



# LANDSCOPE EXPEDITIONS

Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management,  
Locked Bag 104, Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983  
in association with

UWA Extension, The University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6907

**Buccaneer Archipelago 1996**  
**LANDSCOPE Expedition Report No. 15**

### FROM THE EXPEDITION LEADERS

On behalf of CALM and UWA Extension we would like to thank all members for their tremendous support and good humour in making the expedition the success it was. This was our first maritime expedition into the uncharted waters of the Kimberley coast. Your willingness in supporting this research allowed us to gather essential biological information necessary for nature conservation management in the Kimberley region.

We acknowledge the professionalism of our crew of the "Sea Lion" Jason Tulipan, Alexandra Vaughan and Luke Sibon for ensuring the success of the expedition and for getting us safely to our various destinations.

Many of the plants collected (including the algae) have been sent to specialists throughout Australia and will be used in preparing descriptions for the *Flora of Australia*. We trust that the expedition members benefited from the opportunity to visit this spectacular, but poorly known area of Western Australia. We hope to have the pleasure of your company on future *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions.

**Kevin Kenneally, Daphne Edinger and Kevin Coate**



Members of the Buccaneer Archipelago *Landscape* Expedition 1996

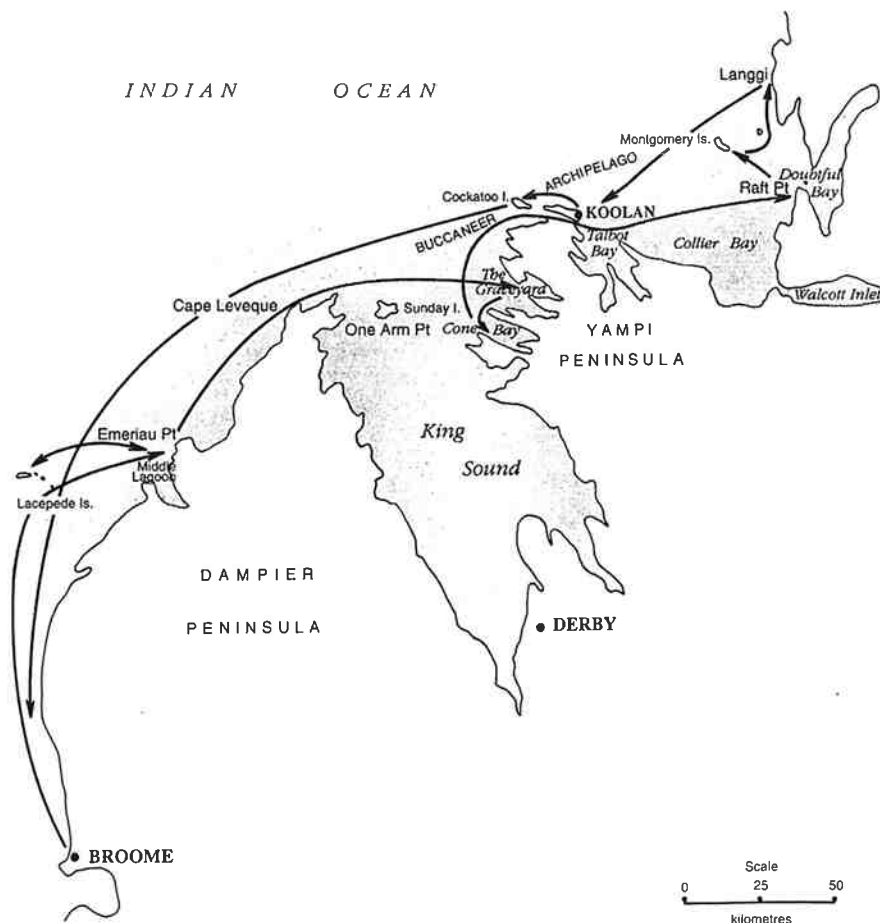
## EXPEDITION ACHIEVEMENTS

1. A number of detailed bird observations were made from various localities along the coast. These have been documented by Kevin Coate (see "Bird Notes") and passed to the WA Museum.
2. An account of the Expedition appeared in the Summer edition (1976-97) of *LANDSCOPE* magazine allowing a wider audience of people to gain some understanding of the expedition and the nature of its research.
3. 126 plant collections were made (including 20 algal specimens). These have been incorporated into the Western Australian Herbarium or sent on loan to plant specialists throughout Australia for identification.
4. Observations and collections were made at the abandoned Hermit's Camp. It was established that one of the climbing plants that was introduced by the hermit (Xenex), namely *Merremia dissecta*, had become an aggressive weed.
5. Bald Rock in Cone Bay was confirmed as a breeding site for Short-billed Corellas and has been recommended for consideration as a Nature Reserve.
6. Exotic weed species on Koolan Island were monitored to establish their viability since the island has been vacated and regeneration of native species is being encouraged.

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

June Brown, Alison and Eric Carlin, Rosalind Denny, Graeme Edwards, Elizabeth Hanrahan, Eileen and David Row.

