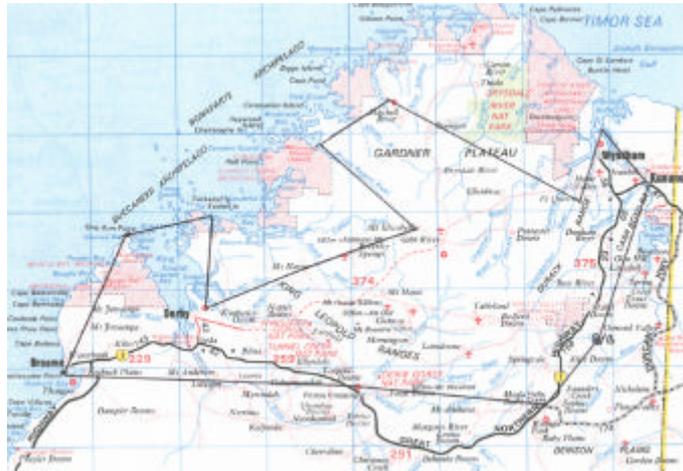


# INTERNATIONAL COMANCHE SOCIETY

## Kimberley Safari - 3-15<sup>th</sup> August 2003



After two years of planning 12 aeroplanes and 27 people finally made it to the Kimberley district of Western Australia. We all had a long journey from our various departure points in Queensland, NSW and Victoria, the furthest being Melbourne some 2000NM. This trip was an awesome experience in itself, traversing as many of us did the vast Simpson desert, lunching at the Birdsville pub, staying underground overnight at Coober Pedy, scenic flights over Ayers Rock, the sight of the Wolfe Creek meteorite crater. Several of us joined Ken Holdsworth and his two passengers in Alice Springs for the weekend prior.

The Safari was a huge success, an experience thoroughly enjoyed by all participants. The magnificent scenery, the gorges, rivers, the people, the wild life, the islands, the sunsets and sunrises for those up earlier to observe them, the flying and the camaraderie. A great adventure. New friendships forged and old ones cemented. Our adventure attracted the media attention with interest from Radio Australia, John Ward who accompanied Jim Barrie in CDB chatted on air with Peter MacNamara on Australia All Over. A German film crew were making a television travel show and included a segment on our aeroplanes, our trip, filmed MEG and interviewed Tony. Manfred featured in an article for the Broome Advertiser.

The following ICS members, pilots, partners and friends took part:

Tony & Angela Read	VH-MEG	PA30
Tony & Jan van der Spek, Heike & Domenic Coia	VH-TSJ	PA30
Fred Morgan ,Manfred & Alison Melloh	VH-FLG	PA24-250
Marcia Morgan &Spider Webb	VH-EOH	PA24-180
John Michell, Bill Forrester	VH-ADD	PA24-260
John & Jan Macknight	VH-MAS	PA24-260
Rick & Dianne Wedgwood	VH-POM	PA30
Ian Thomson & Irene Lawson	VH-MMN	PA39
Trevor & Lynne Nixon	VH-UAW	PA30

Jim Barry, John Ward  
Peter Brown  
Ron & Loyalty Roberts

VH-CDB  
VH-TOZ  
VH-HLP

PA24-250  
PA24-400  
PA39

Our thanks to Manfred our treasurer, Ian Thompson who organized the fuel, and John MacKnight who coordinated the flying for helping us to make this fly away the tremendous success that it was and here's to the next one!

Thanks also to our various scribes whose contributions to this report follow:

*Tony & Angela Read*

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## **First Leg**

### **The Halls Creek Meeting Place and Bungle Bungles**

*Peter Brown*

The 27 members were all fortunate enough to once again awaken to another day. The first call was from one of the many black crows which feature the area. A day of cloudless skies from horizon to horizon. The evening prior having been treated to a grand dinner where we stayed at the Kimberly Hotel. The Kimberly Hotel is only 3 or 4 minutes walk from the air port where many of the locals gathered in small groups in the hot sun, surrounded by dust, gibber rocks, long dry grass and many beer cans. I can well imagine that I too could have escaped the pressures of business life, the tax office demands, OH&S, staff needs, the bank etc, etc, if I had been born to different parents. But then again I can't stand walking around with bare feet so I will just have to put up with my lot. All the Comanches looked magnificent with numerous new paint jobs and obvious attention to detail.

A 20 minute flight took us to Bellburn which is an unlicensed aerodrome of only 1000 meters neatly covered with a mass of smallish rocks and stones. Amidst clouds of dust John MacKnight ushered us to our parking spots. Very shortly afterwards two Kimberly Tour vehicles packed us up and delivered us to a simple but well organised tented camping ground complete with a flywire enclosed eating area and a very effective primitive kitchen and some very energetic talented staff.

