

## Laura River

After arriving in Cairns late in the evening, we were leaving early the next morning on the first leg of our journey to the little town of Laurel located near the Laurel River, our purpose for going was to attend a Corroboree, an Aboriginal Songfest.

This was a five day add on to the trip as the original expedition was to begin the following week with my going to Alice Springs and Uluru, with 8 other participants.

A hearty breakfast in the hotel restaurant was enjoyed by all as the time was spent getting to know one another. We boarded the 24 passenger bus for the trip into the York Peninsula. Eucalyptus, gum trees and kangaroos made up most of the scenery as we slowly wound our way through the bush to our destination.

After more miles of dirt roads than I care to remember we arrived dusty, dirty, and thirsty in Laura. I was expecting something a little larger; the town consisted of maybe a dozen houses, a small post office, the Laura Hotel, which was a small metal building that might house 10 people, hostel style. The hotel consisted of a pub and something they called a restaurant, in reality the restaurant was a few picnic tables and a charcoal grill. The front of the hotel featured the only tree in town, a large Mango tree.

Laura, a town of about 60 people, sits in the middle of the York Peninsula and is inaccessible for up to four months every year during the rainy season. The only way in or out is by a single engine airplane that lands on a dirt runway, which undoubtedly turns to mud in the rainy season. The modern era arrived in the 1980's when electricity was finally brought to the town, ending many years of the town's electrical needs being supplied via a gas generator.

As dinnertime approached, the smell of charcoal filled the air, while making our way to the restaurant; our meal was being cooked by our bus driver and guide. The grille was packed with steak, chicken, and the Aussie favorite, shrimp on the barbie!

After stuffing ourselves with all the delicacies, the next order of business was to check out the local pub, it being rather small and rustic was not unlike a bar anywhere else in the world. My initial thought was to have a beer in a quiet corner and retire for the evening. Boy was I mistaken, the place was packed, it seems as though everyone came for miles around! Not only were there Australians enjoying a drink, but also Aborigines, and it seems people from the four corners of the globe!

Several Fosters later, it was time mosey back to the camp ground, it being an open field, it wasn't hard to find my swag, (a canvas sleeping bag) and settle in for the night under the Southern Cross, not a bad way to end my first day in the Land of OZ.

A quick shower in the outdoor luge and it would be off to the land of nod! I soon discovered that there had to be a better time to shower as several people had beaten me to the showers and the water was ice cold, oh well, I will shower in the morning, wrong again, another crowded shower and more cold water!

I decided it was time to get serious about this shower thing, so the next morning I would arise at 3 AM, shower, and retire back to my swag to finish my nights rest.

Daybreak came with the singing of Kookaburra birds, just like in jungle movies. What better way to open the day after sleeping under the stars in our genuine Australian swags! A breakfast of sausage, eggs, pancakes and all the trimmings cooked over an open fire awaited us, and then it was off to a long and hard rock climb and our first view of

Aboriginal Rock Art at Giant Horse Gallery. These paintings that were either painted on with reeds or blown on with a straw were thousands of years old and made with Iron Oxide, very impressive!

As an added treat, the opportunity was presented us to observe Didgeridoo player Marcell Riguett , he was the first white man to be granted permission to play here, this was my first opportunity to actually observe the Didgeridoo being played, it was interesting in that the musician actually breathes in through his nose and out through his mouth at the same time.

On the way back to Laura, the driver dropped us off to see Split Rock where we were able to observe more rock art, as we were relatively close to Laura we hiked back, having to cross Laura River in the process, it being only a small stream this was no problem, It was then that I observed my first view of Aussie openness, as many people were skinny dipping in the river!

The campground had become rather crowded, as the Corroboree was beginning, native tribes from all over Queensland were converging for this important event. It was quickly turning into what seemed like a spiritual track meet!

One hardly had time to observe everything, as there were boomerang throwing contests, many ancient tribal dances featuring the customs and costumes of the different Aboriginal tribes, displays of rock art, native food, and talks on the many aboriginal teachings. There will come a time when this songfest will be no longer; as the Aborigines are losing their native customs, many times the contests are won by a Caucasian.

One of the most disturbing events happened when another photographer and I ventured down to the river and saw several children playing in the water, amongst several hundred hypodermic needles and beer bottles. Alcoholism and drug abuse is a major problem among the Aborigines, as they have lost their purpose in life. They have lived in the outback for thousands of years and know of no other life. No matter how much the government helps them for the most part, they are unable to adapt.

Being an Aborigine is a way of life or religion, more than a race; anyone can adapt the ways of the aborigine and get assistance from the government. The true Aborigine is Caucasian, when some of them took their shirt off, their chest was white, and they are dark because they have lived in the sun for thousands of years.

One of the highlights was meeting Ted Mitchell, one of the last Trackers, the story was told that a child had gotten lost in the bush, after searching with helicopters, dogs and many search teams, Ted was called in to help with the search, within a half an hour he came back with the child in his arms.

The Aborigines believe that when we visit a place we leave an image, and a person trained to see that image can follow some one regardless of the terrain or how long they have been gone.

Their teachings show many examples of such happenings, as well as casting spells on someone thousands of miles away, with the victim being affected by it even though he has no knowledge of the spell being cast.

The Aborigine who has been taught the Dream time is very intuitive and extremely aware of his surroundings, Crocodile Dundee was all Hollywood, but not very far off on this perspective.

Regretfully, our time to head back to civilization had come, so the next morning we boarded the bus back to Cairns