



**AROUND THE BIG BACK
YARD:
JAPANESE VISITORS 2013**

PREFACE

In the wake of the to-ing and fro-ing associated with two **Neil Young** and three **Bruce Springsteen** concerts back in **March** I wasn't in a hurry to go off gallivanting around the countryside.

Then, when the motivation returned around the start of **May**, there were a couple of appointments to sort out various financial matters that needed to be worked around, which meant it was **mid-June** before we found ourselves with a bit of clear air to plot out a week to ten-day trip.

We'd just about got things sorted after our **Retired Teachers' lunch** at **Bogie River Bush House** when an unexpected email advised that Madam's sister and niece were intending to visit at the end of July. That meant it was just as well we'd put off making bookings in the **Gulf Savannah** until we'd had a good talk to people who'd actually been there about road conditions and options. Procrastination is the thief of time, but it comes in handy when unexpected emails enter the equation. So, having deferred [Undara](#) and the [Savannahlander](#) we set about sorting out a new itinerary that would suit a couple of visitors whose requirements didn't quite compute as far as the standard **Reef and Rainforest** elements were concerned.

Not that we were going to be avoiding the two Rs, you understand.

The time frame was longer than the standard Japanese package tour duration and The Niece was considering studying languages.

She wanted to get an idea of day to day life away from the standard tourist route.

Which, of course, explains why the narrative is based around six days in and around [Bowen](#).

Bowen isn't exactly on the standard Japanese tourist route. It's not far off places that are, which is helpful, but we thought a sidetrack into a rural environment would be a bit of an eye-opener.

With the visitors flying in and out of [Cairns](#) a road trip back to the **Far North** was going to deliver them to the point where the **Rainforest** and a bit more **Reef** could be slotted in, so the basic outline wasn't difficult to figure.

The first consideration was getting the two of them to **Bowen**, which meant flying **Cairns > [Townsville](#)** or **Cairns > Hamilton Island**, which looked like the way to go when Madam investigated the options on a Sunday and found a very reasonable \$99 fare for the flight.

Things, however, hadn't entirely been set in stone on Sunday, and while we waited for advice that the visit was definitely on (a mere twenty-four hours) the cheap fare disappeared into thin air, replaced by a \$300 option.

So, predictably, we found ourselves on the road to **Townsville** on **Day One** of this little odyssey...



1

THE BOWEN LEG

[Monday, 29 July 2013](#)

[Tuesday, 30 July 2013](#)

MONDAY, 29 JULY 2013

The timing of these things, once you depart from the standard tourist operation, can be a little tricky, particularly when it comes to connecting flights, which explained the initial look at flying **Cairns > Hamilton Island**.

We know an overnight flight from **Kansai International** outside **Osaka** is scheduled to arrive right on *sparrow fart*.

When you take the possibility of delayed flights and likely queues to get visitors through Customs the first **QantasLink** flight to **Townsville** might be a little bit dodgy, so you'd be inclined to play it safe, wouldn't you?

Playing it safe, however, involves a five-hour wait. **Cairns > Hamilton Island** leaves earlier, and halves the drive back to **Bowen**, but at \$300, forget it...

In any case, with **Cairns > Townsville** arriving at Garbutt around 11:20, an early departure looked like the way to go,

We were heading out of the **IGA Car Park**, around 7:30 after we'd stocked up on bottled water for thirsty travellers.

That might seem overenthusiastic, but conversations with The Afghan Neighbour, who'd made the same trip a week or so earlier and experienced lengthy delays due to roadworks, suggested we might need three or even three and a half hours rather than the two and a half you usually bank on.

The Neighbour's not 100% on his knowledge of localities along the way, and part of the reason his trip took so long was evident when we turned back onto the highway at **Sandy Corner**.

There were roadworks on the [Brandon](#) side of the intersection.

Whether there's also activity between there and **Ayr** is something we'll find out on Sunday.

Apart from inevitable stoppages due to construction (they're putting a bridge over the tram crossing at the **Brandon Sugar Experiment Station**, and it looks like involving a significant realignment of the highway) there was absolutely nothing remarkable about the trip.

We arrived in **Townsville** with enough time to divert into **Angelina's Deli** at **Fairfield Waters** and take a squiz at the sale at **Kathmandu** *en route* to the airport.

It seemed there was nothing remarkable about the overnight flight and the **Cairns** connection either, though you can never be too sure about these things.

The visitors are an undemonstrative duo, inclined to observe and note rather than offer comment or assessment.

There was, however, a reference to **Hungry Jack's**, which figured, given the combination of teenage appetites and uncertainty about the nutritional horizon.

That had implications once we'd skirted **Castle Hill** and parked the chariot near [CBar on The Strand](#).

The view across **Cleveland Bay** wasn't quite as good as it can be, and we started off at a table in full sun, so things could have been better, but the food, as usual, was good, and the view and the winter sunshine delivered the regular reminder about why we live where we live.

From **The Strand** we looped through **Flinders Street East** and paid a flying visit to the **deli beside the Victoria Park Hotel**. It's an operation that warrants further investigation, though time constraints prevented the establishment from getting the attention it deserved this time around..

An appointment with wildlife meant we headed out of town on the newly completed **Port Access Road**, which rejoins the highway at Stuart and is completely clear of traffic lights.

One point, though.

Coming out of **Boundary Street** there's a **No Right Turn** sign, which means you need to make a U-turn closer to the port.

[Billabong Sanctuary](#) was the destination, and we were pushing along due to the proximity of **Crocodile Feeding Time**, which, as it turned out, we just missed.

I might be wrong about this, but if you're just slightly late for the scheduled 1:15 feeding you might still be able to catch the end.

There are a number of crocs and gators in a variety of enclosures, and one suspects all of them need a feed.

So you mightn't get the whole show, but you could, possibly catch a bit of *snapping jaws action*.

It certainly seemed, after we caught the very end of the feeding session and went for a wander through the **saurian selection**, that the reptiles on display were taking a quiet postprandial snooze.

The most recent recipient's return to his snoozing spot was a reminder of the crocodile's propensity for unobtrusive movement.

We made our way around that end of the sanctuary, hand feeding the odd **eastern grey kangaroo**, making our way back to the **flighted birds' show**, which demonstrated what **Billabong Sanctuary** does best.

It was a quietly authoritative presentation delivered in a low key manner as the feathered participants did their respective things.

When their thing involves flying back and forth between presenter's gloved hand and nearby trees it makes for *an up close and personal encounter*, particularly when the shortest path between hand and perch takes them about thirty centimetres over your head.

The **poisonous snakes' show**, on the other hand, was less impressive, at least as far as Hughesy is concerned.

I've seen a number of these presentations over the years, so the information on offer wasn't exactly new.

There's not much you can really do with a venomous snake without placing participants at considerable risk, so it comes down to the observer's interest in the subject matter.

The Visitors weren't particularly keen on that side of things, so we wandered away, looped around the other end of the sanctuary and headed back to disperse the remainder of a packet of duck and roo food before the **koala cuddling photo session** started up.

Not that we were there for a photo.

Up close and reasonably personal with the cuddly marsupial might have some appeal as far as The Visitors were concerned.

As it turned out they weren't particularly keen, and we headed off around three-thirty, with a couple of tired travellers soon nodding off in the rear seat.

The sun was setting as we hit the outskirts of **Bowen**, and that made a visit to **Grays Bay** to catch the sunset across the water mandatory.

A quick photo session on the beach and a loop through the car park at Horseshoe Bay saw us back at the **Little House of Concrete** just after six.

A hearty serve of Hughesy's favourite *slow simmered sugo alla Bolognese* and red wine wound the **Day One** proceedings up very nicely indeed.

TUESDAY, 30 JULY 2013

Tuesday, 30 July 2013

Having landed The Visitors in downtown [Bowen](#) the task for **Day Two** was to deliver a bit of orientation as to facilities and lifestyle.

