

Travellers' Club Meeting 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011

**Jenni Shipp: "Rugged Kimberley"**

After several overcast days, 31 members welcomed Jenni on a fine sunny autumn afternoon.

We were regaled with a selection of excellent photos that focused on nature (landscapes/geology, wildflowers, wildlife) and Aboriginal Rock art selected from the 10,000 shots taken during a 14 day luxury camping tour in June 2010. Humans were excluded except when illustrating the enormous scale of certain landscape features. The preamble was a map of the route – Broome, Great Northern Highway (paved, one lane), Gibb River Road (unpaved, closed during wet season but recently opened for access to several gorges), King Leopold Range, Drysdale River Station; Kalumburu Road, Mitchell Falls. King Edward River, Kimberley coast; Emma Gorge Resort; El Questro, Wyndham, Kununurra, Ord River, Bungle Bungle, Old Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing; Great North Road back to Broome.

In and around Broome we looked at the sandstone geology, dinosaur prints, camels on Cable Beach, the Japanese cemetery, historical outdoor picture theatre and heard about the filming site for Crocodile Dundee and Japanese pearl divers.

On the road we saw a huge boab tree formerly used as a prison for indigenous folk and massive termite mounds. Windjana Gorge, picnic lunch, first warning not to go too near water's edge (i.e. never smile at a crocodile) – thence to Tunnel Creek Gorge (OK to paddle through with a torch, bats hanging from the roof, wonderful)! Next day to Bell Gorge after signing in and paying to enter the Conservation Park we saw lots of little wildlife and beautiful flowers and were allowed a swim in upper pool and walk to lower pool below waterfall. From King Leopold Range Lookout controlled burning with small firebombs from a helicopter echoed the many cautionary signs about fire safety we were told were along the way. The beauty of Galvan's Gorge was complemented by some Wandjina rock art and that of the Barnett River Gorge by permission to have a swim.

Some of the sites visited were in the huge cattle stations of this region and others were in aboriginal land which contained the next stage of the tour where the guide gave constant reminders to comply with the regulations and restrictions that apply to visitors. Along Kulumburu Road to Mitchell Falls we drove through several rivers and saw more Wandjina art, some with 40 layers of paint under rock ledges (4000 years old in different styles) – fascinating! We moved on via King Edward river (red rocks/landscape) and Mitchell Plateau (Livistonia palms) to Mitchell Falls camp (timber floored tents with ensuite, solar power, dining room).

The easy 4 km walk to Mitchell Falls via Little Mertens Falls was a tour highlight – beautiful sites, flowers and Bradshaw rock art which suggests an Indonesian influence and has been carbon dated from 17000 to 5000 years old. Big Mertens Falls have an 80m drop. Continuing the walk across the Mitchell River to the stunning Mitchell Falls – lots of saltwater crocs below the falls – photos of wildlife especially broilgas and rosellas were taken. Shots taken during the helicopter ride back to camp showed the damaged landscape due to mining exploration, the coast and crocodiles on mud flats at river mouth. Note that the local ducks rest in the trees when the crocs are around.

The next stage included Ellenbrae Station (kangaroos, wallabies, finches, and snakes), Cockburn Ranges, Emma Gorge Resort, Zebedee Hot Springs, El Questro township, Wyndham. The Five Rivers Lookout at Wyndham was a highlight. Onward to Kununurra, a sunset cruise on the Ord River, Purnululu National Park, several gorges, The Domes and the Bungle Bungle viewed from a helicopter, Cathedral Gorge – all stunning! From the mud brick buildings of Old Halls Creek we went to the spectacular China Walls thence Fitzroy Crossing, a cruise down Geike Gorge and returned to Broome.

Thanks Jenni – your emphasis on beauty and the top quality of your presentation and photos really impressed us!

‘Ela Taranto