## MAP OF THE EXPEDITION ROUTE



## DIARY OF BUCCANEER ARCHIPELAGO LANDSCOPE EXPEDITION 1996

**Saturday June 29** Clear skies. Light easterly. ETD Continental Hotel (Conti) parking area 9:00 am. Departure 9:00 am! ETD Gantheaume Point via Zodiac for 'Sea Lion' 10:00 am. Departure 10:05 am due to delay in identifying Brown Boobies. Kevin Coate (KC) to the rescue. Brown Booby question put to rest. Underway 10:30 am. Survival talk from skipper Jason Tulipan. Ship's routines (and ours) from crew Luke Sibon. Team 1 (Ros Denny, Alison and Eric Carlin) help Luke prepare lunch. Post prandial torpor generated mystery regarding unknown bird wheeling in wake of 'Sea Lion'. 'Mystery' bird identified as Silver Gull - comparatively rare this far north. During passage between Lacedepe light and shore, numerous schools of feeding tuna stirred up a late lunch for a small number of crested terns and a solitary Noddy. (Water depth 14 metres, contrary tide 3 knots.) Approach to our overnight bivouac location occasioned a frenzy of luggage resorting. Swags came on deck in readiness for movement ashore.

ETA 4:00 pm. 4:05 pm land approaches. And so we came to Midlagon, 148 km north of Broome, a little piece of heaven carved out by Peter and Traci Howard, Peter, born and raised in Beagle Bay Mission and Traci whose father was the first aboriginal councillor in Broome, heard that land was available for those born to the area, applied to the Beagle Bay Land Council to take up a block of land at Midlagon. Permission was granted, Peter had his dream site. And now on the high ground above the lagoon a rather special, but deliberately not too special, little resort is taking shape. Water is available from two bores feeding to an overhead tank. A small ablution block is in place. Two shelters, nearer to the shore of the lagoon are complete and regularly occupied by tourists who want to share the isolation, the excellent fishing and be self sufficient. Two chalets are planned but then Peter would like to just see how things go. He has no plans or wishes for a new Cable Beach. This is where he wants to be. This is his land.

His present open plan, wide verandahed home may ultimately be a lodge centre for tourists using beach shelters while he and Traci move a short distance to more private quarters of their own, but development will never be allowed to spoil his and Traci's enjoyment of their special block at Midlagon, a beach setting between cliffs of Emeriau Sandstone topped with tall *Pandanus* 'palms'.

All of which rather glosses over a more eventful landing from the good ship 'Sea Lion'. At 4:15 pm the noise of the anchor chain signalled our arrival off the Lagoon. Hatches were raised, swags stacked on deck and the zodiac lowered. Quickly there formed a pile in the centre of the Zodiac. Day packs followed. And then a pair of boots - KC's landed on top of the pile. Anxious to reach the shore we scrambled aboard, avoiding Luke's outboard starting elbow and set off for shore. Luke made passing mention of the swell the reality of which only became apparent as we approached the beach. Expertly the Zodiac was brought about and held to the swell as we tumbled over the stern - literally - and arrived on shore in varying states of saturation.

K. Kenneally (KK) - heroically drenched - helped the ladies ashore - also drenched. By now Peter Howard's utility had appeared. Swags were loaded, day packs squeezed on, topped by the ubiquitous boots - KC's - and we crocodile filed up the sandy rise to Howard's Haven on the Hill.

A sunset walk to the headland with George Dann with tales of Zeros, DC3's and diamonds to play marbles with concluded with showers, beers and barbecued nor'west snapper and blue bone followed by lasagne and curried chicken and rice, then melons. And so to bed in a ringing moonlit silence as the generator shut off. No sound but distant surf. Day one had come to an end. Whither the hotel Continental? Twelve hours and light years away.

Eric Carlin

**Sunday June 30** Middle Lagoon or Midlagon as spoken by local community. Awoke at 6:00 am to find an unexpected, and I gather unusual, mist, and a heavy dew, the latter more evident in what we thought was the experts' corner! By 6:30 am we were wending our way along the red track to the beach, the mist cast an eerie and silent atmosphere as we watched the Zodiac carve through the haze. As we made our way to the 'Sea Lion', anchored further out to sea, we looked back on the sunrise, a rich orange ball ascending through the mist. In front of us a bottle-nosed dolphin led the way and continued to do so until we reached 'Sea Lion'. A hearty breakfast was a welcome sight and much enjoyed by all. Traci, our joint host at Midlagon, joined us for the day and was excited at realising a long time ambition to visit the Lacedepe Islands. Barbara Mickle, an Environmental Science student on vacation from Murdoch also joined the day's expedition.

We set forth for the islands about 7:00 am, a journey expected to take about one and a half hours. The sea mist persisted for some time becoming almost fog-like until a thick mist with rainbow arch (without the colour) opened up to a clear blue sea and bright sun. KC gave us a short history of the islands and plan for the day. The area is a breeding ground for various birds including Booby, Terns, Frigatebirds. The plan was to establish the number of breeding birds. Turtles also abound on the isles.

A small group left for East Island and as they arrived on the shore, our view from 'Sea Lion' was a mass rising of what appeared to be thousands of birds, different flocks dotting the sky. The island has a lighthouse which is solar powered. KC was seen to climb half way up to observe the nest of a sea eagle, to find one eaglet in residence. The group spent about 20 mins on the island and recorded the bird count.

The second group went to Sandy Island, the predominant breeding bird being the Booby - the nests were non-existent - just sitting space for the large birds and their one offspring - few seemed to be too surprised by strangers

walking quietly but oh so close. A rough count of nests, a 15 min walk and back to the Zodiac for the journey to the West Island.

A swell made landing more difficult and KC did a backward flip under the Zodiac, fortunately surfaced very wet but smiling. The tide was going out and the lagoon was gradually emptying into soft mud flats. We walked in line and quietly on the edge of the breeding areas which were extensive - an island for birds alone and absolutely full of them - all sitting on nests with offspring of various size and age - an incredible sight. I will leave types and counts of birds to the experts but the day appeared a success in that respect.