I wasn't sure a predawn start on Hughesy's morning walk was going to appeal, but indications the night before suggested it did, although instructions from The Supervisor meant that we weren't going to do the whole thing in all its brisk walk entirety.

No, *a leisurely stroll around an abbreviated version* definitely seemed the way to go.

We weren't out of the blocks as early as we might have been, but the designated leisurely stroll verged on the *too leisurely*.

We returned to base around an hour and a half later to find The Supervisor on the verge of calling to establish our whereabouts.

She had, after all, definite plans involving **Zumba** and didn't want Visitors tired out by extended pursuit of *Hughesy's loping stride*.

The perambulation up the hill, over the top past the **Shell Servo** and **Cenotaph** and along **Herbert Street** was, however, conducted at a leisurely stroll, with frequent stops for photos in a townscape that has very little in common with what they're used to.

We looped around the bottom of the former movie set, stopped for an examination of movie-related material behind the **Sound Shell** and wandered as far as the **Catalina Memorial** before heading back to the jetty.

We could have halted where the concrete runs out, or at the junction that provides access to the **Bowen Towage** tugs, but we headed all the way out to the very end for a panoramic view of the town, then headed back, turning back and venturing as far as the **Skate Park** before heading home.

A spot of breakfast, a visit to the **Zumba** class and relaxation after a change of clothes filled in the time until lunch, which was where the wheels temporarily fell off.

We needed to book an excursion to **Whitehaven** through the local tourist information centre because they could use the commission.

I had to call into the post office as well, so dropping Hughesy there seemed the way to go.

I figured by the time I'd hoofed it from the **PO Box** to the **Front Beach** the booking would be done and dusted.

That would mean we could head up to **360 on Flagstaff Hill** before The Niece's two o'clock appointment at the **High School**.

Things didn't quite work out that way.

The option we'd favoured wasn't available. There was another option we'd failed to consider, and they'd waited for my opinion.

When we'd booked the alternative we headed to **360** confident we'd be finished lunch by ten to two. As things panned out, though, the kitchen ran out of something or other, the orders were slow getting through and while responses to questions about progress seemed reassuring they weren't followed by the actual appearance of meals, even after we'd been told they were plated up and ready to go. As a result, we ended up with takeaways for three-quarters of the party to consume after the visit to the **High School**.

Hughesy was never a starter for that side of things, and deposited the tucker on the counter in the kitchen servery after I'd been dropped off at the **LHoC**.

Once I'd wolfed down my allocation of calamari and chips I headed to the cot on the presumption that repeated turning of the neck to look back and talk over the right shoulder had done something nasty to the neck muscles, and rest and recuperation was definitely indicated.

The **High School** visit, from what I gathered, went well and was definitely *interesting*, particularly when it came to space and facilities for outdoor activities.

Having sighted various schools on our travels around **Japan** that was much as expected, and was one of the reasons for slotting a school visit into the itinerary.

After the excitement and the late lunch it was nibbles and a light snack rather than a substantial dinner.

We were, after all, off to [Montes](#) for lunch in the morning...



2

THE AIRLIE LEG

[Wednesday, 31 July 2013](#)

[Thursday, 1 August 2013](#)

[Friday, 2 August 2013](#)

[Saturday, 3 August 2013](#)



WEDNESDAY, 31 JULY 2013

After two days with distinct and identifiable themes, you might expect us to give it a break, but **Day Three** was always going to be a day of contrasts.

We'd done the *Introduction to Australia and a bit of fauna* thing on **Day One**, and **Day Two** had been *Small Town North Queensland*, so what did we have in store for **Day Three**?

For a start, with The Visitors having spent most of the trip from **Townsville** to **Bowen** nodding off in the back seat we were still up for a demonstration of the **Great Australian Emptiness**, with a

road trip that would take around an hour and a half, passing through a countryside that was almost entirely unpopulated.

An hour and a half, in other words, of practically nothing.

When we reached our destination there was a fair chance of a significant **Wow! Factor** if the sky decided to cooperate.

After lunch, we'd be motoring into [Airlie Beach](#), with a visit to the supermarket to pick up on snack items before heading off to the accommodation that we'd be calling home for the next two nights. We'd be doing a seafood nibbles thing with Psychologist Girl and a bottle of wine or three. Blotting paper was an important consideration.

We planned to buy nibbles after we'd stocked up on seafood at the operations beside the **Duck Hole**, But when we were late out of the blocks and diverted to look at the live export tanks at [Arabon I](#) suggested we look at that side of things in [Cannonvale](#) where we'd have more time and, possibly, a greater range to select from.

That meant we set out with half a kilo of **banana prawns**, a slightly smaller quantity of **red spot kings** and a couple of **Moreton Bay bugs** tucked away in the esky with bottles of **Riesling**, **Semillon Sauvignon Blanc** and **Chardonnay** and plans to pad out the spread at the supermarket.

Chances to emphasise the **Great Australian Emptiness** went mostly by the wayside as The Visitors once again dozed in the back seat.

Or maybe they were just *lying doggo*, exploiting the fact that I couldn't turn the head to offer mostly incomprehensible explanations of what we were passing).

In any case, there wasn't really that much to talk about, even after we turned off the highway onto **Collingvale Road** to take a short cut that shaves a good ten minutes off the trip to **Montes**. The Visitors were, however, well and truly awake shortly after we turned off **Dingo Beach Road** and headed towards **Hydeaway Bay**.

Between the turnoff and the bend that delivers you into the *rather swisho* seaside residential some acreage properties suggest people with a bit of cash to throw around.

It's only when you come back in sight of the ocean that you realise we're not talking about twenty-first-century reincarnations of the traditional **Queensland beach hut**.

There are seriously impressive pieces of architecture on the slope that looks over the bay.



When you loop through **Blackcurrant Drive**, which we did on the way back you can see why people shell out the big bucks to optimise the view.

We weren't quite ready to check that out yet, and headed on to the dirt road that takes you, once you've negotiated **O My God Hill**, alongside **Gloucester Passage**, delivering glimpses of blue water as you go and delivers you to the rather nondescript car park at the back of **Montes Reef Resort**.

The car park might be nondescript, but there's nothing low key about the view across the water on a good day, and we were there on a day as good as any we'd experienced.

Having taken time to enjoy the view and watch The Visitors take in the **Wow! Factor** we headed for the reserved table and, in due course, demolished the substantial servings regulars know to expect.

We're regulars, though not as regular as we'd like to be, which is why we weren't lining up for anything too substantial in the evening.

With lunch out of the way we headed to the [Eco Resort](#) to take in the view from a different angle, then headed back towards **Cannonvale** by way of **Blackcurrant Drive**,

The sight of the **Warbocamper** suggested The Warbler and Dragon Lady were in grandparent mode on the way back from wherever they'd been.

The shopping excursion, once we'd made our way back along **Dingo Beach Road**, through **Gregory River** onto the **Gregory-Cannon Valley Road** and turned at **Strathdickie** to head into [Cannonvale](#), proved the wisdom of deferring the purchase of nibbles until we got there.

I'd suspected The Visitors would be intrigued by unfamiliar grocery items but hadn't thought we'd be there quite as long as we ended up spending in the aisles of **Woolworths**.

There was a slight hiccough when we arrived in downtown [Airlie](#) when we found ourselves going down the main street and subsequently held up by street renovations.

We'd have been much better off looping around the detour but, of course, we didn't know that at the time..

But that was soon forgotten once we'd checked in to [Martinique](#) and given the correct answer to the \$64 question regarding one or two bathrooms in a two bedroom apartment.

We ended up in **Unit 12**, the penthouse in that block and the view was quite magnificent.





A bit of rest and recuperation, a spot of preparation as far as nibbles were concerned and, as the sun went down we were ready for an extended spell of nibbling, drinking and interesting conversation that filled in a good three and a half hours.

