

The Barkly Region

The Barkly Region embraces a vast area: the open grasslands of the Barkly Tableland, the idyllic but rugged Gulf coast and the ochre-red terrain of central Australia. Only a few sealed roads cross this sparsely populated country, is lightly sprinkled with a handful of towns.

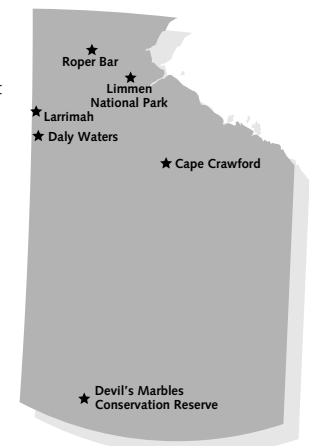
As is the case elsewhere in the Territory, the Stuart Hwy is the region's backbone, branching off feeder roads to far-flung corners of the state. Up and down the highway, lonely outposts vie for the traveller's attention and lucre. To get noticed you need an angle; it may be the bras 'n' bills adorning the Daly Waters Pub or the alien invasion at Wycliffe Well, where supernatural sightings have solved the deficit of natural attributes. However, there's nothing contrived about the intriguing Devil's Marbles – a surreal gathering of granite boulders.

Tennant Creek is the only town of consequential size. It owes its creation, like many Territory towns, to the Overland Telegraph Line, but growth was stimulated by a gold rush in the 1930s, and metal and mineral booms continue to stir it into life – albeit sporadically. Today, the town's telegraph station, mining history and Aboriginal culture are the major drawcards.

East of the Stuart, the Roper and Carpentaria Hwys direct travellers to the remote Gulf country. The testing Nathan River Rd, between Roper Bar and Borroloola, snakes through Limmen National Park – a paradise for 4WD and fishing enthusiasts, with ample bush camping and fabulous fishing spots.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drifting among the precarious granite boulders at **Devil's Marbles Conservation Reserve** (p167) at sunset
- Camping out under the stars beside the Towns River in **Limmen National Park** (p169)
- Viewing the art, absorbing the culture and relishing the bush-tucker muffins at **Nyinkka Nyunyu** (p164)
- Rescuing tasty barramundi from the jaws of crocodiles in the **Roper River** (p168)
- Tucking in to a buffalo pie or the tempting buttermilk scones at **Fran's Devonshire Tea House** (p160)
- Recovering from a long drive at the Heartbreak Hotel in land-locked **Cape Crawford** (p172)
- Propping up the bar at the quaint and quirky **Daly Waters Pub** (p160)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ Barkly Region Tourism: www.barklytourism.com.au

■ Barkly Regional Arts: www.barklyarts.com.au

DOWN THE TRACK

From Mataranka, the Stuart Hwy runs south to Alice Springs. There are long stretches between sights on this road, but character-filled towns and friendly roadhouses, plus a few interesting roadhouses, break up the journey.

LARRIMAH

pop 20

The tiny settlement of Larrimah is one of many towns along the highway that served as important bases during WWII, and there are still reminders of that era around town. There's also an idiosyncratic outback pub.

History

The North Australian Railway terminated at the settlement of Birdum Creek, 8km south of Larrimah. As Birdum was subject to flooding, the Army established Larrimah ('meeting place') as a staging camp on the highway during WWII. In 1942 the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) started work

on Gorrie Airfield, 10km north of Larrimah. It became one of the largest in the Pacific and was the base for 6500 military personnel.

Following WWII, Larrimah's population fell to less than 50. The Birdum Hotel was dismantled and moved to its current location in Larrimah, while the rest of the settlement was abandoned. In 1976 the railway line closed as it had long since become uneconomical to run.

Sights

There's a small but excellent **museum** (☎ 8975 9771; Mahoney St; admission by donation; ♿ always open) in the former telegraph repeater station opposite the Larrimah Hotel with displays on the railway and WWII.

History buffs may find it worth looking over the remaining military buildings and the airstrip at **Gorrie Airfield**, though it's largely overgrown, and the remains of the abandoned settlement of **Birdum**.

Sleeping & Eating

Larrimah Historic Hotel (☎ 8975 9931; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$6/10, s/d \$28/40; ♿ ♿) This is

BARKLY & GULF REGION NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

The Barkly and Gulf region embraces several significant conservation and historical reserves managed by the Northern Territory Parks & Wildlife Commission. Not surprisingly, the remote Gulf country parks provide excellent opportunities for getting off the beaten track. Here you can find solitude under starry skies, unspoilt rivers brimming with barra, and 4WD tracks to test your skill and courage. But don't expect much in the way of infrastructure – there are no Kakadus, Litchfields or Nitmiluks out this way.

Most travellers to this region will undoubtedly stop to stare at the mesmerising landscape at the **Devils Marbles Conservation Reserve** (p167) just off the Stuart Hwy. Likewise, the historical **Telegraph Station** (p164) at Tennant Creek is an easy and rewarding detour.

To visit other parks in the region requires a bit more preparation and planning (and often a 4WD), but the rewards are worth the effort. The **Davenport Range National Park** (p168), east of Wauchope, protects a series of permanent waterholes – an ancient, isolated watercourse that is a vital refuge for birds and mammals and a home to some hardy fish. **Limmen National Park** (p169) in the Gulf region is an extensive reserve comprising 'Lost City' sandstone formations, superb rivers and billabongs, and the chance to really get away from it all. Paradise here is pitching your tent by a river that swirls with fish and freshwater crocodiles, while the star-filled night is pierced by the haunting wail of a curlew.

Literally in the Gulf is the **Barranyi (North Island) National Park** (p171), which protects the picturesque island home of the Yanyuwa Aboriginal people, and is fringed by cliffs indented with idyllic sandy coves. **Caranbirini Conservation Reserve** (p171), 46km south of Borroloola off the Carpentaria Hwy, features yet another sandstone 'Lost City', and is home to the secretive Carpentaria grasswren and other rare creatures. While not providing any infrastructure or obvious attraction to visitors, **Connells Lagoon Conservation Reserve** (p172), east of the Tablelands Hwy, is a significant reserve of native Mitchell grass habitat – a relatively untrampled remnant of the pre-cattle ecosystem.



THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Fran's Devonshire Tea House (☎ 8975 9945; Stuart Hwy Larrimah; priceless; ☺ break-fast, lunch & dinner) For over 20 years Fran has been reviving weary travellers with home-made treats and fresh coffee at the Old Police Station in Larrimah – look for the jumble of blackboard signs beside the highway. Fran's wealth of knowledge on all things Territory is as much of a drawcard as her scrumptious pies, strudels and scones. Fran has answers to questions you haven't yet thought of. 'Home-made' is often over-used in catering, but not here. Everything from the soft drinks and ice cream to the delicious pastry on the buffalo and chilli pies is Fran-made. It's fresh rather than fast, and you won't find a deep-fryer or chip within cooee. Fran's is open daily except for shopping day once a fortnight. Which day? That depends on Fran's diary or whim.

a quirky outback pub with a rustic bar and a menagerie of camels, donkeys, birds, crocs and a rather bedraggled pink panther. The camping ground (with kitchen) is a little exposed, and the rooms are basic, but it's a clean and friendly place. Counter meals (mains \$12 to \$17) at lunch and dinner are served in the shady bar area or in the period dining room.