After a quick splash under the tap (water from a local bore) we took one of the most amazing tours that could possibly be offered. Having set out with the facility of the previously used vehicles and drivers John and Ryan, we were treated to a great commentary of the surrounding countryside, including the fauna, flora and the staggering Bungle Bungle Ranges. The true outback scenery reminiscent of Namajera paintings with its great ochre colours blended with many shades of green, surrounded by never ending starkness. It's no wonder people fall in love with the Aussie outback.

The Cathedral George was probably the most staggering scenery of all. Words just don't describe it nor do photos or even videos. The acoustics are also astounding as was the eyrie silence. The only time I have felt a similar experience is when I have walked



into a huge church cathedral but this is 1000 times more enchanting. No wonder it is called Cathedral George. Besides the silence it would be dramatic to hear a trumpet or saxophone played in this auditorium. Then again a didgeridoo might be much more fitting. All in all a place where I must return with friends, I'm sure that all the group would have the same sentiment.

There were a few thirsty people on our return to the camp and after a number of “cups of tea” we headed off once again in the trekking vehicles to a favourite spot where the Bungle Bungles could be observed in the setting sun. Yet another sight not to be missed.

A short drive back to the camp once again a serious shower was enjoyed by all (individually as far as I know) then a very relaxing meal in the insect proof building as a few more “cups of tea” and a West Australian early night which is 10.00pm EST time but only 8.00am Western time, should be more of it especially after a strenuous day.

## **Second Leg**

### **Bungle Bungles – Kununurra – Argyle Diamond Mine – Ord River**

#### *Irene Lawson*

6.00am Wake in the Bungle Bungles. Birds tweeting, waking the new day in. The thought of that toilet again!! Heads popping out of tents like rabbits from their burrows. The smell of breakfast, eggs, bacon, tomatoes and mushrooms awaits, at 6.30am surely a feast fit for a King. More birds arrive some noisy majors (look it up) and a few double bay finches play in a makeshift water bath. Overhead some blue winged kookaburras pass by. Did you know these kookaburras do not laugh and the reason given to me by a local was - “There is nothing for them to laugh about in the Kimberleys”.

We leave the camp sight at approx. 8.15am and fly out over the Bungle Bungles at 9.15am. Our route takes a short detour to fly down over Piccaninny Gorge and other areas we have explored the previous day. From the air you can see just how vast this area is and get a different perspective from that on the ground.

10.30 am we fly over the open cut Argyle diamond mine and descend to 5000ft. To my disappointment I cannot see the diamonds sparkling. I guess we are still too high! Lake Argyle is now to the east, a massive expanse of fresh water. Stats: Australia's largest body of fresh water 9832 million m<sup>3</sup>. 91.30 Mts. above sea level. Area 927kms sq. and holds 1/3 of Aust bird species. The lake was formed in 1971 with the damming of the Ord River which flows at the top east point.

As we pass over the Karrboyd Ranges we commence our descent into Kununurra. It becomes quite bumpy and very hazy but the farming of sugar cane creates a greener vegetation which makes for a change from the dry land from which we have come. A long bitumen strip makes for an easier landing than the short gravel airstrip at Bellburn in the Bungle Bungles. We are brought in with the assistance of our forward scout John, as there is other air traffic in the area. Thanks John! “All down safe and smiling”.

Kununurra means “meeting of the big waters” 880 kms. from Darwin. The town formed part of the cattle industry when early pioneers drove cattle across the top of Aust. to settle in the east Kimberley peaking to more than 800,000 head in 1978. Now prospecting, mining and agriculture form the structure of the town and surrounding areas.

12 midday, transfer to Kununurra Country Club, rooms large and very comfortable. General milling about, swimming in the pool, shopping, the laundry room is a popular spot. Dianne declines an offer by one of the locals, stating my husband's a policeman seemed to have the desired effect. After a quiet lunch we leave at 3.30pm by coach for the Ord River cruise via the bottle shop, through the caravan park, arriving at the boat ramp at 4pm. Everyone surges on board while little water birds prance on the lily pads. Pre-Dinner drinks compliments of the bottle shop and an address from the Captain with numerous mentions of crocodiles all assist our launching which had become a problem with too many bottoms at the back of our boat. I think I can remember Spider and Tony's names mentioned but anyway the problem was solved when the guilty parties go up forward. Bungee grasses float and move in mass up and down the river like some unattached island. Many birds osprey, sea eagles, snake birds etc. join in as we cruise along, passing a large black pelican drying off in the late afternoon sun. We visit a colony of very noisy fruit bats protesting loudly at our presence, we don't stay long the odour is not good. As the sun prepares to set we consume more drinks - could be a long addictive night. We are now on the lookout for crocs but the concentration of some is broken when we pass a Cessna 206 float plane. We cruise past an old pump station which is about to be converted into a Bar and Restaurant and pass a tidal bridge. I didn't mention but when we first boarded we were told of others who had joined us for a dinner cruise of which ours was not, and that they would be up on the top deck. This I took it as we could not mix classes, a bit like Titanic. These arrangements were fine until some of our party decided the view might be better on the higher deck as John, Tony and Dom had left the rif raf below. I think peasants bearing gifts (wine) may have been mentioned but whatever we managed to all mix in well. Crocodiles' beady eyes in the dark are now to be seen in the darkened waters as we land with many insects all clambering for a space within the lights. At 6.30pm we all

climb back on the coach amongst much frivolity. Manfred offers me bribes to read these notes or to keep his name out. I may consider this dear friend!