Having seen Psychologist Girl down to a cab waiting at Reception I headed back, trying not to think about the need to fill in the details of the day's activities in the morning.

By this point it was getting perilously close to ten.

Given an appointment with a shuttle bus at seven-fifteen I didn't like my chances



THURSDAY, 1 AUGUST 2013

Thursday, 1 August 2013

There were, I think, two things that shaped the reactions to what was always going to be an interesting day, and both emerged the night before as we sat around the table at **Martinique**.

The first started to come seriously into play on **Tuesday morning**, when The Visitors joined me on an abbreviated version of the morning walk.

The regular version is usually something done solo or in conversation with someone who's travelling at around the same pace. I'm not in the habit of turning and talking over my shoulder to people behind me.

I'd already done a fair bit of that on the **Monday** as we headed south out of **Townsville**, although the fact that The Visitors dozed most of the way meant things weren't as bad as they might have been.

In any case, by **Wednesday morning** repeated twists to talk over the right shoulder had left Hughesy with a sore neck that persisted, waxing and waning through to the weekend and beyond.

At times, it delivered something close to absolute hell, with aching muscles gone rock hard.

At others, it receded into the background to the point where silly people became careless and started doing the things that had probably caused the problem to arise in the first place.

There was a point, early on **Tuesday night**, when I hoped Someone would spot that I was in severe discomfort and volunteer to take my place accompanying The Visitors on the cruise.

I underestimated Someone's determination to chill out in the opulence of the unit at **Martinique**.

Nothing was going to get in the way of **Madam's Day Off**, least of all someone who might be sooking it to wheedle his way out of a commitment he wasn't keen on fulfilling.

That last point, the *not keen on* bit, underlies the second influence on perceptions about the day's developments.

Very early on **Tuesday evening** Psychologist Girl had been close to dumbfounded to learn I'd never been to [Whitehaven](#), which brings a couple of issues into play.

The first is a *local versus tourist* vibe that runs through the regional mindset.

There's a clear distinction between things for *us* and activities associated with *them*, which tend to be seen as overpriced and beyond the budgets of the average Bowenite.

We tend to think of **Cannonvale** as somewhere you go shopping when you're after something that you won't find locally, with **Airlie** as *somewhere to go for lunch* as part of the excursion.

We tend to look at the variety of activities being touted along the main street down in **Airlie**, the parasailing, snorkelling, dive courses and all, as tourist activities. And we regard the other retail outlets as gaudy purveyors of T-shirts and the like, places that flog off a variety of tat that's not going to find its way into a local wardrobe.

There is, after all, a limit to the number of T-shirts emblazoned with the words **Airlie Beach** you'll want in the drawer.

In Hughesy's case the limit isn't going to rise above zero any time soon.

The same mindset applies, I think, to things like **Whitehaven**.

They're places you'll go to when you're showing visitors around the region, but at the price and given the crowding factor that kicks in when you head to the lookout it's something you tend to avoid doing until you have a reason to do it.

That, in any case, is my story.

When it comes to explaining why I've spent fifty years *Up North* and close to thirty years in Bowen without doing certain things I'm sticking to it.

We'd planned on taking the [Whitehaven Express](#), but the vessel was on the slipway having its nether regions defouled.

[Mantaray](#) looked to be a perfectly adequate substitute in an environment where you're unlikely to get much in the way of differentiation.

Whitehaven Express offers a barbecue lunch where *Mantaray* does a cold collation smorgasbord, and that's about the only difference (as far as I can tell).

The coaster bus collected us from **Martinique** just after the scheduled 7:15 pickup and whisked us down to **Abel Point Marina**.

On arrival, the first task was completing inevitable paperwork and associated disclaimers that come with the territory when you're embarking on activities that can, and do from time to time, kill.

That last point has a fair bit to do with the cheerful *bonhomie* on display for the benefit of the passengers, any of whom might be inclined to acquire cold feet if they're relative newbies when it comes to underwater activities.

Anyway, with the paperwork complete, and the passenger quotient filled, we set off, passing **Airlie** on a route that took us past **North** and [South Molle](#).

From there, it was along the west side of **Whitsunday Island** and down the east side to **Tongue Bay**, which is where you debouched for the climb to the lookout that delivers your panoramic view of [Hill Inlet](#) and your actual [Whitehaven Beach](#).

It's a pleasant hour, with island views punctuated by the interruptions to try on various sizes of *fins* (a *flipper*, we were repeatedly informed, is a dead dolphin) and take delivery on the proffered wetsuits.

There's a time and place for everything, and a lengthy passage from port to anchorage on a vessel with limited space is obviously the time to look after aquatic administrivia.

Once we'd navigated into the anchorage it was apparent many vessels were, effectively, doing the same thing as we were, dropping by, disgorging passengers for a gaze at the silica sand and clearing out to have someone else take their place.

The transfer from boat to beach happened in three stages (based, predictably, on the space in the **rubber ducky** tender), and then we hoofed it up the hill to find one of the scenic wonders of the world was besmirched by people with very little consideration for everyone else.



I'm not big on queues, and prefer to avoid them, but accept there are circumstances where queuing is inevitable.

Getting a reasonable go at enjoying a spectacular view and getting a decent photographic record of it is one of those circumstances.

As you near the crest that gives you the view the track divides, with a reasonably clear indication it's meant for one way traffic.

That, apparently, didn't fit with the vigorous intentions of what appeared to be an enthusiastic group of **French aquanauts** who seemed to want to get the sightseeing out of the way **ASAP** so they could get on with the important bit.

As a result, they'd opted to go against the flow, jostling their way in to get the odd snap and moving on without too much apparent concern for anyone who might be silly enough to get in the way.

It's entirely possible that, even without the **galloping Gallophones**, the crowd factor would have rendered the sightseeing side of a visit to a quite magnificent vista into the realm of the sub-optimal, but their presence didn't help.

As I stood on the beach waiting for the tender to collect us I couldn't help noting the continual arrival and departure of vessels with their quotas of sightseers.



I ended up concluding the aerial option might be the way to go next time around, because there certainly will be a next time,

And when it arrives I'd like a decent non-jostled look at **Hill Inlet** and a panoramic overview of the whole **Whitehaven** shebang.

Not that there was too much jostling once we'd been ferried back to Mantaray and skipper Cookie had wended his way to a suitably deserted section of **South Whitehaven**.

We had close to an hour ashore while the crew set things up for lunch on board.

An hour may have been excessive, but it certainly gave you time to enjoy the vista, marvel at the fine-grained texture of sand that certainly seemed capable of finding its way into anything (careful

with those cameras, folks) and muse on the tranquility and the total contrast with the recent push and shove (an exaggeration, perhaps, but a slight one).

And lunch provided another opportunity to gripe about the lack of consideration on the part of people of **apparent European extraction**.

We'd been sharing a six-seat table with an older (actually, around Hughesy's age, but you catch my drift) Australian couple, and had snagged seats on the first tender shuttle back on board.

An early start and hunger will do that to you.

The second shuttle had made its way back to ***Mantaray*** while we tucked into the cold collation, which wasn't anything spectacular but did what it was supposed to do perfectly well.

I'd just finished my plate when a bloke with an **indeterminate but Continental accent** asked if there was room at the table for him and his girlfriend.

There was, provided I didn't reclaim my own seat before the other couple made their way back.

So this pair duly grabbed a spot, ate and then, when it was an obvious case of clean up after yourself by scraping leftovers into the bin down there and placing cutlery and plates in the receptacles provided, left their dishes for someone else to look after.

I thought of identifying their country of origin so I could ask if all (insert nationality here) nationals are ignorant and thoughtless bastards who expect someone else to clean up after them, but ended up deciding to be diplomatic.

End of rant.

After lunch we headed north to the designated dive location, another hour's cruising at the tip of **Hook Island**.

