

A WALKING EXPEDITION IN THE KIMBERLEY

At the meeting of 4 August, Peter Knight gave an interesting insight into the joys and difficulties of undertaking walking trips in the Kimberley. Peter graduated from the University of Western Australia as a civil engineer in 1960 and his first job was with Christiani Nielsen and Clough, working on the construction of Ord River Diversion Dam at Kununurra. When he arrived at Kununurra his first job was to build more houses (there were only 6 there at the time) and an outdoor cinema! Six-day working weeks were the norm, however on Sundays Peter tried to explore the nearby country and in the process fell in love with the Kimberley. After two years in the Kimberley Peter travelled overseas and then spent time building a family and career. It was many years before he returned to the Kimberley.

Between 1983 and 1999 Peter has undertaken eight walking trips in the Kimberley, these being the ANZSES (Australian and New Zealand Scientific Exploration Society) trip to Walcott Inlet, retracing of Grey's 1838 expedition, trips to Camden Harbour, Sale River, Mt Elizabeth, Bachsten Creek and the desert, and two trips looking for sites of rock art as described by Joseph Bradshaw.

For the ANZSES trip in 1983, there were approximately 30- 35 participants including Peter's wife Glen and their daughter, Hamish and Rosemary McGlashan and their daughter, Kevin Kenneally, Daphne Edinger, and a fine Worora elder Wattie Ngerdu with whom Peter spent a lot of enjoyable time. Camp was set up above the tidal zone on the Calder River, under the shadow of Mt Daghish. For most activities the participants were in smaller groups to address particular challenges, and Peter spent some time in the lower reaches of the Charnley Gorge and up and around Mt Daghish.

For the last ten days a helicopter (donated by CRA) was used to distribute the groups out from the camp for an adventure. A group of five, including Peter, set out to find the paintings on the Glenelg which were first recorded by George Grey in 1838. The plan was to be dropped near the site of Grey's 26th March camp (a cave) and backpack along his route via the second painting site, then on to Lushingtons Furtherest and Pantijan Station to be picked up there by Dick Robertson. Peter had spent many hours studying Grey's diaries and maps and modern maps and aerial photographs to identify the precise location of the painting sites. He found it most exciting to fly to somewhere he had not been before, know exactly where he was and feel a familiarity with the surroundings. The other members in the group were not as convinced about their location.

The next morning, however, they split and went in three different directions in search of the painting site. Peter and Glen were successful in pinpointing the site exactly and, after everyone had explored around the site, they unsuccessfully

looked for the "Engraved Head" before sitting on a large rock for lunch near the first 'Bradshaw' figures (known as Goyon or Djennaggi paintings by some Aboriginal people) that Peter had seen. Over the next 8 days the group proceeded cross-country to the next tributary of the Glenelg along a delightful creek which was a series of lovely pools and waterfalls and were able to locate Grey's 29th painting site. They then climbed over the Elizabeth and Catherine ranges and walked down a tributary of the Sale River to Pantijan Station.

Many things about walking in the Kimberley were learnt on this first trip. To save weight they had not taken sleeping bags—a mistake not to be repeated—and they discovered where to sleep, for example that rocks are warmer than sand, and learnt the signs of the first faint hints of dawn. They observed the wonderful flora and fauna, didn't challenge the wild cattle, left the environment as they found it, and enjoyed the solitude and peace, the reliance on one another, the sharing, the coolness of the swims, the friendliness of the campfire, and the delicious taste of freshly brewed billy tea. They had no means of communication and so were completely on their own. Another group that had been rafting down the Isdell River learnt about the dangers of salt water crocodiles, when one had a bite at one of the rubber rafts.

