



AATKings - UNTAMED

KIMBERLEY

11 Days, Tuesday 30 August –
Friday 9 September 2022



DAY ONE - DARWIN: 13 Travel Club members flew into Darwin, either that morning or in the days prior. Weather fine. We were booked into the extensive Adina Vibe Hotel which was comfortable, but rooms were small, no balcony and obviously designed for business people/singles. Its saving grace was its wonderful location within the Darwin Waterfront Precinct with great views, close proximity to the Wave Lagoon (safe to swim), the Convention Centre, plus excellent restaurants/bars a few steps away.



At 3 pm, we met with Nellie Sullivan, our Travel Director, and other passengers on this trip, 38 of us in total, who had flown in from all over Australia. None from overseas. By 3.30, we had boarded our coach with driver Phil for a 1½ hour City of Darwin tour where he pointed out the buildings of interest, the main streets, the beaches/mud flats of Darwin Harbour with a photo stop looking across the water to the city. Time for another photo and investigation of the WWII East Point Fortifications built in 1932-34 to protect the naval oil depot. Return past the lovely homes of Fannie Bay, HM Prison, the entrance to Mindil Beach, the AFL

oval (sport big up here), the imposing Parliament House and adjacent Supreme Court, Government House and the old Courthouse. At the beautifully painted Vincent Lingiari mural (voted the best monument or memorial in 2021), some of the group chose to walk back to our hotel while the rest took the easy option and stayed on the coach. That night, was our Welcome Dinner at Wharf One restaurant, several minutes walk from the Vibe, where three courses with two wines were enjoyed.

DAY TWO – TO KATHERINE: Bags and breakfast at 6.15 am and departure an hour later, for the 300 km journey to Katherine, heading south on the Stuart Highway. It was cloudy and the humidity was beginning, though most of us weren't feeling it yet. Nellie pointed out places along the way and told the story of John McDouall Stuart, the very successful explorer of inland Australia. She also spoke of 'Pitch Black', this year's three-week exercise involving 17 nations and 100 military aircraft which was taking place currently over the NT. We'd witnessed some of the aircraft flying over Darwin since our arrival, although it wasn't as noisy as predicted. It's really important on our tours that we pass at least one Bunnings along the way and today didn't disappoint, with one of the country's largest near Palmerston. Also in Palmerston, we noticed that the houses are without gutters due to the heavy annual rainfall, anywhere between 1500 – 3000 mm, most falling in the wet season officially due from November. We also passed mango-growing (looking forward to these), lots of cattle and the old airstrips on the roadside, and followed parts of the The Ghan railway line with its two million concrete sleepers between Darwin - Alice, according to Nellie.

At Adelaide River Inn, there was a refresher break and time to admire the taxidermied Charlie the famous water buffalo from Crocodile Dundee. Next stop was the nearby War Cemetery where we walked amongst just a few of the 434 military graves. Back on-board, Phil took a quick detour to show us the original crossing of the Adelaide River, home to crocs and barramundi, before re-joining the highway. There were road signs saying 'Brolgas next 10 km', but unfortunately we didn't see any! Nellie spoke of the difference in termite mounds which we would see in their thousands during the tour. She talked about how the indigenous people arrived with their hundreds of languages and that we would be travelling across 14 of their 'countries' on this trip. We'd love to have popped in to Pine Creek, the old gold-mining town located just off the main road. The 4th largest between Darwin and Alice, the town was famous for its goldrush and an influx exceeding 3,000 people in the 1890s. As of 2016 census, the pop was just 328. However, a quick visit was not to be and we stayed on the 130 km speed-limited highway, instead admiring the imposing granite boulders which follow the fault-line from Halls Creek to Darwin. Just before Katherine, there was a short video from the ABC's "Back Roads" on Aboriginal artists.





An hour in very hot Katherine for lunch, before the 30-min drive to Nitmiluk (Katherine) Gorge for the boat trip(s) on the Katherine River. There are 13 gorges in total and our cruise covered the first two, the longest, with a 400 m walk on a man-made pathway between them. After the first leg, a couple of us chose to stay, comfortably seated under a canvas shelter with plenty of drinking water available! Many of us had been here previously, some several times, but the rock formations and Aboriginal art never fail to delight. With interesting commentary along the way, it was a great way to spend a couple of hours.