The transit provided the opportunity for scuba divers to kit up, instructors to deliver final instructions and tips to novices, and for Hughesy to decide that the state of the neck precluded anything in the aquatic department.

Once we'd anchored, the scuba crews were the first to go (which was understandable, some were down for two dives), followed by the snorkelers, in stages that were determined by the capacity of the tender.

That ensured **Captain Cookie** was kept busy zipping to and fro.

He was, by all appearances, out to ensure everyone was having a good time.

Part of that, of course, was keeping up the support vibe for nervous novices, and when he sighted Hughesy left on board, along with a Chinese woman and her son, we were offered the opportunity to zip around on the tender.

While the other two went for it (Chinese Boy took a bit of persuasion but succumbed eventually) I was quite happy to remain where I was, eyes moving between boat and horizon with the possibility of a whale sighting in mind.

The currents swung the vessel backwards and forwards through what must have been around ninety degrees and the tranquillity was rather pleasant, though the tender continued to run back and forth so it wasn't total peace and quiet.

All in all, a restful couple of hours and probably just what the doctor ordered in the neck department.

With everyone back on board, when it came time to move again heading back past [Hayman](#) gave me something to focus on as we headed home.

It took until **North Molle** for the neck issue to return to prominence, given the natural inquisitiveness associated with *where the hell are we?*

Back in port the shuttle dropped us at **Martinique**, and after showers all round we hoofed it down the hill to **Mr Bones** for a decent go at the *tapas*-style bill of fare.

Four reasonably hungry people, platters of **mackerel spring rolls**, **Thai chicken skewers** and **stuffed baby squid** that just happened to have four of each and a pizza meant that no one was complaining on the way home.

At least, not as far as the food quotient was concerned.

It's a fair hike up a steep slope, and by the time we were back on the front door four folks were close to out of breath, and one wondering how the neck was going to behave itself on the morrow.

Having ascertained Pup had won the toss at **Old Trafford** and elected to bat I managed five or six overs before the mind succumbed to tiredness and I opted to turn in.



FRIDAY, 2 AUGUST 2013

There wasn't a great deal on the agenda when everyone finally stirred on Friday morning, other than packing up and running down the accumulated odds and ends we'd put together for **Wednesday night's *soirée***.

We'd done a reasonable job with the seafood, though there was a whiff or two to remind you of what had recently gone down.

Still, there was enough left to kick start the morning and fuel us through the process of packing.

Having checked out we headed down the hill, turned right and headed over for a look at the retail side of things at [Port of Airlie](#).

Purely for comparative purposes, you understand, since the second phase of the day's activities had a daylight walk through downtown **Airlie** pencilled in.

It didn't take long before The Niece, in her role as Observant and Analytical Girl, decided there wasn't that much of interest.

We moseyed back to the car by way of **Mangrove Jacks** and [Fish D'Vine](#) and started on the homeward journey.

I'm not sure why The Driver decided we had to call into **Bunnings**, but we did, and further visits to [Plants Whitsunday](#) and [Cedar Creek Falls](#) meant it was well after noon when we pulled into the car park at **IGA** in search of spaghetti for lunch.

I'd opted to walk back by way of the newsagent, the **ATM** and the **Post Office** and, frankly, by the time I hit the servo at the crest of the hill just past the **Cenotaph** I was considering medical attention.

But it's marvellous what an hour's rest can do.

A quiet lie down after a late lunch had me ready to fire, but possibly not entirely on all cylinders, around three-forty-five.

In the interim Madam had taken The Visitors for her own version of the lap through **downtown Bowen**, running into several acquaintances, some of whom she hadn't seen in a while.

That shows, I guess, what happens when you break your regular routine and do something slightly out of the ordinary.

That point was further demonstrated when we set out for an abbreviated version of the regular *show someone from out of town the sights of Bowen* tour.

We'd already been to **Gray's Bay**, **Horseshoe Bay**, the **Front Beach** and **Flagstaff Hill**, so this version was going to involve **Queens Beach**, **Yasso Point** and **Rose Bay** before looping back to spend a bit of time with the Fringed Warbler and Dragon Lady.

Madam, knowing the relatively abbreviated itinerary, was concerned we were going to be early for the **Warbler session**.

Passing **The Actor's bijou duplex** she'd spotted him in the yard and turned back to say Hello.

Then, when we got to **Yasso Point** we ran across Jimbo, Helen and Grandkid Baxter, so a couple of brief conversations ensured it was after five when we pulled up to admire the Warbler camping set up on the back of the bushwhacking vehicle.

A pleasant couple of hours chatting over a drink or three (**Hay Shed Hill Chardonnay** for the elders, fruit juice for Investigative Analytical Girl) and a look at the Warbler's artwork. The regulation nibbles meant we weren't after anything substantial on the way back to base.

In any case, after a hectic few days we were ready for an early night and a rest day on the morrow.

SATURDAY, 3 AUGUST 2013

Saturday, 3 August 2013

In a crowded itinerary rest days are always welcome, though it wasn't all that late when everyone surfaced and Madam rounded up the troops for a little jaunt into **Jochheim's** for a bee sting or three and a sliced white sandwich loaf.

That provided the excuse for Hughesy to add **Vegemite** to The Visitors' dinkum Aussie experiences.

The result was the regulation bewilderment why anyone would bother, followed by befuddlement as Hughesy slathered the toast with a healthy dose of **much-needed Vitamin B**.

I do like a little toast with my Vegemite.

After breakfast, we had a morning of pottering around, followed by a round of dumpling making, which resulted in for a lunch sufficiently substantial to allow us to limit the dinner menu to **homemade pizza**.

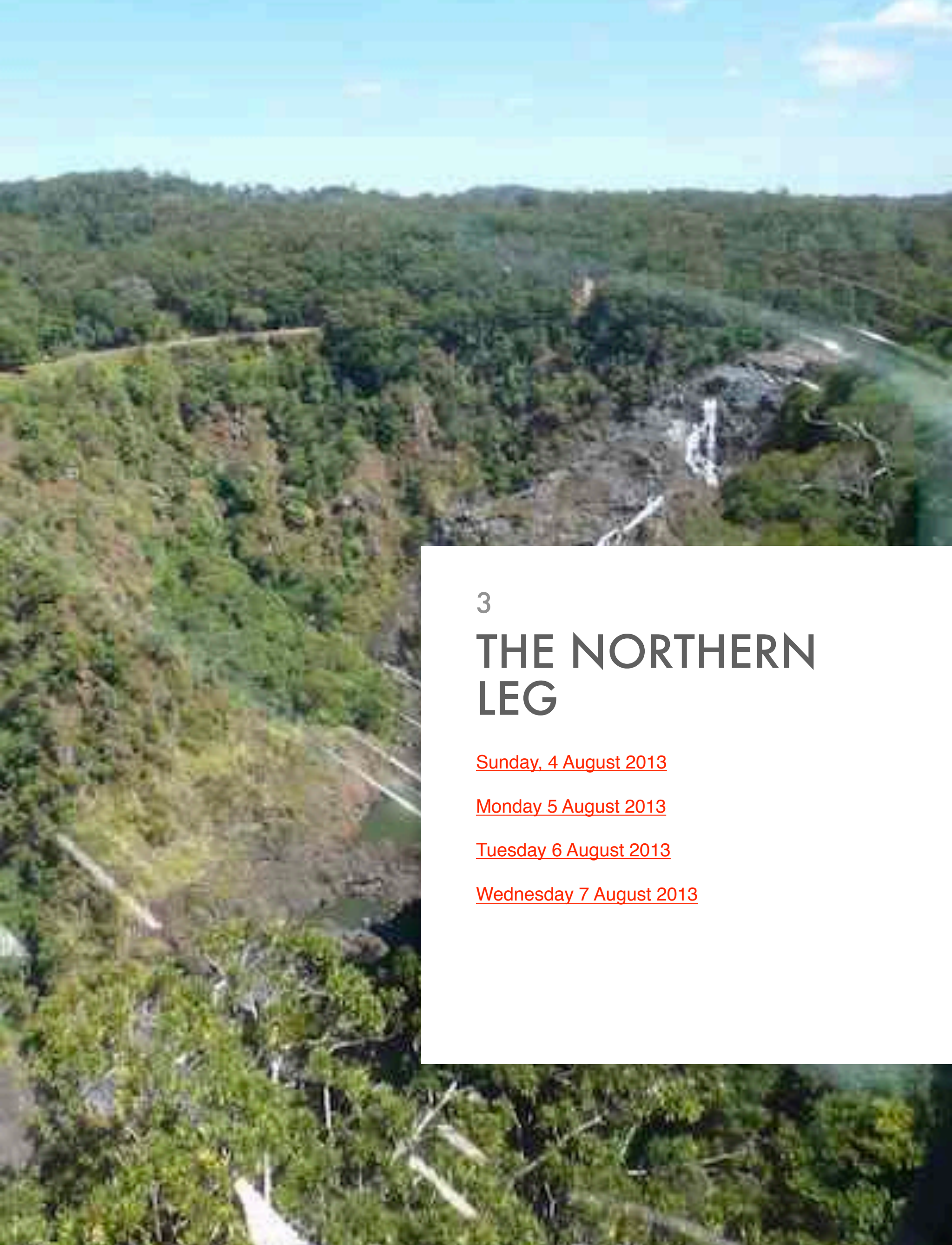
Madam does the pizza dough just right, Hughesy has the toppings almost down pat and the result once again was the regular tasty, but not excessively complicated, treat.