In 1988, the 150th anniversary of Grey's trip to the Kimberley, Kevin Coate gathered a group to retrace Grey's trek from Hanover Bay to Lushingtons Furtherest. It was a most exhilarating and at times exhausting walk, again carried out without radio communication. They landed where Grey had camped in 1838 and climbed up to the plateau via his 80 degree gully, discovering a sample of *Grevillea adenotrichia* on the way. As they walked, Peter discovered that work-type boots were not the best choice and was forced to revert to a pair of Reebok shoes, learning that one needs real walking boots for walking in Kimberley country. They reached Grey's 26th cave and all set out to find the "Engraved Head". Although having failed to find it on the ANZSES trip, Peter knew it should be in a particular gorge, and perhaps because the light was different, he was successful this time. Amazingly it was on the rock on which the group had sat for lunch in 1983! Kevin Coate was also elated to find black grass wrens at the Grey's 29th March location. It seemed an easier trek back to Pantijan Station this time, and in contrast to the 1983 trip, there were many Aboriginal people at the homestead, and they shared food and stories, including talking to the son of Wattie Ngerdu.

For the trip to Camden Harbour in 1990, Peter studied a number of diaries including that of Sholl and McRae. The plan was to walk from Camden Harbour to the Glenelg River, then south to an interesting geological structure on the McRae River, then head back west to the coast to be picked up by a vessel six days later. The group included an Aboriginal elder Donald Llangi and a young man. The elder was born in

the region, and although he had not visited the country for years, he still knew it well. The Aboriginal men thought the participants were mad going walking with great packs on their backs, and they weren't too far wrong!

It in fact had been a very dry year, and the group ran out of water and had to shorten the trip. This was an experience not to be repeated, and although there was water in the Glenelg a few kilometres up from where they stopped, it was better safe than sorry, particularly when there were obvious signs of dehydration at the end. As they were carrying a radio, they were able to arrange to be collected from the Glenelg mud flats. The importance of carrying a radio on walking trips in the remote parts of the Kimberley was again demonstrated on Peter's next trip in 1992, when a knee injury forced him to abandon the trek after one day.

In 1993 Peter did a trip into Walcott Inlet via Mt Elizabeth Station, enjoying the warm hospitality of the Lacy family. The group saw the magnificent gallery at Bachsten Creek, with the most impressive classic Wandjina that represents Nyandugadali. There were many galleries and some very fine examples of rock art. As usual there was a focus on the birds, flora, scenery and art, all in an atmosphere of fellowship, and a spot of fishing at the Walcott Inlet produced a very pleasant dinner of barramundi.

Peter has done two trips to discover Bradshaw's route. First, in 1996, they ventured unto the upper reaches of the Prince Regent River, walking from the Mt Elizabeth-Pantijan Road to Mt Agnes, in the mistaken belief that Bradshaw had been there in 1891. They carried water, not knowing if there would be any water before reaching the Prince Regent, however it turned out to be unnecessary. It was a tough walk, but the delights of the vistas and the spectacular scenery and sites in Pitta Creek were more than ample reward. Floating packs in plastic bags down the creek to get around cliffs too steep to climb was part of the challenge. At one campsite a bed of leaves provided a comfortable sleeping spot until mosquito coils set fire to the leaves at 2 am. Another lesson learnt! They were not successful in finding any Bradshaw paintings but did find a cupule site and some other galleries of typical West Kimberley Wandjina art.

In 1997, having worked out Bradshaw's route, they went in earnest to find the original Bradshaw paintings. Despite the site being visited first by others in a helicopter, following a sharing of information, the credit for relocating Bradshaw's route should go to Mick and Wendy Cusack, who were part of Peter's group. There were successful in following Bradshaw's route, locating his camps and the painting site he found in 1891.

The most recent trip this year was more of a 4-wheel-driving trip into the desert, although there was quite a bit of walking and a considerable amount of rock art was

viewed. The desert was in full bloom and there were birds galore - a magnificent sight.

Peter hopes there are still more walking trips for him to participate in, albeit to a less demanding schedule and style. Mick and Wendy Cusack have taught him to be satisfied with 90% of what you want to achieve in a particular day and stop at 4 p.m., because if you take it a bit easier it is much more enjoyable.

Peter concluded by saying that it has given him great pleasure to be able to walk through the Kimberley region away from the hustle and bustle of city life and enjoy the rugged beauty of the region. He hopes that we will be able to continue backpacking through the Kimberley for a long time yet.

Bev Phillips