We all enjoyed a picnic lunch under the tarp which was a welcome shade area on a treeless island. The turquoise, gently lapping sea on white sand was a great temptation for a quick cool off until we remembered the dangers maybe lurking there and seen by no-one (crocodiles and sharks abound).

We returned to 'Sea Lion' without problems and had all just clambered on board when an observant eye noticed a mast like stick, protruding in the vast openness of sea. A closer look seemed the order of the day and as we made our way towards the scene further evidence presented itself of a past drama at sea. A torn remnant of sail, a bamboo cane and some pieces of net - an eerie presentation of a mystery unsolved. We all sensed the drama and sensitivity of what may have happened and who had been on board and what had followed - a strange phenomenon to face reality in the middle of nowhere. After trying to take in tow the remains of the wreck, which had already a fairly new rope still intact, it was decided to attach two buoys for safety for others and leave the remains, their secret intact. KC had a further count for the day of all the types of birds observed and was pleased with numbers. As darkness descended we headed towards the familiar skyline of Midlagon - Traci excited to be home again. Looking towards 'Sea Lion' as we approached shore, the orange sun was descending and sitting like a huge ball on the horizon. Refreshed by showers, the generous hospitality of Traci and Peter provided a casual relaxing evening after an eventful day. Additional. After discussion and consideration of clues on site, the wreck located in the ocean was confirmed as an Indonesian fishing vessel which had sunk under tow.

**Eileen Row**

**Monday July 1** We must acknowledge culinary skills of Rob Guerny and Margaret Smith, friends of Peter and Traci Howard, who provided tasty and varied dinners, particularly cooking whole on the barbie Northern Snapper and Blue Bone, caught by lines from the rocks. Record the pleasure of sleeping calm and wild under (almost) full moon. Dew on swags a problem for some, bright moonlight for others, but the joy of sleeping under the stars on balmy nights balances that.

Before departure, observe the old fish trap, arc of small rocks piled one metre high across mouth of small rocky bay, abundant oysters. Observed beche-de-mer and a large (6 cm) 'hairy' chiton. Sea mist suspended over the shore line as we departed just after dawn at 7:00 am. Observed low profile coastline, sea snakes. Rounded Cape Leveque 9:45 pm, three Boobies (sic) in our wake. Bright oxide colours brilliant in the sunshine, the cliffy shores of cape and rock island, fringed at water line with white foam necklace; tranquil setting of Kooljaman resort nestled below the beacon.

Beyond One Arm Point, zipping along with the tide. Skipper informs us cruise speed is 23 knots. A turn into the tide brought us back to 9 kms. Spectacular water movement, in the tide race, tidal eddies and tidal swirls. Spectacular horizons as we passed through the islands, gnarled rocky cliffs, the odd sandy one, mangrove enclave. For several hours we cruised through the island chain, observing small rocky outcrops to substantial hilltops, Skipper cautiously driving the boat around headlands and between islands, through uncharted waters.

Spectacular entrance to 'The Graveyard' - at least through slack tide, a benign transition through turquoise water, white/red quartzite portals. Some considerable time cruising this way and that - looking for a suitable camp site. Settled for a 'drowned river valley' about 1:00 pm - some subsequent discussion on names for here. Exploratory party saw birds (refer to KC's Bird Notes), one crocodile 1.8 m (Luke) having been alerted and instructed in crocodile watching behaviour in the Zodiac, *Camptostemon schultzei* (Kapok Mangrove), *Callitris*, and fan palms on the skyline above that beautiful rocky gap.

Expedition divided for late afternoon investigations - three in the Zodiac for troll fishing (nil result), KC and Alex climbed the gap (shades of shout Cortez upon a peak in Darien); the boat watch also tried to catch the big one (nil result) refreshed themselves on the marlin board, and then observed *Crocodylus porosus* of variable length (mostly huge) cruising down the river in the direction of the walking party. The writer is happy to record no untoward outcome from this occurrence. Evening meal a banquet spread on after deck of 'Sea Lion' in candlelight. Suffuse glow from the full moon on water and encompassing hills.

**June Brown**

**Tuesday July 2** The Graveyard. In spite of the location name we all had a good night's sleep. At times we had very strong winds, which kept the dew and insects away.

We headed off for Jinunga River - a spectacular entrance, looking for a superb campsite reported to be here. After alighting from the Zodiac, due to the water becoming shallow, we made our way up the creek to investigate the

headwaters. Each time we reached another pool - salt water again. KC and I headed over the saddle to see if we could find pools of fresh water on the other side and we were in luck. We covered approximately a kilometre and a half of several different pools noting the water lilies, trigger plants and droseras. KK and Daphne went collecting up the hill, recently burnt, and returned with several specimens, *Euphorbia ?vachellii*, *Ptilotus capitatus*, *Pterocaulon sphacelatum* and *Stylidium leptorrhizum*, all new localities. Also collected a rare mangrove, *Bruguiera parviflora* which KC obtained after plodding through mud. We also saw a very big freshwater croc and varied honeyeaters, finches etc.

During this time Luke was constructively using his time fishing. Today, collectively we must have fished for at least six hours - but not a bite! It looks like tonight's bivouac will be just as salubrious as last night - we are all very pleased. The evening meal was excellent and as usual thanks to Luke and Alex. Also a mark of appreciation to Jason our skipper. It is amazing where he has managed to manoeuvre the 'Sea Lion' to make our day more enjoyable.