Next was the Katherine Outback Experience, an initiative by Tom Curtain and his wife Annabelle. We were sceptical at first, but grabbed a welcome cold drink and a seat, to be amazed by this 1½ hr show in a huge sheltered arena. Tom (obviously an animal whisperer) was fantastic with the dogs, not just his own, but others that are sent to him for training from other properties. As well, young horses considered unrideable were putty in his hands. Afterwards, we were able to pat/feed the station animals including a donkey, horses, dogs, cattle and others. Tom is also a country music singer and his CDs were available to purchase.



Our overnight accommodation in Katherine was at the Paraway Motel where we arrived shortly before a buffet dinner. Two free drinks were included and were very welcome after such a long day. Needless to say, we slept well!

DAY THREE – TO KUNUNURRA: Bags and breakfast at 6.30 am today and departure at 7.30. Beautiful weather as we headed out on the Victoria Highway for Kununurra, a total distance of 514 km. Crossing The Ghan railway line, Nellie explained about the camels and the history of Fitzroy/Ord River. The drive took us through scrubby countryside and Brahman cattle, as we watched some of mini-series “Kings in Grass Castles”, the book written by Mary Durack and we would visit her home later. By 9.30, we’d arrived at Victoria River Roadhouse for morning tea and some of us took a quick stroll to view the river. Further up the road was a photo stop looking towards Stokes Range, as we were now just within the 4-wheel drive only Judbarra/Gregory NP which interestingly is the second largest national park in the Northern Territory, after Kakadu, with an area of 13,000 km².



To pass the next hour, we watched more of the video on the way to Timber Creek Bakery (the indigenous-owned Wirib Store & Tourism Park) for an early lunch. A popular spot, it was hard to find a seat! Timber Creek is well known for the Bradshaw Field Training Area close by. In October 1996 the Department of Defence proposed to establish a manoeuvre and field live firing training area for the Australian Army and as an Australia-US Joint Combined Training Centre, on the former cattle property Bradshaw Station. Several military personnel popped in for refreshments whilst we were there.

Leaving at 12.30, the road followed the Victoria River for a short time. We watched the rest of the video, passing the road leading to the huge Bullo River Station, a cattle property, formerly owned by Sara Henderson.

The entrance to Keep River NP (700 sq km) was just prior to the NT/WA border (no fruit/vegs allowed) with another clock change of 1½ hours, two hours in all behind the east coast. More spectacular countryside and thirty minutes later we’d arrived at the Argyle Homestead Museum, the homestead originally built in 1895 by the Durack family on Argyle Downs Station now mostly submerged by the lake. Constructed of handcrafted limestone blocks with crushed termite mounds used as mortar, it was a magnificent building for its time. During the early 1970’s and before Lake Argyle began to fill, the homestead was removed in order to preserve this magnificent building for all time.

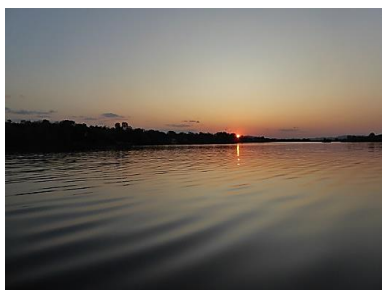


It was dismantled stone by stone with every stone coded in such a way so as to be able to be rebuilt with every stone back in its original position. The homestead now lives on as a museum dedicated to the pioneering spirit of the Durack Family (info taken from the Lake Argyle website). Together with family graves, it was an interesting property to visit, though we didn't stay very long. A few minutes later, we were on the spectacular road leading down and across the Ord River Dam to where our cruise boat was waiting.

In 1967, the Commonwealth Government provided a grant for the construction of the Ord River Dam to provide a major storage reservoir, called Lake Argyle. Lake Argyle is now one of the world's largest man-made water bodies and was formed by an earth and rock filled dam in the Carr Boyd Ranges. When the Ord River Dam was completed in 1972 it became the largest capacity dam in Australia with a volume of 5641 gigalitres (equivalent to 11.2 Sydney Harbours). The flow from it and the Kununurra Diversion Dam (opened in 1963 and which we would see later) was regulated to maintain a stable level in Lake Kununurra, which enabled the water to be diverted by gravity to the Ivanhoe Plain. The permanent water supply to Lake Kununurra also enabled the development for irrigated land on the adjacent Packsaddle Plain. In the early 1990's, it was decided that a hydroelectric power station would be built at the base of the main Ord Dam. In order to be able to guarantee a reliable supply of energy, a higher water level was needed to be maintained in the lake. Engineers determined that by building a weir across the spillway they could safely raise the storage by six metres. This almost doubled the volume to 10 763 gigalitres (increasing the capacity to 21 Sydney Harbours). Info from the Lake Argyle website.



