



TOP SHELF

Is a Cape York ride still the ultimate trail tour? We took aim on the Tip with Fair Dinkum Bike Tours Cairns to find out.

Story & Photography: Clubby

TALK ABOUT famous last words! Trail boss Dave Williams from Fair Dinkum Bike Tours Cairns was laying down the law ... and our eight-day ride from the Tip of Cape York to Cairns had barely begun!

"This is only the first day," Dave explained. "It's not a race, there's going to be traffic around here at the Tip, and there's going to be dust, so spread out and take it easy. You guys haven't ridden dirt bikes for a while, so take it easy ..."

So, an hour or two and an easy ride from Bamaga out to the Tip later, and guess what happened? A heap of the guys bunched up in a group, chewing each

other's dust, right when the track made a 90-degree turn to the left, which is precisely when Deano came in way too hot and nailed the only tree trunk he could find on the outside of the turn ... boof! Welcome to Cape York!

LET THE ADVENTURE BEGIN!

Thankfully Deano came out of his tree-hugging altercation relatively unscathed, although the same could not be said of his Tag Heuer watch. It was a timely reminder of just how easily rusty and overly enthusiastic riders can come to grief



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MAIN: There are a lot of miles between Cairns and the Tip with plenty of water hazards along the way. Some are nasty, deep mongrels that you have to carry the bikes over, while others - like this one near Lockhart River - are a walk in the park. 1. Our ride started right here, at the Tip of Cape York peninsula. Cairns lay in wait for us, eight days and 1,377km away. 2. The ones that didn't get away! Sam, Don and Peasey proudly show the spoils of a fishing charter to Thursday island. 3. Boothy and Quirky ease into it on day one with a beachside blast near Somerset Homestead ruins.

TOP SHELF

MAIN: You can only walk out to the Tip, up and over a craggy, rocky headland. But yes, the scenery is worth it. 1. The first day's beach riding near the Tip threw the boys in at the deep-end. 2. A sea of DR-Z yellow on the ferry crossing over the Jardine River. 3. Within minutes of hitting the Telegraph Track we were into wheel-deep creek crossings ... and loving it!



on the Cape's often dusty and slippery pea-gravel roads and trails. Even that first day's 'cruise' out to the Tip and then on to Somerset ruins for a spot of beach riding can bring the uninitiated unstuck all too easily.

A total of 12 of us were on tour for this particular trip 'down' from the Tip to Cairns with trail boss Dave and his Fair Dinkum crew, which included sweep rider Kev and support truck driver Speddo – who just so

happened to be former Aussie enduro champ Troy Spedding.

As for the tourists, the roll-call included Brisbane truck dealer brothers Don and Gerry, who had brought their own bikes (KTM 525EXC and Yamaha WR250 respectively), seven-foot-tall Sam (from Tassie) and his mate Peasey (from Victoria), and the magnificent seven from Queensland and NSW – Slater, Leo, Boothy, Quirky, Matt, Deano and Arnold – who had been mates for ages and had long promised themselves a Cape York tour.

VITAL STATS

Who: Fair Dinkum Bike Tours Cairns.

What: Guided trail rides from Cairns to the Tip of Cape York.

Where: The top: FNQ, of course!

When: 1/2/3 day tours near Cairns all year round; 5/8/16 day trips to the Tip from May through October.

Weather: The Wet season (November to April) is wet and steamy! The Dry season (May to October) is dry and mild.

Terrain: Ranges from tropical rainforest between Cairns and Cape Tribulation to wide-open grasslands up the Development Road to sensational sub-tropical wilderness along the Telegraph Track.

Cost: The 8-day one-way trip to/from Cairns and the Tip costs \$4,100. This includes flight from/to Bamaga, bike hire, meals, camping gear, accommodation, guides, support vehicle, permits etc.

Contact: Dave Williams on (07) 4031 0540 or check out the www.fairdinkumbiketours.com.au web site and be sure to tell 'em TRAIL ZONE sent ya!



Even the first day's 'cruise' to the Tip can bring the uninitiated unstuck.

