

## Queensland Adventure – a holiday that didn't go to plan.

I've been to Fraser Island many times over the past dozen years, mainly with mates, chasing the Tailor in August or September, but my wife Yvonne has only spent a miserly two days there. It was on a road trip from Cairns in 1998, after we picked up a niece visiting from the UK. So I planned this trip to convince my wife that life in a camper trailer is pretty good, and that holidays on Fraser Island are not (completely) dependent upon fishing and beer. Let's see what happened.

It's Sunday evening 18<sup>th</sup> June and we are camped on the ocean beach at Fraser Island; paradise I hear you say, but actually we are hoping that our camper trailer will still be standing at day break. Yes, Fraser Island is a lady of many moods and we are experiencing one of her darker moments – teeming rain and howling, almost gale force winds, ripping straight up the beach. For me it doesn't really matter, I'll take it any way it comes, but when I'm trying to give Yvonne the holiday of a lifetime to convince her that our camper trailer is where she really wants to be, it doesn't help.



But let's go back to the beginning, which is always a good place to start. We left our home near The Oaks in NSW, on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June and drove to Laurieton on the NSW north coast for an overnight stop with relatives. We had showers of rain on way, which was unfortunately a sign of things to come. Leaving Laurieton early next morning we then completed a long drive to the Glass House Mountains in Queensland.

Yvonne rugged up as we set off for the trip.

I had booked a powered site for the camper at a park on the tourist drive road, not far from Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo. I had stayed there once before, but, whether it's memory loss or too many wines on that previous occasion, I didn't recall it as being particularly noisy. However, Yvonne and I (and most of the other visitors) could not believe the amount of truck and train noise, ALL NIGHT, that kept us awake and wondering what on earth was going on.



Yvonne at our Glass House Mountains camp site.

We had booked for five nights, so next morning, not happy, bleary eyed and weary, we empathised and had a good whinge session with our neighbours about trains and air horns.

Happily though the human body is very adaptable. The second night was not so bad. By the third we were even sleeping and during our last two days there we wondered what all the 'noise' fuss was about, while we focused more on if it would ever stop raining!

Our journey north to warmer climes was supposed to include nothing but blue skies and sunshine, but somehow this part of the order form must have been missed by the big travel agent in the sky. Whilst we had some 'lovely moments', much of every day was rainy, overcast and not the best holiday weather. Matter of fact it rained so hard that a few drips squeezed their way inside the camper, mainly in the awning where it 'zippers' to the camper, but also, unfortunately, near the head of our bed area which made the corners of two pillows wet.

I tried to convince Yvonne that I must have sweated during the muggy Queensland night, but she didn't buy that, so, donning a very concerned look, I inspected the canvas at great length whilst predicting that it couldn't possibly rain for much longer. Wrong.



Determined to enjoy ourselves anyway, we saw what we could of the very scenic Glass House Mountains, visited the "Crocodile Man", Steve Irwin at the Australia Zoo, which was really good, had an enjoyable drive to the pretty towns of Maleny and Kenilworth where we bought locally produced cheese and found cappuccinos that made your hair stand on end – great.

**At the spectacular Mary Cairncross lookout.**

**Gordon & Yvonne with a slithery friend at Australia Zoo**



We broke camp in the Glass House Mountains in sunshine – I was convinced all would now be well. Wrong again.

Next stop was Inskip Point, via Gympie then Rainbow Beach. We found a great camp site under the Casuarina trees atop the beach, only trouble was – it was raining again! By now I'm getting concerned. Here I am trying to impress Yvonne and convince her that the camper trailer and travelling around Australia is the answer to all our dreams, but so far I've failed miserably. We were due to spend five days here – please let the sun shine!



**The evening clears after a rainy start to our camp at Inskip Point**

Finally the big fella in the sky read his 'thought – mails' and on our last two days at Inskip Point, turned on the most magnificent weather – clear blue skies, 23 deg and lovely sunshine, just the way Queensland is supposed to be in the winter time.