Graeme Edwards

**Wednesday July 3** From our overnight anchorage in Strickland Bay we all awoke to a perfect sunrise over granite hills and water. We could see the early waders, whimbrels and white herons fossicking on the mudflats and with the day's plan of action arranged, it was time to indulge in a cooked breakfast on the after deck, before crowding around the wheelhouse to hear KK on a ship to shore link up with Verity James of the ABC, hopefully convincing the listening audience to hasten and enrol as a volunteer on some forthcoming trip!.

Set off in the Zodiac upstream on a low tide to explore - guess who forgot his walking boots! A little bit of showbiz going to his head! On the way we caught sight of a pair of majestic Wedgetail Eagles circling above, a pair of Little Eagles and a few Whistling Kites.

When we could venture no further by boat we went on foot, following the river's course and finding fresh water flowing into several pools afloat with water lilies. The mountain goats of the group followed the intrepid KC over the impossible rock barrier to explore further upstream. Those of us left behind shared idle chatter in the shade and then a refreshing bathe in the pool - keeping a close watch out of course for anything with sharp teeth and a long snout. After a short Zodiac ride, we found the 'Sea Lion' had made its way upstream on the high tide and was waiting for us. Lunch on board, an afternoon siesta, while we sailed on towards Cone Bay.

The afternoon highlight was to see dozens of Corellas screeching and soaring above Bald Rock, a granite outcrop barren and isolated, yet obviously a breeding haven for these birds. These Cone Bay Granites are Archean and one of the oldest rocks in the world. Two pairs of Pied Oyster Catchers (also with young) were indignant at being discovered. KK and KC and several others set off to climb the rock. Little will be said here of a certain Kevin trying to climb the steep bald face (not to mention the undignified boarding back in the Zodiac). And who would be so cruel as to photograph these incidents?!

Another glorious sunset as we gathered on deck to discuss the day's activities and sightings over a welcome drink. BBQ on deck tonight as we ride gently on a calm sea.

The gold has gone from the Western haze  
The sea birds circle and swarm  
But we shall have plenty of sunny days  
And little enough of storm.

(with apologies to Henry Lawson, but with gratitude also). Full moon tonight rising at 8.15 pm.

Beth Hanrahan

**Thursday July 4** Another beautiful day, cloudless skies and everyone ready by 8.30 am for an expedition to check the ecology of a unique area of Cone Bay Granites. This features large granite outcrops and supports different plant life, the most obvious being magnificent stands of Boab trees, but not a single eucalypt, many *Terminalia* instead, *T. canescens*, *T. hadleyana*. Also collected *Acacia gracillima*, *A. orthocarpa*, *A. plectocarpa* and *Grevillea dimidiata* - interesting vegetation. Of delight to the Birders, was KC's discovery of a Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest, with two eggs, also a Greycrowned Babbler's nest. Others were delighted with a crop of oysters on the rocks, which provided a mid morning snack. By 9.45 am we were on 'Sea Lion' having tea and Luke's special cereal slice. At 11 am we had passed the Oyster beds, marked out by lines of floats and reached the Hermit's Retreat. We all piled into the Zodiac for a slightly precarious landing, where a fresh water creek reached the sea, a place favoured by Mullet, who were too smart to get stunned! We climbed up the creek bed for about 100 metres, when we came to the remains of the Hermit's dwellings. These were now in total disrepair, but enough remained for us to admire their concrete mosaic and colour. At one time 8 persons lived there and established gardens and fruit trees, few of which now survive, the whole area covered in the introduced *Merremia dissecta*, a rampant convolvulus weed. However, their freshwater pool remained, and we all had a heavenly dip. Ros who managed the hazardous landing, found her own rock pool, and was rumoured to be skinny dipping!

The garden with its irrigation must have been something to see in its heyday, a lime tree and bougainvillea still remain. We were also lucky to find a Bowerbird bower and Mistletoe Bird's nest with three young. We were

back on 'Sea Lion' by 1.15 pm for a long voyage to Langgi, or as near as the tides would allow. Going through the whirlpool passage was smooth, but the scenic beauty of the islands was much appreciated. We then passed Koolan Island and KC gave us an interesting lecture on the history of the iron ore mining and its subsequent cessation. We had a good view of the old workings. By this time we were sailing into a falling tide, which slowed the 'Sea Lion' to 13 knots, and was quite choppy. Just after passing Koolan Island we were fascinated to watch a Brahminy Kite fishing, just in front of 'Sea Lion' a fish was caught and carried off to shore, much to everyone's delight. After a long sail against the tide we finally reached Raft point. Later a fine chicken curry (Luke's best) was enjoyed by all.

Captain's stats. After 1 pm we covered 95 nautical miles (175 km) used 840 litres of fuel (\$800) and passed seven pearling operations. A great day.

**David Row**

**Friday July 5** Anchored in Doubtful Bay, between Steep Island and Raft Point. We woke to a beautiful view, unseen last night as it was dark by the time we arrived. The name Steep Island is description enough, but Raft Point was equally steep and seemingly impregnable. Views across the ocean to a gap in the hilly coastline near the Glenelg River.

An early breakfast, then a 7 am start with KC to view aboriginal art ashore. After a slushy walk-wade, we donned boots and gaiters and climbed up to the small overhang where we saw examples of the wandjina art - the sea wandjina, turtles, fish, squid, trepang. The bird enthusiasts found some birds and the walk-clamber in the shade was appreciated - as was the smell of the eucalypts.

We returned to 'Sea Lion' and headed for Bird Island now called Mulgudna Island, renamed by Ian Elliott and David Llangi in 1990, where a small party went ashore. They were rewarded with views of plentiful bird life, including a pair of Osprey with a chick, a Caspian Tern with two eggs. Those who remained on board also saw birds and dolphins and a small shark.

