plenty of scope for “walking the dogs”. The dogs were two little “moodles” (malteseXpoodle) – they were quite cute and easy to handle. We had a tropical pool, and can you believe it – we did not swim once, but did spend a lot of our spare time in the surrounds.



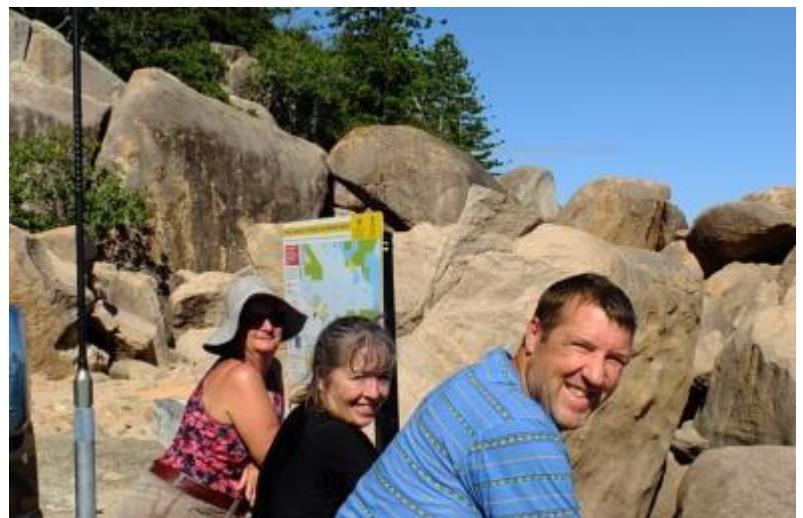
We took walks on The Strand where the water tried to entice us to come for a swim (crocs and stingers - I don't think so) and hikes on Castle Rock in the rain – looking for caches, and found both the army and air force museums.

Friends from our home town of Jimboomba had moved up to Magnetic Island so we caught the ferry over twice for day visits; they took us on a world wind tour of the island, and scuba diving out in one of the bays where there is a submerged cache near a wreck.

We did not find the cache, but enjoyed the swim all the same.

When Helen and Keith our Townsville house hosts returned, we were off on Easter Thursday.

To hide from the Easter hoards, we decided to head back to the Burdekin, where we had read about camping on private property – the Burdekin Cane Farm welcomed us with open arms, and we used it as a base to explore Ayr, Home Hill and Ravenswood.



Lorraine's Blog

The town of Ravenswood has been on the list of must do's for quite a while, so we headed out one day for a day trip. Interesting heritage listed town, where gold was during the 1860s to 1900s. The town was deserted by 1915. Several heritage listed buildings remain now, but the population of 5000 has now dwindled to around 190.



It was sad to hear that many of the remains of buildings will soon go "under the mine".

I told John to take pictures of the chimneys, as they probably won't be there next time we visit.

Lorraine's Blog

We checked out the various beaches nearby – Ava and Wunjunga – Wunjunga being a little out of the way, but I think the locals liked it that way.

Quite a popular spot for fishing; we just enjoyed our lunch - and the view.



While on the cane farm, the owner Greg passed on so much knowledge about cane farming, gold mining in the Charters Towers area, and tourism in the Burdekin.

There was nothing he did not know.

We went on his buggy and toured the cane fields, we had so many questions about cane growing that we had fielded since travelling through all the cane areas; he was able to fill



in all the gaps.

We left with a bag of home grown avocados!



Lorraine's Blog

Heading north again, and bypassing Townsville on the ring road, we found our way to Saunders Beach for a quick overnight stay, enjoying happy hour with Cheri and Neale from the Redlands. It was nice to catch up with a couple from our home town.

Another few days were spent camped beside Crystal Creek. We had the creek all to ourselves, and



enjoyed the sound of the water babbling over rocks.

The water was too cold to swim in, however evidence shows that locals do use it on weekends.

Many pools and little dams have been built and rebuilt out of the rocks.