DALY WATERS

The historical settlement of Daly Waters, just 4km west of the Stuart Hwy, is a worthwhile detour. The pub here has carved a name for itself in the Hall of Eccentric Little Places, and though it seems a little forced and touristy, the beer is cold and the patrons keep arriving.

On the highway itself, 4km south of the Daly Waters turn-off, is the Daly Waters Junction, where the Carpentaria Hwy heads 23.4km east to Borroloola and the Gulf.

The **Daly Waters Campdraft, Show and Rodeo**, in mid-September, is the social event of the year, with a dance held at the pub on the Saturday evening.

History

On John McDouall Stuart's third attempt to cross the continent from south to north, he came across the small creek here, which

he named in honour of the then governor of South Australia.

In 1872 the Overland Telegraph Line came through and a repeater station was built. In the 1890s a pub sprang up, catering for drovers who had started using Daly Waters as a camp on the overland stock route between Queensland and the Kimberley. The current building dates from the late 1920s and, from the outside at least, looks much the same as it would have then.

In the early 1930s Qantas, then a fledgling airline, used Daly Waters as a refuelling stop on the Singapore leg of its Sydney–London run. The airstrip became one of the major stops in northern Australia.

The RAAF also used Daly Waters as a refuelling stop for its bombers en route to Singapore, and in 1942 established a base here. It was in constant use throughout the war, and the restored hangar now belongs to the National Trust.

Sights

The **Daly Waters Pub** has the most unusual array of mementos left by passing travellers – everything from bras to banknotes adorn the walls! It also lays claim to the title of 'oldest pub in the Territory', as its liquor licence has been used continuously since 1893.

About 1km from the pub there's a sign-posted turn-off to the sorry remains of a tree where John McDouall Stuart carved a large letter 'S'. Following on from here, the **Daly Waters Aerodrome** has an aviation display in the old hangar. Among the memorabilia, you can see an old photo of the aforementioned tree in which the 'S' is clearly visible.

Sleeping & Eating

Daly Waters Pub (☎ 8975 9927; www.dalywaterspub.com; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$10/14, s/d \$35/50, cabins \$65-95; ☺ ☺) Beside the pub is a grassy, well-shaded camping ground, and the accommodation, which is across the road, ranges from basic dongas to spacious self-contained cabins. Hearty meals (mains \$10 to \$30) at the bistro are served from breakfast to dinnertime, and the beef 'n' barra barbecue (\$18) in the evening is very popular. Fuel is available from 7am to 11pm daily.

Hiway Inn Roadhouse (☎ 8975 9925; cnr Stuart & Carpentaria Hwys; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$10/16, dm \$22, s/d \$65/80; ☺ 6am-11pm) This clean roadhouse and bar features simple dongas and

comfortable motel rooms, all set well back from the two highways. Filling roadhouse meals (mains \$15 to \$24) are available in the bar and dining room.

DUNMARRA

The name of this roadhouse was derived from that of Dan O'Mara, a missing man whose body was never found. **Dunmarra Wayside Inn** (☎ 8975 9922; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$11/17, s/d \$65/75; ☺ ☺) has a friendly restaurant-bar (mains \$12 to \$20) and a reptile display (yes, live snakes), as well as the usual fuel, refreshments and takeaway. The standard air-con rooms have a fridge, and there are gas barbecues in the camping ground.

The Buchanan Hwy, a beef road which heads west to Top Springs and the Buntine Hwy (to Halls Creek in Western Australia), starts 8km north of town (see p155). Forty kilometres north of Dunmarra, the sealed Carpentaria Hwy heads off east towards Borroloola and the Gulf of Carpentaria.

About 30km south of town, an **historic marker** to Sir Charles Todd, builder of the Overland Telegraph Line, commemorates the joining of the two ends of the line in August 1872.

ELLIOTT

pop 430

Most travellers bypass Elliott, which sits at the halfway point between Alice Springs and

Darwin. The town includes several roadhouses (which stock groceries), a **police station** (☎ 8969 2010) and a nine-hole golf course that boasts real grass greens. If you must stay, try the **Midland Caravan Park** (☎ 8969 2037; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$7/20, cabins \$65), which is also the post office agent. Fuel is available here from 7am to 5pm daily.

RENNER SPRINGS

An hour or so down the track from Elliott, Renner Springs is a roadhouse on what is generally accepted as being the dividing line between the seasonally wet Top End and the dry Centre.

The often monotonous country that the highway passes through is relieved around here by the Ashburton Range, which parallels the road for some distance either side of Renner Springs.

Renner Springs Desert Inn (☎ 8964 4505; www.rennersprings.com; Stuart Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$15/20, d \$80-85; ☺ 7am-11pm; ☺ ☺ ☺) is housed in an army hut removed after WWII from the staging camp at Banka Banka Station to the south. It's built entirely of corrugated iron – even the bar. It's a great place to get all your road train questions answered with the drivers passing through. The camping ground is a bit exposed, though the motel accommodation is decent. The dining room (mains \$14 to \$20) is cosy and atmospheric, although it's only open for dinner.

DETOUR

Newcastle Waters is a former droving town that was at the intersection of northern Australia's two most important stock routes – the Murrnanji and the Barkly. Today it is virtually a ghost town, the only permanent inhabitants being the families of employees from Newcastle Waters Station. Located 3km west of the Stuart Hwy, the turn-off is 80km south of Dunmarra and 25km north of Elliot. There are no facilities of any kind in the 'town'.

In recognition of the need for permanent water along the stock routes, Newcastle Waters was made the depot for a bore-sinking team in 1917. Once the 13 bores along the Murrnanji were operational in 1924, use of the route increased steadily.

The town site for Newcastle Waters was leased from the station by the government in 1930 and a store and pub were built, followed by a telegraph repeater station in 1942. The town's death knell was the demise of the drovers in the early 1960s, with the advent of road transport for moving stock, and the fact that the Stuart Hwy bypassed the town.

On arrival, check out the **Drovers' Memorial Park**, which commemorates the part played by the drovers in the opening up of the Territory. Only a few buildings remain on what was once the main street. The rustic **Junction Hotel**, built in 1932 out of abandoned windmills, was the town's focus. The other notable building is **Jones Store**, also known as George Man Fong's house, which was restored by the National Trust in 1988 and houses a small museum with information and photos of the town's heyday, including a few interesting anecdotes.

Breakfast, lunch and snacks can be eaten out on the wide veranda.

BANKA BANKA

The historical Banka Banka cattle station, 60km south of Renner Springs and 100km north of Tennant Creek, makes a relaxing and welcoming stop along the Track.

Banka Banka Station (☎ 8964 4511; bankabanka.stn@bigpond.com; Stuart Hwy; unpowered sites for 2 \$12) is a friendly oasis that offers a grassy camping ground shaded by yellow flame trees and pristine toilet and shower blocks, including wheelchair accessible amenities. This oh-so-relaxing place has a couple of marked walking trails – one leads to an attractive waterhole with rock walls surrounded by gum trees and abundant bird life. ‘Bundy’, the station’s dog, will no doubt dive in for a dip with you. In the evening, the station master runs a slide show and talk covering all aspects of station life – from mustering and pregnancy testing to butchering the ‘killer’. The small licensed kiosk hosts a sausage sizzle in the evenings, and sells ice creams, milk and soft drinks. For meals you will need to be self-sufficient, but there are barbecues, a good camp kitchen and you can get gas refills.

