



Lakefield National Park

May 21 - 25, 2008

Overview: a quick trip from Port Douglas up through Lakefield National Park and back in our Grand Cherokee with another couple in their Landcruiser 100. Our intended destination had been Cape Melville however the tracks are still closed so plan B was to explore the National Park instead. This is a great destination for a long weekend out of Cairns or Port Douglas.

Day 1 - Lakeland Downs

We left Port Douglas at 3pm after a frantic morning at work trying to get everything done before packing the car. Destination - Lakeland Downs hotel.

The 185km drive up to Lakeland Downs is on excellent sealed roads and took around 2 hours. You do have to watch for cattle on part of the road where there is no fencing.



The hotel is very basic but has a bar and restaurant for meals. State of Origin attracted a large group of locals to the bar that evening.

Day 2 - Lakefield National Park

After a quick breakfast we left the hotel at 8am and headed to Lakefield National Park.

The road up to Laura is mostly gravel but in very good condition albeit quite dusty in places. We topped up with fuel at Laura and took the turn-off to the park, which is about 2km north of Laura.



Day 2 continued.....



We continued up the park until we arrived at the self-registration kiosk near the Ranger's station. This is well organised - simply look at the board to see which camping spots are vacant, fill in your name, arrival and departure dates and pay the fee with cash or credit card. Cost is \$4.50 per person per night. Kalpower camping area is well looked after with grassy camp sites, toilets and (cold) showers. As we had stayed there many years ago on our way back from Cape York, we decided to register for a campsite about 35km to the north called Orange Plain.



The drive up to Orange Plain took about 1 hour in driving time but we did stop off to see Red Lilly Lagoon which is huge. The track can become quite rough in places but all in all, quite a comfortable drive. Take care when driving where there is long grass each side of the track as I found out - a group of three wild pigs shot out from the grass about 1 metre ahead of us at one point, a good test for the ABS which happened on more than one occasion.



At Orange Plain there are 4 camp sites which are all spaced out about 500 metres or more apart so very private. We didn't hear the other campers at any time during our 2 nights there. We checked out the other 3 sites and in our opinion, number 2 and 3 are the pick, being right on the water with large shady trees.

After setting up camp and lunch, we tried our hand at Barramundi fishing from the bank - one of our party hooked a 60 cm Barra just before dinner, so we put the steaks back in the fridge.

Day 3



A day of relaxation today together with a little exploration, off-roading and some more fishing. A dinghy would have been handy we decided.

We also drove across to the Hann River crossing, about 17km from our camp for a swim in relative safety from crocodiles, then some lunch by the river. There are a number of very nice camping spots along this river which we'd be happy to stay at next time.

Day 4

Today we packed up camp after breakfast and headed back to the Hann River crossing where we had visited the day before. We stopped there for another swim before heading west towards Musgrave.

Along the way we crossed a few rivers, one of which was about 0.7mt deep, more than our recommended wading depth, so our water bra was put to use with no problems.

Along the way we visited Low Lake, an amazing huge lagoon full of bird-life and lilies. We also crossed Nifold Plain - a huge flat area with very few trees and many termite mounts. Great scenery.

With thoughts that we may stay in a cabin that night, we called into Lotusbird Lodge which is located just before you arrive at Musgrave on the Peninsula Development Road. They have a number of cabins beside a large lagoon - a popular stop for European birdwatchers. Fortunately they were booked out as the tariff is \$258 per person per night! That does include all meals however.

We continued on to Musgrave for a quick stop. We would have loved to turn right and head up to Cape York! Instead we turned south towards Laura and decided to head down to the Hann River Roadhouse for lunch and to setup camp for the night.

Hann River Roadhouse has grassy campsites, power, hot showers and toilets for \$6 per person per night. Spent the afternoon having a few quiet ales and a swim in the river. Quite a pleasant spot.



Day 5



Time to head home today unfortunately. With only around 5 hours to Port Douglas, we had a leisurely breakfast, packed up then headed south.

The road was once again very smooth so sitting on 100 was possible most of the way.

A stop on the McLeod River for lunch and then we headed home to Port Douglas.

Conclusion

Anyone looking for a short break, with some great scenery, fishing, wildlife spotting and off-roading should consider visiting Lakefield National Park. If you can take a tinny, do it.

You do need to be self-sufficient with plenty of fuel, food and water.

