

Savannah Guides Field School

Gulf Savannah - 28-31 October 2021

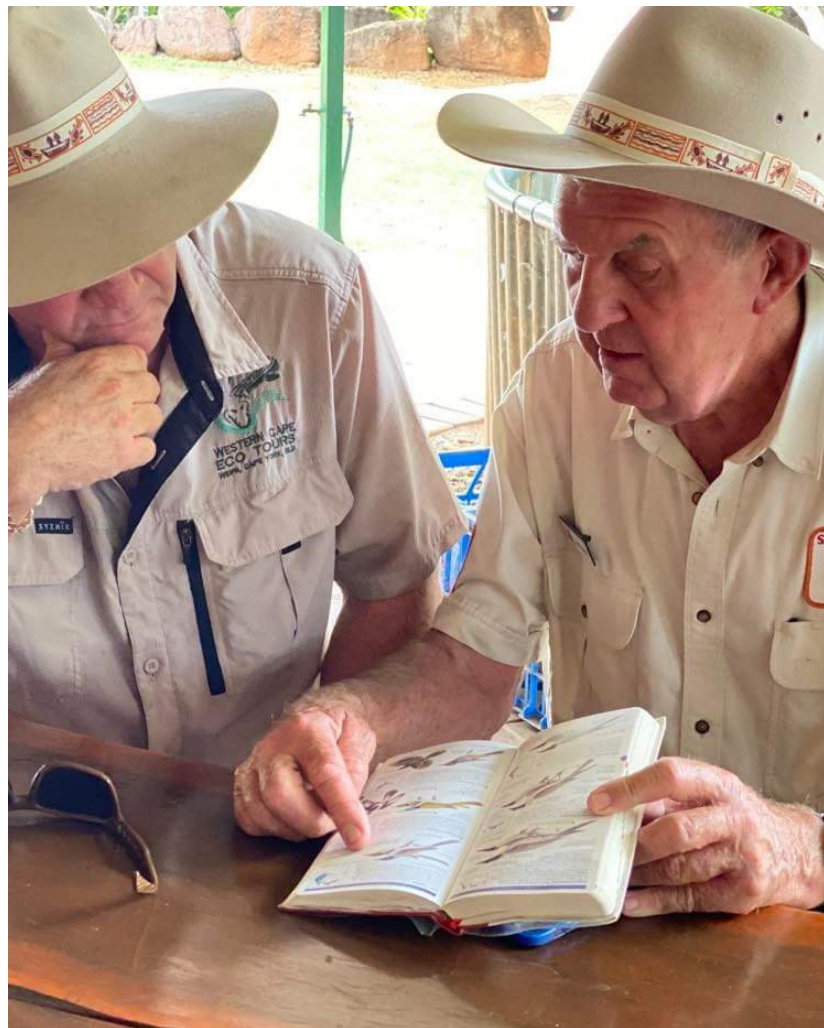
Thanks to Kim Murray, Friend of Savannah Guides

The Savannah Guides Field School starts on Wednesday for me. It's an early start and we are off to Ravenshoe where we meet the bus and enjoy Breakfast / Morning Tea at Ravenshoe Bakery. For those of you not familiar with the Ravenshoe Bakery, they cater for the whole population of the town and surrounding districts, twice over every morning! Providing pies, cakes, coffee to all and it is always PACKED. That, my friends, is the sign of an excellent bakery. This is not a paid advertisement. At Ravenshoe, I met the irrepressible Melissa from the Cairns Museum who has the best laugh I have ever heard.

Onward, to Bedrock Village at Mt Surprise to gather more participants including Ivor "Birdman" Davies and Bram Collins, amongst others. Chatter in the bus at this stage rivalled mating season on a goose farm! It was a fabulous, happy noise. We pushed on towards Normanton and arrived late in the afternoon. We settled into our rooms and then headed to the Albion Hotel for a well-earned beverage and meal. Well, that's when the manure hit the oscillating cooling device! Despite ALL of Sam Boswell's proper prior planning, you still can't

prevent a poor performance if the Chef doesn't turn up! Sam was not phased and was straight onto the phone to try and organise a meal for 40 people in Normanton with no notice whatsoever - good Luck with that one! Long story short - the Albion Hotel called out the cavalry and meals and pizzas soon started arriving in short order and they were delicious. Crisis averted; the world was saved. The Field School hasn't even officially started!

Thursday - Day One of the Field School. We get to know each other at Introductions around the Room. Listening ears were on and plenty of notes taken during Russell's "Transformational Tourism and Travel for Good" Presentation. But then things turned dark. This room of nature-lovers, environmental warriors, saviours of endangered species, Protectors and Interpreters of the Outback, upholders of professional guiding standards and behaviours? Vanished! Gone in an instant! Why? Hirani Kydd announces the TWITCHATHON! Teams are announced and leaders nominated. Ranks are drawn, lots of side-eye to other teams, strategies for bribery are suggested. Let the birding begin!



