

BOATTAIL IN THE KIMBERLEY

Monday 11 April 2005 and two Boattails headed north out of Perth. Unfortunately Tony and Marny Howe could only escort us to Regan's Ford where we would have lunch on Day one of our trip through to Darwin. After a pleasant lunch on the riverbank, we parted company and we headed north.

The first day was a short trip to Geraldton, only 400 or so kilometres to stay with in-laws. Pulling into a garage in Geraldton to fill up, the young bloke at the pumps said admiringly - "What a great car, what is it?" Alan replied, "It's a Buick." Young bloke says, "Who makes them?" Alan replies, "Well..... Buick does." Oh.

The opposite occurred the next day however, while the car and us were having a breather at Billabong roadhouse, a very dusty bloke pulled in on a motorbike with camping gear loaded on. He walked over and said "I never expected to see a 72 Riviera up here!" It seems he had come across the Tanami Track but had actually ridden 32,000 km including around Tasmania.

The temperature was starting to climb rapidly during the day and we were glad to pull into Carnarvon that night. Carnarvon is a very pretty town and after checking in at a motel we drove alongside the lagoon area and found an incredible seafood restaurant near the fishing boat harbour. What a great photo it would have made of the Buick parked near a palm tree and a crescent moon overhead.



Morning tea under Ghost Gum at Minilya

Next morning we drove out through the banana plantations for Karratha to stay with friends. Stopped at Nanutarra roadhouse for a pie. You had to be quick, the flies

were in droves so careful eating had to be achieved. Drove into Karratha and received thumbs up from the local aborigines who appreciate a good car. They stand on the side of the road and say "Aiiee!" It probably helped that the car is red too. Word had gone out that the Buick was in town and blokes started to arrive to check it out. Usual bonnet up and blokes standing around it. What I call the seagulls on a chip look. The temperature was about 38 ° at 10 p.m. in the evening. We were most happy to leave the BBQ area outside and head into an airconditioned bedroom.

It was decided to get going next morning before sunup to beat the heat. The air conditioning on the car certainly made the temperature gauge swing up. It was decided to only have it on if it wasn't so hot! There is a logic here only known to men. An early start means keeping your eyes peeled for roos and massive cows that loom up at the edge of the road.

A quick stop midmorning at the Whim Creek Pub for a lemon squash was most welcome.

We checked out South Hedland, called at the local golden arches and then drove across into Port Hedland to get fuel. Alan asked the bloke at the garage not to fill the car beyond the click. OK replied the bloke and then filled it until fuel was pouring out. Snarl from Alan. This entailed a drive around to use up some of this fuel with the result that when we pulled into our motel to check in, the car had a surly boil in protest of its treatment. The temperature at this time was 43 °. A cold shower, a snooze, a few beers and room service smoothed out ruffled feathers.

A long haul the next day to Broome across Roebuck Plains which seem to go on forever. One has to hand it to the early explorers and cattlemen in this area for their tenacity and endurance. Broome was a very welcome site as were the faces of son and daughter-in-law who had driven down from Derby.

A few days R and R at the Mangrove Resort. This is a very special spot and sitting out on the deck over the mangroves and gazing at the amazing turquoise waters of Roebuck Bay lined with the ochre red dirt surrounds was great. Broome has certainly developed its own unique style now with many artists now living in Broome and creating a particular style. Broome was gearing up for the usual influx of caravans from down south (referred to as the SAADS - See Australia and Die brigade).

North again to Derby where son Martin is part of the thin blue line. Derby gets a bad press in comparison to Broome but is actually a very pretty town with its boob trees, frangipani and bougainvillea. Unfortunately its situation on the mud flats of King Sound deprives it of beaches.

After a couple of days break, we were ready to leave for Darwin with son and daughter-in-law. We made the decision because of the heat to leave the old girl in Derby (not me, the Buick) and travel in the nearly new Nissan Patrol with the kids.

What a great drive the north-west highway is. Not as scenic as the Gibb River Road but still interesting. A spot on the Mary River called Mary's Pool was the chosen lunch spot. Pelicans and other wading birds were on the river, the bank lined with magnificent river gums.

We stopped at the sign for Haime Hill. Alan's earlier engineering days had involved designing the Kimberley Microwave System. Many of the hills used for the communication system had never been named, hence he took the opportunity to name a hill with microwave tower after himself.



The Haimes at Haime Hill

That night we arrived at Kununurra and our unit faced the lagoon with the Sleeping Buddha rock in silhouette. What a spot. Before daybreak we were on the road and stopped at Timber Creek in the Northern Territory. Couldn't get over the size of the Victoria River, absolutely massive with water in it too! Something you don't see in most of our rivers at that time of the year.

Katherine was the next stop and was very lush and green. From there the trip to Darwin was interesting, especially to read about the WWII activities in the area around the Adelaide River.

Our accommodation was at a great place in the CBD area of Darwin which meant you could walk to restaurants and shops. We made a point of getting up early and attending the Anzac Day Dawn Service at the park overlooking the harbour. This was attended by thousands of people and was very warm already at that early hour.

A visit to Darwin wouldn't be complete without visiting the Museum and to learn in more detail of the pasting Darwin took by Japanese bombers in WWII. Apparently the same planes that had bombed Pearl Harbour had bombed Darwin, only more of them. In a yearly period, Darwin and the Northern Territory was bombed 70 times. The Aircraft Museum was especially interesting.

The rebuilding of Darwin has made it a very well laid out city. The lifestyle, climate and attractions are well worth a visit. We were all most impressed and vowed to return at a later time.

A few days later we headed south again and reached Katherine in time for lunch. Choosing a picnic spot under a large shady tree, we proceeded to eat. Big mistake. The tree was full of bats and they seemed to be annoyed at us being under the tree and let fly with bat poo. A hasty retreat on our part.

Back to Derby again for a weeks rest before heading back to Perth. One of the best kept secrets in the north must be the seafood cafe on the Derby Wharf. This looks so nondescript to be almost invisible but has the best seafood. When we were in Derby it was the time for the peak tides, which means a 10 metre tide. Nothing can beat sitting on the Derby Wharf at sunset with a few drinks, in about 30 ° heat, watching the tide come in and eating barramundi and chips (or seafood coconut curry).



Sunset and Low Tide at Derby Wharf

Unfortunately this idyll came to an end. The Buick was made ready for the trip south and we headed off at 5.30 a.m. one morning.

Stopped at Sandfire Roadhouse for a break and were descended on by a bunch of peacocks. They walked past us and headed straight for the Buick grille where they proceeded to eat insects out of grille. Probably was a hot meal for them.



Peacocks cleaning-up the Buick

By the time we reached South Hedland we were picking up some rain and by the time we had reached the Kumarina Roadhouse, there were floodwaters across the road. The Buick drive quietly through flowing water, and we kept an anxious look out for any huge mining trucks coming in the opposite direction.

At Meekatharra some locals gathered around the car again. Its incredible that some people know exactly the make and model. Apparently a Ferrari had been through the day before and we wondered how deep the water was he went through.

Down to the Queen of the Murchison, Cue, which according to the locals, is about to experience a mining boom again. Nice to see the place come to life again.

An overnight at Mt Magnet in deluging rain. We had a superb meal at the pub which would have done a city restaurant proud. This sort of food must be an eye opener for tourists from overseas to get this sort of quality in the back of beyond.

The next day was dry and we headed for a much colder Perth, the Buick having travelled 3,493 miles to Derby and back.

L Haime (WA Buicks)