ATTACK CREEK HISTORICAL RESERVE

About 90km south of Renner Springs the highway crosses Attack Creek, and on the southern side is a memorial to John McDouall Stuart, with a shaded picnic area, water tank and barbecue (BYO wood).

On Stuart’s first attempt at a south–north crossing of the continent, in 1860, he got as far as this creek before he was forced to return to Adelaide, partly because he was low on supplies. Stuart’s version was that his party was attacked by hostile Warumungu Aboriginal men and that this forced the turn around. The attack certainly occurred, but the details seem to have been exaggerated by Stuart.

THREE WAYS

Being the point where the Stuart Hwy meets the road east to Queensland, the Barkly Hwy, it didn’t take much wit to come up with the name Three Ways. At 537km north of the Alice, 988km south of Darwin and 643km west of Mt Isa, it’s a long way from anywhere apart from Tennant Creek, which is 26km down the Track. Three Ways

is a classic ‘get stuck’ point for hitchhikers and a ‘must stop’ point for road trains.

On the north side of the junction next to the highway there’s a construction that looks like a brick water tower. This is in fact the **John Flynn Memorial**, commemorating the founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Reverend John Flynn. It’s one of the least aesthetically pleasing monuments you’re ever likely to see.

Threeways Roadhouse (☎ 8962 2744; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$14/19, dm \$20, budget s \$35, motel d \$70; ☎ 6am–11pm; ♿) is a typical roadhouse and features a grassy camping ground, budget dongas and standard motel rooms, including some wheelchair-accessible rooms. There’s an information centre, a bar and a restaurant (mains \$12 to \$20) that plates up steak, barra and schnitzels in truck-driver proportions for lunch and dinner.

TENNANT CREEK

pop 3290

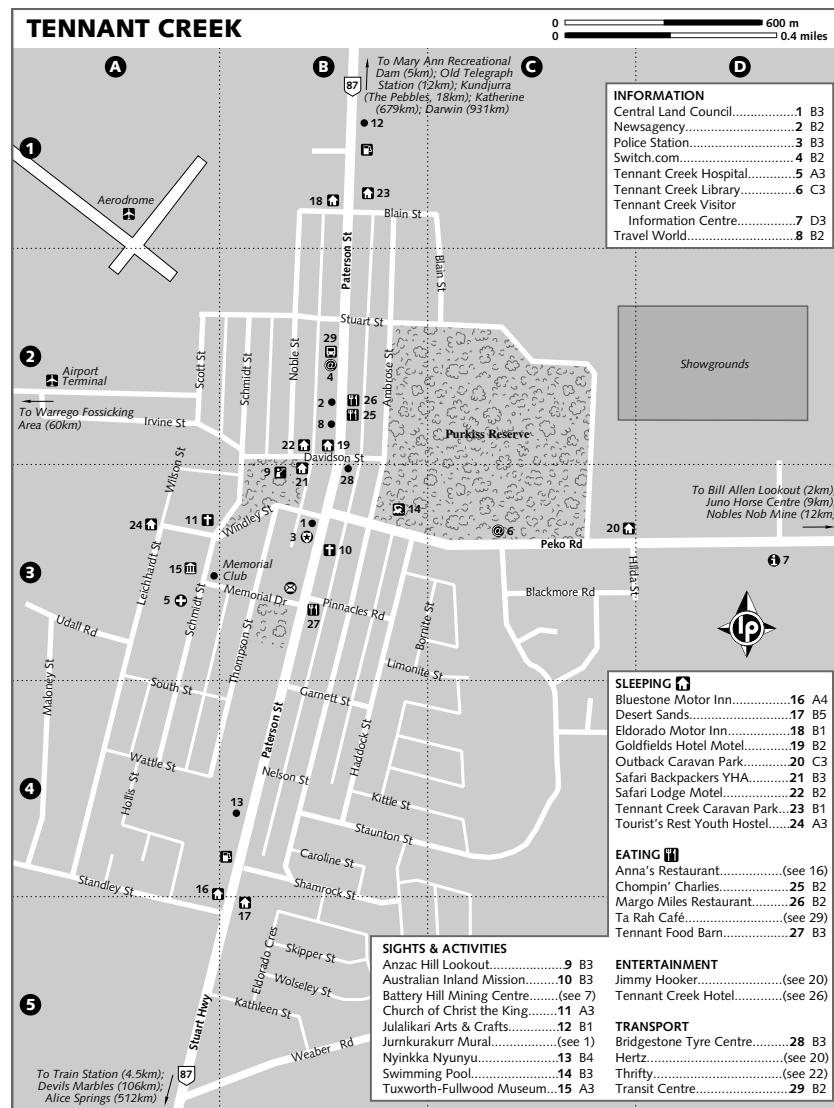
Straddling the Stuart Hwy, Tennant Creek is the only town of any size between Katherine and Alice Springs. It’s 26km south of Three Ways and 511km north of Alice Springs. Many travellers spend a night here to break up the driving and see the town’s few attractions.

History

Known as Jurnkurakurr to the Warumungu people, Tennant Creek is at the intersection of a number of Dreaming tracks.

John McDouall Stuart passed through here on an expedition in 1860 before turning back at Attack Creek some distance north. He named the creek, which is about 10km north of town, after John Tennant, a prominent pastoralist from Port Lincoln in South Australia.

A repeater station for the Overland Telegraph Line was set up in Tennant Creek in the 1870s. The story goes that the town itself was established 10km south of the repeater station because that was where a wagonload of beer broke down in the early 1930s; rather than take the beer to the people, the people went to the beer and that’s where the town has stayed. The truth is far more prosaic: the town was established as the result of a small gold rush around the same time. In 1932, a Warumungu man found a rock containing traces of gold and showed it to a group



of men who formed a syndicate and began mining and prospecting. By WWII there were some 100 small mines in operation.

Once mining was under way, the local Aboriginal people were moved to the **Phillip Creek** settlement on the Stuart Hwy north of Tennant, where the mud brick ruins are still visible.

However, the gold rush was short-lived and the town might well have gone the way of a number of ‘boom and bust’ towns in the Territory, except that viable quantities of copper were found in the 1950s. New technology led to further mining and one mine, Nobles Nob (16km east of town) ranks among Australia’s richest. It was the

country's biggest open-cut gold mine until mining ceased in 1985. A substantial new gold-mining venture started up in 2003 at the Chariot mine, 9km west of town, and mining and exploration for gold and other resources continues in the region today.

Orientation & Information

Tennant Creek sprawls north-south along the Stuart Hwy, which becomes Paterson St, the main drag, as it passes through town. You'll find the Transit Centre, most places to stay, a few places to eat, banks with ATMs and a supermarket along here. There are also two roadhouses, a pub and post office.