TOP-SHELF DESTINATION

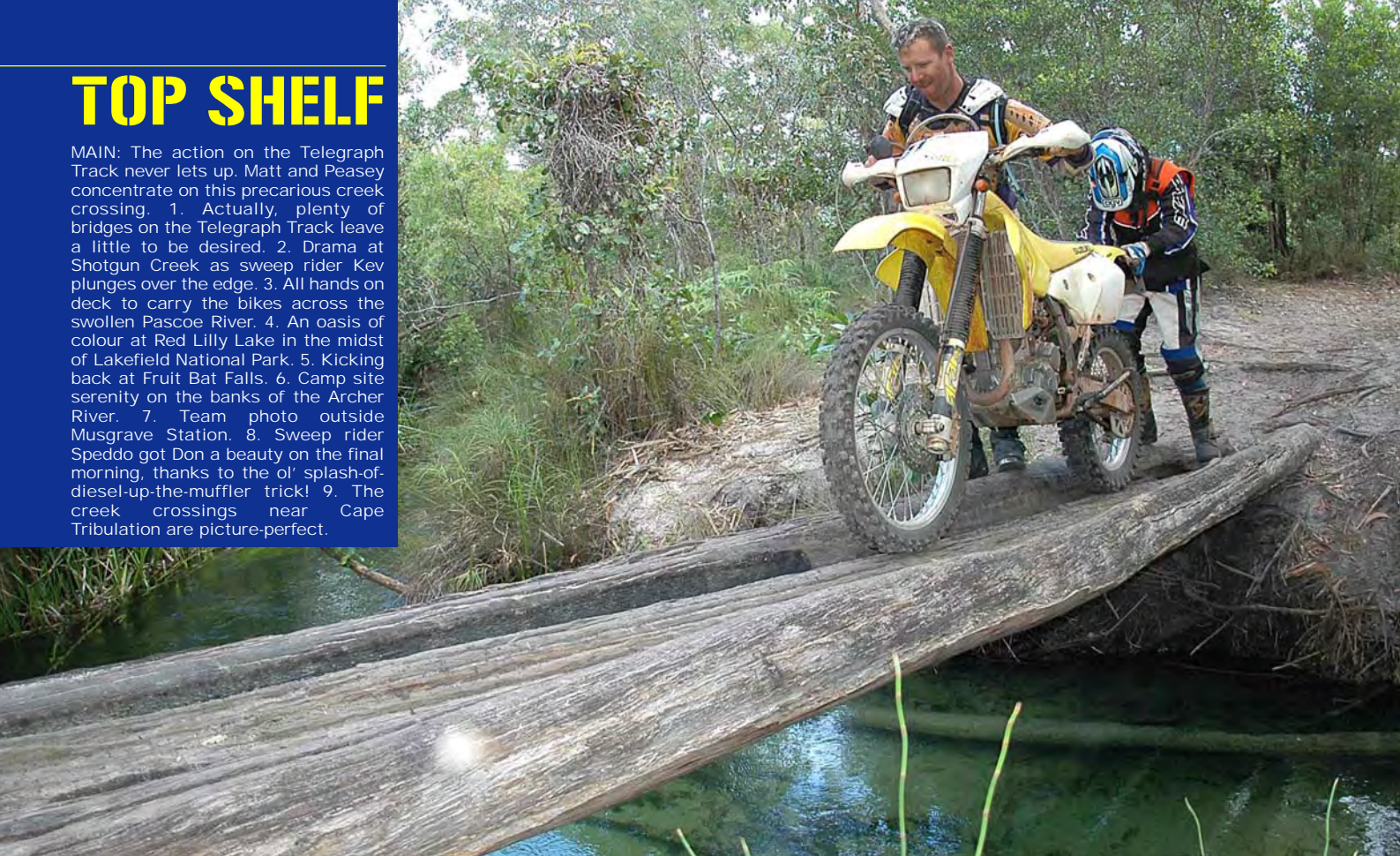
A trip to the Tip still ranks as the great Australian dirt bike adventure. I did my first Cape York trip over a decade ago, and I still love doing them. So I knew full well what the guys were in for on the Fair Dinkum ride.