Back at the hotel by 6.30pm freshen up to be out again for dinner by 6.50pm. Can't possibly make ourselves beautiful in such a short time (Oh well!). Waiting outside the hotel Jim manages to entertain all with Ditty's from his youth. Off in a convoy we arrive at 7pm at Stars of the Kimberleys for dinner. A great meal of local barramundi or steak, followed by pavlova and a leisurely walk back to the hotel at 10.30pm. Eyes closed. Thanks Angela and Tony for another great day!

6.30am Through the rabbit warren of units to breakfast. Guess who after a frantic search for missing room key obtained a second key. Apologies for being late to the dining room were met with Jan kindly asking had we checked the air-con. Some people need more time than others to wake up! 7.30am into two coaches with another head count, we head off for the Argyle Diamond Mine. The tour is conducted by Belray Diamond Tours and our guide Joe who is a charter pilot fits in well. His knowledge of the surrounding area is extensive and informative. Along route we pass some Boab trees. These bulbous trees are native to most areas of the Kimberleys and have been measured with a girth of up to 20mts. Small clouds are forming in skies that have been clear up to now as we travel along the Wyndham Great Northern Hwy. and pass by the Deceptions on our right. 50km along the Hwy. we stop to stretch our legs for morning tea then off again this time on the Stuart Hwy and more termite mounds. The road suddenly deteriorates to a bone shaking ride as we approach the mine area. Argyle mine has 520 workers with 12% indigenous all of who work 12 hour shifts two weeks on, two weeks off. Conditions are pretty good with free trips home to Perth twice a year, a swimming pool and canteen with copious amounts of healthy fresh food. There is a waiting list to obtain employment at the mine which produces 1/3 of the worlds' industrial diamonds per year. The discovery started in 1979 by CRA in the river bed at Smoke Creek, followed up the creek bed to the AK1 pipe. In 1983 alluvial mining produced \$470 million in its first year, and in 1984/85 those moneys were used to build the processing plant. These diamonds were formed 150km underground and brought to the surface through volcanic action. Pink diamonds are recovered at a rate of one handful per year and it was at this stage my thoughts of ever having one deteriorated. One can only dream! The \$15million worth of diamonds still under the airstrip did interest me as I thought with all these fly boys around maybe we could make a claim or something. The rough diamonds are taken to Perth to be graded, some stones are sent to India to Argyle's Bombay Office. The pink and champagne coloured stones stay in Perth and are sold in Perth and Antwerp or are sent to Hong Kong and Geneva for displays all over the world. We are shown into a small shop and can view some of the precious stones, a microscope in needed. My expectations are by now completely squashed. Oh well, good company and a good lunch lies ahead as I am brought back to reality. A short video of Hugh Soren, an artists impression of the area and then off to lunch and back on to the bus. We must remain on the bus for this part of the tour for both security and safety reasons. We drive into the high security area to where the T-Rex trucks (driven by women) dwarf the other larger than life machinery. These trucks use 5000 ltrs of diesel fuel per shift (12hours) and can carry up to 240 ton of red rock. Red rock is tipped over the over burn which we are told will produce complete re-growth of vegetation over a 100 year process. The mine is due to run out of present level productions in the year 2007 but this may be extended to 2013 if



alternative mining takes over. At this point we all don hard hats and glasses as we get out to see the open cut Ak1 mining area. The viewing area allows us to see over the vast area of terraces in which the vehicles work, and over on our left the ground is being set up with dynamite for future blasting. There is a huge area already been excavated not unlike a volcano blown open. It is hard to imagine that they promise to have the vegetation back someday. Back in the bus and around under extensive conveyors and huge machinery, again we are escorted out of the bus and into the control building. One person sits in front of five computer

screens with other screens high around the room. His responsibility is to watch for problems and activate solutions without leaving his desk. He can view anywhere within the mining and processing areas. Very hi-tech. Into a display room to see more of the types and qualities of stones. Ian's hiding with his credit card. Time to leave. Joe has to go through stringent security but comes back smiling with a story on smuggling diamonds out of the mine. A tale based on love, betrayal, theft, greed, and murder. The trip back to Kununurra is pleasant with pre-dinner drinks and nibbles. Wouldn't you know it our bus ran out of drink.

That night we did our own thing, some ate, some shopped, and some had an early night and Lyn was still at the laundry. The warm balmy night folds over all after another perfect day in paradise in the company of wonderful friends.