Central Land Council (☎ 8962 2343; 63 Paterson St) Can assist with permits to cross Aboriginal land.

Police station (☎ 8962 4444; Paterson St)

Switch.com (☎ 8962 3124; 145 Paterson St; per 20min \$2; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; ☎) Internet access.

Tennant Creek Hospital (☎ 8962 4399; Schmidt St) A couple of blocks west of Paterson St.

Tennant Creek Library (☎ 8962 0050; Peko Rd; per 20min \$2; ☎ noon-5pm Mon, 2-6pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am-noon Sat; ☎) Internet access.

Tennant Creek Visitor Information Centre (☎ 8962 3388; www.barklytourism.com.au; Peko Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat Oct-Apr) Located 2km east of town at the historical gold stamp battery.

Travel World (☎ 8962 2211; 62 Paterson St) Sells airline and long-distance bus tickets.

Sights

Nyinkka Nyunyu (☎ 8962 2221; www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au; Paterson St; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-4pm Sat May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm Sun year-round) is an excellent Aboriginal art and culture centre, with absorbing displays on contemporary art, traditional objects (many returned by the Victorian and South Australian museums), bush medicine and regional history. There's a landscaped garden featuring indigenous flora, which is sometimes the venue for ceremonies and performances, and the excellent Jajjikari Café, which sells espresso coffee, muffins flavoured with native flora, burgers and focaccias.

Inquire at Nyinkka Nyunyu about visiting **Julalikari Arts & Crafts** (☎ 8am-noon, Mon-Fri), also known as the Pink Palace, in the Ngälpa Ngälpa community at the northern end of town. Here you can see Aboriginal women painting traditional and contemporary art.

Gold-bearing ore was originally crushed and treated at what is now **Battery Hill Mining Centre** (☎ 8962 1281; Peko Rd; adult/child/family \$30/20/60; ☎ 9am-5pm), 1.5km east of town. There are **underground mine tours** (☎ 9.30am & 2.30pm) and surface tours of the 10-head **battery** (☎ 11am & 4pm). In addition there is a superb **Minerals Museum** and you can try your hand at gold panning. The admission price gives access to all of the above, or you can just choose one of the tours (adult/child/family \$20/12/40), visit to the Minerals Museum only (adult/family \$5/10) or go panning (\$5 per person).

The **Jurnkurakurr Mural** (63 Paterson St), on the wall of the Central Land Council building, was painted by the local Aboriginal people. It depicts Dreamings from this area – among them the snake, white cockatoo, crow, budgerigar, fire and lightning.

Across from the Memorial Club, the small **Tuxworth-Fullwood Museum** (☎ 8962 2340; Schmidt St; admission \$2.20; ☎ 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat & Sun May-Sep) dates from 1942 when it was built as an army hospital. Until 1978 it was used as an outpatients' clinic for the hospital next door. There are displays of local memorabilia and a re-creation of a miner's camp.

The 1936 **Church of Christ the King** (Windley St) and the **Australian Inland Mission** (Uniting Church; Paterson St), just south of Peko Rd, are both constructed of corrugated iron. The latter was built in the 1930s by the Sidney Williams Co. (Many corrugated-iron buildings along the track are of Sidney Williams construction; see the boxed text opposite.)

The small **Anzac Hill lookout**, off Davidson St next to the Safari backpackers, offers a good view over the town.

As you approach Tennant Creek from the north, you'll see the lovely green-roofed stone buildings of the old **Telegraph Station** just off the highway about 12km north of town. Built in 1872, it is one of only four of the original 11 stations remaining in the Territory (the others are at Barrow Creek, Alice Springs and Powell Creek). This was the most northerly station to be provisioned from Adelaide, and the supplies were brought by camel from the railhead at Oodnadatta. The station's telegraph functions ceased in 1935 when a new office opened in the town itself, but it was in use until 1950 as a linesman's residence and until 1985 as a station home-stead. It is an interesting and pleasant spot

THE SIDNEY WILLIAMS HUT

Time and again, visitors to the Territory who have an interest in history and architecture come across corrugated-iron buildings known as Sidney Williams huts. These prefabricated buildings were supplied by a Sydney-based company that was established in the 1920s by Sidney Williams, an architect and engineer.

Initially Sidney Williams & Co specialised in windmills, but from experience gained on his travels throughout remote parts of the country, Williams realised that there was the need for a building system that was cheap, easy to transport and simple to erect. The company developed the Comet Building, a system of interchangeable steel sections that bolted together so that any configuration of walls, doors and windows could be achieved. The beauty of the steel frame was that it was not only stronger than local wood, but was also termite-proof.

Sidney Williams huts went up in all corners of the Territory from the 1920s onwards, and became very much a part of it – in 1935 the civic buildings in the new township of Tennant Creek were almost exclusively of Sidney Williams construction. The defence forces erected many Sidney Williams huts from Alice Springs to Darwin during WWII.

The company was wound up in 1988 and all records destroyed, so it is not known just how many were shipped to the Northern Territory. Many of the original buildings have been moved, often to remote locations, but many still survive – the old Inland Mission building in Tennant Creek and the Totem Theatre buildings in Alice Springs were all supplied by Sidney Williams & Co.

that's well worth a wander around. To see inside, you need to get a key (\$20 deposit) from the visitors centre, the Outback Caravan Park or Three Ways Roadhouse.

Just north of the Telegraph Station is the turn-off west to **Kundjarra** (The Pebbles), a formation of granite boulders like a miniaturised version of the better-known Devil's Marbles found 100km south. It's a sacred women's Dreaming site of the Warramungu people. Access is 6km along a good dirt road, and it's best enjoyed at sunset or sunrise.

The **Bill Allen Lookout**, about 2km east of the visitors centre, looks over the town and the McDouall Ranges to the north, and has signboards explaining the sights.

Activities

If you're into fossicking, head for **Warrego Fossicking Area**, about 60km west of town along the Warrego road. Note that a (free) permit must be obtained from the visitors centre.

The town has a good outdoor **swimming pool** (Peko Rd; adult/child \$2.60/1.30; ☎ 10am-6.30pm).

About 5km north of town is the **Mary Ann Recreational Dam**, a good spot for a cool swim or a picnic. A bicycle track runs next to the highway to the turn-off and then it's a further 1.5km.

Tours

Devil's Marbles Tours (☎ 0418 891 711) runs trips out to (you guessed it) the Devil's Marbles.

There's a day tour (\$75) with lunch, and a sunset tour (\$50).

Festivals & Events

Tennant Creek plays host to the **Tennant Creek Show** (July), the **Tennant Creek Cup** (August), and the **Desert Harmony Arts Festival** (August/September).

Sleeping BUDGET

Tourist's Rest Youth Hostel (☎ 8962 2719; www.touristrest.com.au; cnr Leichhardt & Windley Sts; dm/d \$18/38; ☎ ☎) This is a small, friendly and ramshackle hostel with clean rooms, free breakfast and YHA/VIP discounts available. The combination accommodation/Devil's Marbles trip is good value.

Safari Backpackers YHA (☎ 8962 2207; safari@switch.com.au; 12 Davidson St; dm \$17, tw & d \$40) Owned by and opposite the Safari Hotel, this is a big house with average four- or eight-bed dorms and private rooms with shared cooking and bathroom facilities. YHA discount is available.