The trip to the Tip is an eight-day smorgasbord of dirt riding delights, where you hook up with a bunch of strangers who have the same idea as you: flogging the guts out of someone else's dirt bike to one of Australia's landmark geographical destinations. You can either ride 'up' from Cairns to the Tip, or back 'down', which the is the ride we did. Another tour group rode the bikes north the week before us, then flew back to Cairns from Bamaga to complete their tour. Two days later we flew in to begin our journey.

Bamaga is a small aboriginal community, with the nearby Loyalty

TOP SHELF

MAIN: The action on the Telegraph Track never lets up. Matt and Peasey concentrate on this precarious creek crossing. 1. Actually, plenty of bridges on the Telegraph Track leave a little to be desired. 2. Drama at Shotgun Creek as sweep rider Kev plunges over the edge. 3. All hands on deck to carry the bikes across the swollen Pascoe River. 4. An oasis of colour at Red Lilly Lake in the midst of Lakefield National Park. 5. Kicking back at Fruit Bat Falls. 6. Camp site serenity on the banks of the Archer River. 7. Team photo outside Musgrave Station. 8. Sweep rider Speddo got Don a beauty on the final morning, thanks to the ol' splash-of-diesel-up-the-muffler trick! 9. The creek crossings near Cape Tribulation are picture-perfect.



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THE DOCTOR IS IN!

FAIR DINKUM Bike Tours Cairns runs a fleet of Suzuki DR-Z400E hire bikes – and for good reason. They're rock solid reliable, plush and therefore easy to ride and, of course, they've got the button. Supplied via local dealer Wayne Leonard Motorcycles, the Fair Dinkum DR-Zs are specially prepped for the rigours of constant runs up and down the Cape, boasting mods such as AFAM alloy bars, long-wearing Maxxis IT tyres, heavy-duty tubes, EK chains, AFAM sprockets, Rock Oil lubricants, fuel filters, alloy-reinforced handguards and B&B Aluminium bashplates. Fair Dinkum's DR-Zs are never on-fleet for more than one season, as Dave says this rules out the potential for



any long-term mechanical ailments developing and thus keeps maintenance costs down. "At the end of each season we never have any trouble turning over the bikes," Dave explains, "because they're not even six months old and still have another six months warranty and rego. If anyone's looking for a good DR-Z, give me a call!"

Beach campground on the edge of Torres Strait our home for the first two nights. Days one and two were settlers, during which we cruised out to the Tip for the obligatory team photo beside the metal signpost at the northern-most point of Australia, and then most of the lads went out on a fishing charter in search of a feast of marine delights for dinner on night two. Full marks to Sam, Don and Peasey for delivering!

FOLLOW THAT TELEGRAPH LINE

By the morning of day three we were chomping at the bit to get into the long ride south. The ride to the Tip had only left us wanting more!

Cruising down the main Development Road from Bamaga we soon crossed the Jardine River ferry, then 18km later Dave had us regroup for the turn-off to the Telegraph Track. Carved out of the harsh subtropical landscape in the 1880s to allow construction of the original overland telegraph line, the Telegraph Track runs through the heart of the northern end of the Cape. It's a brilliant piece of trail that is 4WD twin-track the whole way, punching through the thick ground cover and plunging down into creek crossings that during the wet season swell into raging torrents. It's washed away in places, littered with blind corners, boasts 4WDs coming the other way and throws out more than a few log bridge crossings. It's action all the way and by the time we reached Bramwell cattle station and the overnight camp we were spinning yarns and re-living the day's highlights before we'd even pitched our dome tents and reached inside the beer fridge to wash the dust away.



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WHAT'S THAT SHADOW IN THE WATER?

Day four delivered yet more great twin-track riding, in the form of Frenchmans Track out toward the Lockhart River community on the east side of the Cape, which was hammered by Cyclone Monica earlier in the year. The track eventually delivered us to the banks of the Pascoe River, where it was a case of all hands on deck, four men to a bike and carry our steeds across on sticks. Now, who wanted to know if there are crocs in the rivers?!

After lunch on the riverbank, we fired up in earnest for the afternoon

Peasey promptly plunged into a deep rock crater off the side of the track!

session, however Peasey proved a little too earnest. He promptly plunged into a deep rock crater off the side of the track and was so lucky not to suffer serious injury to bike or body. It was another salient reminder of just how easily you can come to grief, and if you do, you're a bloody long way from anywhere!