Keep it simple, *passata*, a few anchovies, basil, olives and *mozzarella* and it's difficult to go wrong.

If that sounds immodest I'd point out we fluked the right combination first time around based on definite ideas of what's on and what's not.

Once you've managed that it's just a matter of sticking with the tried and trusted, isn't it?

In any case, with the road trip beckoning it was another early night ready for the next adventure in the morning.



3

THE NORTHERN LEG

[Sunday, 4 August 2013](#)

[Monday 5 August 2013](#)

[Tuesday 6 August 2013](#)

[Wednesday 7 August 2013](#)

SUNDAY, 4 AUGUST 2013

Madam had pencilled in an early start, and while we didn't quite manage what she had in mind we were well on the way by eight, delivering us into **Townsville** by way of the markets at [Ayr's Plantation Creek](#) around ten-thirty.

The game plan here was a look at shopping experiences, with a visit to the [Cotters Market](#) in the old CBD followed by a trip out to [Stockland](#).

Why we'd included the former **Nathan Plaza** (*Nathan Plastic*, as its much smaller early incarnation was known to certain early seventies uni students) was something I couldn't quite fathom, but it did provide Hughesy with the opportunity to riff on the old *'Course, when I come here this was all bush* theme.

That continued as we motored out along **Nathan Street** and headed north, where things, momentarily, went very close to going seriously wrong.

We'd rocked on through [Deeragun](#) and the turnoffs that take you out to the **Northern Beaches**, blown through [Bluewater](#) and debated the advisability of fuelling up at [Rollingstone](#), but rolled past.

That was the result of confusion about the location of the cheap fuel distributor, who may actually have gone out of business a few years ago.

But there was a sign...

Had we stopped there, as I pointed out later, we would have missed the following incident.

There was another possible fuel option at **Bambaroo**, but we were past it before it registered.

There was, as far as any of us can recall, a green car ahead of us as we reached a crest, noticed a motorcyclist who seemed to be falling into our path, swerved, felt the impact of something and car and pulled up a tad further down the road than some might have liked.

That, in my opinion, anyway, turned out handy because once I was out of the vehicle I was able to flag down oncoming traffic.

Given the scene behind me I shuddered to think what might have happened if we'd had someone with an inclination to speed and an impatient nature heading south.

As it turned out the car ended up in a position that gave us a chance to talk to a reassuring southbound traveller.

His comments on the group of riders involved in the accident tended to reinforce the belief that *this wasn't our fault*.

As far as we could make out, one of the bikes had hit the back of a southbound vehicle.

There was, for some reason, a police car already on the scene, and you'd have to assume the green car had sighted the police officer or his vehicle, slowed down. That seemed to have caused the first prang with the leading bike in a group that was, according to our southbound traveller, *travelling too close to the vehicles in front of them*.

One bike seems to have hit the green car, another had swerved to avoid that, and, in the process may have come off.

Someone or something, though we couldn't be entirely sure who or what, had dented the side of our car, starting from the front of the driver's side door and running through to the back panel.

Fortunately, from our point of view, the damage was superficial and the car was drivable.

From the riders' point of view, things were considerably more serious, with two ambulances needed to take three patients to the **Townsville**, rather than the significantly closer **Ingham hospital**.

There was a lengthy delay while we waited for ambulances, followed by the inevitable **Police inquiries** and recording of details but, at least, we were allowed back on our way before the ambulances had cleared the highway, and the regular traffic flow resumed.

It was a subdued outfit that made its way into [Ingham](#), refuelled, heading straight on to [Cardwell](#) for a rendezvous with **crab sangas** and an opportunity for Hughesy to lose his mobile phone, though of course we didn't realise that at the time, did we?

With lunch out of the way and no thought given to mobile phones we did the last leg into [Mission Beach](#).

We pulled up at [Cassawong Cottages](#) with enough time on our hands to have Madam looking at a walk through the rainforest.

Once we'd extricated the baggage from the car we were retracing our tracks as far as the **Licuala day-use area**, where the 1.3 km **Fan Palm walk**, with sections of boardwalk along the way, meanders through fan palm forest still showing the impact of [Cyclone Yasi](#), with fallen trees and sawn-off trunks.

Having done that, it seemed logical to do the significantly shorter (400 metre) **Children's Discovery walk** that follows a trail of 'cassowary footprints' to a 'nest' just before the car park.

With the walk out of the way we took a look around, venturing as far as **Clump Mountain National Park**, just south of [Bingil Bay](#), where we could, have taken another walk, but it was late afternoon.

A return to base by way of the beach at **North Mission** seemed the better option.

Another stop at **Wongaling Beach** to catch the sunset got us back to the cottage around dusk, with Hughesy designated to look after the barbecue when it came to the evening's catering.

I'm not the world's greatest barbeque operator, the steak packs we'd from Dave Matthews at **Angus Butchers** deserved better treatment, but there were no complaints from the consumers.

After an eventful day, with a need to be on the road early the next morning there wasn't much in the way of post-prandial action before the travelling quartet were pushing up Zs in comfortable sleeping quarters.



MONDAY 5 AUGUST 2013

Under normal circumstances, given an early departure, you'd fancy your chances of making the drive from [Mission Beach](#) to the **Skyrail terminal** in **Caravonica** in time for an eleven o'clock booking.

On the other hand the day after a traffic accident hardly qualifies as *normal circumstances*, and making an early departure slips into the *harder than you thought* basket when you have issues with telecommunications.

They weren't big dramas, but through the night I had suspicions that I'd misplaced my mobile.

Once I'd showered I set about conducting a reasonably thorough search of the environs.

When that failed to deliver a result, it was time for the inevitable work around and ask Madam to call me on her mobile.

The silence that followed certainly suggested a lost phone, but a minute or two later an incoming call on Madam's phone revealed mine was sitting behind the counter at the cafe in **Cardwell**.

Fine, we now knew where it was, and we'd be able to collect it on the way home on **Wednesday**.

But it did raise some issues.

Madam had been using her phone to time some *tai chi* related exercises.

When the police officer at the scene of yesterday's accident had asked for a contact number her phone book wasn't working.

No problem. Unlike many people, Hughesy knows his phone number and duly rattled it off.

Now, some eighteen hours later, that contact number was, uncontactable.

The solution was obvious.