Soon after lunch we entered the Montgomery Reef area and had a very interesting view of some of the mangrove covered islands. Mostly stands of *Excoecaria agallocha* and occasional meadows of saltwater couch, *Sporobolus virginicus*, on the very low, flat, mud covered 'islands', measuring 28 x 17 km! When the water became too shallow, we returned through the islands and came out at slack tide, about 2 pm. Again many birds were sighted, including Great Egrets - and one large crocodile. The islands were interesting to see, but inviting only to winged creatures and crocs and I wondered how many mariners have been disappointed thinking they had reached dry land!

Ticks have been a problem for some and we suspect we now have them on board.

By almost 4.30 pm we were anchored off the breakwater of Montgomery Reef. As low tide is not till well after dark we will miss the dramatic waterfall effect today.

The fishing has not yet produced a feed (other than for Daphne who consumed the tiny fish which leapt into the Zodiac days ago) but there are big ones out there jumping - maybe tomorrow!

**Alison Carlin**

**Saturday July 6** Up at 6 am as usual for a quick breakfast before boarding the Zodiac to take us over to the high and dry coral platform of Montgomery Reef, named for the surgeon on board 'Bathurst' captained by Philip Parker King in 1820. As we approached we saw green turtles bobbing their heads up to breathe. Ros stayed in the boat while the others wandered around looking at the amazing corals, sponges, algae of all shapes, sizes and colours. Daphne collected algae into her specimen bag and most took many photographs of the tidal water cascading over the high coral walls of this incredible reef. A fantastic sight. Back to the 'Sea Lion' after an hour's collecting. They pressed 19 different algae of the three colours, greens in shallowest water, browns mid depth and reds from deepest water, dictated by the amount of light reaching them.

10.15 am back on board and steaming for the mainland and Freshwater Cove. Here we again landed for an hour's browse along the beach and up the freshwater stream with many wet area plants such as *Utricularia* (bladderworts) *Stylidium* (trigger plants), 3 species of *Xyris*, grasses, *Goodenia* and *Mitrasacme* all collected by the botanists who also identified three wattles, *Acacia dunnii* (Elephant-ear wattle), *A. plectocarpa* and *A. translucens* in the area. I sat under the *Pandanus* and had a wallow in the freshwater pool amongst the rocks on the beach after everyone had gone. Eileen and I watched a pair of Osprey calling and catching fish. Lunch was brought from the 'Sea Lion' to shore and I joined the others to eat in a rough bush shelter. KC rushed into the bush as usual with Graeme Edwards and KK exhausted himself and collapsed under a tree. KC couldn't go ashore to Langgi with the mob afterwards.

The trip to Langgi was beautiful - we saw a Sacred Kingfisher and the marvellous rock formations like the petrified warriors. Eileen fell badly and hurt her wrist and ankle. I found another tick in an unmentionable region, the second one. Many others had ticks too, caught us at the hermits' hut we think. Bird call as usual during the Happy Hour up forward, now on at 5.30 pm. The sun has sunk in a blaze of golden glory, and now we're enjoying the after glow. A marvellous day as always.

**Ros Denny and Daphne Edinger**

Sunday July 7      **Langgi home of the Wandjina men.**

The Morning Star paled slowly  
The Cross hung low to the sea  
And down the shadowy ridges  
The tide came swirling free.  
The lustrous purple darkness  
Of the soft Australian night  
Waned in the grey awakening  
That heralded the light

Cuthbertson, An Australian Sunrise

Everyone up at 6:00 am after the usual hesitant raisings of heads and swag flaps, the waving of arms and the determined burrowing back down of the reluctant awakeners. Swags being rolled up. Mental awnings raised - gingerly by some, vigorously by others. KC stands on the top deck surveying the silhouetted hills - not a bird dare stir!

Down below, the decks are resuming a living room - from a bedroom - configuration. Temporarily the toilet becomes a revolving door. Out comes the cereals (not from the toilet) the milk - no hot water yet - and yes, the generator's started - the toaster is plugged in, the controls of the hot water urn are adjusted by 10 people - white chairs are unstacked and formed into an arc on the aft deck. Seats are taken, bowls raised and another breakfast on 'Sea Lion' is underway. Predictably Alex appears with trays of sweet corn pikelets. Ours could never be called a subsistence diet!

Just when you thought you had time to clean your teeth, its 'Wet shoes and walking boots. Better take a water bottle, too!' KC is whipping the troops into line and everyone jumps to it. An 'ecstasy of fumbling' and we're all big bosomed and hung about with gear and tumbling - literally - into the zodiac. The beach is sandy and gently shelving - the Wandjina men stand back against the orange cliff: black, grey and orange they stand, sandstone memorial plinths, heavy with cultural significance. A freshwater stream meanders from the narrow gorge and snakes toward the temporarily distant sea. Out there rides 'Sea Lion' packed with technology - here stand the Wandjina men: mute evidence of man's enduring need to give form and shape to his day to day life.

Up on the hillside KC guides us to an Aboriginal grave, where the parcelled bones of an Aboriginal man lie on a rock shelf protected by stones in a shallow cave. The ochred skull is visible at one end. I am reminded of a poem I saw at the Argyle Homestead Museum.

Her tribe has vanished,  
With daughters and sons.  
All her people lie under the sand,  
Nothing to prove that she'd ever lived,  
But the faint outline  
of a stencilled hand.

