

Queensland Recreational Aircraft Assn
Tour to North Queensland, 14 – 23rd August 2022

Day 1 - Warwick to Emerald

Finally, after three years of planning and lots of Covid issues, our tour has happened. There were four Jabirus and one RV9 on the tour.

We made it to Emerald after a hiccup at Chinchilla when one plane wouldn't re-start. Fortunately, we were able to jump start it using very long jumper leads and the Chinchilla aero club secretary's ute. Graham and Noel spent a couple of hours working on the alternator when we got to Emerald, but found a quick connect that wasn't positioned correctly. Problem solved.

We enjoyed dinner at our motel. Our package included bed and brekky and a packed lunch for the next day. What a great deal for flyers like us.

Day 2 - Emerald to Forsayth

Today we had a leisurely start as we had to wait for the shops to open so Noel could top up battery supplies.

We loaded up and left after Noel had recharged his battery (it had been on charge overnight in helicopter man's hangar) and headed for our next fuel stop, Charters Towers.

As soon as we were up and flying, Noel reported that everything was back to normal and the voltage was coming up. Great news.

We flew the longer leg to Charters Towers at 3000ft to minimise the effects of a headwind. We fueled up (using the very user friendly FuelCharge app) and ate our motel sandwiches (amazing!) in the poor under-loved terminal there. At least the loos flushed!

Next leg we had a slight tail wind at 3000ft, but eventually had to go to 4500ft to get over the range. It had been a bit bumpy all day regardless of our height.

We were fueled up at Forsayth thanks to Simon Terry, using a 200L drum and pump. Then we were picked up in a big (almost new) 4WD bus and taken in to the Goldfields Hotel. Our accommodation was next door to the pub. It's pretty new and very comfortable. We all met up and enjoyed dinner at the hotel. We later discovered that Simon Terry is the owner of the property which encompasses the gorge, the hotel and accommodation. Plus it's a working cattle station as well. Quite an amazing family and property.

Day 3 - Cobbold Gorge

No flying today. We all met at the pub this morning, where some of us enjoyed toasted sandwiches and coffee before the bus picked us up for our Cobbold Gorge tour at 9.30.

It's almost an hour away over roughish roads, but the driver is a regular so I suspect he knew every bump and dip pretty well. It's pretty tough country all around here, with dry grass (and some places not even dry grass) and lots of ant's nests. When we arrived at Cobbold village we basically had time to look around, have a swim (if we wanted to) in the infinity pool or lie and relax on the sun lounges. We wandered around, checked out the merchandise shop, had a coffee and sat and chatted. Nice and relaxing. We were served a very nice lunch in a large room adjoining the balcony, on our own. We all felt very special.

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The tour of the gorge left the main area by bus and we arrived at the gorge area itself about five to ten minutes away. Once there (three busses of us) we split into groups of about twelve with a guide each. Our guide talked to us about the history of the area, edible foods etc, and then we walked our way around a loop that included the glass bridge over the really high part of the gorge. It wasn't too bad early on, but got quite rough towards the top. We all managed the walk though.

The gorge is very narrow and the water deep. When we finished the walking loop we went for a ride up the gorge and back in electric powered boats. It was really quite beautiful. It's very narrow most of the way too.

Cobbold Gorge is certainly a beautiful place and we would thoroughly recommend a visit.

Day 4 - Forsayth to Karumba

The day dawned nice and fine again. After a big brekky at the Goldfields Hotel, we were given a lift to the airfield in Simon Terry's new bus. We departed about 9.45 and while some decided to over-fly the gorge, some of us flew straight to Karumba. We arrived not long after eleven. Just in time to head into town, drop our luggage at GD's cabins and head for the Sunset Tavern for lunch. Such a lovely spot.

We had to be at the Karumba Point boat ramp by 3.15 for our Sunset tour. Once we were loaded, we putted around to Karumba town and picked up another couple plus two workers to help with serving the drinks and tucker.

We saw a big croc on the bank and a couple of Jabirus which the boat lady feeds. We sailed out into the middle of the river and she fed the kite hawks as well.