Leaving from the base of the dam wall, the cruise was wonderful and with a terrific driver/guide explaining everything in detail. He even managed to unravel a great map that made this complex area more easily understood. We did spy some action along the way: a couple of freshwater crocs, numerous birds including a couple of white-bellied sea eagles and a guy going all out to impress his friends by jumping from a height



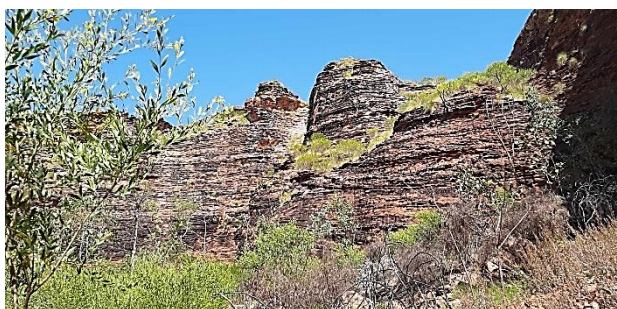
into the water stark-naked. He chickened out and quickly turned his back when he saw us, but we got a photo anyway! About 2/3 of the way along, we stopped in a picnic spot on the river bank for an enjoyable afternoon tea. As we neared the Kununurra end where our coach would be waiting, the spectacular sunset over the water was a perfect finish to the day. The next two nights would be at the Kununurra Country Club Resort.

DAY FOUR – KUNUNURRA & SURROUNDS: Weather perfect. There were three options today: sleep in a little and visit the Mirima NP/Kelly's Knob Lookout with Nellie later; the two-hour early morning scenic flight over the Bungle Bungle Range/Argyle Diamond Mine then Mirima NP, or the all-day flight/4WD tour to Purnululu NP to view the Bungle Bungle from both the air and ground. Both Bungle Bungle expeditions were at extra expense. Most of our TC members chose the two-hour flight and the following was written by Jenny:

"Those on the scenic flight assembled at 5.00 am and were a little perplexed to find that the all-day group was also supposed to be picked up at that time. Unfortunately, we hadn't received that memo! Poor Nellie had to quickly knock on everyone's door/make phone calls to wake them up! We watched the sunrise from the airport hangar whilst being given the safety briefing, then met our Pilot, Emma. After flying over Kununurra Lake and Lake Argyle, we flew over massive mountains until reaching the Bungle Bungle which were as spectacular as promised. They looked like striped beehives, masses of them. Emma provided a great commentary all the time, making sure both sides of the plane saw everything. On the way back, it was interesting to see the diamond mine, part of which has undergone the first stage of rehabilitation. Back to Kununurra and the Ord River Scheme, then home to a boxed breakfast surprise at the hotel."



A few members took the all-day trip, one because she'd taken the shorter one years ago and wanted to view these amazing rock formations from the ground. As Jenny said, Nellie made the early-morning surprise call but did give these people a little longer to get themselves together. Two planes made the trip with eleven on one and seven passengers (probably the heaviest of the group!) on the other. It was magical - fabulous views of Kununurra, Lake Argyle (giving a better indication of its enormity), before crossing spectacular rugged terrain to the very special Bungle Bungle Range only discovered by Europeans in 1983. We were met on the ground by Lachy in a 'difficult to climb into' high-clearance 4WD. The day would be hot, but made bearable by a slight breeze as we headed to the southern end of Piccaninny NP. While one of us waited under a shaded picnic spot in the Piccaninny Creek carpark, Lachy escorted the rest on the one-hour relatively easy Domes Walk which joins up with the Cathedral Gorge Walk. These are the most accessible of the walks in this area, with the Domes Walk a one km (about an hour) circuit meandering through the red and black striped domes which enables a real sense of these ancient formations. Back at the carpark, a very tasty boxed lunch followed. Then a drive over corrugated dirt roads to the base of a hill which passengers reluctantly climbed but, for their efforts, were rewarded by impressive 360° views. Before returning to the airstrip, we stopped at Lachy's home for the season, an eco-resort called Bungle Bungle Savannah Lodge, for a surprise afternoon tea. Lovely spot! A wonderful flight back to Kununurra, with more fabulous views flying over the old Argyle Diamond Mine.



Regarding Mirima NP, Jenny says: "Those who didn't take the whole day trip to the Bungle Bungle, had a lovely couple of hours in the Mirima NP located just north of Kununurra. Covering 2068 ha and accessible all year round, it is a significant place for the local Miriuwung people. The rock formations, deposited up to 350 million years ago, were exactly like the Bungle Bungle but smaller. Some of the fittest amongst us had a lovely bushwalk up steep stairs to the lookout while the rest waited in the shade of a covered picnic table. Western Australia looks after its natural beauty spots well. The tracks are all well-made and signposted, with rest stops for the more challenged of us and, best of all, no litter!" Dinner was back at our resort and, understandably, all of us were early to bed!