Clear bright skies greet us the next morning after a little sleep in. Another equally good breakfast and on to the coach to the airport. A number of the aircraft decide to take a detour and fly along the course of the Ord River from Kununurra to its mouth at the sea. Our flight is spectacular at 500 ft and Angela spots a crocodile sun basking on the river bank. At the river mouth the colour changes to a brilliant turquoise at the Cambridge Gulf. We round View Hill and fly down the west arm over Kununurra, the Cockburn Ranges, Emma Gorge, and land on the 1100 metre private gravel strip at El-Questro. The parking space is very limited and

the twelve aircraft get packed in an area the size of a shoe box. At this stage we will sign off till next we meet!

### **Third Leg**

#### **El Questro**

#### *Rick Wedgwood*

Another clear, blue sky day, perfect flying conditions for the short, 30 minute flight south-west from Kununurra to El Questro.

Instead of tracking direct to the overnight stop, some of the group decided to follow the Ord River downstream to Wyndham. The extensive irrigation areas made a stark contrast to the surrounding dry, sparsely populated country that we had been over for the past few days.

El Questro is a working cattle station of some one million acres, and carries about 5,000 head of Shorthorn and Brahman cattle. Upon sale, stock have to be transported either Wyndham, or to Derby or Darwin (each about 1000 km away) for the increasing live export trade. The romantic days of the drovers shifting stock hundreds of miles overland has been replaced by the more economic, prosaic road trains. These road trains are powered by a 500-600 h.p. prime mover, and pull (usually) three trailers, each of two decks. Depending upon the size of the cattle being hauled, each road train will carry between 120 and 180 head of stock, and they usually travel in a convoy of five to ten trucks. El Questro, like many agricultural enterprises in Australia, has recognised the value of tourism to supplement (or in many cases, replace) income from primary production.

El Questro Wilderness Park was developed in 1991 and is situated on the eastern perimeter of the Kimberleys, an area extending from Broome in the South West, to Kununurra and Wyndham near the Northern Territory border. The property runs some eighty kilometres into the heart of the region, most of which has never been explored and certainly never settled. Animal, bird and fish life congregate on the rivers and waterholes, of which EL Questro boasts four major river systems – from fresh water springs to the lazy salt water estuaries in the northern part of the property.

The first consideration to be met was parking, the previous day I had been advised that the parking area at the station airstrip accommodated but three or four aircraft. Our fleet of 12 Comanches had to park overnight, and three other aircraft were expected to come and go through the day. The parking area was not too bad, however in his efforts to get right up the back Spider got somewhat stuck in the bulldust, and had to shut down and be man-handled into position, in the process having a close encounter with the barb wire perimeter fence.

All parked, then up to the “Station Store”, El Questro’s office, to be allocated to our bungalow accommodation. The bungalows are situated overlooking the everflowing Pentecost River, and their balconies provided a first class area to relax and observe the bird life. However, that was to come later as it was now off to the Zebedee Springs.

We were driven some distance in purpose built four wheel drive vehicles to the start of the walk, which led through dense Livingstonia palms to a series of thermal pools, a fabulous place to soak and relax. Although these pools are normally closed from midday, our tour organisers, Angela and Tony had used their flair to get the best for us and we had a special opening to enjoy them. In his haste Tony managed to get his swimmers and

towel wet prior to us getting there, however that paled into insignificance when Trevor's leather soled boots let him down, and he took a tumble into the water, turning his Canon into a Nikonos underwater camera!

The thermal pools are another example of the warm waters of the great artesian basin surfacing, as it does throughout Australia.

One of the two vehicles had developed a slow tyre leak, so as the passengers on that one hurried back to camp, the rest of us were shown a huge Boab tree with a diameter of some 12 feet.

The next morning we were transported out to the Chamberlain Gorge, a 3 klm fresh waterhole bounded by tropical vegetation belittled by 200ft escarpments. The gorge can only be traveled by boat, and during our voyage we were entertained by the inimitable "Buddy", an aboriginal former stockman, drover, entertainer, and spinner of tall tales. At the head of the gorge we disembarked to be educated by Buddy about the examples of Windjina rock art which he showed us.

Then it was back to the aircraft where there was one more close encounter with the barb wire fence prior to lift off from El Questro, another fabulous stop-over on our Kimberley Safari.



#### **Fourth Leg**

#### **El Questro - Mt Elizabeth – Mt Hart**

#### *Jan van der Spek*

#### **Breakfast @ 0630 hrs:**

Manfred M called loudly on us all to tell him where his lovely wife had spent the night when she was late for breakfast!

#### **Depart for tour of Chamberlain Gorge by boat @ 0715 hrs:**

Tour guide Buddy called himself "black & dark", and showed himself to be a well-travelled horse-breaker and rodeo rider, now retired, by his tales of many aspects of his life and some snippets of local history as well. He certainly kept us enthralled as we glided along the river between the shimmering ochre tones of the walls of the gorge. When we reached the site of the huge rock paintings, we saw a huge Wandjina complete with feet, Lightning Man, a piccaninny and numerous Bradshaw figures high above our heads.