Outback Caravan Park (☎ 8962 2459; outback@switch.com.au; Peko Rd; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$18/22, cabins \$50-80; ☎ ☎) About 1km east of town, this is a pleasant shady park with a kiosk, 'refreshment' garden, camp kitchen, fuel and the irrepressible Jimmy Hooker (see p166). It's worth paying the few extra dollars for the en suite cabins.

Juno Horse Centre (☎ 8962 2783; junohorsecentre@switch.com.au; unpowered sites for 2 \$12; 🏠) A very atmospheric camping ground run by a true Territorian about 10km from town along a sealed road. Caravan sites are drive-through but not powered, and there's a unique swimming pool made out of a squatters' tank. Inquire about horse riding (not available at time of research).

Tennant Creek Caravan Park (☎ 8962 2325; tennantvanpark@bigpond.com.au; Paterson St; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$16/20, dm \$25, cabin d \$45; 🏠 🚻) On the northern edge of town, this is a friendly park with lots of shade, a camp kitchen and top-notch amenities.

MIDRANGE

Bluestone Motor Inn (☎ 8962 2617; bluestone@switch.com.au; 1 Paterson St; s/d from \$90/95; 🏠 🚻) At the southern end of town, this 3½-star motel has comfortable standard rooms with all the expected facilities. In addition there are very spacious hexagonal deluxe rooms with queen-size beds and a sofa. There are wheelchair units, and the licensed Anna's Restaurant here is one of Tennant Creek's best.

Desert Sands (☎ 8962 1346; desertsands@switch.com.au; 780 Paterson St; s/d from \$70/80; 🏠 🚻) The Desert Sands offers enormous units (sleeping three to eight) each with a fully equipped kitchen, TV (with in-house movies), and a bathroom with a washing machine. This is excellent value.

Eldorado Motor Inn (☎ 8962 2402, fax 8962 3034; 192 Paterson St; s/d from \$100/110; 🏠 🚻) On the highway at the northern edge of town, this brick complex of 80 comfortable, well-appointed units surrounds a pool and includes a licensed restaurant.

Safari Lodge Motel (☎ 8962 2207; safari@switch.com.au; Davidson St; s/d \$75/85; 🏠 🚻) Part of the Budget chain, this motel is centrally located and has standard motel rooms with phone, fridge and TV. There's also a spa and laundry.

Goldfields Hotel Motel (☎ 8962 2030; fax 8962 3288; Paterson St; s/d \$65/75) The cheapest rooms in town at the rear of a rowdy pub.

Eating

Margo Miles Restaurant (Tennant Creek Hotel; ☎ 8962 2227; 146 Paterson St; mains \$15-25; 🍴) Lunch Mon-Sat & dinner Mon-Sun) This restaurant is a pleasant change from the roadhouse dining rooms up and down the Track. Choose a drink

from the varied and reasonably priced selection in the Faye Lewis Bar, set yourself down in the period dining room, and peruse the special board or choose a steak, seafood, pasta or gourmet pizza from the menu. The pizzas are the best in town.

Anna's Restaurant (☎ 8962 2617; Bluestone Motor Inn; 1 Paterson St; mains \$18-28; 🍴) This is a casual licensed restaurant with a good selection ranging from Thai curries and pastas to hefty steaks. There is a user-friendly kids' menu (\$7.50) and one or two vegetarian options always available.

Ta Rah Café (☎ 8962 3790; Transit Centre, 151 Paterson St; meals \$6-14; 🍴) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Inside the Transit Centre, this is a spotless café, which greets bus passengers with espresso coffee, scrumptious cakes, gourmet pies, berry crepes and roast of the day. This is also the best option for breakfast in town.

Chompin' Charlies (☎ 8962 2399; 114 Paterson St; mains \$6-8; 🍴) dinner Tue-Sat) Near the Tennant Creek Hotel, this is a popular local take-away with monstrous burgers (from beef to barra), yiros, fish 'n' chips etc.

Tennant Food Barn (☎ 8962 2296; 185 Paterson St) Opposite the post office, it can supply your self-catering needs.

Entertainment

Jimmy Hooker (☎ 8962 2459; Outback Caravan Park, Peko Rd; admission \$2; 🎶 7.30pm) Jimmy is a Tennant Creek institution. He is a bush poet, yarn spinner and mine of information on bush tucker, which he will bring along for you to taste.

Tennant Creek Hotel (☎ 8962 2006; 146 Paterson St; burgers around \$6) Jackson's Bar opens at 10am and the Faye Lewis Bar takes the evening shift with live entertainment on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. Occasionally the Shaft nightclub kicks off on a Friday night.

Getting There & Around

Aboriginal Air Services (☎ 8953 5000; www.aboriginair.com.au) flies to/from Alice Springs (from \$280 one way) three times a week. **Vincent Aviation** (☎ 8928 1366; vincentair@optusnet.com.au) flies to/from Darwin (from \$370 one way) three times a week and Alice Springs (from \$250 one way), also three times a week. Tennant Creek airport is about 2km west of town, out along Davidson then Irvine Sts.

All long-distance buses stop at the **Transit Centre** (☎ 8962 1070; Paterson St). **Greyhound**

Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has regular buses from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs (\$130, 6½ hours), Katherine (\$135, eight hours) and Darwin (\$185, 14 hours).

The weekly *Ghan* rail link between Alice Springs and Darwin can drop off passengers in Tennant Creek, although few people stop here and cars can't be loaded or offloaded. It's actually cheaper to travel to Darwin from here than it is from Katherine, far to the north – see p276 for details of fares and timetables. The train station is about 6km south of town and there is no shuttle service. Instead, call for **Rocky's Taxi** (☎ 8962 2522).

Car hire is available from **Hertz** (☎ 8962 2459; Outback Caravan Park, Peko Rd) and **Thrifty** (☎ 8962 2207; Safari Lodge Motel, Davidson St), while bike rental is available from the **Bridgestone Tyre Centre** (☎ 8962 2361; Paterson St; per half/full day \$5/10).

DEVIL'S MARBLES CONSERVATION RESERVE

The huge boulders that appear beside the Stuart Hwy about 105km south of Tennant Creek and 393km north of Alice Springs are known as the Devil's Marbles, one of the most famous geological sights in the Territory. This area is particularly beautiful at sunrise and sunset, when the oddball boulders glow warmly.

How and what? Over an estimated 1640 million years a huge granite block criss-crossed with fault lines eroded into slabs roughly 3m to 7m square. The extreme desert temperatures forced the expansion and contraction of the blocks, and slabs flaked off, like the skin of an onion. With corners rounded off by eons of erosion, the result is a stunning clutch of granite eggs. Some appear to have been stacked in precarious piles, others stand alone balanced at unlikely angles – they look as if a good shove could send them tumbling.

The area is a registered sacred site known as Karlukarlu to the local Warumungu tribe. Several Dreaming trails cross the area, and the rocks are believed to be the eggs of the Rainbow Serpent.

The **self-guided loop walk** (20 minutes) starts at the car park and is enlivened with interpretive signs and diagrams. It passes an amazing 4m-high boulder that has been neatly split in half – as if by a giant carving knife.