We, of course, were busy photographing the gorge, the Wandjina men, 'Sea Lion' lying off shore, the beach and one another, to prove by our photos that we are, we were ..... an anonymous face in a photo.

Back aboard, wet shoes are shed, bums dried, clothing changed and soon tea or coffee steams in the mugs and a tray of muesli slice descends from the kitchen like manna. We're back in the 'real world' and headed for Secure Bay. Arrived Secure Bay. The tide has turned and running in - the entrance is narrow but deep (50 metres). Lunch is announced but ignored. Everyone is up forward or on the flying bridge. The water boils up like some giant pea soup cauldron. 'Sea Lion' rocks and half spins one way then the other - and we're going with it! The tide and, of course, (Sea Lion). A few more minutes of excitement as we're tossed about but then with a surge of power we're into calmer water. Secure in Secure Bay.

Well, we thought so. With lunch barely downed, KC is calling for wet boots, dry boots, water bottles and into the zodiac. We're off to explore the far reaches of the bay and river systems. Well the Humbert Creek, anyway.

Puttering along on a rising tide we're regaled with sightings of Common Sand Pipers, eight different herons including a Black Billed Heron that looked like a 'stealth' bomber, 25 Whimbrels, Bee-eaters, Kingfishers, White Egrets, a rock wallaby. At nil depth we plunge off in the wake of our leader as he cries over his shoulder 'Back by 4.15 pm. Don't go too far'. Go too far?! We're all bogged. Eventually a reasonably dry spot is found by the unadventurous rump and we settle down to observe the river life above and below the surface. Mysterious geysers bubble and froth, minute fish chased by bigger fish chased by monster fish thresh through the newly flooded shallows. A heron stands immobile on a rock waiting for fish. An egret stands aloof on the far bank and Curlews were also seen and heard.

KC, as always, eventually returns with his small band and off we muddy well go again - downstream. But we are twice blessed. As on the trip up we receive a fly-past of four Brolga. Majestic, graceful they pass slowly, wheel

and fly over us down river, necks thrust forward, long legs trailing and those enormous grey wings slowly beating. It's peaceful now. The zodiac cleaned, the passengers hosed down and changed, some dinner preparation finished. It's time for a drink and a bird count, secure in Secure Bay.

Eric Carlin

### Monday July 8 Secure Bay and Dugong Bay

A leisurely rising today with cooked breakfast and by 7.30 am 'Sea Lion' was leaving Secure Bay en route for Talbot Bay, later Dugong Bay - if able. Our first encounter was the hazardous area of tidal current surges and whirlpools and everyone had vantage points to witness the passage of gallant 'Sea Lion', ably manoeuvred by Skipper Jason. After negotiating the funnel it was out into the open sea, gently choppy, brilliant hue, warm sunshine and Kimberley blue skies.

There were a large number of islands, multi-shaped, mostly treed and exposing rocky areas and some beaches - a scenic delight to meander our way through. Ospreys were sighted on two islands and as one nest appeared accessible on the rock face, the zodiac was launched and a group accompanied KC to observe. The nest was located and found to contain three young Ospreys - inhabitants of an unnamed island west of Traverse Island.

On return to 'Sea Lion' a period of self-indulgence and tranquillity with periods of reading, forty winks or just watching the progress of the journey - a pleasant state of relaxation obviously enjoyed by all.

The waiting on appropriate tidal water saw us leave the 'Sea Lion' at 2:30 pm in the zodiac to explore the far reaches of Talbot Bay. The first stop was to view the nest of a Brahminy Kite at close proximity, having first been noted from 'Sea Lion' on arrival - when there was some fighting off of a Sea Eagle, which ventured too close to the nest. Photographs were taken from various angles, the parent posing happily for quite some time, until fear overtook and the nest was temporarily left - at which stage we moved on through to the now dry Dugong Waterfall - approximately 200 feet high wall of sandstone with permanent staining from the cascades of water in the wet season.

Rock wallabies rushed from spot to spot on the rock face, such dexterity, agility and sure footedness being displayed. White-quilled Rock-pigeons were also observed. It was decided KC would climb to the top of the fall - only Graham volunteered to accompany him. In the meantime, Eric and Luke cast the line in the hope of catching that elusive fish - sadly still the tale of the one that got away (or was never there in the first place)!

KK and Daphne collected some botanical specimens - largely due to the mountain goat activities of KK - and thankfully no dropping off into the 'drink' as observers thought might occur. KC and Graham returned from exploration with reports of finding a few ponds and a very attractive area with panoramic magnificent views from the top of the cascade. They had collected specimens of quartz crystal, pieces of rock and plants and observed a variety of birds.

The return to 'Sea Lion' resulted in some interesting sightings of Woodswallows, Mangrove Heron and Red-winged Parrots. We had a superb evening meal and all thanks to Alex and Luke for their efforts.