Savannah Guides discussing bird identification during the 'Twitchathon'

Lunch at Karumba Sunset Tavern on the Gulf, sponsored by an anonymous Savannah Guide. Thank you. The highlights here were the raptors (Kites?) who were abundant in the Tavern area and behaved like seagulls on a hot chip! It was wonderful to see them so close. We were treated to a behind-the-scenes tour of the Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre which is truly world-class, and we all learnt so much. Lots of nodding heads and raised eyebrows! Later we went on a short cruise on the Norman River, with nibbles and drinks.

Back to Normanton in the bus, I noticed that numbers on the bus were dwindling, and more people were joining the self-drivers in the comfort of their larger seating and cold air-conditioning! All in the name of keeping the self-drivers company, I'm sure! A dinner venue with a difference, on the breezy platform of Normanton Railway Station. A great night was had by all.

Friday and it was all aboard "The Gulflander" for a round trip to Critters Camp and back. Ken was full of information and stories and Glen looked after us passengers like silkworms, plenty of icy-cold water on board because, guess what? It was HOT! Back on the bus to Croydon and the numbers on the bus are smaller again. Lunch at Lake Belmore then a wander through the history of Croydon at the True Blue Visitor Centre and a fascinating discussion led by Hirani Kydd on water usage and gold in the pioneering days.



Savannah Guides discussing river systems.

A quick stop at Cumberland Chimney on our way to Georgetown, make no mistake dear readers, elbows are out and so are the binoculars. It's Twitchin' time. No quarter is taken or asked for, this is serious stuff. Our barbecue dinner at Latara Resort Motel is held inside because, you guessed it, It's HOT! After dinner a large circle gathered out the back of the Motel (yes, there was a cool breeze) for what turned out to be a mini Savannah Guides Jam Session!

On Saturday, we embarked on a fabulous Treasure Hunt through The Terrestrial Centre. After a short walk down the dry Etheridge River bed, we sat in the shade under a road bridge and listened to an amazing explanation of rivers and their influence, complete with sand drawings, over time by our president Michelle Whitehouse. Even I understood!

Saddle up! Onwards to Bedrock Village, Mt Surprise. There are six people left on the bus, everyone else is crowded into private vehicles. It's lovely to see everyone getting along so well. We hear from Peter and Adam from Flat Creek Station, both of whom could have

talked all day in my humble opinion. Fascinating what they are doing with their cattle and the many different breeds. Friend of Savannah Guides, Wendy Kelton had a tough act to follow with "Mosquitoes – the Good, the Bad and the In-Between" but her work is amazing and important to the health of all Australians. Very good Friend of Savannah Guides, Sarah Swan gave a wrap up of her observations and thoughts of the previous days. Finally, a reflective walk along Elizabeth Creek discussing "Healthy Creek Systems: Past, Present and Future" with Bedrock Owner and Senior Savannah Guide, Joe Lockyer.

Free time and a last opportunity to spot birds, sneak up on other Teams' sheets, cajole information, bribe judges, make dodgy drawings and all the other general good fellowship stuff that comes out of a Twitchathon. Formalities got underway with Bram introducing us to Founding Member and Life Member of Savannah Guides – Bruce Butler, who had joined us for the evening with his wife Niccy. What an honour for us all. Madame President, Michelle Whitehouse, accredited Emily Monacella and Shaun Brown from Red Cat Adventures as Savannah Guides. Lots of tears, hugs, and congratulations.

As the sun went down out came some seriously delicious nibblies! Dinner of course, was Bedrock's famous Wood-

Fired Pizzas, followed by their equally famous, Vanilla Slice! The Jam Session got underway, and a highlight was JR singing a heartfelt rendition of "Seasons in the Sun" ... it was beautiful. CRACK! ... then some serious gravel-travelling whip-cracking by Darren Corke! I'm sure that wasn't part of the plan!

Sunday morning and "The Magic Keys to Guiding" from Ivor "Birdman" Davies went down very well. We then gathered ideas from around the room on how to continue our Professional Development and where we can gather resources. Now – the moment we were all waiting for, the results of the Twitchathon! I don't know who won, I don't care. It was great fun and we all learnt something more about birds. Shaun Brown from Red Cat Adventures was a complete convert and his partner, Emily Monacella, also from Red Cat Adventures, was chosen as the person who gained the most from the Twitchathon.

All too soon it's time to turn our heads for home. The bus was full again and it once again sounded like mating season at a goose farm. That's always a good sign. See you at the next Field School.