**Yvonne decides she likes fishing**



We had a ball. Sat in the sun, soaked up the warmth and went fishing. This was great, because fishing was not something high on Yvonne's wish list of things to do.

I couldn't believe how well Von was able to take to it. In a couple of hours she was having fun, casting about 30 metres and baiting her own hook. More than that, she was catching fish and out-fishing me to boot!

Her catch included crabs, even two at a time on one occasion, puffer fish, a small tailor, some whiting and three 'painted grinders', the latter, together with my three, were smoked for last night's meal.



**Sunset at Inskip Point after a perfect day**

These were two great days we will remember. Not only for the fishing, but for the bush turkeys that ransacked our camp site devouring chocolates, bread & biscuits then spreading sugar, tea bags and anything else they could get to, all over the beach around our camp. After the initial shock of thinking 'someone' had done us over, we had a good laugh at the 'turkey attack' as we more securely stowed our food.

So that brings us back to now. We caught the barge to Fraser Island around 8am yesterday morning after an early get up and get packed up session. All was looking good, mainly – blue skies, sunshine. We travelled up the beach around 70kms and found a camp site within a reasonable distance of a fresh water creek near Koorooman sand blow, relatively flat and with good views of the ocean. Agreeing on this 'idyllic' spot we proceeded to set up camp.



**On the Manta Ray and on our way to Fraser Island**



**Wild and windy camp site on the ocean beach**

As we did so, the wind arrived, tearing straight up the beach like a lunatic let loose and, I am aggrieved to say, it hasn't let up since.

The setting up of camp was interesting to say the least. I was desperately hanging on to the canvas awning that would have preferred to go sailing over up the beach and dunes towards Indonesia and yelling all sorts of nasty things towards Yvonne, who was trying her

best to get sand pegs hammered into the ground and guy ropes hooked up to secure things, whilst I played around on the end of the awning.

Fortunately Yvonne is very forgiving. Apparently it's a 'man thing'. We yell at the nearest person when what we are responsible for doesn't go well. Good job women know about men. Thank you dear.

That was yesterday morning – and nothing has changed. The rain quickly followed the wind and it too has stayed, with only brief interludes of tantalising sun and blue sky. We ventured up the beach for a short time today and out of desperation I even tried to fish for a while, but soon gave up – at least I got the waders wet.



**Trying to fish in a gale wasn't easy and wasn't a success**

The good part about it all, is that we are in a wilderness area and seeing it in a less than tranquil state is just as important as any other, but please, we've seen it now – can it be nice for a few days; please?



**Yvonne at the Maheno wreck under a deceptively blue sky**

We are hoping for better days to come. Fortunately the camp has held up well even Sir Thomas Crapper, our trusty shower and toilet tent is still standing, although I must admit to having doubled the guy ropes to ensure it did not take off down the beach whilst Yvonne was sitting on the loo! That would definitely have put me in serious trouble.

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June and we MAY just be about to have our first Fraser Island barbeque.

The weather has become boring. Wind and rain, rain and wind, on and on, over again and more of the same. This has been the worst week of weather I have ever experienced in all the years I've been coming to the island. The rain has been patchy and you can deal with that, but the continual very strong wind; it has been driving us mad. I can assure you that after five nights of canvas flapping, wind howling, rocking

and rolling in bed as the camper is buffeted by the wind and pelting rain, any romantic notions about camping on the island are long gone.

Last night was probably the worst. I woke at 1am, venturing outside to check guy ropes and to see if Sir Thomas was still with us – the amount of flapping I could hear from his direction had me fearing that at any minute he would take off down the beach in Mary Poppins fashion. After that I didn't sleep much and neither apparently did Von. When we finally got around to speaking to each other in the first grey light of dawn, we agreed that today was the last chance for the weather to improve or we would cut short the stay on Fraser and move on – to anywhere - just out of the wind.



