

5 weeks, 5800nm and 1200 litres of fuel (Outback Safari and CAGIT) – by Kev Young LTVA

Back in May 2010 a friend of mine, Pete Sealie suggested we look at doing an outback safari in 2011. Over the next 4 months we put together a rough plan of where we would like to go. The one place we needed to go to was Bundaberg so that Pete could carry out the 1000 hour overhaul of his Jabiru SP.

By Christmas 2010 we had a good working flight plan in place. We would head to Bundy for a week, then head west to Mt Isa, work our way north to Kakadu and Darwin, then west to Kununurra before returning home down the centre via Alice Springs and the Flinders Ranges.

Departure day was set at July 29th, annual leave was booked, and accommodation was investigated. Finally the day of departure arrived. One other aircraft had arranged to join us on the trip to Bundy. The crew for the trip was Kev Young (me) and Penny Morrison-McGill in a J170 (5336), Pete and his partner Linden in a Jab SP4 (4214) and Sonny Webb and his Wife Debbie in a J230 (5560).

Our course from Latrobe Valley was one we had flown many times, from Latrobe Valley west to Lilydale then North over Eildon Weir to Corowa for a rest stop and onto Narromine for the first night. As expected there were no real issues on this leg of the trip and we set off the next morning for Moree.

A few weeks before the trip I found out that the Come And Get It Trophy (CAGIT) had moved to Gympie. I contacted Deb Wagner and made arrangements to relieve her of the trophy on our way to Bundy. From Moree Penny and I headed for Gympie as the others went to Bundy via Chinchilla. Arriving at Gympie we found Deb and her husband Ian waiting for us, unfortunately it was getting late so we could not stay too long to chat. Penny and I said farewell to Deb and Ian and headed off for Bundy where we touched down about 10 minutes before last light.

On the trip up from Latrobe Valley I had become concerned about the oil pressure and oil usage and had decided to speak to the engine Guru's at the Jabiru factory. Early Monday morning I called into the engine department at Jabiru and explained my dilemma, within the hour my engine was being pulled apart and it was discovered that three of the piston barrels had been over heated and were distorted. Over the next day and a half the engine was stripped and rebuilt. When it came time for the test flight I was pleased that the engine performed better than new.



One sick jab

We spent the rest of the week in Bundaberg looking around the local area and flying out along the Eastern side of Fraser Island.

On Saturday 6th August we loaded up the SP4 and the J170 and set off for a few days in Longreach. Sonny and Debbie left us and headed home via Lightning Ridge and Echuca.

Our course out of Bundy took us out over the town of Monto and then direct to Emerald. As we approached Blackwater we encountered a bit of low cloud and fog so decided to head North until we struck the power line running beside the Capricorn Highway then we followed the road and power line into Blackwater and onto Emerald. We stopped at Emerald for a break and a refuel before heading off to Longreach. We landed at Longreach and took the obligatory pics of our aircraft in front of the static 747.

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After the photo ops, we rang Rodd at the Abajaz motel and arranged for a lift into town and our accommodation for the next few nights. Being a jolly good bloke Rodd even took us on a “refreshment” run to the local drive through.

Over the next day and a half we toured through the QANTAS museum and the Stockman’s Hall of Fame. Monday morning arrived and we were taken back to the airport by Rodd. Penny caught the RPT back to Melbourne and work while Pete, Linden and I carried on for our next destination, Mt Isa.



Longreach

From Longreach we tracked to Winton to Cloncurry for a fuel stop then on to Mt Isa. Arriving at Mt Isa, we slotted in between a RFDS flight and an incoming Cessna and then tied down for another two day stopover. We were lucky to have found accommodation in Mt Isa as the town was gearing up for the annual rodeo. While in Mt Isa we looked around the Mt Isa tourist centre and the Riversleigh Fossil centre. Then we made our way to the Mt Isa underground Hospital. The Hospital was constructed during World War 2 just after the bombing of Darwin but was apparently never put into service.



Underground Hospital



Departing Mt Isa

Heading West from Mt Isa we headed for our next overnight stop at Tennant Creek. On this leg we found ourselves flying through a deep layer of smoke from bushfires somewhere in the area. Attempting to get above the smoke we climbed to 8500ft only to find the ceiling for the smoke was well above our approved flight level. Form the next two hours we tolerated the smoke and headed for a lunch break and rest stop at Barkly Roadhouse.

The Roadhouse was a surprising stop off, firstly because we encountered a couple of Brahman cattle resting just off of the threshold of the runway and secondly the accommodation and facilities were nothing like we expected to find. We made a mental note to include this as an overnight stop next time we came this way. From Barkly Roadhouse we again headed west into Tennant Creek. Unfortunately this stop was not one of our more memorable stays. All I can say is the tales we had heard about the town were not far from the mark.

From Tennant Creek our plan was to head North to Daly Waters and on to Katherine. We had hoped to have a break at Daly Waters but on arriving overhead we found the strip to be practically unusable. It was decided to push on to Mataranka as a possible rest spot.

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Daly Waters, Airstrip is at top centre.

At Mataranka we found we were only about 50nm from Katherine so we chose to push on and make an early day of it. This would be my first visit to Katherine so I was not prepared for the length of the runway. I landed short on the runway and was then faced with and almost 3km taxi to the civilian aircraft tie down area.

One of the things we had planned to do during our stay in Katherine was to take the Katherine Gorge tour. We arranged for an afternoon trip up the three gorges, the whole trip was filled with fantastic rock formations and colours. The water was clear and fresh and we managed to spot several species of fish swimming close to the banks and not too many freshwater crocs. Our two aboriginal guides provided us with an informative narration over the 3 hours. I was surprised to find a small waterhole with populated with what appeared to be frogs; I found out shortly after that they were cane toads.



