

## KIMBERLEY SOCIETY COASTAL EXCURSION 1996

Cathie Clement opened the meeting on 4 December by mentioning the CSIRO Medal won by Kevin Kenneally and Daphne Edinger and presented in Sydney last month for their authorship of the book *Broome and Beyond*. Cathie, whom we were glad to see looking so well after her recent major surgery, then introduced Kevin Coate as the evening's speaker.

Kevin began his talk by tracing on a large map the route sailed by the MV *Sea Lion* on the May 1996 trip which included the history, botany and Aboriginal culture of the areas visited. He stressed that it is a dangerous coast with extremely high tides dictating one's activities, and the ever present crocodiles, before showing excellent slides borrowed from many of the 16 members of the excursion.

The voyagers left after dawn from a Broome beach and were transported by zodiacs to the *Sea Lion* to meet her crew of four. There were 16 passengers, all members of the Society. First stop was the Lacepedes where they landed to view the bird breeding sites for which the Islands are famous. They saw Brown Boobies and Lesser Frigate birds sitting on nests and protecting young, and hundreds of birds wheeling overhead. Green turtles also breed here. The islands, which were an important guano mining site and a port of call for vessels working on the pearling ground in the early days, have an interesting history.

Next stop Midlagon (Middle Lagoon), run by an Aboriginal couple, and an examination of an ancient fish trap where rocks are built up to trap fish as the tide retreats; quite effective. It was then on to Crocodile Creek, built by BHP workers for their recreation from Cockatoo and Koolan Islands. They had a stainless steel ladder for disembarkation and beds cemented into the rock platforms. On a walk from here, the voyagers collected a rare *Boronia*, *B. pauciflora*, which has few flowers and entire leaves, and brought away seed for Kings Park to grow. They landed on Cockatoo Island and swam in the world famous pool perched atop a sheer cliff at what is now a famous tourist resort. Most of the houses have been retained, but none on Koolan which is being allowed to revert to nature. On leaving the Yampi Peninsula, they passed through a mighty tidal rip up to 60 ft high before calling into Raft Point where famous cave paintings were examined after a tough climb to the towering cliffs and a high overhang. There were Wandjinas and fish (rock cod) which everyone found fascinating.

The *Sea Lion* went up the Sale River to spectacular scenery of high red sandstone cliffs and deep gorges, up which the voyagers walked, always looking for plants and cave paintings. They saw Bradshaw figures (known as Goyon or Djennaggi paintings by some Aboriginal people) with some pieces missing. These were said to be the oldest of the world's rock art, being 50 to 100 thousand years old. They camped

ashore up the Sale River, at BBQ Creek, on a freshwater stream tumbling down from a patch of closed riverine forest where black grass wrens and Rufous owls were seen, feeding on rock rats and other small marsupials. The next port of call was Llangi, an important Aboriginal site for which permission had to be obtained to land. It has rock art related to the Raft Point paintings and stone statue-like formations that represent fallen Wandjinas to the Aboriginal people. Our voyagers camped on the beach.

A trip past Kuri Bay, site of the first pearl farm in the area, led to Camden Harbour, which was settled in 1864 and only lasted 10 months, a tragedy from beginning to end. Those that succumbed and died were buried on Sheep Island, with the one remaining grave stone being that of Mary Jane Pascoe. There is also a landing platform blasted out of rock so that gear could be unloaded from the ships. The voyagers climbed Mt. Lookover to get a magnificent view of the whole area before sailing on to St. Patrick's Island, which they climbed through dense vine thickets to get a superb view including Mt. Trafalgar.

Next landing was at Camp Creek on the Prince Regent River, with a camp under *Melaleuca leucadendra* and *Pandanus aquaticus* and much admired reflections in the still limpid pools. Here they fished for their supper quite successfully amongst water lilies, *Nymphoides indica*. The artists on board were kept busy portraying the magnificent scenery. This was a very relaxing place with many camp fires to sit around while spinning many a tall yarn! The tides here reach as much as 33 metres and are diurnal and dictate the movements of the boat at all times. Further up this river is the King Cascades where King filled his empty barecas with sweet, fresh water in 1820. The *Sea Lion* crew did likewise, also allowing the voyagers to have a sluice down under the waterfall. Then it was on to Hanover Bay - where George Grey landed Timor ponies in 1838 to start his walk to the Glenelg River - Montgomery Reef and Careening Bay, where Phillip Parker King had careened his cutter *Mermaid* and inscribed a huge boab tree with the first graffiti of the Kimberley: "HMC Mermaid 1820". Alan Cunningham, the botanist on board, planted orange and lemon seeds wherever he landed; just as well the quarantine officers weren't in force at the time and that they didn't grow! This area hasn't changed at all since and it is possible to see the vegetation exactly as they saw it so long ago.

In Prince Frederick Harbour the voyagers landed on Naturalist Island and then ventured into the Hunter River. There were photographs of huge white jellyfish with brittle stars under the bell. This posed a mystery to them and they approached Society member Loisetta Marsh to solve it for them on their return. She had seen similar occurrences in Shark Bay and reports of the same in Madagascar and India. She thinks they probably settle out as larvae, sharing its food or feeding it at night, a fascinating association.

The voyagers also boated up the Hunter River to look for a rare *Pittosporum* collected by Alan Cunningham but never seen since. No luck, but they saw some Chestnut Rails instead. Bigge Island was the next landing to look at the superb art sites here, of Wandjinas, ships and what may be Europeans smoking pipes. The latter possibly depicted Dutch or Portuguese mariners who visited long ago.

The trip ended at Port Warrender, the voyagers still looking for paintings, plants and bird life, and they found *Cordia subcordata*, a strand plant with large yellow flowers. From here, the helicopter lifted them off to land on the Mitchell Plateau airfield and pick up a fixed wing aircraft to take them back to Broome, flying over immense patches of mangroves - the richest in the world of 17 different species. They flew over Montgomery Reef and Island, the Buccaneer Archipelago, comprising over 800 islands, and Talbot Bay of the horizontal falls 12-15 feet high, a fitting end to an incredible trip.

Kevin answered some questions then Mike Donaldson took over to mention that Grahame Walsh, an expert on cave paintings and author of a recent book on same, will come over if we wish. His call for an expression of interest from members resulted in a good show of hands. Kevin Kenneally also mentioned that the Landscape brochures are now available, listing the trips arranged for next year, and members and guests adjourned for supper.

*Daphne Choules Edinger*