We took a day trip from here into the Paluma Range National Park, our first taste of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

We visited Little and Big Crystal Creek, walked out to a look out near Paluma, where we saw many pretty fungi.



Further into the forest found us at Paluma Dam, (Lake Paluma). This facility is a drinking water storage owned by NQ Water, and has some beautiful opportunities for camping. Currently the dam level is at 95%, while Ross River Dam in Townsville is at 16%! Here we learnt that while the catchment area is very minimal, they rely on their water runoff from what they call "cloud stripping". This is where

Lorraine's Blog

water is harvested from the clouds that shroud the mountains and can supply up to 40% more water. The rainforest plants harvest moisture in the air that passes through the forest. When upland rainforests are covered in cloud, the moisture condenses on tree trunks, branches eaves etc, and either drips to the rainforest floor or flows down stems then eventually into the waterway that feeds the dams.

We had our lunch in the extremely clean park and chatted to the two resident rangers, who told us about this phenomenon.

At Halifax, near Ingham, we were able to take up the hospitality of the local pub, and camped on grass "out the back" while we drove down to the local beaches from there - Lucinda and Taylors Beach. Lucinda has a 5.76km long jetty at its port, operated by the Lucinda Bulk Sugar Terminal. This jetty apparently is the longest in the southern hemisphere.



Shopping always is a problem when we have the caravan in tow, as there is never anywhere close by to a supermarket to park up. Ingham was no different. We inadvertently ended up in the carpark with very little turn around. One of those turban wearing gentlemen was moving shopping trollies; we asked him where we could park our rig. "Where ever you like" was his jumbled reply. I really don't think he knew exactly what we needed. This is one reason why we like the smaller towns with an IGA, usually there is plenty of street parking nearby.

From Ingham we headed inland to Paronella Park at Mena Creek. We don't normally do "tourist attractions" due to their cost, but this was on 'the list' for both of us. Along with senior concession for entrance, and one free night camping (on power and water) in their caravan park, made this attraction well worth the visit.



Paronella Park is a Spanish Castle ruin, built in the 1930s by José Paronella. José, former pastry chef in Spain, cane cutter and cane farm developer in North Queensland, built his dream castle on 13 acres of virgin scrub with his own waterfall on Mena Creek. He planted gardens and a reception centre for the enjoyment of the public.

Floods, fires and cyclones have paid toll on the buildings which have deteriorated over the years, but the current owners maintain the now heritage listed property as a ruin, running evening and day tours, allowing you to wander and picnic in the grounds, and camp overnight. Such a beautiful story, such a beautiful place – and we saw our first Ulysses Butterfly here. We were introduced to their Kauri Pine avenue, and here we learnt that this is where the idea of camouflage colours were taken.



If you are interested in reading more about Paronella Park, go here:

<http://www.paronellapark.com.au/about/brief-history>



We stayed two nights (paid for the second) and upgraded our ticket to a two year pass (at no extra cost) and paid the extra for the bundle ticket to allow us access to the nearby SkyWalk.

The Mamu Skywalk is only about 30 minutes' drive from Mena Creek, in the Wooroonooran National Park. A pleasant walk on elevated walkways, cantilevered viewing decks and an observation tower gave us the experience of being in the trees with views over the World Heritage rainforest landscape. Built after cyclone Larry tore through the area in 2006, the skywalk has been built in such a way not to further damage any of the understory, following tracks damaged by the cyclone.



Further up the tablelands found us at Ravenshoe (Queensland's highest town), where we camped the Ravenshoe railway caravan park. The caretakers made us welcome, happy hour in the camp kitchen every night around a fire, and a great base to explore Millstream and Little Millstream Falls and Tully Gorge.

Lorraine's Blog

Millstream Falls is “reputably” the widest single drop waterfall in Australia.



After walking out to the falls, we took a pleasant walk through a dry forest where WWII camp sites were constructed for various battalions between 1943 and 1945. The walk has interpretive signs, with some evidence of features still visible.