Ring Ingham police and give them Madam's number.

That meant we had to access her phone book, which refused to play nicely, so we had to phone a friend to find the number.

These things take time and require explanations, so once we had that sorted and settled we were around the time when we'd planned on hitting the road with one more call that needed to be made.

We hadn't contacted the insurance company.

When you do things like that you're almost invariably embarking on a lengthy process.

I ended up doing the talking after contact had been made, and had great difficulty extricating myself from someone who wanted to sort out all the details of the claim process right there and then.

Since we were just on fifteen minutes late at **Caravonica** Hughesy is wholly convinced a departure at the intended time and a right hand rather than a left hand turn out of **Cassawong Cottages** would have landed us at the **Skyrail terminal** right on schedule.

As it was, we turned left, got held up at roadworks on the corner and again near **Mission Beach School**. That, along with the fuss over Hughesy's mobile was probably the difference.

We'd skipped breakfast because we knew there was a faster option at the bakery at [Mourilyan](#), which has become a regular stopping point when we pass that way, and pies all round made an enjoyable cultural experience for The Visitors.

The drive through the settlements scattered along the highway is almost invariably a pleasant enough excursion, as long as the rain holds off.

We did the 157-kilometre run comfortably, passing through [El Arish](#), skipping past [Silkwood](#), and **Moresby** and pulling up at the bakery at **Mourilyan** ready for a substantial bite to eat.

From **Mourilyan**, we wended our way through [Innisfail](#), heading out towards the [Bellenden Ker Range](#) and [Mount Bartle Frere](#) through [Goondi](#), [Eubenangee](#), [Mirriwinni](#) and [Babinda](#), with Hughesy cursing the fact that the schedule didn't allow for a brief turn off to take a squiz at the **State Hotel**.

Apparently it was the only State enterprise launched by Queensland's Labour Government in 1915 to turn a healthy profit.

It also features the longest bar in the southern hemisphere (or something).

Reports suggest you'll find a decent Chinese feed there as well.

Passing on through **Bellenden Ker** and [Deeral](#), it was increasingly apparent we'd be pushing to get to **Caravonica** on time, and I kept a beady eye on the *Maps* app on the iPad through **Fishery Falls** and on the loop around [Gordonvale](#).

Once you hit [Edmonton](#) you're effectively in [Cairns](#).

It seemed we hit every traffic light (as you do, it's a standard feature of **Murphy's Law**) through [Bentley Park](#), [White Rock](#) and [Earlville](#), with Hughesy's focus split between the iPad and the side of the road, where there'd be a sign advising us of the turn off onto the **Cairns Western Arterial Road**. It was a turn I didn't want to miss.

Off the main highway things flowed rather smoothly through [Manunda](#), **Kanimbla**, **Brinsmead** and **Kamerunga**, with the only slight hiccup when Madam attempted to turn left into [Tjapukai Aboriginal and Cultural Park](#) rather than heading straight on to the [Skyrail Terminal](#) once we'd turned off the **Western Arterial**.

Checking in was painless, so we bade farewell to the driver, who'd be meeting us in [Kuranda](#) and headed for the gondola and the ascent to [Red Peak](#).

Your best bet, assuming you haven't crammed half a dozen folks into the six-seater gondola is to have your back to the ascent for the first bit, which gives you the best views back across the coastal strip.

It might be a case of skimming over the treetops, but there's plenty of time to look downwards over the three stages of the ascent and, in any case once you've crossed the ridge on the last stage into the first rainforest mid-station at [Red Peak](#), the gondola descends through the canopy layers and you're looking back at the forest.

Red Peak Station is the highest point of the cableway, at 545 metres (1788 feet in the old money) above sea level.



A 175 metre rainforest boardwalk represents a perfect opportunity to take a ground-level view of what you've been passing over.

There are regular, complimentary boardwalk tours available through the day. One of them was just ahead of us as we made our way around the boardwalk circuit.

We could, I guess, have paused to listen and continue along the rest of the way, but I figured we were better off skirting around the group and avoiding the queue that would ensue once the group was looking to move on to the [Barron Falls Station](#).

Madam left strict instructions to look out for the distinctive electric blue of the [Ulysses butterfly](#).

That didn't seem of great import to The Niece, until she spotted one, and it wasn't too long before The Sister was in on the butterfly spotting act.

As is almost invariably the case in such circumstances, Hughesy's side of the gondola seemed totally butterfly free.

I consoled myself with the thought of crocodile spotting a little further on and enjoyed the treetop view.

Red Peak is all about the rainforest itself.

While that's also a significant element at the second stop at **Barron Falls** the focus is on the **Gorge** carved by the river.

You get spectacular views of the chasm on the run into the [Barron Falls Station](#).

Once you've alighted you might as well take a stroll around the walkways and lookouts, particularly if you're not taking the train back to **Cairns**.

You can't see the **Falls** from the highway, and while they're not as spectacular as they could be if the river wasn't dammed they're still reasonably impressive.

They would be quite a sight in the middle of a good wet season, but the middle of a good wet would bring its own issues with precipitation and visibility.

The **Barron Falls** stop features detail about the **hydroelectric scheme** that dates back to **1935**, when the Governor of Queensland opened Queensland's first underground hydroelectric power station.

A project of this type had been mooted as early as **1906**, though there were the predictable issues with access to the site, what with the gorge, its precipitous cliffs, the wet season's torrential rain, and the floods that would inevitably ensue from the runoff from Queensland's wettest section of coastline.





The [Barron](#)'s not the only river that carries the runoff, but it's the only one draining the northern part of the [Atherton Tablelands](#) that flows to the **Coral Sea**.

Materials and machinery used in the construction of the project came up the railway line, which had been operating since **1891**.

The line got things as far as a rail siding, but with the construction happening on the other side of the river everything needed to be transferred over the falls by **flying fox** and lowered by **tramway** to the worksite.

There are examples of both beside the walkway back from the three lookouts above the **Falls**.

The original power plant was dismantled and decommissioned in **1959** with a new power station further downstream coming onto the grid in **1963**.

Once we'd taken in the views of the **Gorge** and the **Falls** we headed to the **Rainforest Interpretation Centre**, developed in conjunction with CSIRO and worth a look as a visual and interactive explanation of what you've been looking at from above.

There's also a **Djabugay Aboriginal Guided Tour** which takes about forty minutes and gives the visitor an idea of the local rainforest people's history, language, culture and traditions. We didn't opt for this one this time around, but, on a future visit I'm definitely planning to.



From the **Falls** it's 1.7 kilometres to [Kuranda Terminal](#), a ten-minute hop that produced sightings of crocodiles sunning themselves on the river banks last time around.

I was looking forward to a repeat here, but the water stretched from side to side of the bed, and the pebbly beaches I'd seen last time looked to be under a fair depth of water.

So no basking lizards to wind up the experience, but the average visitor won't be complaining.

On the ground in [Kuranda](#) we took a mosey around the tourist traps, something I wasn't particularly looking forward to, but understood why it had to be done.

Having missed the shopping gene in the DNA and coming from a culture that doesn't have a tradition of gift-giving beyond Christmas and birthdays and such, I could probably have suggested they drop me off at the pub and collect me when they'd done the shopping bit.

Discretion is the better part of valour and I trudged along without (I hope) offering too many signs of impatience or outright boredom.

Once the circuit was complete it was a case of back to the car for the twisting and turning descent that delivered us back to **Caravonica** and a run into **Cairns** along the **Captain Cook Highway**.

After we hit the **Esplanade** a brief spell of semi-confusion ensued before we pulled up at the entrance to [Aquarius](#). The keys to Apartment 44 were tucked away in a safe that required a security code in a check-in process utterly devoid of human contact.

We looped around the block twice (we missed the entrance to the car park first time around) and made our way up to the seventh floor, where the view was close to jaw-dropping, as long as you avoided looking at the low tide mud flats fronting **The Esplanade**.