DAY FIVE – TO EMMA GORGE: Fine weather and departing at the civilised time of 8.30 am, probably because our first stop would involve alcohol, it was just up the road to Hoochery Distillery and its gin, whiskey and rum. Rich (accompanied by Jackson the dog) took us on a tour, whilst explaining the history and processes here. Information on their website says: Raymond 'Spike' Dessert III, our founder, owner, developer, and farmer, first landed in the remote Kimberley outback in 1972 to develop his seed business. He fell in love with the Kimberley, and eventually made it his home. Stubbornly independent, Spike liked doing things his way, and in 1995 the area's fledgling sugar industry, the perfect tropical climate, and a trip to the southern wineries planted a seed in his mind. The Hoochery was born because, as Spike put it, 'Governments keep telling farmers to diversify.' So he diversified, creating Western Australia's oldest continuously operating (legal) still. He did it his way. Built on the Dessert family farm just outside of Kununurra, the small pot distillery was created entirely by hand. Everything, from the still to the building itself, was crafted from materials found around the farm. Spike even taught himself to distil, with nothing more than a passion to make good, honest rum. It is a 100% Australian-made, owned and operated family business that uses locally-grown ingredients wherever possible.



We enjoyed some alcohol samples and morning tea with their Ord River Rum Cake, and a few bottles were purchased at the bar to take home. Next was the Kununurra Sandalwood Factory shop where there was limited time to purchase items from their extensive product range. And purchase items we did!

Western Australian sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*) is a slow-growing hemiparasitic, long-lived small tree which occurs naturally in the southern two thirds of Western Australia. The sandalwood industry is one of the oldest export industries in the State, with the first exports recorded in 1844. It can take from 7 – 30 years between establishment and harvest of a sandalwood tree.

Back into Kununurra township for a little more shopping before heading to Wyndham for a pre-ordered lunch at the Croc Café & Bakery. The 1¼ hr drive took us past grain-growing (maize) and sandalwood, and across



the Diversion Dam that had been mentioned so frequently during our Ord River cruise. Unfortunately, there was disorganisation upon our arrival and huge disappointment when the crocodile pies that so many of us had ordered didn't eventuate. The situation did settle down eventually and we enjoyed their other pies/sandwiches. However, Wyndham made up for the lunch shortfall, when Phil took the coach up a hair-raisingly steep gradient to the Five Rivers Lookout at the top of the Bastion Range. Wow, what amazing panoramic views – we couldn't get enough of them – where the Ord, Forest, King, Durack and Pentecost Rivers combine and enter the Cambridge

Gulf, with surrounding mangrove swamps and mudflats. We dragged ourselves away and headed back down (even more hair-raising) to view the Big Croc in town. This concrete statue, 20 metres long and three metres high, reminds visitors to be vigilant when it comes to the local saltwater crocodiles. Here, one passenger purchased an etched boab nut from a clever local indigenous man.

15 km south of Wyndham, we took the corrugated dirt road to an area called Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve, a pretty wetland area with the main Marlgu Billabong accessible by a boardwalk. At the end was a bird hide (rather crowded unfortunately) where over 160 bird species have been recorded, including migratory waders which can come from as far afield as Siberia. There are saltwater crocs here too, though they were difficult to spot amongst the waterlilies!



Located about half way back to Kununurra and with the imposing Cockburn Ranges in the background, we turned on to the famous Gibb River Road, the first section quite suitable for coaches. We arrived at El Questro's Emma Gorge Resort around 4 pm and what a delightful spot, an oasis in the middle of very dry country. Over one million acres in size, El Questro extends for approximately 80 kilometres into the Kimberley's heart and is one of Australia's last true frontiers. El Questro Wilderness Park offers three types of accommodation, each different in style and catering to a range of budgets: exclusive and five-star luxury at the Homestead, tented cabins (glampers) nestled into the natural bushland at Emma Gorge Resort, and bungalows or riverside camping at the El Questro Station. It is illegal to camp elsewhere in the park.

