

REPORT ON THE GULF SAFARI

We have still not received two of the sections of the report from members including Sweers Island and Bedourie but have put a brief piece on those in anyway.

BEDOURIE

Saturday 11 June

First official stop. Many have come via Birdsville. Extensive rains made the area around Bedourie eerie with great expanses of water lying amongst the red dust. It was to rain so heavily just after our departure that the town of Bedourie was isolated for some time with all roads cut.

The local mayor/publican/town father picked us all up from “Bedourie International Airport” and took us to his and the only hotel. We had a welcoming barbecue that night at which Fred presented us all with a “hat”. Our new tribe chief can be seen wearing his and “admiring” Jan’s.



Tony Read

Sunday 12th June

A damp departure from Bedourie



A lunchtime arrival at Adel's Grove followed an uneventful but interesting flight over inundated Channel Country via Mt Isa for fuel and thoughts of a cappuccino – and a loo! Unfortunately everything was shut up. Even Dr Barry managed to reach Mt Isa from Bedourie despite professing to be tracking 149°. Ken's description of this feat was how well he'd overcome being Cartuseanally challenged.



Channel Country



The spring fed lagoon at Adel's Grove was crystal clear and deep but freezing cold!

Swimming below our tents at Adel's Grove

Monday 13th June

The short flight to Adel's Grove was also uneventful despite some members requesting coordinates for their destination midway through the flight.

Lunch followed a successful sorting out of sleeping arrangements, with the exception of Fred and Barney who raised objections to sharing a single bed. The afternoon saw us split into two groups, one going to Riversleigh Fossils Fields, the other swimming & relaxing around the Grove.



The morning saw the two groups again go separate ways either to the Fossil Tour or Lawn Hill Gorge, with a slightly delayed start due to the "late Wright Brothers". The Gorge created an impression with all, providing opportunities for swimming, walking and canoeing, displaying magnificent scenery. Even the wildlife gave us some excitement.

Johnson River Crocodile (est. 8-9 feet long)

Evening saw us again line up for an excellent repast following a shortish Happy Hour on the bungalow landing.



Happy Hour



Following dinner a planning session, to determine sleeping arrangements for the next stopover, was led by the digitally challenged Jan Macknight and Irene Lawson.

Jan - 10, Irene - 1

In order to maximise our fishing opportunities the next day, an early start was planned. Some were horrified at the thought whilst others in Fred's party enthusiastically embraced the idea of a pre-dawn start with its inherent visibility problems. Fred managing to get slightly lost and engaging in an altercation with a barbed wire fence!



Jim Barry shows horror at the thought of an early departure.

Tuesday 4th June

The hour long flight north to Sweers Island was initially over a light fog bank but cleared to a wonderful balmy 29° day

Margaret Wettenhall

SWEERS ISLAND



We arrived at Sweers Island just before lunch, found our sleeping quarters (more about that later) and went straight to the boats. Each boat, an aluminum cat hulled open dingy with 40 HP outboard held 4 would-be “fisherpeople”, all the bait and tackle. Not a lot of success before lunch but much fun was had in charging about the clear blue waters around Sweers. Back to the Island for a great lunch at the open air dining/drinking/fish-story-telling “restaurant”.



After lunch and now being experienced fishermen and women we set forth again in the boats and all had varying levels of success. Some of the more seasoned fishermen did very well. We had a giant turtle swim about our boat for a while.

The people on the Island made us a great dinner which was accompanied by many fishing stories and drink.

Then to the sleeping quarters. Most seemed to want to avoid Ken due to his famous snoring ability and seven of us bunked in the one room. We would have been better off with Ken. Ian who was next to me was the loudest, Jim the most high pitched and the rest a chorus. I tried to escape to the red dust outside at about 3am.

Perhaps the best place was the Sweers Hilton occupied by Angela and Noeline. It was a shipping container with windows cut into the sides.

Dawn saw us taking off into the sun in the dust with Geoff leaving his clothes hanging on the clothes lines and shoes outside the hut.

Some of our party stayed for a further days fishing in lieu of the Gulflander train trip.



