

# BUSH TELEGRAPH

July, 2007

The last 12 months have been most eventful with so much to report so I will need to be briefer than I would prefer. During the year I both became 'quollified' and seriously disabled for a few months. The 'Quollification' occurred when a Spotted-tail quoll (see the brochure) walked up to me and was about to clamp in to my shin during the CERRA – Border Ranges safari. I shouted before the teeth sank in but it was just one of those many unforgettable GO BUSH experiences.

My disability began when I slipped at a waterfall in Northern Thailand on 11<sup>th</sup> January and tore the rotator cuff on my right shoulder. With rest and physiotherapy I had almost recovered from that when on 13<sup>th</sup> May I fell off a viewing platform in Cooloolo National Park almost breaking my neck but surviving that by shattering my right shoulder further. It is now awaiting imminent reconstructive surgery.

I am optimistically expecting to be recovered by the end of the year and I am planning to resume my GO BUSH program in 2008 for my penultimate year for leading advertised safaris.

Reflection on the last year revives such rich memories that I am reluctant to give up this wonderful lifestyle but I am committed to making the big change in 2010 as age decrees.

Just feeling the chill of winter reminds me of the wonderful CERRA safari last July when despite camping in below zero temperatures and having a Christmas in July we enjoyed the great company of those veteran "greenie" activists, publishers and naturalists, Hugh and Nan Nicholson of Terrania Creek. They enriched the safari enormously and I am looking forward to another sortie into their territory with their guidance next May when the weather should be milder.

Last year I spent almost 30 days on Fraser Island for both conservation and for GO BUSH. I may have exceeded that this year if my injury hadn't prevented me. However it was good to be able to take son Keith and his family along on our Fraser Island and Whale Watching trip. It has helped prepare him to stand in for me this year but he will be ably assisted by those veterans Wamut and Smithy who must have notched up a couple of dozen trips or more with me to that fabled island. I am always eager to take people to explore Fraser Island but it is always a bonus to have the luxury of camping in such special settings and to have close encounters with whales.

Last spring I had two trips to Uluru to try to keep up with the demand. They were really wonderful especially as we were able to see more by camping. My highlight was taking a

helicopter ride over the West MacDonnell Ranges. Seeing the landscape from the air made the Aboriginal creation story of the caterpillar all the more amazing because from the air the range just looked like a giant caterpillar crawling across the very colourful landscape. It is amazing that this bird's eye view of the landscape was conceived without the aid of mechanical flight. This year's scheduled Uluru and Australia's Red Heart safari was one casualty of my disability. However I am eager to return to this dramatic landscape.

Our PNG safaris were also in the year's program. Unfortunately many people were spooked by the events in the South West Pacific, riots in Tonga, coup in Fiji, chaos in the Solomons and the Julian Motti affair involving PNG all gave credibility to the media reference to "The Arc of Instability". Although our ship based operations are incredibly safe as previous safarists can attest, there wasn't enough support for either our safaris. I am still very keen to offer more safaris in PNG but alas, our ships are not available at all in 2008 as they are fully engaged in community development work along the Fly River.

Our November Torres Strait-PNG safari was fortunate enough to explore 400 kms up the Fly River in the "MV Sepura". We got only half way up to the international river port of Kiunga where 2000 tonne ships regularly berth discharging cargo from Australia. We visited several villages and saw lots of wildlife. The country and culture we experienced was very different from that which we saw in northern coastal provinces and the communities appeared to be poorer if that seemed possible.

By the end of this year some of the cargo being discharged in Kiunga will be resources for the incredibly deprived PNG schools in Western Province. The Trust that evolved from our PNG adventures has the cooperation of the Ok Tedi Community Development Foundation. We can now ship supplies of stationery and books from Brisbane to PNG for direct distribution. The Trust is about to dispatch over a dozen large cartons of resources to the schools we visited. The Queensland Education Department plans to follow this up by establishing a "Sister Schools Program" where Queensland schools will establish on-going relationships with the schools in PNG they "adopt" and will help augment their resources. If anyone wishes to assist or be involved in this desperately needed program to advance the education of our nearest foreign neighbour (which was until 1975 part of Australia) please feel free to contact me.

**GO BUSH Safaris** (ABN 41 053 411 706) Australia's **World Heritage Area Specialists**  
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*Let us take you up country and show you the bush*



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My family has been urging me to cut back the program and take less strenuous trips in 2008. That meant fewer camping and more accommodated trips. I tried but I couldn't eliminate the only two camping trips I currently undertake — Fraser Island and Uluru. Then as I started reviewing the options for places I really wanted to take people I found that there were some I couldn't do without at least some camping. So instead of reducing the camping trips in 2008 now more than half have at least some camping component.