Fortunately, we had the luxury of glamping, but, with the rough ground, staff loaded our suitcases on to a cart and delivered them right to the door. The well spaced-out, off-ground tented accommodation was very comfortable, normal beds, tea/coffee making and a really nice ensuite, though we were warned to keep toilet lids down at all times to deter frogs! We'd be staying here for two nights and happy hour was on offer from 5 pm each day so we made a beeline to the bar soon after arrival. A great buffet dinner afterwards, but the dining area was extremely busy/noisy with other groups including a long-awaited fancy-dress birthday bash in a separate area.





DAY SIX – EL QUESTRO: Our itinerary was spot on when it said that we'd be woken by native bird calls and, together with stunning weather, it was a great start to Father's Day. After disposing of a frog that made itself quite at home in one of the ensuite basins, and enjoying a hearty breakfast, we drove several km on corrugated roads through the small township of El Questro Station, to the river for the 1½ hr Chamberlain Gorge cruise with rangers Steve and Andrew giving excellent commentary. In the shade of one towering escarpment, we stopped the boat for a sparkling wine and fresh fruit whilst feeding pellets to the spitting Archer fish. They

were surprisingly accurate, with one passenger so startled that his sunglasses fell into the water and, yes, they're almost certainly still there! Fairy martins and their nests, rock wallabies and a freshwater croc sunning itself could all be seen during the cruise. We returned to the busy township for lunch/souvenirs and generally checking out the area. Cold beers went down well. Very dry, dusty and not our cup of tea as far as their close-proximity tented accommodation went, but still a very popular spot. Back to the tranquility of our resort with the afternoon at leisure but some of us chose the three-hour Emma Gorge hike/waterhole swim accompanied by Nellie – not an easy feat apparently. Others took the effortless option and enjoyed the resort's pool. Another early buffet dinner after, of course, a well-patronised happy hour.



DAY SEVEN – TO HALLS CREEK: No frogs this morning and another beautiful day with departure at 9 am. Sad to leave this gorgeous spot, despite the long(ish) trek from our glampers to the main building. There was a photostop at the famous Gibb River sign and we passed small slow fires as locals cleared the underbrush. About an hour later, there was a half hour stop at Doon Doon Roadhouse for refreshments, before we were once again on our way and listening to an audio on Rio Tinto's Argyle Diamond Mine. The mining lease is on the traditional country of the Miriuwung, Gija, Malignin and Wularr people and was formerly part of the Lissadell pastoral station. The 50-ha site mainly produced brown diamonds, but it is their rare and exceptionally beautiful pink diamonds that are very much in demand. The mine ceased operations in November 2020, after 37 years and those workers left will take some years to fully decommission the mine and rehabilitate the area in conjunction with the traditional owners of the lands.



Sadly, mostly due to 'Covid requirements', we were not permitted to visit the site. Once at Lissadell Road, however, we collected Teddy Hall, an extremely interesting and knowledgeable indigenous guide, who explained how on 2 October 1979, Maureen Muggerridge discovered diamond samples in the floodplain of a small creek in the area. Whilst he relayed this story, we had driven around what seemed to be a circuit, stopping a couple of times for photos of boab trees and mine tailings. Teddy had organised a great packed lunch for us under a large canvas shelter with plenty of seating. Whilst we ate, he relayed the story about the \$50 million pink diamond heist back in 1987. It would take years to find out exactly what had happened and for the (insider) culprits to be charged. It was a real pleasure to meet Teddy and the next paragraph is a little about him from his tour brochure on the internet:

Ted Hall owner operator of Luridgii Eco Cultural Tours, is a respected Miriuwung/Gidga man who lives at Mandangala community (Glen Hill Station) in the North East Kimberley. Ted carries on the stories of his mother's sacred country, including the totem of the Tiltuwum tribal group who are the guardians of the Jaliwang Dreaming, where the Barramundi travelled across the country and laid her eggs at Argyle Diamond Mine. Born in Wyndham and raised on Lissadell, a cattle station south of Kununurra in the remote north of Western Australia, Ted has been operating Luridgii Tours for more than 10 years. In 1980 Ted returned to his family's community of Mangdangala, next to Lissadell Station, the home of the Argyle Diamond Mine. Ted is passionate about tourism and the opportunity to show people his home, tell the stories of the country and explain the cultural values of his people.

Back to the Great Northern Hwy, newly-surfaced in parts, heading in a south-westerly direction towards Halls Creek on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. Here we would stay just the one night at the Kimberley Hotel which is apparently popular accommodation for the rare earth metal miners working in the area. On the way, we heard the amazing story of Jimmy Darcy, the little-known outback stockman that died over 100 years ago, which became the impetus for Reverend John Flynn's Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Cloudy now, with rain in the distance. Lots of burnt off countryside, but amazingly the termite mounds looked untouched. Nellie told the story of boys James Annetts and Simon Amos who perished in the Great Sandy Desert in 1986. In Halls Creek there is a plaque in their memory erected by the aboriginal members of the community. At the hotel, we were checked-in to our spacious rooms in plenty of time for a quick swim and a drink before the 6 pm buffet dinner. A few raindrops and clouds were menacing, but nothing came of it.