On our return to the landing, more stories tumbled out to entertain us while the dust of the departing trucks dissipated. Buddy concluded with a comment about how he had now reached the age where he was looking over his shoulder for the "big man with the shovel" to catch up with him. As he lit yet another cigarette I unwisely commented that the Winfields might get him first to which he shot back the retort – "I don't remember us being married!"

#### **Departure from station airstrip 1015 hrs:**

An uneventful flight ensued, with several aircraft diverting north over the Mitchell Plateau, Mitchell Falls and the Prince Regent River, before all were safely on the ground at Mt Elizabeth station.

#### **Mt Elizabeth Station and the Lacy family:**

After a warm welcome from Pat Lacy and her staff, the first flight of aircraft crews had lunch and prepared for the tour to view local rock art (Marella) and end with a swim at Wren Gorge. The second flight crews, and some of the early birds who preferred a quiet afternoon at the homestead, settled back to a lazy time of R & R, quiet chat and a cool drink or two under the shady trees in the homestead garden after lunch.

A tribal elder first approached Marella Rock, so named because of the depiction on it of the warrior Marella, seeking permission from the Wandjina spirits of the rock to allow the approach of visitors. After a refreshing swim in the waterhole, complete with small fish, turtles and waterlilies, group one returned to the homestead to find group two sprawled out under the sunset, quaffing wine and listening to Ted Morgan's stories and jokes. These continued until dinner, despite the initial shock (for some) of the unavailability of beer, even the light variety, due to the failure of the last delivery. The wine cellar proved equal to the task however and a delightful 3-course repast followed.



Pumpkin and potato soup, freshly baked bread (Pat's specialty), buffet choices of vegetable patties, cauliflower cheese, chicken and mushroom casserole and beef casserole with rice, fresh beans AND a choice of 3 desserts was enough to satisfy the hungriest diner. Jim B, who hails from Swan Hill, disgraced the fraternity by trying to gate-crash the queue so thoughtfully arranged by our hostess to simplify access to the buffet. When your scribe suggested that she would catch up with him later (to teach him some manners?!), the guffaws of laughter which greeted this outburst clearly showed how easily messages can be misunderstood. After all, this scribe already has her own pilot AND aircraft, so what more could she require?

**Midnight "shenanigans"** – Scribe exits bedroom to sashay along the verandah to bathroom. On her return passes first pilot of ADD, then spouse, with same destination clearly in mind of each male. Safely back in bedroom, male enters, appears disoriented, then quite taken aback to find he is in the wrong room, having miscounted the doorways on his return. Specs don't help in the dark, do they JM!!!?

#### **Saturday August 9, Mt Elizabeth to Mt Hart:**

After breakfast, as group 2 prepared to set off for their tour to Marella, it transpired that Jimmy was "indisposed" that morning after a heavy night of imbibing with his mates, and was unavailable to accompany the group to the art sites. Did this have anything to do with the events that followed, or was it "just a coincidence" that Pat's vehicle, hastily prepared to participate in the tour that morning, ran out of fuel beyond the airstrip! While most of the group waited near some grazing cattle beside the track, Pat and one of our number went back in one vehicle to bring a second along with sufficient fuel for the trip. After that, no further problems ensued, and group two all enjoyed their tour, swim and morning tea. Some anxious pilots, part of group one, awaited our return however, as the temperature rose along with the wind, threatening our take-offs with increased density altitude AND an uphill take-off run!

After a quick sandwich lunch, group two readied for departure, and some concerns were expressed as the heavier aircraft wallowed on their way up the hill into wind as the temperature climbed. All departed successfully however, and bade farewell to the Lacys and their working cattle station. A new and different experience awaited us at the recently declared National Park of Mt Hart Station.

#### **Fifth Leg**

#### **Mt Hart**

#### **Fred Morgan**

First to arrive at Mt Hart International Airport was Manfred and his crew. As with all arrivals that day our very affable host Taffy Abbot introduced himself and personally welcomed each person to his resort.

Manfred quickly made himself at home in a comfortable chair in the shade of a tree at the edge of the strip with his hand held radio listening to the inbound calls and making himself busy giving out information re airfield conditions.

It was not long before we were all into the tea, coffee, cake and biscuits and refreshments while discussing the mornings activities and events. Word came through that Jim Barrie tried his hand at Tour Guiding back at Mt

Elizabeth when one of the Tour Guides became indisposed. Apparently John Ward had to put the pressure on Jim to continue the tour otherwise he may have stayed on in his new vocation.

The late morning and afternoon was taken up with catching up with our washing, walking about, canoeing on the river and trying out the hammock.

One of the would-be canoeists was particularly hopeless. He was paddling around in circles and when he was not doing that he was running into the bank. Thank goodness for his passenger, Rick Wedgwood and John Ward were close at hand on the riverbank. They were able to give him a lesson on how to paddle a canoe; they obviously were good instructors because he was able to paddle in a straight line much to the relief of his passenger.

Spider Webb ran a retirement seminar in the lounge room to an interested group.