Look towards the horizon, however, or confine the downward gazes to high tide, and the view, with the rainforests on **Cape Grafton** over on the right running right down to the water, was magnificent, promising plenty of visual interest around sunrise.

Aquarius, we'd noted on the way in, was also right next door to our regular Italian restaurant stop ([Villa Romana](#)). Which is where we found ourselves a couple of hours later, tucking into a selection of **Pasta Scoglio**, featuring a variety of fish and shellfish and a fairly hearty meal for two, along with one of the daily pasta specials based around crayfish (Hughesy's selection).

The **seafood risotto** which The Niece had fancied that turned out to be the pick of the three dishes.

That's a huge wrap, because Madam and I rate the **Scoglio** very highly indeed.

Anyway, with glasses of **Pinot Grigio** and **Vermentino** to wash the meal down, it was a quartet of close to sated diners who wandered away from **Villa Romana**.

Close to sated was the critical descriptor here, since there were two highly rated gelato operations nearby.

Devine Gelato, ranked #1 on the [tripadvisor ratings](#) for **Cairns** restaurants, was just across the road and down the street, but we ended up going for the Swiss franchise option at **Movenpick**, which was excellent, so it wasn't as if Hughesy was complaining.

After all that and a post-prandial glass of red back upstairs Hughesy didn't need any rocking come bedtime. Predictably, neither did anyone else.

TUESDAY, 6 AUGUST 2013

Pencilling in the day by day details for this excursion we figured we'd covered the basics.

We'd done the *small town Australia* bit (which explains why we live where we live), hit the *Reef and the Rainforest*, the basic draw for overseas tourists visiting our part of the world, and delivered a glimpse of regional city life.

Good food and wine along the way, some interesting people...

So what do we do for the last full day?

We'd left it relatively free, with two basic options and possibilities pencilled in that could be explored should the inclination take us.

The basic options, predictably, covered **the Reef**, which is a closer in along the **Cairns-Port Douglas coast**. You could, should the mood take you, venture out to the **Outer Reef** or visit somewhere closer in for snorkelling and glass-bottomed boat action.

The Sister, however, wasn't keen on the snorkelling side of things, having *been there and done that* on Thursday.

Once, it seemed, was enough for this trip, and The Niece can always come back with friends around her age should she want to do something involving a lengthy spell in the water.

We also reckoned if the desire to get up close and personal with the coral wasn't there we could switch it for the panoramic view with what looked to be a reasonably priced flight over [Green Island](#) and **the Outer Reef**.

That would take a bit under an hour, and would probably be spectacular, weather and cloud cover permitting.

I don't know how keen Madam was about the flight, but having flown back and forth from [Palm Island](#) through the 1973 school year (at least once a month) I was looking forward to it.

Light aircraft fly a lot lower than commercial jets, and you can see more detail of what's below when you're flying in one.

Sightings of **turtles and dugong** were relatively commonplace back then, and I reckoned you'd get a better perspective on the sheer magnitude of the system from the air.

The operator we'd found was [Daintree Air Services](#), the cost was a reasonable **\$160/head**, and at least one of us was keen.

One suspects a certain degree of trepidation among the other three, but I was actively looking forward to it.

We'd been relatively late booking the flight due to a **Saturday afternoon nap** that ran a bit longer than expected. We booked directly ([here](#)) and, what with it being a **Saturday night** with the office closed and all, hadn't received confirmation everything was under control when we left on **Sunday morning**.

That was fine.

I had the phone number in my mobile, contact details on the **iPad** and we'd have access to **WiFi en route**, so if anything failed to come through we'd be able to chase it up.

Of course, the mobile was sitting in a cafe in Cardwell but when we logged on to **WiFi** at **Cassawong** there was an email saying they'd pick us up from the **Aquarius** at **ten-thirty** on **Tuesday morning**.

From there, if the inclination took us, we could always head out for a bit of rainforest action and a drive up to [Mossman](#) and [Port Douglas](#), but there was also the shopping bit that needed to be slotted in, so I didn't like our chances.

Not that I was objecting, of course.

These things come down to The Driver, and if everyone else was out looking for gifts to carry home Hughesy would be able to sit on the balcony at the **Aquarius** and enjoy the view.

That was fine with me, since I figured I'd be several days behind with *Travelogue* details and it'd be a good chance to (partially) catch up.

A glance at the environs as we pulled into the **Aquarius** the previous afternoon had me pencilling in breakfast downstairs before the ten-thirty pickup.

That idea got shot down in flames when Madam announced there were a couple of decent bakeries in the *not quite immediate vicinity* and that was where we'd be heading in search of breakfast.

I'd been thinking more along the lines of **Eggs Benedict**, but there you go.

Or, rather, there you don't.

Anyway, I reckoned I needed the exercise, so we hoofed it over to **Grafton Street** and picked up enough pastry to do us for (at least) the next two mornings.

We called into the supermarket on the way back to pick up some odds and ends and it was comfortably after nine when we settled down for breakfast.

I'd been up much earlier, and noted, again, despite quality accommodation, the coffee on offer was the *tasteless International Bloody Roast*. I had visions of picking up a smallish jar of something more interesting when we were at the supermarket.

I'd been left to guard the bread while Madam and The Sister did the shopping, and was informed, once they'd finished, that coffee was too expensive at around \$9 and we'd be wasting money if I bought some...

So I'd diverted to a coffee shop near the **Aquarius** and paid \$5 for a takeaway...

But I digress.

By the time breakfast had been demolished and showers *et cetera* taken it was almost bang on time to head down to the front of the premises for the ten-thirty pickup, which came in the form of the obligatory coaster bus, with an older bloke already on board along with the driver.

That delivered us to the **Daintree Air Services** doorstep, over in the **General Aviation** section that runs along the **Captain Cook Highway**, where we found a Scot and his Asian lady friend waiting for the flight, and a German couple with a toddler looking to see if there was room for them on the nine-seater.

As it turned out, there was, though a bit of calculation of weights *et cetera* was needed before they became definites.

Once we'd made our way across the scales and figures had been tallied and totals totted, we had the on-ground equivalent of those in-flight safety warnings you get on commercial airlines, delivered by the hospitality staff who are totally aware the majority of the people they're supposedly addressing have tuned out.

It's a bit harder to tune out when you know you're going up in a light plane, you're standing rather than sitting, and the person delivering the briefing is able to establish eye contact.

With the preliminaries out of the way we were ushered through the security fence onto the tarmac, where seats were allocated by weight distribution rather than personal preference.

On a minor note of slight discontent I noted the aircraft we were boarding had wings attached to the bottom, rather than the upper part, of the fuselage, which you might expect to get in the way of the scenic sight-seeing.

Once aboard we taxied out, shuffling our way into the schedule on the single runway operating in the airport that is, according to one source, **the seventh busiest in the country**.

No wonder we had to wait...

Predictably, given **southeasterlies** that weren't operating at their regular strength but were definitely noticeable, we took off to the south, looping over **Trinity Inlet** as we headed out to sea past [Cape Grafton](#) and the Aboriginal community at [Yarrabah](#).

It was only a matter of minutes before we'd covered twenty-seven kilometres from [Cairns](#) and were performing a figure of eight over the top of [Green Island](#).

From the air, it was apparent just how small this coral cay is.

According to **local Indigenous tradition** it's about a quarter of its former size.

There's an extensive spread of shallow reef on the southward side of the cay.

After we completed the figure eight we headed east over **Arlington Reef** and [Michaelmas Cay](#) on the way out to a sweep along the outer extremity of the reef system on the edge of the continental shelf before heading back to the mainland.

It was after twelve by the time we'd landed and disembarked, and the courtesy bus deposited us at the **Aquarius** shortly after that, in time for a brisk walk over to **The Pier**, where Madam had intentions of fine lunching at **M Yogo**.