Although I made a number of memorable trips to the beautiful coral cays of the southern Great Barrier Reef starting in 1969 I realized that it is now a decade since I took a GO BUSH trip there. I was trying to work out the best way of doing this to coincide with the coral spawning on the Great Barrier Reef and I remembered a wonderful long weekend in January 1971 camping on Lady Musgrave Island. It inspired me to repeat it so that is one of the extra camping trips on offer.

Then there was that most enjoyable trip in 2006 with Hugh Nicholson to the amazingly different CERRA World Heritage National Parks mainly around Mt Warning. Even then I was craving for an encore. Unfortunately we can't visit the stunning Washpool and Gibraltar Ranges National Parks unless we are prepared to camp. But the rewards of visiting these very different granite landscapes with their diversity of scenery, rainforests, and wildflowers justify spending a few nights under canvas and just a little "roughing it". By going in May we should comfortably avoid the sub-zero temperatures!

As the deadline to retirement looms closer I am trying to fit in those place I really have a strong urge to revisit. I am really tempted by the wonderful Queensland Odysseys we offered in 1989 and through the early 90s. However they were all camping and of such duration (21 days) that they are impractical now. Instead I have picked out a section of this wonderful safari that is "doable"— the Bunya Mountains and Carnarvon Gorge. This though has the handicap that to keep it affordable necessitates camping at Carnarvon Gorge. It is just three nights and it may be cold in July but certainly warmer down in the gorge than Gibraltar Range in July. The bonus is that safarists will also have an incidental opportunity to see some of the industry that is driving the surging Queensland growth at present.

Two other safaris which I haven't offered for some years and which I am really looking forward to getting back to are Discovering Tasmania and Shark Bay and the Western Wildflowers. It hasn't been lack of enthusiasm for these destinations on my part that has prevented them going ahead.

In the case of Western Australia it has just been a conflict with other commitments I had. These clashed with the optimum time to enjoy the

magnificent displays of wildflowers in the west and also probably the balmiest weather there.

Balmy weather is also a critical factor in Tasmania. After an absence of five years I am planning to return there for my 15<sup>th</sup> and probably my last safari there in the golden weather that the island state usually has in February. Instead of being accompanied by the venerable Eddie Smith this time I will be accompanied by Ian Morris who jumped at the chance to get away from the tropics for a while. It will be a nostalgic trip to this island paradise.

2008 will be my penultimate year leading GO BUSH safaris but already I am starting to plan what the ultimate year, 2009 will include. I am already committed to another Thailand-Laos safari in January 2009. This is such a wonderful area and it is such a rich experience that I plan to expand the safari to also include Angkor Wat. That will make three World Heritage cities in three countries in one safari. It also includes traveling down the mighty Mekong River and staying in home-stays in hill tribe and other villages. Anyone wanting register interest in this safari can do so now.

In the last 12 months I also included a Mungo Mutawintji and More safari through drought ravaged New South Wales and Victoria. Despite the depressing drought, starkly brought home when we walked across the bone dry Darling River it was a fascinating trip. I thought that that would be my last safari there but Badger Bates has different ideas.

GO BUSH Safaris is far from being a "one man band". The family feeling safarists have enjoyed for 20 years now is the result of the enormous input I have received from my family and friends. Even some that I hardly knew initially are now close friends. I have been privileged to have some of Australia's great naturalists accompany me for which I am most appreciative. As well as being so competent in identifying and interpreting the environment, people like Ian (Longnose) Morris, Allan Notley and Hugh Nicholson are such interesting people and so easy to get along with. It is small wonder that the percentage of repeat clients for GO BUSH safaris keeps growing. In addition there are other people who help me on the basis of friendship more than anything else. Some such as Su Dawson and Russell Close have been longtime members of the GO BUSH family but that family keeps being added to with the George Haddock, Smithy, Bino Bill, laconic John French, Russell Butler and others joining the list including the Collins family from PNG and my friends in Thailand. I am indebted to them all for adding to the happiness of both the GO BUSH safaris they have participated in and me. I thank them all most sincerely.

So as I recover from this year's slight setback I have lots to look forward to next year. Maybe you might want to join me for some of it.

*John Sinclair*