Eileen Row

**Tuesday July 9** Depart Talbot Bay 7:30 am. Serene morning, sparkling water. A fleeting glimpse of a crocodile in passing. First landfall the site of yacht club and loading ramp on Koolan Island. Landing party ascended the road at individual pace, some reaching the site of Koolan Village. There were spectacular views over the embayments, headlands, other islands, back to the mainland. Truly emerald gems floating in diamond sparkling azure. Some consternation when half of the party failed to return at the KC assigned time of 10:00 am - unaware that KC had doubled back through the scrub, having enjoyed an extended walk along the old road, inspecting indigenous and feral fauna, party reunited neither penitent nor contrite. KK and JB sighted White-bellied Sea-eagle immediately overhead and KC missed that one! Cruise around and point the nose in Silver Gull Creek. Too shallow for further inspection. Disturbed the solitude of a blue yacht out of Shark Bay going north and east. I could leave home for an outfit like that! Further round to Crocodile Creek, a favourite weekend spot for residents of Koolan and Cockatoo Islands. Anchor here for lunch in [approx.] 1 m of water, parked on the bottom. Skipper expects tide to return. I love the way this big vessel noses up into these inlets and streams, cautiously feeling the way, weaving past rocky corners into new waters, walls only metres away on either side. I don't see too many birds, but I love to watch the changing columns and forms of the different rock structures, all resting on a muddy band of yucky grey rocks, or fringed with clinging mangroves, or the occasional sandy cove. There's no swell on this now turquoise water, the edge creeps up or down imperceptibly. All into the zodiac for run up to the freshwater hole at Crocodile Creek - surprised to see masts protruding above rocky crag - find an ideal mooring basin, three blue water yachts there, Wilponeena II from Sydney, Grace (Fremantle, bound for Bali and the Greek Isles) and Caper (Fremantle). We find this a major stopover spot for mariners - the ritual being to leave an artefact of their visit, identifying ship and crew. Skirting the tidal, crocodile occupied lower pool, we scrambled up to the cascade to a jewel of a freshwater pond - clear, deep, overhung with vegetation - whose occupant there is a water monitor - calmly, warily, regarding our approach. Great hilarity in the party on the occasion of a proper, freshwater swim and ablutions. KC collected a specimen of a white frog which was later identified as *Litoria rothei*.



Depart thence for run across to Cockatoo Island for 'shore break'. As we approach the end of this fascinating expedition, I am reflecting upon what we have experienced and observed during these days. We have seen this marine landscape under the most ideal conditions - clear calm sunny weather, the security of a stout vessel with water, fuel and food supply. We can admire the rugged beauty of the coastline, enjoy the lilt and lift of the motion of the boat. It is sobering to contemplate that we follow many, who have suffered terrible privations and perished under the most extreme conditions, as over the centuries people have attempted to make their mark on this land. And yet those quartzite ridges, rocky cliffs, surging tides and searing seasons have endured for eons. Then we come to Koolan Island, where MAN has made his mark, departing with some effort to restore the natural state - but poincianas, poinsettias, tecomas, garden mint don't really belong. At last, Cockatoo Island, where the might of 'The Quiet Achiever', modern technology and the economic imperative of an exportable resource prevails for human settlement for the time being, and man has made his mark. A most enjoyable evening spent in the guest house of this "least known paradise island in the world", drinks on the terrace by the pool, watching the sunset again over this island-studded sea. Some walked along the cliff ridge towards the same sunset, to stretch the sea legs and resting on an ironstone rock at the point, high above the glistening water, hearing the water lapping in a sandy cove way below.

My deepfelt thanks to KK, KC and DE for creating this expedition, for taking us to these little known, wonderful places and providing a rich learning experience about landscape, seascape and their inhabitants; and to Skipper, Alexa and Luke for taking us so comfortably and safely through these seas. I wish to record also my joy and interest in my fellow expeditioners, the pleasure of conversations and shared experiences.

**June Brown**

**Wednesday July 10 Final Day** Awoken very early by KK switching on lights in the school house on Cockatoo Island. The only bonus was to see the sunrise over rugged headlands as we collect swags and pack up - not yet 6 o'clock! 'Sea Lion' away at 6.45 am after ferrying back and forth on the zodiac was accomplished. It's interesting to see the new life pumping back into Cockatoo after it's been overlooked for past years, also to compare it with Koolan Island, which is now reverting to it's natural condition, with all buildings removed.

Back on board the 'winding down' began as we left Cockatoo behind in our wake, a few catching up on sleep, some reading, some writing as Jason sets the course for Broome. The 'Sea Lion' answered the call, like a bolting horse returning home and we made very good time to Cape Leveque. Alex served a gourmet lunch yet again to the ever hungry group. Sadly the eager fishermen have given up - fish proving to be a very elusive commodity this trip! Saw few birds. Several groups of silver gulls feasting on bubbling schools of fish, a few Boobies and Terns and KC spotted a lone Wilson's Storm-petrel.

Suddenly about 2 pm 'Thar She Blows'. A wonderful sighting of spouting whales close by. Around turned the boat to follow many pointing fingers and we came across a couple of humpbacks slowly cruising just below the surface, occasionally rising, blowing once again and raising their flukes. What a sight and to be so close was very special - a great finale for a wonderful trip.

Saw several dolphins and a lone green turtle and in the distance evidence of bushfire. And so to Broome arriving about 4 pm having averaged about 19 knots.

After packing, final farewells to the crew and going ashore, we eagerly sought a LONG hot shower. Then on to the Conti (Continental Hotel) for the last dinner together.

It has been a privilege to share the experiences of the last 12 days with great company in some of the remote areas of the Kimberley. Of course we'll ALL be coming back. It can't be too soon for me.

Special thanks to Daphne, KC and KK.

**Beth Hanrahan**

### **A HERMIT'S STORY**

Our visit to the isolated "Hermit's Camp" in Cone Bay was one of the highlights of the expedition. It made us stop and think why? Why would you chose this place to live and endure such privation and loneliness for so many years. To understand you have to know something about the man who established the campsite.

Peter John Rew chose his lonely lifestyle at Cone Bay when he turned his back on a life of crime which, at its most spectacular, involved planting explosives at the Townsville Supreme Court in 1965. The Court did not explode but it was a turning point in Peter Rew's life.