The **camping ground** (adult/child/family \$3.30/1.65/7.70), around the eastern side of the

boulders, has remarkably hard ground and really fills up in the afternoon. There are pit toilets, a shade shelter and a fireplace (BYO firewood).

Tours to the marbles are run from Tennant Creek. If you don't want to camp, there's accommodation about 10km south of the reserve at Wauchope.

WAUCHOPE

The settlement of Wauchope (*war-kup*) is little more than a fuel stop by the highway, though it does have some character. The pub itself dates back to the 1930s, and the 'town' owes its existence to the discovery of wolfram (tungsten) in the area in 1914. At its height, around 50 miners worked the small but rich field 12km east of here. Many more worked larger fields at Hatches Creek, about 140km to the east in the Davenport Ranges. After WWI the price of wolfram halved almost overnight as the British no longer needed it in their war effort, and the Wauchope field became unviable.

The price of wolfram revived in the late 1930s in the build-up to WWII, and it was at this time that the pub was established. For a second time a war finished and the demand for wolfram fell dramatically. Before long the fields were deserted and Wauchope became the stop on the highway that it is today.

Wauchope Hotel (☎ 8964 1963; Stuart Hwy; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$12/16, s \$30, d \$35-65; 🏠 🚻) is a handy place to stay near the Devil's Marbles. The budget rooms are spotless and the more expensive doubles are comfortable en suite rooms. Disabled rooms are available and camping is on lush lawn. As well as a pool, there's a tennis court and pleasant beer garden. The restaurant serves great meals (mains \$12 to \$20) – there's always a good-value special on offer and it's open for all meals. Otherwise there's a barbecue in the camping ground. Fuel is available from 6am to 11pm. Bicycle hire is available (\$10 a day) if you feel like pedalling the 10km to the Devil's Marbles.

WYCLIFFE WELL

'Earthlings are welcome at Wycliffe Well', just 18km south of Wauchope, where a spate of UFO sightings has been claimed in recent years.

The well referred to in the name dates from 1872 and the Overland Telegraph Line, although the water quality was not all that flash. In the 1930s a bore was sunk to provide good water on the North–South Stock Route. During WWII a 2-hectare army vegetable farm was established to supply the troops further up the Stuart Hwy.

Wycliffe Well Roadhouse & Holiday Park (☎ 8964 1966; www.wycliffe.com.au; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$20/25, s/d from \$50/60, cabins from \$80; ♿ ♿ ♿) is believed, by some, to be on a cross-section of ley lines (energy lines), meaning that UFOs flying around will pass through this area. In among all manner of alien critters (and for some reason, the Incredible Hulk, the Phantom, Elvis and a toy gorilla), there's an indoor pool, laundry, barbecues, camp kitchen and a pleasant restaurant (mains \$17 to \$20), which is open for all meals. You can read all about the UFO sightings while sampling the enormous variety of international beers available at the bar – and ponder the association between alcohol and aliens.

DAVENPORT RANGE NATIONAL PARK

The ancient Davenport and Murchison Ranges east of Wauchope are included in this 1120-sq-km proposed national park. The Davenport Ranges are not the most spectacular on earth, but they are among the oldest, as their eroded peaks are all that remains of the 1800-million-year-old geological formations. The park protects a series of permanent waterholes, which harbour several species of fish and provide a vital refuge for water birds and other animals.

The **Whistleduck Creek** area and the **Old Police Station Waterhole** are the only places that can be visited. Both can be reached by 4WD vehicle from the Stuart Hwy (91km and 170km, respectively) via the track to Kurundi and Epenarra Stations, which leaves the Stuart Hwy at Bonney Well, 90km south of Tennant Creek. Otherwise, Old Police Station Waterhole can be accessed from the south (also 170km via the Murray Downs station track, which heads east off the Stuart Hwy close to where it crosses Taylors Creek, about 40km north of Barrow Creek). Access is by high-clearance 4WD only. This is very remote country and tracks are not signposted.

The camping grounds at Whistleduck Creek and Old Police Station Waterhole

have pit toilets and no other facilities. All visitors must be completely self-sufficient. Fuel is available at Kurundi, Epenarra and **Murray Downs** (☎ 8964 1958) stations. Roads can be flooded between December and March; for information about conditions phone the **police station** (☎ 8964 1959) at Ali Curung. For the latest park information contact the Visitor Information Centre at Tennant Creek (p164).

BARKLY TABLELAND & THE GULF

To the east of the Stuart Hwy lies the huge expanse of the Barkly Tableland and, beyond it, the Gulf of Carpentaria region. It is primarily cattle country, characterised by the arid grasslands of the tableland and the open woodland country of the Gulf.

Most visitors pass through on the Barkly Hwy, which connects the Stuart Hwy with Mt Isa (Queensland). The prime attraction is the fine fishing – the Roper River, on the southern edge of Arnhem Land, and the waterways around Borroloola near the Gulf are renowned among fisherfolk.

The Barkly Tableland, named after the Governor of Victoria in 1861, comprises a relatively featureless plain dominated by tussock grasses. Only in the few creek lines do many trees occur.

Oh, and remember that crocodiles inhabit the Roper River and all the waterways in the Gulf Region.

ROPER BAR

Just south of Mataranka on the Stuart Hwy the mostly sealed (apart from 45km) Roper Hwy strikes east for 176km to Roper Bar. The Roper River is over 100m wide and lined by huge paperbark trees at the rock 'bar', or ford, and is a popular fishing spot particularly renowned for barramundi. It's also an access point into southeastern Arnhem Land, or you can continue south to Borroloola.

In the early days, steam ships and large sailing vessels tied up at the bar to discharge cargo. The wreck of one of them, the *Young Australian*, lies about 25km downstream.

The **Roper Bar Store** (☎ 8975 4636; unpowered sites for 2 \$16, donga d \$65; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 1–6pm Sun; ♿) is all there is out here. It stocks fuel,

general supplies and takeaway food. Note that fishing tours are available, but need to be arranged before you arrive. There are dongas behind the store (the interesting smell outside is due to the cooking oil poured over the baking ground to keep the dust down), while the camping is at Leichhardt's Camping Ground about 100m from the river. The camping ground has hot showers and flushing toilets, but it's usually noisy because the anglers keep their catch cold with generators and portable fridges.

The road to **Ngukurr**, an Aboriginal community 30km away, crosses the river at the bar. Access is by permit only to this dry community. **Bobby Nungumagabar** (☎ 8975 4755) in Ngukurr can arrange a day permit and art sales.

ROPER BAR TO BORROLOOLA

The Nathan River Rd from Roper Bar to Borroloola is part of the famous Gulf Track. Here it varies from pretty good to bloody rough – the grassy strip down the middle in parts certainly spells 'track' rather than 'road' to many drivers. A 4WD is not obligatory, but good clearance certainly is. It's advisable to carry two spares, and to slow right down on the loose and sharp shale sections.

Limmen National Park, through which much of the road passes, has been established to cover an area of 10,000 sq km, encompassing several rivers and associated wetlands, striking sandstone formations and some interesting history.