As it was ANZAC day, we felt it was fitting that we should take the walk that day.



Everywhere we travel in the topics we are reminded of cyclones past be it people we meet, buildings rebuilt, or remains of trees down.

Nearby Little Millstream falls called us, and we hiked down to view that as well. Pretty, and not as impressive as her “big brother”, rather these falls tumbled over boulders as the Millstream flowed further to meet the Herbert River, before heading out into the ocean near Lucinda.

Tully Gorge and Falls – well the gorge is still there, but the falls now only flow during a big wet season, due to the Koombooloomba Dam being built on the Tully River to provide hydro-electric in the 1960s. The lookout over the gorge is still pretty impressive.

Lorraine's Blog

We saw our first ever cassowary in the wild on the drive in, he had his chick with him, and disappeared pretty quickly into the forest when we pulled up in the car to take a picture.

We did, however, get a decent picture of the chick.



Moving from Ravenshoe to Tolga, we found another freedom camp (donation) at the Rocky Creek War Memorial Grounds. The Tablelands are full of reminders of WWII, many camps were set up for training, and Rocky Creek near Tolga had a hospital and an entertainment centre. The entertainment centre (the Igloo) still remains. After the war, a family bought it and bought up 13 children there, before donating it back to council in 1996. Since fallen into disrepair, it is now currently under restoration.



While at Tolga, we visited fellow grey nomads Dave and Ellen, who are house sitting in Atherton. It is always great to catch up with fellow travellers to compare notes and share and absorb new

information. Ellen cooked us muffins and cookies, I hope if they visit us in Cairns, I can return the same cooking skill as hers. Here, we managed to photograph the beautiful blue Ulysses Butterfly.



Lorraine's Blog

We had two trips around Tinaroo Dam, visiting all the camping grounds in the national park, just for comparison. You currently cannot drive all the way around the dam, there are bridge works just past the Kauri Creek Camp site, so after a bit of a hike there, we returned and went around the other way the next day, visiting Cathedral Fig Tree, Mobo Creek Crater, Euramoo Crater and the Chimmneys.

The Cathedral fig is a site to behold. Here are a few quick facts about this amazing fig:

- It would have been a seed about the size of a sesame seed, and germinated about 500 years ago.
- Its girth is about 47 metres (picture about 40+ adults with arms outstretched to go around the base)
- Now I can't find the brochure with the rest of the facts! Including just how many hectares its root system covered. Yes, I said hectares. Buggar, even Mr Google has been unable to help with this!

The Chimneys are the remains of a sawmiller's house built back in 1920s.

Now a pretty day use area, two chimneys remains as a start reminder of a settlement that once was at Danbulla.

Yungaburra, on Lake Tinaroo has a beautiful memorial to the fallen, at the Afghanistan Avenue of Honour. Opened in 2013, this is recognised as a significant National Memorial. The avenue is lined with flame trees, which blossom in time for Remembrance Day. Again, as we were there during the week of ANZAC Day, flowers, wreaths and poppies were in abundance.



One of our little caching adventures found us only about 500 metres from our camp site at Rocky Creek. Using our gps and compass, we found our way through the bush at a little hidden gem. Barney Springs, a permanent waterhole feeding eventually into the Barron River, hidden in a little rainforest outbreak. There are little rock lined paths indicating that at some stage there may have been a house. A few of the trees had name markers, and there was a sign indication indigenous importance, but searching Mr Google, I cannot add any more to this mystery. I am just glad that our hobby of geocaching took us to this little hidden gem.



With our Cairns house sit due to start on 1st May, we headed down the mountains without even scratching the surface in Mareeba (but we did use their dump point) and Kuranda. Both are close enough from our northern suburbs house sit to take a day trip back up the big hill.

Lorraine's Blog

Eating our way around Australia this month finds us at Gallos Dairyland, up on the tablelands, where we enjoyed a cheese platter.



Told you we enjoyed it!