DAY EIGHT – TO FITZROY CROSSING: Sunny and already 24° at 7 am. Bags and breakfast at 7.30, with departure at 8. We headed the short distance out of town to a private property (making sure that we closed the gates!) to a fascinating rock formation called the China Wall – with some similarity to the Great Wall of China. It is known as Burreluba in the Jaru language and as Mulugunjiny in Kija. On the website, it says that China Wall is a natural vein of sub-vertical white quartz rising up to 6 metres above the surrounding country in places. This striking formation transects the country for many kilometres, rising high out of the ground and then disappearing back into the earth again. Scientists believe the wall was formed when the rock surrounding the much harder and resistant quartz was weathered and eroded away. Aboriginal people have a different account of how this formation came about. Some of us ventured down to the nearby gorge.



Returning to Halls Creek, to the Yarliyl Art Centre which was first formed in 1998 and has operated from numerous locations but these days from a modern purpose-built gallery and studio positioned on the highway at the eastern end of town. It is an Aboriginal-owned enterprise and has more than 100 artist members whose art is in a wide range of styles and mediums. They attend the centre daily to paint and express stories of history, people, the country and cultural connection, but we were sadly a little early to meet them. The name Yarliyl is the Jaru word for small paperbark tree, a tree that was used for shelter when people lived a traditional lifestyle. The gallery had some interesting paintings, but unfortunately had run out of smaller items that would have made great souvenirs and been easier to carry home.



From there, we took a short stroll to the Russian Jack Memorial, a statue in the park and a popular tourist attraction near the (closed for the season) Visitor Centre. On Australia's Northwest website: The memorial captivates visitors with a story of camaraderie and selfless bravery. Legend has it that Russian Jack pushed his sick mate for many miles in a wheelbarrow to seek medical attention. Jack Jugarie was a well-respected Jaru Elder who had worked as a police tracker, at the hospital and as an Aboriginal Police Aide. In 1997, at the age of 70, he took part in a 305 km race from Halls Creek to Wyndham. He used his knowledge of country and the stars as his navigational tools and to find food and water. We grabbed an enjoyable coffee (and muffin) at The Café - Mungarri in the Park alongside.

Time to head west 290 km to Fitzroy Crossing and saying a fond farewell to the East Kimberley. We passed the track leading 48 km to the Wolfe Creek Meteorite Crater (875 metres in diameter) which would have been absolutely fantastic to see, but definitely not accessible by coach! Nellie informed us that it is the second largest meteorite crater in the world and formed by a massive meteorite travelling at 15 km a second, estimated weight 17,000 tonnes and smashing to earth many thousands of years ago. The crater was only discovered by Europeans during an aerial survey in 1947 but has long been known to Aboriginal people. Nellie also spoke of the 1850 km Canning Stock Route, running south west from Halls Creek to Wiluna. Next was Len Beadell's audio recording and, even though some of us had heard it numerous times, we still found it very funny. Len was a surveyor, road builder, bushman, artist and author, responsible for constructing over 6,000 km of roads and opening up isolated desert areas – some 2.5 million square kilometres – of central Australia from 1947 to 1963.

At Ngumbun Cliffs we were supplied with a cold drink and snack at the pretty picnic area. It was officially goodbye to the east Kimberley and welcome to the west, admiring the beautiful rock formations here, with another hour or so to lunch at Fitzroy Crossing. There was another recording to keep us occupied, this time with Broome vet Dave Morrell speaking of his life, the aboriginal community and his bush poetry.

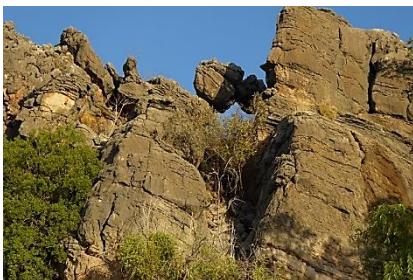


A quick check-in to Fitzroy River Lodge for one night's stay and lunch, before again boarding the coach mid-afternoon for the Danggu Geikie Gorge boat tour on the Fitzroy River. During the 20 km drive there, Nellie spoke of the MacDonald brothers who established the adjacent Fossil Downs Station in 1886, after droving cattle more than 5,600 km from Goulburn NSW! A journey that took three years and is the longest overland cattle drive in Australia's history! The 4,000 sq km property was purchased by Gina Rinehart in 2015.