As the road begins to hug the southern bank of the Roper River, about 45km from Roper Bar, you may notice what appears to be a gypsy camp. This is the basic **Tomato Island** camping ground (as yet no facilities), where you can launch a boat and park a campervan. From here, giant grey termite mounds mark the 25km to old **St Vidgeon Homestead** – a lonely ruin on a stony rise that conjures up stark images of battlers eking a scant living from the hostile bush. Just behind the ruin is the superb **Lomarie Lagoon**. Fringed by paperbarks and covered by blooming water lilies, the lagoon has many birds and a peaceful atmosphere.

From the lagoon it's 40km to the beautiful **Towns River**. The official camping ground is on the southern side of the river, and provides toilets, secluded sites and a boat launching area. The number of freshwater

crocs in this stretch of the river attests to the abundance of fish.

From the Towns River it's 48km to the turn-off for **Limmen Bight Fishing Camp** (☎ 8975 9844; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$14/15, gazebos \$25, air-con cabins \$55; ♿), reached via a 21km track. There are hot showers, flush toilets, a small shop, fuel, boat hire and a public phone. Welding and tyre repairs are available here.

The road soon crosses the Cox River and then, after weaving through a small range, the Limmen Bight River. The **Nathan River Ranger Station** (☎ 8975 8792) is reached 13km from the Limmen Bight crossing. (There may be no sign at the turn-off to the station.) The ranger station in the old homestead can provide information on camping and 4WD tracks (including a key to the Western Lost City sandstone formations) in the national park.

Six kilometres south of Nathan River is a pleasant but basic camping ground beside the beautiful **Butterfly Springs**.

For about 44km southwards from here, the road runs up narrow valleys between rugged ridges, before finally joining the sealed Carpentaria Hwy 30km from Borroloola, or you can continue on to Cape Crawford.

BORROLOOLA

pop 770

Among fisherfolk, Borroloola is something of a mecca, but unless you've come to catch a fish there's little here of interest to a traveller. The Borroloola **Fishing Classic** at Easter draws many enthusiasts, while other annual events include a **rodeo** and **show** in August.

History

Until 1885 there were no facilities, apart from a few scattered homesteads along the Gulf Track – a major stock route from Burketown in Queensland to Elsey Station and Katherine. Then a racketeer by the name of John 'Black Jack' Reid brought a boat loaded with alcohol and supplies up the McArthur River to the Burketown Crossing, where he built a rough store (the Royal Hotel), and from this the settlement grew.

Twelve months later, the Kimberley gold rush greatly increased traffic on the Gulf Track and the new township soon had a population of 150 non-Aboriginal people: 'the scum of northern Australia', according

to one government official. A decade on, the gold rush and great cattle drives were over and only six people remained. Borroloola survives as an administrative and supply centre for cattle stations and nearby McArthur Mine, which extracts silver, lead and zinc.

Borroloola was blown away by Cyclone Kathy in 1984 and much of its old character was lost in the rebuilding.

Information

The town's services and businesses are stretched out along the main drag, Robinson Rd, and include a post office (within Borroloola Bulk Discounts), supermarket, mechanical repairers, fuel outlets and marine suppliers.

Gulf Mini Mart (☎ 8975 8790; Robinson Rd) and **Borroloola Bulk Discounts** (☎ 8975 8775; Robinson Rd) act as Westpac and ANZ agents respectively and both have EFTPOS and fuel. There are public phones at Gulf Mini Mart and near the police station.

Medical centre (☎ 8975 8757; Robinson Rd) Opposite the police station.

Parks & Wildlife office (☎ 8975 8792; Robinson Rd)

Police station (☎ 8975 8770; Robinson Rd)

Tourist Information (☎ 8975 8799; Borroloola Town Council, Robinson Rd; ☎ 8am–noon, 1–4.30pm Mon–Fri) In the rear of council building complex.

Sights & Activities

Much of the town's colourful history is on show at the **museum** (admission \$2; ☎ 8am–5pm), housed in the corrugated-iron police station, which was built in 1887. Displays weave through Aboriginal lore and trade with the Macassans, and tell wonderful tales of cattlemen and explorers through fascinating newspaper articles, old photos and bric-a-brac. You can read about local eccentrics such as the Hermit of Borroloola, who walked here in 1916 from Cunnamulla – more than 2000km away. He lived in an old water tank, and was quoted as saying: 'Man's richness is in the fewness of his needs.' The 'working lists' of burials and serving police force members may be of use to those tracing their ancestry.

The main attraction to the town is undeniably **fishing**. You can cast a line for a wide variety of fish, including barramundi and threadfin salmon, from the banks of the McArthur River in town or 40km downstream near King Ash Bay camping

ground. There are boat ramps at Borroloola and King Ash Bay, and good fishing in the river, estuary or out in the Gulf around the Sir Edward Pellew group of islands.

You can drive north to the sailing club at King Ash Bay and on to **Bing Bong**, around 44km from Borroloola. There is no access to the harbour, as it's under a mining lease, but if you're desperate to see the coast (literally metres away) there's a viewing tower to the left of the gates.

Tours

Borroloola Estuary Fishing Tours (☎ 8975 8716) can organise full-day and overnight fishing tours with all gear and meals and camping equipment.

Cape Crawford Tourism (☎ 8975 9611; www.capecrawfordtourism.com.au; \$200; ☎ Apr–Oct) runs three-hour tours that include helicopter access and hiking, which take in the Lost City rock formations in the Abner Range (some of which tower 50m high), cool ferneries and tumbling waterfalls, none of which is otherwise accessible to the general public.

Sleeping & Eating

In addition to the following options, there are pub rooms and a caravan park at Cape Crawford, 129km to the southwest.

Borroloola has little to choose from in the way of eateries. Takeaways are available at both of the general stores.

Borroloola Guest House (☎ 8975 8883; www.handr.com.au; cnr Robinson Rd & Broad St; budget r \$50, cabin d from \$80, guesthouse d \$100; ☎) This is the best (ultra clean) spot in town and has a barbecue in the peaceful garden. Also known as H&R, the budget rooms have share facilities, and the breezy guesthouse has a cosy atmosphere and good common areas.

McArthur River Caravan Park (☎ 8975 8734; fax 8975 8712; Robinson Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$18/22, cabin d \$55–100; ☎) Just down from the pub, this is a clean and shady site with wood barbecues and good cabins. Coastal and estuary fishing tours can be organised from here, or if nothing's biting, inquire about where to buy barra and mud crabs.

King Ash Bay Fishing Club (☎ 8975 9861; King Ash Bay; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 per week \$70/120) This camping ground is 40km north of Borroloola, and has passable share facilities. There are also bush camps further down the river. The Gropers' Grill (mains \$10 to \$15)

serves steak and burgers (dinner only), and there's always a daily special. Basic supplies, bait and ice are available from the mini-mart. There's good fishing from the river bank at King Ash Bay, with a boat ramp.

Borroloola Hotel/Motel (☎ 8975 8766; fax 8975 8773; s/d \$60/75; ☎) This is a rowdy pub with OK rooms and a busy kitchen (mains \$10 to \$23) churning out the usual pub fare.