Katherine Gorge

From Katherine our plan was to fly out over the Katherine Gorge into Kakadu. We departed early in the morning intending to avoid the tourist helicopters in the gorge. After flying over the gorge for about 40nm we tracked for Coinda before heading for the Ranger Uranium airfield at Jabiru.

We managed to talk the local tour operators at Jabiru into giving us a lift into the caravan park in town then we hired a car and started to look around the park. We drove out to the Ubirr reserve and took in the local rock paintings and hiked up to the lookout where portions of Crocodile Dundee were filmed.



Ubirr Lookout

The next day our plan was to fly to Coinda and do the Yellow Waters tour, instead we chose to drive and take in some more of the areas wonderful scenery. We arrived at Coinda around lunchtime and relaxed around the resort bar waiting for the afternoon tour.

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One of the locals



Sunset over Yellow Waters

After two days in Kakadu we set out for a week's stopover in Darwin. Departing Jabiru we tracked out to the north and over flew the Ubirr area just to see what it looked like from up here. Then we headed West over the West Alligator river and Leitchfield national park into Emmkaytee airstrip.



Ubirr from the air



West Alligator River

When I arrived at Emkaytee, I found that the strip co-ordinates I had programmed into the GPS were out. I had used the figures from the AOPA airfield directory which were two degrees out. With some assistance from Pete I managed to overcome my "geographic embarrassment". Emkaytee is a fair distance from Darwin and our accommodation. We had to take a \$34.00 taxi fare into our caravan park, then another \$60.00 fare into Darwin to pick up a hire car. There is no regular public transport service out to some of the suburbs of Darwin.

Darwin was a very slow capital city, nothing like I was used to in other capital cities. We walked nearly everywhere we wanted to go, the waterfront and the oil storage tunnels, Mindle Market, and the Casino. After a few days in Darwin we decided that the next time we visited this area, it would be easier to fly into Jabiru then hire a car for a week and drive into Darwin.

After our week in Darwin, we set off for Kununurra in WA. This track took us out over Daly River Station and onto the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf.

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Bonaparte Gulf



Finals for Kununurra

Kununurra was a pleasant town to visit, situated on the shore of Lake Kununurra below the huge Lake Argyle. One of the activities we undertook here was the Lake Argyle/Ord River tour. This was a 4 hour tour starting with a bus ride from town to the Durack homestead below the lake, then onto the Lake wall and a boat ride back down the river arriving back in Lake Kununurra just on sunset. Again the colours and the formations of the rocks were spectacular to see. And the amount of water in the lake and flowing down the river were hard to imagine.



Lake Argyle



Cliffs on the Ord River

We departed Kununurra early in the morning and headed off to Katherine for the night. Our outbound route was up over the Ord river to the dam wall of Lake Argyle, then tracking East to pick up the Victoria Highway and the VFR route into Tindal. After Katherine we headed back to Tennant Creek for the night and then on to Alice Springs for two more nights. Due to airspace restrictions we landed at Bond Springs where we were met by Ken Watts a local helicopter pilot and RAA instructor who assisted us with refuelling and then gave us a lift into town.

Looking around Alice Springs we took in the old Telegraph station and Anzac Hill. We also stopped off at the Conellan Airways air museum which we were told was the original airfield in Alice Springs. One of the interesting exhibits was a Wakett trainer that was found in the middle of SA three years after it was reported missing on a flight from Melbourne to Perth in 1963.



Alice Springs

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Leaving Alice Springs we headed out along the southern side of the West McDonnell Ranges to the Finke River then followed the river south to Hermannsburg before tracking to Curtin Station. For us Curtin Station was a great find. Only 50nm east of Ayres Rock we had great accommodation and meals at a fraction of what we would have paid at the Yallara complex. We had planned to spend two nights at Curtin Springs and on the second day take a trip around Ayres Rock and the Olgas. After flying around these two attractions, we landed at Ayres Rock airport and filled both aircraft. We were informed that \$55.00 landing fee would be waived providing we could depart within the hour.



Ayres Rock



Olga's

After spending a second pleasant night at Curtin Springs, we set out early for our next overnight stop at Cadney Roadhouse in South Australia. Again we were surprised by the quality of accommodation provided at the roadhouse also it was great to be a short walk from where we had tied down to the café and bar in the roadhouse.

We departed Cadney the next morning for William Creek, Lake Eyre and Maree. From Maree we headed off to Rawnsley Park in the Flinders Ranges for the next two nights. While Rawnsley we hiked up to the top of Rawnsley Bluff and took in the view down Wilpena Pound.



Rawnsley Bluff



Wilpena Pound

From Rawnsley we set off for Broken Hill and then on to Mildura for the night then for our last night out we headed off to Milawa and the airstrip at Brown Brothers winery. Here we spent a pleasant night with our friends Jennie and Sam who run the Cottonwoods B&B in Milawa.

Our final day was wet and miserable, what else would you expect for Victoria. Departing the Milawa strip we headed out over Eildon Weir and the Yarra Valley. Turning overhead Lilydale we headed east to the Latrobe Valley. Despite the wet weather we managed to pick up a 35kt tail wind making the trip home very quick.

Our trip took 5 weeks and we travelled 5800nm. I used 1200 litres of fuel and managed an average ground speed of 82kts. Thanks for reading: Kev Young - Sept 2011