

CAPE YORK ADVENTURE

Peter d'Plesse

At Dover District High School, where I am the Principal, we first heard of Andrew Hughes just before he left on his epic journey to paddle a kayak from southern Tasmania to Thursday Island. The school was impressed with the goal that Andrew had set himself. To celebrate his south to north journey, we bought two statues, one large and a smaller copy, crafted by a local artist from the Far South of Tasmania.

We gave the small statue to Andrew to carry north with him on his journey. While the mail would have been the practical way to deliver the large statue, Gail and I felt it was more fitting to deliver it by four wheel drive to the Thursday Island State School, along with two turned wooden stands. These are now waiting for Andrew to complete his journey and at some time in the future they will stand together on Thursday Island as a reminder of his trip.

The journey to Cape York has long been



Lady in distress on Archer River and the

regarded as one of the great road trips in Australia and this was certainly true in our case. The after effects of cyclone Monica had flooded much of the cape and washed away many sections of the road to the Top. The result was 150 river and creek crossings and a battering journey that tested both vehicle and Gail and me.

It certainly concentrates the mind to plan a crossing of the Archer River, flowing wide and fast across a rocky and deep sandy bottom, with a Landcruiser slammed crazily against the rocks of the far bank with the water flowing freely through its open doors. Planning and three wadings of the Archer avoided that fate.



DC3 crashed on final Higgins Field 1945

While on the Cape, we explored some of the aircraft wrecks from World War II. Various remains of Beauforts, Kittyhawks, Dakotas, Fortresses and other assorted wreckage can still be found if you know where to look. Snakes and crocodiles are a major disincentive but can usually be worked around. Each aircraft wreck represents a human story about young men at a time when Australia was under threat.

In a swamp off Jacky Jacky Creek I got close to substantial wreckage, but six nasty stings from something small and unfriendly and the thought of wading the last twenty metres through evil looking, slime covered water drove me out.

The prime target for the trip was Ft-Lt. Shipway's P-39 Airacobra that went down near the coast in 1942. A friend drew a detailed map on how to get into the area, but finished with the words "If it was me I wouldn't be going, the crocs are thick in there this season". Wisdom prevailed and that wreck will have to wait for another time.

The saddest sight was the remains of a Beaufort, enough to do a rebuild, but rotting away in the jungle where it lays in a no-mans land of uncertain ownership.



Still lined up for the threshold 500' low

"A Landcruiser slammed crazily against the rocks"



Me and Gail in the rear gun turret of the Beaufort