We'd arrived in ample time for their guided 4 pm cruise and with time to view the river's various flood levels displayed on the beams of their waiting area (and there were 14 major floods from 1983 until 2011). It was some distance between here and the river, with a steep walk down, so the readings were hard to imagine. The Fitzroy River flows for 733 km from the King Leopold and Mueller Ranges into King Sound south of Derby, and has a catchment area of 93,829 sq km. In full flood, the flow rate down the 15 km-wide flood plain at Fitzroy Crossing is estimated to be 23,000 cubic metres



per second. This volume of water could fill Sydney Harbour in six hours!



Personally, I thought this the nicest cruise of the whole trip, only about an hour, but beautiful. We didn't come across much wildlife – mainly some freshwater crocs and a few birds, but the rock formations were incredible. Time to return to our hotel at dusk, all the while concerned that wallabies etc were going to leap in front of the coach – fortunately they didn't! An early, very nice buffet dinner, but the bar was chaotic.

DAY NINE – TO BROOME: Bags and breakfast at 6.30 am, departure at 7.45. Cloudy but would remain fine. Travelling slightly north-west on the Great Northern Hwy, our morning tea stop was the Willare Bridge Roadhouse, 2½ hours drive. Another couple of hours from there, we'd reached Broome and were dropped off in town to find lunch, whilst the coach took our bags to the Cable Beach Club Resort & Spa, ensuring that they would be in our rooms on arrival for the two-night stay. After lunch and a bit of shopping, Phil collected us from town for an orientation tour, firstly to the immaculate Japanese Cemetery. From the Broome Visitor Centre website: Gain an appreciation for the lives sacrificed by the Asian migrants who settled in Broome to prosper from Broome's lucrative pearling industry. The Japanese Cemetery in Broome is the largest Japanese cemetery in Australia, and dates back to 1896. The Chinese Cemetery is found next to the Japanese Cemetery, and there is also a Muslim cemetery with many graves of Malay divers who contributed to the pearling boom in the late 19th and early



20th centuries. There is also an Aboriginal cemetery 50 metres south of the Japanese cemetery. Reflect on the diverse multicultural history of Broome as you wander amongst the hundreds of graves, with unique headstones crafted out of coloured beach rocks. The sheer enormity of the number of deaths in the early pearling days resonates from this poignant tribute. Pearl diving was a dangerous pursuit. A large stone obelisk in the cemetery recalls those who were drowned at sea in the 1908 cyclone. The cyclones of 1887 and 1935 each caused the deaths of at least 140 men. The majority of deaths commemorated in the cemetery resulted from the bends or drowning.

Phil then took the road to Gantheaume Point facing Cable Beach and where those of us who were able took the walk down the pathway. The ocean was a stunning turquoise and, coupled with the white sand beach, made for spectacular viewing. Of the Point, Wikipedia says: There are outcrops of Broome sandstone, deposited in shallow water in this area in the Early Cretaceous period, about 130 million years ago. Footprints from dinosaurs of that time, and plant fossils, are preserved in the sandstone. At very low tide, dinosaur footprints can be seen about 30 metres (98 ft) out to sea.



Then to Cable Beach to finally view our rooms and, hankering for a tippie, we armed ourselves with the resort's map (crucial) to find their largely outdoor Sunset Bar & Grill and, even then, some got lost. However, after applying insect repellent (to guard against their famous midges which are not as prevalent at Cable Beach as other parts of Broome near the mangroves), what fun it was to sit there with a cold drink enjoying the setting sun, the people-watching, the two extremely-lengthy camel chains returning from their afternoon trek and the many 4WD vehicles that had been permitted on the beach 'north of the rocks' during the day. Many of us purchased our reasonably-priced dinner here also, with staff happily bringing the meals out to us. We found all of the staff excellent at this resort. Eventually night set in, bringing with it the cooler air and it was time to drag ourselves back to our rooms (maps became even more essential!).