Before dinner we all gathered in the bar where Taffy gave us a very interesting talk on the history of Mt Hart, its previous owners and how he came to take over the place.

A delicious dinner was had by all after which we retired to the bar area for a rest and a chat.

The peace and quiet was suddenly broken by the arrival of a party of three; obviously in a bad way from the noise of their cries for help.

Out of the dark emerged Tony, Angela and Irene with blood stained bandages on their heads; Tony with his arm in a sling and Angela not only suffering from her multiple injuries but also in the advanced stages of pregnancy or some other dreadful intra-abdominal pathology.

As is usual in every gathering there is always a Doctor and Nurse in the audience, on the bus, at the event etc,



well it was the same here. We had Dr Ian and Nurse Loyalty who just happened to be at Mt Hart for the day. They very quickly had things sorted out much to the relief of the onlookers and of course especially to the wounded trio. However, as with every disaster things always get worse before they get better. Angela's condition appeared to deteriorate suddenly but Dr Ian and Nurse Loyalty diagnosed the onset of labour from which a bouncing, bouncing baby was skilfully delivered. Rumour has it that it was wrapped up, put in the canoe and floated off down the river.

Althea diagnosed Manfred as having hip pocket area impaction. She instructed Fred in her Buckley's technique. Althea reports that it's an easy technique but Fred found it a bit difficult. There were lots of yells and moans from Manfred. He required more than one application of anaesthetic. The offending foreign body was delivered after much pulling and tugging it was found to be engorged with phone numbers and addresses and a measly \$5. Althea said in retrospect it would have been easier to get it out with an enema.

Taffy Abbot came first in the joke telling contest with Tony Read and Jim Barrie coming equal second.

We all retired for the night after having had a most restful, enjoyable day.

After a hearty breakfast next morning we all departed on the next leg of our flight to Derby and beyond.

## **Sixth Leg**

### **Morning at Mt. Hart – Cape Leveque**

*Jim Barrie*

I awoke to the howling of dingoes for the second time. The first lot of howling occurred at around midnight and woke us up and I have never heard anything like it. I do not know how many dingoes were involved but they sure made a lot of noise. Peter brown suggested the howling was Annabel, Taffy's wife. We had a marvellous dinner the night before, in fact probably the best food of the trip so far. Sunrise was quite amazing as it was a beautiful sky and birds everywhere. Very noisy. Thr dingoes howling set off the white cockatoos who also made a dreadful noise.

A fascinating history of Mt. Hart was given by Taffy at the Mt. Hart Wilderness Lodge after the dinner on the 9<sup>th</sup>. The property is now reduced to a radius of 10kms from the homestead. It was originally a million acres. It is now a wilderness protection area but there is some local dissatisfaction with the way it has been operated by CALM (Conservation and Land Management) with regard to fire management, stock control and the like.

Breakfast at 8am in the main building was all the usual cereals, plus a cooked breakfast with homemade bread and again the standard of the cuisine was the best so far for the trip. Taffy's and Annabel's warmth and generosity were a feature of the visit.

After breakfast we proceeded to the airfield which was the usual rural situation, with saplings growing everywhere with no clearly defined run-up area. I elected to do my checks with only 1300 revs to try to avoid stone damage to the prop. There was a great blast of dust as we took off on Runway 21. We in CDB with MMN, MEG and EOH flew to the Windjana Gorge. It would have been lovely to stop and actually walk up the Gorge but in the time available, this was not possible. Rick left early in POM and flew to the north-west to return coastal to Derby.

We eventually arrived at Derby by about 11 am, we refuelled on the ground and were met by Don our friendly bus driver who showed us the sights of Derby. The golf course which was sparkling with reuse of grey water from eth town, rodeo ground where a rodeo was in full swing although we could not stop, the wharf where we viewed the fittings to cope with the second highest tide in the world. Fabulous weather continued as it was a clear, warm, calm summers day by our standards, in the middle of winter.

Derby was pretty busy as the rodeo had attracted ringers from stations near and far, who were in town for a big weekend. The population of Derby is about 5,000, about 50% indigenous and 50% European. The main activity seems to be indigenous services. A visit to the visitors centre followed by a long stop at the pub as no grog was available at Cape Leveque. Most people bought a slab and several bottles of wine, as there were two days at Cape Leveque. Most aircraft I would guess were near their maximum take-off weight with emergency supplies of booze.

Most of us decided to fly north to the horizontal waterfalls which were as spectacular as they are reputed to be. Turquoise water, beautiful islands, aircraft everywhere at different levels and circling in different directions, so one needed to look, listen and speak.

We then continued over the Buccaneer archipelago which was equally spectacular on our way to Cape Leveque. We all landed safely at Cape Leveque, but CDB slowed down to let a slower aircraft, MEG land first. MEG took such a wide circuit out to sea that we almost exhausted our fuel reserves in the holding pattern waiting for him to land.