We had nibbles and drinks as we sailed around and listened as the tour guide did a running commentary. We went right up the river one way and then turned around and went back out into the gulf eventually. We sat around as the sun went down and we all had a few prawns and some bubbles to celebrate. What an enjoyable evening.

Day 5 - Karumba to Winton

We had Brekky at the Karumba cafe this morning before heading out to the airport for takeoff to our first stop, Cloncurry, for fuel.

From Cloncurry we flew to McKinlay, population ten! The owner of the Walkabout hotel picked us up in two loads and we enjoyed a really nice lunch on the verandah of the pub. Then he showed us THE knife! The hotel is so far from everywhere, but there was a constant stream of travellers calling in while we were there.

McKinlay to Winton was a short hop and everyone arrived safely, we refueled and were picked up by Red Dirt Tours, Dana. She did a town tour for us before dropping us off at the motel. We walked into town to the North Gregory hotel (on her suggestion) and enjoyed a poet and storyteller telling the story of Banjo Patterson's life. We stayed for dinner and were entertained by a guitar playing singer, Chris Matthews, from Kununurra. It was great entertainment and all free.

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An interesting thing happened as we were flying just south of Cloncurry. I was looking out the window and spotted a very long train way down on a track on my side, so took a photo. Then when I zoomed in, I discovered it was actually a train crash, with one of the locomotives lying on its side. We discovered after investigation that it had only happened the day before and had been a head on collision.

Day 6: Winton

Winton - no flying today.

Dawned as another perfect day weather wise. Cool nights, but comfortably warm days.

We all headed off to the bakery for breakfast. We're staying a stone's throw from the centre of town in a lovely motel, being well looked after by the owners.

Dana (Red Dirt tours) picked us up at 8.30 and chatted about the flora, Winton etc all the way to the Age of Dinosaurs jump up. It was all very interesting. It's about 20 minutes or so out of town built on a mesa (4200 ha) donated to the cause by the grazier who owns the surrounding property. It's an amazing setup and everything is very professionally run. We toured the laboratory area where they receive the bones (they come from the dig sites wrapped in a layer of alfoil, then newspaper, then plaster that sets hard and protects them in transit). The dig sites are pretty much all within a radius of 150 kms. We had a guide explain everything that was going on in this section. Most of the people who clean the bones are grey nomad volunteers. There are only three paleontologists involved, I think. The guides are paid staff, usually dinosaur fanatics, and come for the 'season'.

Next, we moved on to another section where we heard more about the finding of the bones and saw short movies on the dinosaurs Matilda and Banjo, one of a kind fossilized dinosaur bones found in the Winton area. We had another young guide for that tour.

Then we went to a huge shed where they have relocated a large section of a creek bed of fossilized dinosaur footprints. We had yet another guide for this section, explaining all the different prints. It's pretty amazing how professional and well set up the whole place is.

Lastly, we walked down a path past bronze dinosaurs etc set up on rocks amidst the native flora.

There is also a night observatory built to resemble a meteor hitting the earth. They've even put a ridge of soil around the outside so it looks as though the 'meteor' crashed into the earth.

Our Red Dirt Tour lady, Dana, was always there waiting and helping (she ordered all our coffees for morning tea while we were in one of the displays). We had no waiting anywhere because they had also pre-organized all our tickets. We couldn't have asked for better service.

This afternoon some of the group wandered around Winton, shopped and checked out some of the sights. There's plenty to see and do to fill in a few hours in Winton.

We met up at the North Gregory hotel again about 4.30 to listen to the poet and storyteller talk about the history of Waltzing Matilda. After that we ate dinner and listened to the guitar playing singer, Chris Matthews, until we were all ready to retire after our big day.

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Day 7: Winton to Charleville

We were picked up by the Red Dirt Tours lady, Dana, and delivered safely to our planes. It was less than an hour to Longreach where we wandered around to the Qantas Founders Museum Cafe for morning tea. As usual we had a headwind!

From Longreach we headed to Charleville. That was a longer leg and still a headwind. At one stage we went to 9500 feet to try and minimize it. Pretty cool up there! We flew most of the way at 7500 ft. The motel owner picked us up in three relays, which was good of him.