Tony Read

NORMANTON

15th June

Despite the delights of Sweers Island, there grew an intense desire by the female contingency to see the big Rugby game (State of Origin) so reluctantly we arose early to fly to Normanton where the Purple Pub was known to have a big screen TV and many fanatical followers of this most basic of sports. When the ladies had finally sorted out their shoe shuffle from their night in the dormitory, we boarded trucks for the airfield in the pre-dawn pitch-black morning. Eight aircraft flew across to NTN to arrive in time for the Gulflander. This train has been doing the run to Croydon for more than a century so we aviators were keen to experience one of the world's unique journeys.



Unlike modern transport systems the Gulflander stopped to let us aboard near the airport. Using his native skills John Michel was able to predict its arrival by listening to the rail tracks. Interestingly the tracks are laid on steel sleepers on the ground thus allowing the line to be submersible in the event of floods. The "Tinny" rattled its way along for three hours with lots of mail drops and flora/fauna commentary before we were offered tea and scones at a siding called Black Bull. It was not too long before this 105HP diesel engine inched its way up the gentle incline into Croydon. This old gold mining town was

now just an historic tourist venue but had at one time a population of 8000. We wandered around the town and after lunch caught a bus back to NTN.

Now I won't tell you what colour the Purple Pub is painted. Suffice to say that it can easily be identified in the main street not too far from the giant croc. That evening the girls seemed to have lost interest in the Rugby so we settled in to a good pub dinner. For once we did not need to be up too early for the next day's travel so the ensuite accommodation made it an easy start for the re-group with the Sweers fishermen and then set off for Undara.

Spider Webb

UNDARA

Thursday 16th

The whole team departed Sweers Island at almost daybreak after finding the shower room in the dark and wading through deep red sand.

Most of the aircraft had been preliminarily checked the prior afternoon so that no last minute surprises were ready to greet anyone prior to departure. The airstrip was quite rough with loose stones so run-up and departure throttle settings were subject to some caution. The runway was guttered out to some degree. Never the less everyone departed with confidence, cunning and a hefty load of experience.

For good reason everyone tract direct to the mainland to help avoid the dentures below. Some took the opportunity to observe the wildlife along the coast while others chose to awaken those slumbering in a couple of settlements along the way. The air was cool, clear and still and a cigarette could have been balanced on the dashboard.

Thirty to forty minutes later all had arrived and the easy to find 1400 meter strip at Undara. It is a nicely grassed strip and easy to use. The main concerns being to co-existence of cattle and risk to them damaging aircraft and the long, dry grass in the area which could catch fire at any time and burn most of the Australian fleet out of existence. We were welcomed by two small coaches and their drivers as well as a support Toyota Ute.

Undara Lodge offers a great experience for campers, motor homes, and even one Austrian on a pushbike who had ridden all the way from Melbourne to Adelaide and Normanton via Birdsville. On checking his distance and time taken he would have had to average 20mph for 24 hours per day to cover the distance?? We left him in Croyden at the end of a 100mile train trip only to find that he had arrived in Undara before us. He must have fold out wings for his pushbike.

All the facilities at the Undara Resort we found just as good as I think most of us expected, if not better. They were well arranged and very hospitable and the highlight was undoubtedly the lava tubes. Tracie Fratier conducted an exceptional tour and Tony Speedie shared his great knowledge and enthusiasm for the environment.



In talking with the locals it appeared that many people were not happy with the management practices of the Natural Park. Their main concerns seemed to be the filling-in of man made water reservoirs and the exclusion of cattle, which previously reduced the grass to a level where controlled burn off procedures could be exercised without undue damage to the environment. The feral animals apparently also cause considerable destruction of wild life and any eradication which can be afforded is complicated by boardroom kid glove regulations. Their biggest concern seemed to be that the National Parks did things their way regardless of anyone else's opinion.

As with all trips there is always the odd happening. One suffering from a Wright Royal headache on Friday morning and Ian Thompson's multi million dollar movie camera managing to find its owner after a multi cave chase. Nice to see that honest Aussie spirit is still alive. On Saturday 18th we all departed to our various destinations with a fair share of weather challenges in almost every direction.

Peter Brown

