

RIVERS EDGE

Kim Guthrie



JOHNS LANDING
CAMPING GROUND

& GAGAJU BUSH CAMP

ENTRANCE 100 METRES

RIVER’S EDGE
Photographs by Kim Guthrie

Johns Landing Camping Ground
118 Johns Road, Cooroibah
Queensland 4565, Australia

23 — 27th June, 2017

“The edge... there is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over.”
– Hunter S. Thompson

Johns Landing is an out-of-the-way tract of absolute Noosa riverfront land, just beyond Lake Cooroibah in southeast Queensland, purchased by the Johns family in 1892 to escape the hustle and bustle of the Gympie Goldfields. Until recently, Johns Landing has been in the care of Bennett (Ben) Winn Johns and his wife, Patricia (Pat) Ann Johns. It’s past the end of the bitumen road and if you weren’t aware of its existence, you’d never know it was there. Ben and Pat Johns have run a low cost private camping ground at ‘Johns Landing’ since approximately 1952 unofficially and legally, with purpose-built ablutions blocks from 1994.

They’ve provided a safe, non-judgmental sanctuary for the down-at-heel, homeless, alcoholics, drug addicts and otherwise struggling members of the community along with annual family campers. What makes them unique is they are not affiliated with any organised religious group or otherwise benevolent organisation; they are just good, kind people. The Noosa Shire Council has coveted this

extremely rare, valuable and much sought after riverfront land, for rehabilitation to add to the environmental buffer along the Noosa River, to save it from degradation. The Johns’ have made the decision to retire and sold to council. There are widely conflicting opinions of Johns Landing Camping Ground; the following is one of the more interesting Google online reviews:
“This place has every druggie, X-con (sic), wanted person, violent lowlife at it. Police are frequently called to this place for serious offences. It’s filed (sic) with hobos and degenerates. Your experience will be horrible. Loaded with mosquitoes and filth. My advice is to avoid this place like the plague!”
– Jason Jupp⁽ⁱ⁾

Being a street photographer and working daily this way, the unusual thing I noticed about everyone I met, old or young, residing at Johns Landing was they were all friendly. Some didn’t want their photograph taken but that’s nothing unusual and of course I respected their wishes. There seemed to be a refreshingly distinct lack of judgment here. Not like in the outside world, where so many people appear indoctrinated by the popular media regularly thinking the worst of someone taking photographs as a cop, a council by-laws officer,

some kind of deviant ... or worse still ... a pedophile. Contrary to these paranoid stereotypical generalisations, there was none of that at Johns Landing; everyone was trusting, relaxed and happy (even if some did have obvious substance abuse issues). I wasn’t there to judge people; in fact I had total empathy. I mentioned this observation to Ben Johns, he replied, “They’re all good people, it’s just that some of them have made some bad life choices.” EXACTLY Ben! Fortunately for them they had found people who understood this and were providing refuge long enough for them to realize the error of their ways.

On that note ... included are a couple of photographs of Bob French that were shot on an earlier visit to Johns Landing in 2010. As the photographs obviously illustrate, Bob was a chronic alcoholic. On this recent excursion in 2017, after hearing of the camping ground’s imminent closure, one of the first questions I asked Ben Johns was, “What became of Bob French?” Fully expecting him to tell me that he’d drank himself to death. But to my surprise Ben said, “He moved out yesterday! They found him a place up in Hervey Bay.” I asked, “Is he still drinking?” Ben replied, “NO! He gave it up three years ago!” I was

flabbergasted and elated saying “REALLY! That’s fantastic news.” Ben went on to tell me how Bob had taken to hand feeding the birds. This was poignantly underlined to me later when I approached Bob’s former camp, now abandoned and being demolished; a flock of several species of birds flew down to me, heartbreakingly expecting to be fed.