**Australia in the wet – Yidney Scrub**

But what has happened in the interim.



**Knife Blade Sand Blow**



**A friendly Lake Allom turtle**



**Gordon and Yvonne at Sandy Cape**

Determined to be undaunted by the constant raging gale on Monday, we figured we'd out-fox the wind and head inland to the rainforest which would give us respite. Our ploy worked and we had a good day visiting Lake Allom, Yidney Scrub, Knifeblade Sandblow and travelling about 40kms on the inland tracks. The best thing the rain has done is to make the tracks very hard and easy to drive on.

On Tuesday we headed north up the beach and made our way right up to Sandy Cape, as far as it is possible to go driving the beach. The cape is a remote and very beautiful part of the island and we enjoyed the day, managing to be in the car when it was raining. There is a track that bypasses Nkgala Rocks that you must take to get to the Cape and the rain had made even it easy to navigate. We cruised over this in high range with little effort, whereas in more normal conditions, the sand is a bone dry fine powder, 40 – 50 cm deep that has trapped me (and many others I hasten to add) many times.



**Wild and beautiful – the beach at Sandy Cape**

I do thank the rain for not having to put Yvonne through the excitement of bogging the vehicle and having to dig it out or be snatched out by some good Samaritan!



**Dingoo on the track between Waddy Point and Indian Head**



Today we headed south again, inland and out of the wind, spending the day at Central Station, Lake McKenzie and Lake Wabby.

So that brings us to now, just gone 6pm and whilst the wind has picked up again, I think we may still be able to barbeque. Yvonne has thawed sausages anyway so let's hope for the best.

**Relaxing at Lake McKenzie**

Tomorrow morning will tell the story about whether we stay or go. If it's a good day and the wind has dropped we'll stay and try to get some fishing in, but if tonight is like last night, I have no doubt it will be all hands on deck to pack up and get back to the mainland – time will tell.



**Yvonne gets up close and personal with a stag-horn at Central Station**

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June – Home Sweet Home.

It's 5.30am and I have been awake since about 4 o'clock, imagining I can hear Sir Thomas flapping in the wind. We arrived home last night, in the rain. Quite a fitting way to end the trip, as we started in rain and have had nothing but during our time away. Despite the lack of perfect weather we've had some good laughs and have learnt a few things along the way, but to end the story let's go back to the barbeque last Wednesday night.



**Not ideal conditions for a barbeque**

umbrella (to keep the food from 'broiling' on the plate) and eventually managed to produce something that resembled barbequed sausages. Much to her delight, Yvonne snuck out of the camper in the rain and captured this moment culinary brilliance on camera.

The wind did pick up, not to the force of early in the week, but enough to make cooking the sausages very difficult even though I had the little portable barbeque protected as best I could between the car and camper. The wind however was not the main problem. Yes, you've guessed, it began raining about 30 seconds after I tipped the sausages on the hot plate. By this stage I was determined not to be beaten. I donned a hat, rain jacket and

The night was an absolute shocker – wind and rain and more of the same and little sleep for either of us. Next morning we decided to pack up and go somewhere 'nice' on the mainland for a couple of days before heading home as per the plan. It hadn't rained for a couple of hours and the camper canvas was relatively dry so, happy with our decision we began the jobs of breaking camp.

This process takes us about two hours and I was praying the break in the weather would last that long, but unfortunately my prayers were not answered. About an hour

and a half into the process it started to rain, gently at first, but getting heavier by the second.

I started to swear, gently at first, but getting more animated by the second. The rain persisted, soaking the camper trailer canvas again. We had gone past the point of no return. I knew it and that's when I lost it – big time.

Doing my best Basil Fawlty impression, I raged at the sky, flailing a clenched fist and yelling “is that all you've got! You've dumped on us for two weeks. Come on! Give me your best shot you, you, you ----!”

Sometimes you get what you ask for.

The skies opened up and down it came; in bucket loads.