When we were all settled, we had an informal meeting re the activities planned for the next couple of days. Firstly, for the bus tour to the WWII Secret Air Base in the morning and then for departure on Monday to Cameron Baker's property, Guestling.

Nothing out of the ordinary to report re flights today. Everyone went well and so far we are all still healthy and the planes performing well. Who could doubt a Jabiru!

Day 8: Charleville

We were at the bakery early this morning having some brekky and in walked an old friend. Then in walked some more friends from the Goondiwindi aero club. They were travelling with four planes and had been to Lake Eyre. Such a small world sometimes.

Today was a bit more interesting (and stressful). We had spent time making sure all group members knew they had to be ready to catch the bus for the WWII Secret Base by 8.45am. Everyone was ready to go, then we waited and waited! No bus. I couldn't raise the Tourism people who I booked through, so I rang the WWII base and the girls there (after a few phone calls) couldn't really help. Thinking, thinking.....so I rang the mayor! He was in Brisbane catching a plane, but must have gotten on to the Manager of the Base, who came and picked us up (three trips) and took us to the Base. It's a self-guided tour firstly, then at 11.30am he lined up three cars to take us for the tag-along driving part of the tour.

Because we were running so late we missed the bakery for lunch. No worry, by way of apology for missing our pickup, the Murweh Shire council shouted us lunch at Coronas pub! All's well that ended well.

The WWII Secret Base Museum and tag along tour were excellent! We had a lovely, informative guide and she was also one of the ferries who drove us around. We'll definitely be back when they finish the next section of the museum (due November).

Later in the day, Graham and I went for a walk along the fairly new Warrego River walk. It's quite a long walk, but well done and it was nice to get out and stretch our legs.

Day 9: Charleville to Roma

Today we flew into Guestling property owned by Cameron and Jeannie Baker. Cameron had been working on the strip the day before and he had it in perfect condition with a large graded area for parking.

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We enjoyed a lovely morning tea at the homestead courtesy of our gracious hosts before heading back to our planes to bid farewell and head for Roma.

Day 10: Roma - home

After a wonderful tour we all made it home safely. We had a great flight home from Roma with up to 20 knot tailwinds. We were doing between 130 and 140 all the way home. Very nice. Just after we all landed, I got a text from the Watts Bridge connection saying they had landed safely as well.

It was almost still at Warwick airfield when we landed about 9.10am and by lunch it had become quite windy. Then late in the afternoon it showered.



The poem for Robyn on our last night of the tour

We left our homes nine days ago,
After three years of planning, we're able to go!
A slight hiccup at Chinchilla with Tesch's,
Then all was sorted with a big ute of Jess's.

First stop Emerald where we slept and ate,
Then next day to Forsayth...all going great.
A day of rest from flying low,
To Cobbold Gorge on a tour we go.

From Forsayth we headed up north,
To Karumba, the sea, some crocs and so forth.
The sunset cruise was such a hoot,
We all enjoyed our time to boot.

From Karumba we headed south to stay,
Arriving in Winton, but along the way,
We had lunch with Crocodile Dundee's big knife!
Fortunately nobody got into strife!

At Winton we were met by the lovely Dana,
Who chauffeured us round for a small retainer
The next day we went to dinosaurs see,
An amazing place, sure worth the fee!

Red Dirt tours were our saving grace,
They saw us round, all over the place.
They took us out to load our planes,
Then off we went to the south again.

Charleville next and the WWII Secret Base,
But forgotten we were so I tried to save face
By chasing around till the mayor helped us out
And Sam picked us up and off on the route.

The tour was fantastic, The people so good,
Time came for town and looking for food,
Then the council and staff, they shouted us lunch,
So full tummies for free, we were a happy bunch!

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Today we have flown to Roma to stay,
After morning tea with the Bakers to start out our day.
We enjoyed time at Guestling with the goats close at hand,
Sabrina even came over for a pat with our hands!

Tonight is our last night and it's dinner for all,
To celebrate the times we've shared on the tour,
Tomorrow it's home to the cold and the pets,
And I think we're all ready....but I'm not taking bets!

The worst thing of all, we were minus Mac and Rob,
The organizer and entertainer, they both do their job!
When they get back and time does them allow,
We'll go somewhere special, but we miss them for now!