While the walk wasn't totally necessary as far as the appetite was concerned it did take us past the swimming pool on **The Esplanade**, where the number of people enjoying the facility provided a stark contrast with the interior of **The Pier**, where the lights seemed to be dimmed and the pedestrian traffic was almost nonexistent.

A glance at the [M Yogo website](#) says bookings are recommended, but based on what we saw at one o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon if you lob on the doorstep you'd have no problem getting a seat.

The lack of a crowd, Hughesy hypothesises, had nothing to do with the quality of **French-influenced food** which has a strong **Japanese fusion influence** blended in.

Madam and I hit the **Sautéed Market Fish** (Barramundi) from the lunch menu, very reasonably priced at \$16.90 and excellent eating. The view out across the marina towards the rainforest clad slopes of **Cape Grafton** is rather pleasant as well.

Based on lunch I'll definitely be looking forward to a return visit to have a go at the dinner menu.

In any case, with lunch out of the way we wandered back through the almost deserted **Pier** before I peeled off to head back to the **Aquarius** while the Japanese trio set off on the shopping trail.

An hour or two of tapping out the *Travelogue* and a power nap took things to the point where we needed to start thinking about dinner, and it didn't take that long to reach a consensus.

[Bayleaf Balinese Restaurant](#) came highly rated, and had featured in the **Wine List of the Year** booklet that arrived attached to the latest issue of *Gourmet Traveller Wine*, so as far as I was concerned it was a no-brainer.

There were some concerns about the spice levels (Madam and The Niece being chilli-averse), but The Sister was keen on the *nasi goreng*, and that decided it.

We'd sighted the place from the shuttle bus on the way back from the airport, which became an issue when I spotted another landmark that also caught my eye on the return journey.

That resulted in a lengthier walk than was strictly necessary.

Still, it helped work up an appetite, didn't it?

Predictably, *nasi goreng* got a guernsey in the order, as did a *sate lilit* appetiser, the *kambing mekuah* (Balinese lamb stew, Hughesy's choice) and marinated grilled fish of the day in banana leaf, *pesan be pasih*, which turned out to be a very tasty mangrove jack.

The wine list revealed some interesting options, plenty by the glass, and a distinct lack of the usual wine list suspects.

I was tempted to have a go at a couple of by the glass options after a **Tamar Ridge Gewürztraminer**, a **Kalleske Rose** and an **Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc** caught my eye, but when Madam suggested we opt for a bottle rather than the by the glass option there was really only one candidate.

I would have been quite happy with a glass of **Mitchell Clare Valley Riesling**, but when you're sharing the bottle you're going to get more than the one glass, aren't you?

At **\$35** for a **Halliday 94 pointer** you can't go far wrong and the lime and coriander notes in the nose and across the palate went down a treat with the food.

I could easily have gone another bottle...

We wandered back by a more direct route, and the rest of the party suggested a *gelato* from the place we hadn't favoured the night before.

Predictably, since that it was Hughesy's first choice and I'd been outvoted, it isn't open on Tuesdays, so there went the opportunity for a dash of *I told you so*.

WEDNESDAY 7 AUGUST 2013

With the tourist bit done and dusted and the gift purchases duly accounted for there wasn't a great deal to do apart from deliver The Visitors to the **International Terminal** at **Cairns Airport**.

Bags had been packed, breakfast consumed and we were ready to roll around eight-thirty.

That might be seen as a tad early when you're looking at a twelve-twenty departure, but Hughesy's point of view on these matters tends to involve getting there early, checking in and sitting down and waiting.

After all, once you've arrived on the premises there isn't a great deal that can go wrong.

Once you're checked in it's their responsibility to make sure things go as planned. They're probably not going to be able to deny you the chance to fly once you've got that boarding pass in your clammy claw.

It's not as if you've arrived too late...

Madam tends to work on the other version of things, preferring not to arrive too early and keeping the time in the terminal to a minimum, which explains why we turned off into a car park at the northern end of **The Esplanade** once we'd loaded the car and checked out of the **Aquarius**.

It wasn't as if I was objecting, because the view, having moved along past the point where low tide mudflat turned into sandy beach, wasn't too bad, the sun was shining and overall conditions allowed Hughesy to rhapsodise on the joys of *winter in the North*.

It also meant, however, once we'd climbed back into the chariot and made our way to the **Airport** there was a lengthy queue at the **Jetstar check-in counter**.

I'd been delegated the task of accompanying The Visitors that far while Madam parked the car.

By the time she joined us it was fairly obvious the immediate itinerary would involve much standing around and waiting.

Under Hughesy's preferred scenario you get there early, check in as soon as possible and then take yourself to the relevant departure lounge and settle back to read (or whatever) until boarding time.

Had we got there half an hour earlier, one surmises the check-in would have been negotiated fairly rapidly and from there it would have been a case of walking The Visitors to the foot of the steps that take you up to **Departures** and then heading back to the car park.

With the prospect of a half hour wait while The Sister and The Niece made their way through the check-in queue it seemed we'd be bidding them farewell sooner rather than later and hitting the road ourselves.

After all, we had a good six and a half hours on the road along with breaks and other interruptions and Mickey's big hand was heading towards the twelve with the other one nudging the ten.

Back on the road we headed back to the bottom of the **CBD** and headed out through [Portsmith](#), avoiding the traffic lights on **Mulgrave Road**, and getting us out of **Cairns** with a minimum of fuss.

Once we'd hit the highway there wasn't a great deal to note as we headed out past **Fishery Falls** and [Mirriwinni](#). One of these days I'll manage to persuade someone to turn off into [Babinda](#), but this wasn't an occasion to suggest a detour.

We broke the journey at a fruit stall on the southern outskirts of [Innisfail](#), and again at the turnoff to [Silkwood](#) where a **Portsmith Fuels** outlet provided the chance to refuel.

There was another fruit stall thereabouts, so I guess we could have saved the earlier stop, but there you go.

Or not, as the case may be.

Refuelling there removed that issue from the equation, along with do we stop in [Tully](#) or continue on to [Cardwell](#) (fuel permitting)?

A stop in Cardwell was mandatory, given a need to reunite Hughesy with his mobile.

We'll be stopping at the Vivia Cafe whenever we're passing from here on.

Actually, we'd probably have been stopping there anyway, but the proprietor's consideration on the matter of lost phones tipped things over into *mandatory*.

In any case, every time we've stopped there for a meal the food has been good, and *when you're on a good thing...*

Roadworks over the **Cardwell Range** seem almost complete, though there's still something going on in what looks like the scenic lookout department.

That meant we sailed up and over the range without any hassles whatsoever, and once we'd made our way through **Ingham** the next section passed in a subdued manner as minds were cast back to events a few days before.

There were a couple of instances of *Is this the place? No, don't think so* before we hit what I'm sure was the right location, and while we didn't slow down to take a detailed look what I saw as we whizzed past was enough to suggest the place was ideally suited to a fixed point police monitoring position for traffic travelling southwards.

From there on the mood lightened considerably as we passed through **Rollingstone** without locating the cheap fuel place we'd missed on the way up.

There seemed to be evidence to support a hypothesis that the operation wasn't in business any more.

Out of the **wet tropics**, we ran on through **Bluewater** and **Yabulu**, skipping the opportunity to use **the ring road** because we had an appointment with a large bag of cat tucker.

Having looked after cat catering issues we were back on the way out of **Townsville** just after three-fifteen, and things continued without undue excitement as we turned off at **Sandy Corner**, looped through the back blocks and rejoined the highway south of [Ayr](#).

We were, if anything, about a quarter of an hour behind where we'd been a nine days earlier with two semi-somnolent passengers in the back seat, but there were no side excursions to photograph the sunset this time around.

As a result, we were pulling into the driveway and opening the gates at about the same time as we'd done the same thing towards the end of **Day One**.

Which, as far as Hughesy's concerned, delivers an elegant bit of symmetry to proceedings.