

ASPECTS OF KIMBERLEY TOURISM

On 7 February 2001, for our first meeting of the year, we heard from Campbell Cornish, who operates Campbell Cornish's Australian Odyssey, and Liz Terry, co-owner of Kimberley Coastal Camp. Unfortunately our third speaker for the night – Craig Howson, skipper/owner of the *True North* – had just returned from overseas and had to send his apologies.

Proceedings opened with Campbell Cornish giving some background information on himself. He worked for the Art Gallery of Western Australia for twenty-two years, during which time he oversaw the Aboriginal Art Collection, became curator in 1979, and then moved to exhibition design. Prior to working at the Art Gallery he travelled in the desert regions of Western Australia and fell in love with the Pilbara and Murchison areas. Occasionally he travelled as far north as the Kimberley. After leaving the Gallery in 1995 he travelled to the Kimberley region on a regular basis and also worked with Bob Cooper in the Pilbara region.

Campbell organised tours, first looking at Rock Art in the Pilbara and then eventually the Kimberley. In fact he did 12 trips in 5 months at one stage. After one trip involving repairs to eight tyres he decided on the purchase of an OKA. He had a trailer custom built to provide a pantry on one side, luggage storage on the other and kitchen at the rear. He has a rule of never driving at night if it can be avoided, and his other overriding concern is the safety of his passengers. His tours have a maximum of 12 people and he believes that they want time to enjoy the places visited on his trips. Campbell enjoys cooking and includes such Australian delicacies as kangaroo and emu on his menus. A typical menu would start with pumpkin soup followed by Thai chicken and then the roasting of Quandong seeds by the fire. Some of the slides that accompanied the talk certainly bore witness to the fact that he prides himself on setting a good table! Table cloth, napkins and wine glasses with individual place settings.

This year Campbell is leading tours into the Kimberley and, with the aid of some of Mike Donaldson's slides, he gave a very interesting talk on the areas he will be visiting. These include the Charnley River and Mitchell Falls, with searches for examples of Bradshaw figures (known as Goyon or Djennaggi paintings by some Aboriginal people) and Wandjina rock art, a topic that Campbell himself is quite knowledgeable about. Another point that Campbell made was that he always applies for permission well in advance from both pastoral property owners and Aboriginal groups before planning trips. He also operates with current licenses from CALM and Department of Transport, together with an up to date Certificate in First Aid.

Liz Terry of Kimberley Coastal Camp was our second speaker for the evening. Liz opened by showing on a map the whereabouts of the Camp. She then outlined the

stages she and Rocky, her husband, have been through in their quest to establish their dream. Liz described the ten years it has taken them to establish the Coastal Camp, as it is today, as an evolution. They started off as tourists doing the standard Kimberley tour destinations until the late 1980s when they ventured into the Drysdale and King Edward regions and finally up to the Mitchell Plateau. As Liz described it they “got hooked and besotted” with the region. They felt they had connected with the sea and fell in love with the Admiralty Gulf. Having decided their children were old enough to cope with their parents leaving home they set off for Walsh Point in November and travelled around in a 10-foot dinghy until they settled on the ideal site for their venture and marked their map with an “X”.

The bay they chose was located on vacant crown land and is sheltered from the sea breeze and from the full force of cyclones. In 1994, after gaining a lease from DOLA, they set about planning the camp site. The logistics of the site required much careful planning. There were, and still are, no roads or airstrip available. The land area consists mainly of King Leopold sandstone. The decisions of how, and of what, to construct the buildings, and how to transport the materials to the site, all had to be made.

The only solution was to bring everything in by sea, i.e. by barge. Rocky decided a boat was essential to their enterprise and designed the *Warrabee*. Initially their only form of communication with the outside world was via HF radio and the RFDS Service, now non-existent. This has now been replaced with a solar powered phone. Power for the camp was also provided by a solar unit and only recently has this been upgraded to provide a 24-hour supply. Liz pointed out that all the buildings at the camp had to have plans drawn up and submitted to the Wyndham-East Kimberley Shire for approval, and that they are also required to pay rates and taxes despite being largely self sufficient. Great care has been taken to ensure minimum impact on their surroundings. All waste is composted or burnt and anything that cannot be disposed of in this way is sent out by barge. The septic tanks and leach drains are all located well away from any water sources.

A swimming pool was also a necessity. The bronze whaler sharks and estuarine crocodiles inhabiting the Gulf make swimming in the ocean inadvisable. Tourists visiting the camp mostly fly in from Broome or Kununurra, although some drive to the Mitchell Plateau and fly in from there. Some arrive by float plane, others by helicopter.

Liz described some very amusing anecdotes on the wildlife found in and around the camp. Rock rats and hermit crabs are constant inhabitants as are Quolls. In fact the quolls had a population explosion which in turn attracted olive pythons, which feed on quolls. It is fairly common to have an olive python literally hanging around

the camp buildings, one in particular is around 12 feet long. The area is a rich fishing ground along with much evidence of Aboriginal habitation in the form of many shell middens. The examples of Bradshaw figures include the tasselled, transitional and geometric figures and new finds are still being made. The abundant bird life found around the camp includes osprey whose nests have been monitored for the last 10 years. Scrub fowl with active mounds are also in evidence.

The guest accommodation, for a maximum of 8 guests, consists of open-air gazebos that are fitted with flyscreens, shade cloth blinds, fans and 24-volt power. A large 60 x 30 open air shed constructed of recycled timber from the Fremantle Woolstores serves as dining room, common room etc. All supplies come by barge but food is also gathered during excursions to nearby points of interest such as Steep Head Island and Secret Creek. Such delicacies as oysters, mud crabs and fish are available.

The kind of people that are attracted to the Kimberley Coastal Camp are generally couples or groups of friends, mostly 40 plus. The Australians tend to be well travelled and well educated and the overseas travellers are people looking for something different. Specialist groups such as artists, photographers, bird watchers, naturalists and Aboriginal rock art enthusiasts and of course those who love good fishing are also attracted. The Camp is open only during the dry season from May to November, by which time Liz and Rocky need a rest from the daily grind! The camp is also an official Meteorological Bureau site and New Year's Eve this year they recorded 308mm of rain!! Liz gained this information when she phoned to find out how their caretakers were coping during the "wet".

Daphne Edinger & Susan Clarkson