DAY TEN – FREE DAY IN BROOME: Another cloudless day. Only those of us taking optional tours needed an early breakfast today which was also located in the Sunset Bar & Grill. Optional extras included the Willie Creek Pearl Farm, departing quite early although they did offer an afternoon session. Anne, one of the farm's drivers, collected us in their minibus for the informative 40-min drive, some of it on corrugated, thickly-coated red dirt road (like bulldust). The farm itself is in a gorgeous spot overlooking the beautiful blue waters of Willie Creek. On arrival, there was a talk, then a tour of their purpose-built oyster nursery, a boat ride to view their oysters suspended in wire cages, a delicious morning tea starring their homemade damper and freely-offered recipe, then a further talk that included a live pearl harvest. Of course, we couldn't resist spending far too much time and money in their magnificent showroom before the long return to our hotel! With the afternoon also at leisure, it was up to us where we ate lunch, but the resort offers a few eating spots. Our Farewell Dinner was at 6 pm in the Sunset Bar, but we somehow managed to drag ourselves there earlier for drinks. The evening went well and our thanks were presented to Nellie and Phil who'd safely driven us 2,696 km on all types of roads. Amazingly, no flat tyres! Nellie had been up against some challenges on this trip (though none of us caught Covid thank goodness) but she was extremely professional, very helpful and handled difficult situations with ease. It was a little sad to bid farewell to the other passengers, some staying on in Broome or flying home directly to various states, and others furthering their Oz holiday elsewhere.



DAY ELEVEN – BROOME: Another beautiful day with a quiet, leisurely breakfast in the Sunset Bar, enjoying its gorgeous ocean views one last time before the required 10 am checkout. Initially, some of us were thinking that this lovely resort was only for the elite and were perhaps uncomfortable about staying here, but we'll very much miss this stunning property with its great location, restful beds, adults-only pool (there's a kids pool too), resident wallabies, good food and friendly and obliging staff. Not cheap, but would definitely stay here again!

THE REST OF OUR TIME IN BROOME: Several of our Travel Club members remained in Broome for a few more days at their own expense, but in different parts of town in a variety of accommodation from hotels and units to B & Bs and even a pearler's cottage. The reasonably-priced Explorer Bus made it easy to get around and there were plenty of taxis. Only one major supermarket though, lots of pearl stores (to be expected), a couple of impressive art galleries, and souvenir/clothing shopping was okay. There are some fabulous day trips which need to be booked early if possible, and probably the most popular is the Horizontal Falls with a brief description below:

Some of us were keen to see the Horizontal Falls and, on offer, were the half-day and full-day tours from Broome with Horizontal Falls Seaplane Adventures. The half-day involved flying both ways and, the fact that picturesque Cape Leveque is currently closed, would have been the preferable option, but this may change in 2023. The full-day tour meant flying one way and 4WD bus for much of the return. A couple of us chose the full-day (booked some months ago) and opted to fly in the morning. We were collected from our accommodation just after 5 am to meet up with others at the airport. A bit of standing around, but eventually we were all weighed (incl. up to 3 kg of luggage pp) and this was done in a respectful way. There were 18 passengers in all who were loaded onto two rather strange looking amphibious aircraft – Cessna Caravans according to their website. The flight north to the pontoon/houseboat in Talbot Bay near the falls was absolutely breathtaking, weather perfect, smooth, the most amazing scenery including the hundreds of islands basking in the clear azure waters of the Buccaneer Archipelago and, to top it off, a fabulous water landing! The trip took about an hour and, on arrival, there was a cuppa/toilet break before taking the first of three boat rides. The first was to view a nearby island from the



water. Back to the pontoon for breakfast and to watch the fish/shark feeding with some of us taking to the water and a safe interaction with these animals from the adjacent shark/crocodile-proof enclosure. A second boat trip to admire the unusual cliff formations of the McLarty Ranges before heading back to the pontoon, and then a final cruise to the falls which are actually powerful tidal currents and located nearby but had been hidden from our sight by towering cliffs. Due to an unfortunate boating accident here a few months back, our driver was only permitted to take the craft through the first and

wider of the two falls (the second, 10 - 12 metres wide, is off-limits for now). However, he made up for it by tearing over and back three times – a lot of fun!

Back to the pontoon to board our plane, but this time our pilot flew right over the falls allowing some great photos, before a shorter trip back to the mainland. At the dusty airport (name unknown), a 4WD bus collected us, with one photo-stop on the short drive to Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm. A one-hour tour here, before a barramundi lunch in their restaurant.



Afterwards it took a couple of hours to return to Broome by road, each of us being dropped off to our accommodation in the late afternoon. That night (Sunday 11/9) from about 6.40 was the start of Broome's monthly phenomenon Staircase to the Moon when a full moon rises over the exposed tidal flats of Roebuck Bay - occurring between March and November annually. As our hotel was close to the right spot of Town Beach, we managed a partial viewing, but a decent photo without a tripod was difficult.

SEE LOTS OF PHOTOS ON OUR WEBSITE SHORTLY!

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