WHERE'S REX HUNT WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

A secret camp site on the banks of the Archer River marked the halfway stop on our ride and try as they might, fishermen Arnold and Matt just

couldn't land a catch. So it was steak and vegies instead!

A leisurely, later start on day five saw us cruising back down the Development Road to Musgrave Station, from which on day six we turned east and traversed the wide open spaces of Lakefield National Park and Battlecamp Station to aim for civilisation once again in the form of windy Cooktown. Strangely, though, the caravan park in Cooktown turned us away, so we saddled up again and headed down the road (past the eerie Black Mountain range) to the famed Lion's Den Hotel, where the beers flowed long into the night and the pool table copped an absolute hammering, with Boothy, the jump-shot champion, leading the floor show.

ONWARD: TO THE TOP OF MT MISERY!

After a long 320km ride the previous day – punctuated by the ugly corrugations near Laura Station – day seven's 130km jaunt to Cape Tribulation sounded like a breeze. But trail boss Dave threw in a sensational trig tower access trail through the rainforest to the top of Mount Misery that was greasy, gloopy, sloppy and an absolute hoot!

And then it was on to Cape Trib and PK's backpacker resort for the final night, where the tents got to stay in the trailer and we got to rest in bunk beds after another long night at the bar and the pool tables.

BRING ON THE CREB TRACK!

As much as some of the self-inflicted sore heads amongst the group

MAIN: Lush green paddocks and rainforest-covered slopes make for beautiful scenery between Cooktown and Cape Tribulation. 1. Narrow 4WD trails make sections such as the Telegraph Track and Frenchman's Track the most memorable parts of a Cape York ride. 2. I had to wait seven days, but I finally got a photo of someone drowning their bike. Thanks Deano! 3. Heartbreak Hill on the CREB Track lived up to its name!



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might have wanted a cruisy final day, trail boss Dave had other ideas. A gnarly carry across a river at China Camp had us all sweating and

MAGNIFICENT SEVEN!

IT'S NO SURPRISE that Cape York tour operators like Fair Dinkum are finding many of their clients are riders who had dirt bikes in their teens and early 20s, before getting married and trading two wheels for kids and a mortgage. Then, 20 years later, when life settles down and there's a few bucks in the bank account, it's time to get back on the dirt and do, 'A trip to the Tip!' Meet (from left) Slater, Leo, Boothy, Quirky, Matt, Deano and Arnold, who've been mates since primary school and had a 'pact' that when they turned 40 they'd ride to the Tip. "You can actually blame my wife for us being here," explained ringleader Slater. "She'd had enough of us all talking about a trip to the Tip, so she got us organised and booked and on the ride. It's been awesome!"



heaving, after which we powered on to the famed CREB Track, which had just been declared open ... and we didn't need to be asked twice. The CREB is another trail riding national treasure, slicing through the rainforest from north of Cape Trib to the Daintree River. It's packed with gnarly, greasy hills, creek crossings, rock ledges, bogs and clay-tops that are as slippery as snot. Yeah, it's awesome!

After lunch at Daintree village, a final charge across the edge of the Atherton tablelands lead us down to the Fair Dinkum HQ in Cairns, with some 1,377km having passing beneath our wheels in eight days.

Was it a sensational adventure ride? Was it a great way to escape

Did the magnificent seven really drink \$1,000 worth of beer and rum?

from all the pressures of work and home – at least for the first six days when the mobiles didn't work? Did the magnificent seven really drink almost \$1,000 worth of beer and rum? Did trail boss Dave rub his hands together with glee when handing out the grog bills? Did Peasey really get pinged \$850 for cracking his DR-Z's digital speedo in his rock crater get-off? Did we really only cop one drowning, when Deano (again!) went tits-up in a stream near Cape Trib? Did we not get one flat tyre the whole ride? Did sweep rider Kev really fall backwards into Gunshot Creek, when we were all standing around watching? Did all of us bin it on the greasy bloody CREB Track? Did we all wish we were still out there and doing it? The answer is 'YES!' on every count!

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