Here we were met by John who needed five trips to move all the people and rehydration fluid. Each trip took a little longer than the last as there was a bit of a hold-up at the check in area. I was installed with the boys, Peter Brown, John Michell and Bill Forester in a beach shack, while John was foisted on to Angela and Tony the honeymooners, where he proceeded to cramp their style and was banished to sleep on the front verandah.

Dinner was a cook your own pre-packed meal provided by the bush butlers. What it lacked in finesse it made up for in quantity and we had a very generous meal. John and Bill excelled by cooking their own and then promptly going to bed leaving poor Peter and me to fend for



ourselves, after an evening stroll on the beach. An early night after a few beers was appreciated by all.

Magnificent sunrise awoke us at around 5.30 and Peter and I took an early morning swim. Several more trips to the beach and swims followed lunch at the beach restaurant. I won the wet T-shirt competition. An afternoon nap was much appreciated as the previous 10 days had been pretty hectic. A final swim and dinner at the beach restaurant where everybody signed John Ward's book which gave him a magnificent record of the whole trip.

Our last night was followed by a spectacular sunrise which was a portrait of things to come. The trip to Broome is for somebody else to report. In all, a marvelous two days on a marvelous safari.

## Seventh Leg

### Broome

#### *Manfred Melloh*

The most demanding weather wise part of our trip was the flight from Cape Leveque to Broome. Before that section of our tour the weather was perfect. We all departed the Cape in really good weather, (the forecast was not all that great for Broome but as we were all travelling coastal, thought we could fly to Broome VFR no problems.) This was not the case as the weather at Broome had deteriorated to such an extent, low cloud down to 150 ft. visibility reduced to 500m. and rain showers forecast all day. This left the I.C.S. fleet unprepared and having to find an alternate destination as the airport in Broome was not suitable to VFR traffic and IFR would have their work cut out for them to get in as well. All turned out OK after some hurried reassessments the Comanche fleet managed to find 3 alternate airstrips. The majority ended up at Beagle Bay, (a reasonably good strip 50nm north east of Broome. Two aircraft found a safe haven at Pearl Beach airstrip, coastal from Beagle Bay. The two most experienced pilots ended up at Derby. As the day progressed the weather at Broome improved and gradually the Comanches regrouped and with some encouragement from the aircrews who had braved the abnormal unseasonal weather into Broome all of the twelve Comanche aircraft finally arrived in Broome by late afternoon, (too late for the arranged tour). What a start to our Broome adventure. As we had become accustomed, Angela and Tony had arranged a great stay for us by booking us into first class accommodation at the "Mangrove Resort".

With all the bad weather behind us our Broome discovery was all ahead of us and we had to make up for lost time.

From the airport we were bussed to our accommodation via a scenic tour through Broome. After a quick freshen up we all dined out at Café Carlotta and had a great time. During the evening Café Carlotta the I.C.S. contingent took the opportunity to thank both Angela and Tony for their great effort in organising the marvellous Kimberly trip. We presented Angela with a Broome pearl in appreciation for a fabulous tour.



The next day got off to a great start, a cruise along Cable Beach on board the pearling lugger "Willie". Among the flight crew we found some sailors who could not resist the opportunity to climb up to the top of the mast, (which by all accounts was not a pretty sight), while others took time out to relax and take advantage of the luggers hospitality.

Most of us joined the bus tour up to Willie Creek Pearl Farm in the afternoon. This was very interesting and educational, learning the difference between a mabe, cultured and keshi pearl. From all accounts the Showroom did a roaring trade with most female crew members

drawing on all their feminine charm to leave Willie Creek with a share of the pearls. Some could barely afford the fuel home. What would we do without the plastic?

The last evening at Broome Mangrove Resort was something very special. It was the Staircase to the Moon. *See the attached.* The spectacular sight that evening made up for the poor service and trouble that was experienced with our meal, but there were free coffee and cakes for our inconvenience.

We enclose with this report an extract from the Broome local newspaper, with the normal media poetic licence, of the I.C.S. visit to their town. The treasurer was left behind at Broome to pick up the tab, but on this occasion was trapped by the media while more worthwhile spokespersons were making ready for their Fitzroy Crossing adventure.

Some quotable quotes and interesting observations and exchanges heard during our Broome stay.

If God had wanted me to fly He would have given me more money.

Heard over the air waves from one of our experienced pilots, "What's this ATIS all about?"

It was heard from a reliable source that one of our aircraft was so low on fuel, the pilot had to scrounge fuel from his Comanche friends so he could fly into Broome. Just as well someone up there had arranged for this extra fuel stop at Beagle Bay.

When the possibility of an unscheduled under wing overnight stay was contemplated at Beagle Bay, typical comments heard from a crew member. "I won't be sharing my apple and 2 lollies with anyone."

While having our sumptuous dinner at Café Carlotta, we dined with a Scottish couple who were celebrating 39 years of living together and from all accounts were truly rejoicing in their achievement.

It was overheard that in Broome women prisoners broke out of gaol each Friday only to return promptly on Monday morning so as to avoid their domestic responsibilities.