During most of this time, Yvonne had been able to work inside the camper or awning, remaining relatively dry, but when it comes time for closing up – oops. The short story is we both ended up like drowned rats, packing the camper and its' canvas away soaking wet, which was exactly what I did not want to do. This now meant that the rest of the holiday, including visits to relatives in Brisbane and Scone on the way home was not an option as we couldn't leave the canvas wet for 5 days until our original return time.

Finally we hitched the camper up to the Patrol, stripped off our sodden clothes and, naked (Yvonne not quite), got in the car with a towel each to dry off. Yvonne had managed to find me some dry shorts and shirt, but her clothes were not as accessible, so she left the island wrapped in the towel and not much else.



**Wet track to get past Ngkala Rocks on the way to Sandy Cape**

At Rainbow beach, we found Yvonne some clothes and still looking very bedraggled like a couple of derelicts, cleaned the salt and sand off the vehicle, fuelled up, had some lunch and headed south.

Where to stop for the night was the next question. Anywhere but in the sodden camper! We drove for about four or five hours I guess and after checking a couple of tourist parks for overnight accommodation without success, ended up at a small town on the Cunningham Highway.

There wasn't much there other than an all night truck stop and lots of interstate trucks. Did I mention trucks? But we did discover a tourist park – of sorts. As it was past normal hours the office was closed so I rang the night bell and a lady eventually opened up.

“Do you have a van or cabin we can hire overnight please?”

“No”

“Oh, that’s a shame because we need some overnight accommodation”

“Have you got your own blankets and pillows?”

“Yes”

“OK, then you can have a van”

Why didn't she say this in the first place?

Now it got interesting.

“You'll have to excuse me”, she said giggling, “I've had a few drinks – it's his birthday” indicating to someone I couldn't see in another room.

“Oh, happy birthday.”

“Grunt”, from inside the room.

Eventually, after some interesting antics by our intoxicated hostess working the credit card machine and deciding which caravan had been cleaned that day (not sure she got it right), we got set up in a one star (I'm being generous) van, had a fantastic hot shower in the amenities block; well, the water was good, and began to feel human again.

Just to round off the night we then managed to lock ourselves out of the van which meant another trip to the tipsy woman who was thankfully still sober enough to find us a spare key.



**I was thinking I could have used the croc if the bikies got stropky**

We were up at 3.30am to the sweet serenading sounds of large diesel engines, air brakes and gear changes. The good part was that we ended up being on the road ourselves by 4am. The trip home was largely uneventful but there was one worrying moment.

We were having breakfast at Glen Innes where I'd

carefully parked the car well out of the way at a garage / restaurant. I was finished but Yvonne who eats much more like a human, was still munching on her bacon and egg roll when a dozen or so bikkies arrived. Black Harley's, black leathers, black helmets, face masks and large emblems on the jacket backs declaring "Odon's Warriors".

I normally wouldn't have been too concerned, particularly as when the helmets came off, lots of grey hair and beards were revealed, but, they had parked their bikes directly in front of and around our car and camper, completely blocking us in.

I began having silent practice sessions about how I would get them to move their bikes when we were ready to go, or, on the other hand, decide we should just relax, sit tight and hope they wouldn't be there all day.

Luckily they only stopped for a smoke and to use the toilets – didn't buy any fuel or anything from the shop – cheeky buggers, so by the time Yvonne had finished breakfast, they had hopped back on the Harleys and were throbbing away down the main street.



So, it's great to be home. This morning we will start the clean up job and, if it doesn't rain, get everything dried out.

I've learned in life that normally out of adversity there are positives to be found.

For me it was yesterday, when, looking much less glamorous than she would like, deprived of sleep and with itching sand fly bites (that's another whole story),

**Let's do it again soon – hopefully in better weather**

Yvonne said "well, I've seen the sights of Fraser island now, so next time we can just relax and go fishing".

Hey, maybe the sun really was shining. I'm with you babe!

Written by Gordon Tuthill  
July 2006