Gulf Minimart (☎ 8975 8790; ☎ 6am–8pm) Also known as the Chicken Shop, it serves sandwiches, hot food and, if you get in early enough in the day, has fresh rotisserie chickens (\$12). By the time you are reading this you may even be able to get an espresso coffee here.

Getting There & Away

Savannah Aviation (☎ 8975 8620; www.savannah-aviation.com) and **Air Ngukkur** (☎ 8945 2755; www.airngukkur.com.au) provide charter services to/from Darwin or Katherine.

AROUND BORROLOOLA

Barranyi (North Island) National Park

The islands of the Sir Edward Pellew Group lie in the Gulf of Carpentaria about 30km north of the McArthur River mouth. One of the islands, North Island, is owned by the Yanyuwa people and much of it is managed by Parks & Wildlife as the Barranyi National Park.

The park features sandy beaches and sandstone cliffs, and four species of marine turtle nest there. The waters surrounding the park provide excellent fishing.

While there are no facilities in the park, it is possible to camp if you have your own gear.

Contact **Parks & Wildlife** (☎ 8975 8792) in Borroloola before heading out to the park. There is drinking water (but check situation with Parks & Wildlife) and pit barbecues at Paradise Bay. Access is only by boat via the McArthur River and Carrington Channel (35km); the closest boat ramp is at King Ash Bay, 40km north of Borroloola. Even in the Dry the waters of the Gulf can be quite rough and the 30km crossing to North Island should be attempted only by experienced skippers.

Caranbirini Conservation Reserve

This small reserve 46km south of Borroloola lies at the western extremity of the Buka-

lara Range, and protects a rugged sandstone escarpment, some attractive outlying sandstone spires (known as 'Lost City' formations) and a semi-permanent waterhole.

The local Aboriginal people, the Gadanji, used the reserve's waterhole as a source of food such as turtles, mussels and water-lilies, and two Dreaming trails, the Emu (Jagududgu) and the White Cockatoo (Barrawulla), have associations with the site.

There are no facilities and camping is not permitted, but there are three walking trails. A short walk takes you to a **viewing point** on the waterhole, where lots of birds congregate in the drier months. The **Barrawulla Loop Walk** (2km, one hour) takes in the 25m-high Lost City formations, and is a pleasant spot in the early morning or evening. The **Jagududgu Loop Walk** (5km, three hours) to the east is home to the rare Carpentarian grasswren; if you go looking for this bird take plenty of water and wear appropriate clothing – it's an exposed trail through rocky, spinifex country.

BORROLOOLA TO WOLLOGORANG

From Borroloola, a good gravel road heads southeast towards Wollogorang Station on the Northern Territory–Queensland border, 266km east of Borroloola on Hwy 1. This road is best traversed with a 4WD vehicle, but conventional vehicles with high ground clearance should have no difficulty. If you plan to travel across in the wet season, check road conditions with the Borroloola police. Highlights of this stretch include some fine river crossings. The Wearyan River, 56km from Borroloola, has water and good **bush camping** just upstream from the crossing, where tall cycad palms grow.

The Robinson River, 50km further on, is a good spot for a picnic. Travellers with 4WDs can reach some good **bush camps** beside shallow flowing water. The Calvert River Crossing is 80km beyond here, and is another pleasant spot. There is some dramatic scenery along this 72km stretch to Wollogorang.

Wollogorang Station, established in 1881, covers over 7000 sq km and boasts an 80km frontage of pristine sandy beaches on the Gulf of Carpentaria. For many years this was an obligatory stop for travellers, with a roadhouse and accommodation. This is no longer the case and there is no fuel or

accommodation between Borroloola and the Hells Gate Roadhouse – 59km across the border in Queensland. When entering Queensland don't forget to put your watch forward half an hour.

CAPE CRAWFORD

Despite its name, Cape Crawford is nowhere near the coast – it's at the junction of the Carpentaria and Tablelands Hwys, 113km southwest of Borroloola and 234km east of the Stuart Hwy. There's nothing here except for the Heartbreak Hotel – one of the best roadhouses in the Northern Territory, which sees very few tourists.

Sleeping

Heartbreak Hotel (☎ 8975 9928; fax 8975 9993; cnr Carpentaria & Tablelands Hwys; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$12/22, dm/s/d \$40/65/75; 🚻 🚰) This friendly place is a requisite stop whichever way you are heading. Pitch the tent on the shaded grassy lawn, and then park yourself on the wide veranda with a cold beer. The amenities were undergoing renovation when we visited, while the kitchen, which offers all meals (mains \$10 to \$22), and the well-used barbecue were feeding steak, chips and salad to a merry and contented bunch of ringers, miners and (lost?) campervanners. Fuel and takeaway beer is also available.

From here it's a desolate 374km across the Barkly Tablelands to the Barkly Hwy and Barkly Homestead.

CAPE CRAWFORD TO BARKLY HOMESTEAD

This desolate route follows the Tablelands Hwy due south from Cape Crawford to Barkly Homestead, passing just one station along the way. Note that no fuel is available along this 375km stretch.

Brunette Downs

Brunette Downs Station (☎ 8964 4522; Tablelands Hwy), 245km south of Cape Crawford, covers just over 12,000 sq km. It is accessible by conventional vehicles with care.

This station would be no different from any other in the region if it wasn't for the **Brunette Downs Bush Races**, held in June each year. A cast of hundreds flocks in from miles around for a lively four days that includes a rodeo and ball. There is no charge for

camping or to use the showers and toilets, and a professional caterer supplies meals and keeps the beer flowing. The race track is around 20km from the homestead.

It's a great outback event and one well worth the detour if you happen to be in the area. You can find out exact dates from www.barklytourism.com.au or the station itself. Note that the station can offer nothing in the way of facilities for travellers.

Connells Lagoon Conservation Reserve

This lonely reserve is on Ranken Rd east of Brunette Downs Station. Here, 256 sq km of pancake-flat land was set aside to preserve undisturbed Mitchell grass habitat. It may look pretty uninspiring, but there's a surprising range of botanical diversity – 189 plant species are known to exist in the area.

The namesake lagoon doesn't amount to much and, in fact, only fills after good rains. When it does, it attracts migratory wading birds, as well as grassland species such as flock bronzewings and pictorella manikin finches. The long-haired rat forms plagues after big rains here, when grass seeds are abundant. In turn, it becomes food for predators such as owls, kites and dingoes.

There's no drinking water and there are no visitor facilities within the reserve, with the exception of an information bay on the southern side of the 4WD access track between Brunette Downs and Alexandria Stations.

Barkly Homestead

The **Barkly Homestead Roadhouse** (☎ 8964 4549; www.barklyhomestead.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$16/23, budget s/d \$65/75, motel s/d \$85/100; 🚻 🚰) is the last stop before the Queensland border. As a place to stay, it's not such a bad choice – there's a licensed restaurant (mains \$15-20), which is open for all meals, clean accommodation and watered (though ant-riddled!) camping sites, and the shade trees are growing. However, it also has the most expensive fuel between the Queensland coast and Tennant Creek.

From the roadhouse, it's 210km west to Tennant Creek, 375km up the Tablelands Hwy to Cape Crawford (note: there's no petrol along this route) and 252km east to the border, followed by a further 13km to Camooweal in Queensland.

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