No greater love has any man than to give up his last drop of port wine to his fellow flying mates. It was also noted that Brown Bros have no control over their staff when it comes to the selection and drinking other brands of inferior wines.

Rumour has it that Dr Jim is contemplating a career change and will join the broadcasting fraternity in specialising in recording location ATIS information.

It was observed that the Thomson/Lawson crew staggered onto the bus via the rear door to avoid being breathalysed after a great deal of merriment at Café Carlotta. They were not present for breakfast either. The bus trip home must have contributed to them sleeping in.

We believe other crews also indulged too much at the Mangrove, as only half our normal contingent turned up for the early departure breakfast. It appeared breakfast was fast becoming the most unpopular meal of the day.

At Mangrove Resort 2 sisters did not spend a great first night in their room. They preferred their tent at Cape Leveque. All the technology was all too much. Nothing would turn off in their room, air con, TV, lights etc. the removal of the key from its door slot was never contemplated.

Quote, "This is no holiday, I have not had time to sober up properly."

**A Poem of thanks by one of the travellers.**

Kununurra was a treat  
After meeting you all at Hall's Creek.  
The Bungle Bungles I have to say  
Taught us in comfort the explorers way

El Questro was done in style  
At Elizabeth Station we could have stayed a while.  
Taffy and Annabelle at Mt Hart  
Made a delightful middle from the start.

Cape Leveque, what can I say  
Swim, eat, relax, the holiday way  
A flight through cloud and rain  
Showed the spirit that will sustain  
The friendship of the Comanche plane.

A sail, a pearl, staircase to the moon  
What more can we wish for, sad to say, we will depart soon.  
We now fly our separate route  
Let Fitzroy Crossing give much enjoyment to you.

We have met you as strangers and leave as friends.  
Our best wishes are with you all right to the end.

Thanks Angela and Tony, Tony and Jan, John and Jan.

***By Heike.***

## Final Leg

### Broome - Fitzroy Crossing

*Lynette Nixon*

Final day and flying leg of Safari, destination Fitzroy Crossing and tribe seems just a little tired this morning. A feeling of sadness as we all say our farewells to Jan & Tony van der Spek and Heike and Domenic. So remaining 23 tribe members travel by bus to Broome airport. Planes refuelled and checked just in time to be caught in the peak period, so safari takes a little time to take to the skies. Weather was beautiful with a slight easterly head wind. Just prior to the last planes leaving Manfred Melloh, flying FLG was interviewed and photographed by the Broome Advertiser.

Finally we were ready for take off, departing over Roeback Bay and then over the flood plains stretching far out in the distance. Over numerous clay pans we flew with a few clouds and outside temperature at 19degrees. Flying past Mt Anderson and Grant Range, Fitzroy River area was a contrast of lush green carpet, with water low but still running, winding past the local aboriginal communities. Looma Community Centre area during 1950s was the first attempt to grow rice on a large scale in the Kimberley, drought, flood and poor irrigation systems caused this scheme to fail. After flying for 1hr 40mins Fitzroy Crossing - elevation 368ft 18deg 10,9's 125deg 33.5' E - airfield came into view.

With most folk all ready waiting in the buses for the Darrngku Cruise down the Fitzroy River no time was lost in boarding the bus. These tours are conducted by the local aboriginal people who explained the history of the Crossing its people and the mighty power of the Fitzroy River in flood.

Well another marvellous boat trip, under perfect weather conditions we travel down the Fitzroy River which runs through the Geikie Gorge. Passing huge towering cliffs which marked the flood levels and the effects of the recent floods. Plenty of wildlife sighting ibis, ducks, brolgas, fairy martins, also counted about 20 crocodiles lying on the bank sunning themselves.



We gathered at the Gorge for Billy tea and further aboriginal stories (re. tribal punishment and fitting in the with white mans laws). By this time we were all longing for a cuppa tea and shady spot. Also during this time the guide demonstrates the art of fire making.

On the road again, buses take us back to Fitzroy River Lodge, on the way we were shown Lyrebird nests, old Fitzroy crossing Bridge, old town tour, via supermarket for John's tobacco. Noted the power for local street lighting was unique, each by an individual solar panel.

Finally again we settle into our accommodation and dinner time is organised, then a gap of free time to plan the following days return home. With the plans all finished, we can now relax, have fun and enjoy the camaraderie of our Comanche friends, with drinks in the bar in readiness for the last supper to together. So once again another enjoyable dinner with a few bottles of wine, we later find our way back to our rooms.

What a trip such camaraderie, unbelievable , most people are making plans for our next flyin at Dubbo. Everyone to bring their photographs and movies, a photo competition with the prize being the most recent wine club pack of 4 bottles of wine from All Saints and/or St Leonards wineries. Thanks to our Comanche vigneron.

At the airport next morning, refuelling and checking completed, members say their goodbyes and start their journeys, via Geikie Gorge before heading south to various destinations home.

Goodbye for now...until next safari.

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