I was having a really enjoyable chat with one of the remaining Johns Landing residents, Steve. I mentioned how I’d previously photographed another resident Stephen, who at first I’d thought was a boxer because of his bandaged hands. Steve hilariously set me straight, “Nah! He was baked on the meth and trying to light a fire. The fuckin’ idiot threw some petrol on it, pulled out his lighter and lit it. It blew up in the fuckwit’s face. Didn’t your mum ever tell you petrol explodes!?” Photographing Penny at her camp she was proudly showing me around her home, particularly pleased with the rudimentary cold-water shower she’d rigged up in a shade cloth shower stall, complete with soap dispenser and a shelf. She told me how lucky she was to even be talking to me, because a few weeks back, a large tree at the front of her camp had fallen during a storm and crushed her car narrowly missing her tents. The best bit is a

remarkably generous local car dealership heard of her predicament and presented her with a very tidy replacement used car, free of charge!

It’s my suspicion that the bureaucrats in council dislike these “riff raff” living on such a valuable tract of land at minimal cost; they were charged just under \$60 per week to live there. Quite a number of residents had been re-located to Johns Landing by government bodies that deal with those who’ve fallen on hard times. Now these same residents have been moved to other locales, much to their bewilderment and upset. There are families and individuals who will be disadvantaged by this upheaval. But they are the voiceless and that appears to be their lot, to be moved on as an era came to a close with the retirement of Ben and Pat Johns.

The truth is any one of us privileged folk could at any time encounter a bad set of circumstances and... voila! We could find ourselves in their place. I’m not a believer in God myself, but the aphorism, originally uttered by evangelical preacher and martyr John Bradford in the sixteenth-century: “There but for the grace of God go I”... is ringing in my ears.

(i) NB: a quick Google search revealed the identity of this reviewer as Constable Jason Jupp of the Queensland Police Service.

<https://www.google.com.au/search?q=johns+landing+campground&oq=johns+landing&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j69i57j0l4.6089j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#lrd=0x6b9342a8bb43b1df:0xd9dfed3c206bb862,1,,>

Johns Landing Sign



This place has every druggie, X-con (sic), wanted person, violent lowlife at it. Police are frequently called to this place for serious offences. It's filed (sic) with hobos and degenerates. Your experience will be horrible. Loaded with mosquitoes and filth. My advice is to avoid this place like the plague! — Google review



Cat

Ben and Pat Johns





Pat and Ben Johns

Rachel



Sanctuary



Opening hours



Pat and Ben's Shop

Payphone





Noah, Savannah and Rachel

Cassy





Johns Landing Open Letter

After years of living on this beautiful stretch of land beside the Noosa River and sharing it with many visitors Pat and I are now planning to retire ...

Johns Landing





Tarleah and Savannah



Tarleah

I never understood society. I understand that it works somehow and that it functions as a reality and that its realities are necessary

to keep us from worse realities. But all I sense are that there are plenty of police and jails and judges and laws and that what is meant to protect me is breaking me down...

— Charles Bukowski



Annette





Aerial



Dante, Savannah, Noah, Rachel and Justin



Annette's Place

The edge... there is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over.

— Hunter S. Thompson





Rainbow Lorikeet



Cat on a Hot Canvas Roof

We wish everyone the best for the future and God's speed.

– Ben and Pat Johns
June 14, 2017



Aligendis rem et exero il ma voluptust
rerferum apeditam autem nest quiande
lendis modi vendi volum diostia vernat
em labo. Ut ad excere plandeliae. Itate
laborer ationes sequat.
Atium derciis sin nis prrior si occupt
atem quat alicil inimportis volorae
consed qui connihilibus aut volupta con
et volorer emodipiet ent, conestrupae
eic tem quia venditis ut fuga. Nam fugia
numquas qui dit et aut vellit ut quiandu
ndestin tiatqui acepre nonsedite venimint
officip iciliqui dolenist, quis consequo
dolorio nseque etustin impost, susdam
custium qui natum necestempos molorro
to te re natio. Itatissita volorion nis
anditatem. Odit eos volorissi.

Kim Guthrie

Rivers Edge