After serving eight years in gaol, he assumed a new identity as Xenex Xenex. In 1972 he chose to relocate to the isolated and remote Cone Bay which was to be his home for the next 14 years. Located three hours by boat from Derby, the campsite is inaccessible by land. Xenex lived off the land, fishing, shooting game and eating berries. He did not get the dole or any social security benefits.

His peaceful isolation was shattered in February 1986 when three police officers turned up in a boat. There was a confrontation which ended up with Xenex being arrested and taken to Derby. He was charged with possessing cannabis and with firing a rifle at the police with the intention of resisting arrest. After a period in custody he was released on three years probation.

Following a radio interview that I did with Verity James prior to the 1996 expedition to the Buccaneer Archipelago, I mentioned our proposed visit to the Hermit's Camp. Shortly afterwards I received a phone call from a man who identified himself as John X and claiming to be the hermit in question. I set up a meeting with him at his unit in Scarborough where he was living at the time.

The door was opened by a slightly built, merlin-like man with long curly hair and a grey wispy beard. He was softly spoken and invited me into a sparsely furnished room filled with memorabilia of his stay at Cone Bay. Over a cup of coffee, I asked him about his time at Cone Bay. He explained that he is a prospector and that he had gone to the Kimberley to seek his El Dorado. He was very cautious as to what his El Dorado was but I suspected he was prospecting for gold. He implied that he had made some interesting discoveries but would not elaborate.

Cone Bay provided the material for a series of inspirational booklets which John self-publishes under the Hermit Publishing imprint. As I expressed interest in these publications, he presented me with a set of the books. These contain impressions and reflections expressing his philosophy.

One of the main reasons for making contact with me, was that he was concerned about one of the climbing plants he had introduced to Cone Bay in 1976. On a return visit to his campsite at Cone Bay some years ago he was alarmed by the rapid spread of this plant and wanted to bring this to my attention so that we could identify the plant and monitor its spread. The seeds of the plant were obtained by him from a garden in Derby.

Curious about the history of the Cone Bay settlement, I asked him for some background information. He said that he had visited many coastal areas of the Kimberley with a local identity known as Long Mac (Desmond McKenny). The site at Cone Bay had appealed because of its proximity to Derby by boat and, most importantly, because it had a continuous supply of fresh water, fed from a spring. The presence of this water supply was well known to early pearlers working these waters. His camp was established in December 1972. A number of plants were introduced to the area. These included banana, pawpaw, pineapple, lime, orange, mandarin, cashew nut, mango, Iranian date palm and aloe vera. He said that vegetables such as carrots did well but legumes failed to thrive.

John explained that at one stage there were at least six houses in the camp and a transient population. He said he was always grateful to have company because of the isolated nature of the campsite. The arrival of the police in February 1986 at his remote home had been a blessing in disguise as he had been wanting to turn his back on his reclusive lifestyle. "I was suffering from temporary mental instability because of the isolation," he said.

As I was leaving I asked John X what the future held for him. He explained that the call of the Kimberley was still there and that he had bought a boat with the intention of returning to Derby to continue his prospecting lifestyle.

The expedition's arrival at the Hermit's Camp in Cone Bay was not without difficulty. The inlet was hard to see from the Sea Lion as it blended into the surrounding sandstone. However, we were able to spot the black polythene pipe that transports water from the creek that runs through the Hermit's Camp. The water pipe is laid on the sea floor and services the Cone Bay Pearling Farm on the adjacent island. Access to the campsite involved a steep climb up rugged sandstone through which the creek runs, emptying over a sandstone wall into the sea. The track is densely vegetated with wild figs and ferns forming impenetrable barriers. On the way up we encountered relics of the former camp - weathered statues reminiscent of Eastern deities. There were a number of deep pools suitable for bathing.

The former campsite is located in a valley between massive outcropping sandstone. The native vegetation in the valley is a combination of rainforest elements (e.g. *Alphitonia*, *Canarium*, *Pouteria*, *Flagellaria*, *Capparis*) and savannah elements (e.g. *Acacia*, *Eucalyptus*, *Buchanania*, *Distichostemon*).

A number of the dwellings are still standing and are constructed from an eclectic array of materials in innovative designs. The presence of the former inhabitants is evidenced by the number of exotic plants that still survive in the vicinity of the ruins. These include bougainvillea, banana, lime, cashew and aloe vera. Also obvious was the vine that John X had planted at the campsite. This was identified as *Merremia dissecta*, a member of the morning glory family. This species is recorded as an aggressive weed, particularly invasive of disturbed areas, that has spread throughout the Kimberley. It is native to the Southern USA and South America. The vine has become rampant over his former dwelling, where he grew it to provide shade. As this plant produces large numbers of seeds, it has the capacity to quickly spread. However, it does not appear to have spread outside of the well watered valley area.

The visit to the camp will always be remembered for the enormous ticks that attached themselves to many of the expeditioners.

Kevin Kenneally

## Bird Notes

Much valuable avifauna information was accumulated from seldom visited areas of the Kimberley coast on LANDSCOPE Expedition's first foray into the region. The breeding information obtained from the islands will be of value in assisting CALM in its planning and management strategies.

The expedition visited the Lacepede group of islands, one of the major sea bird and turtle breeding areas in the Kimberley. On East Lacepede Island a recently hatched White-bellied Sea-eagle chick was recorded in a nest built on the light tower. As it was high tide, we discovered the island provided roosting for nearly 400 assorted wading birds.

On Sand Island we established that it possessed a large colony of Brown Boobies and that breeding was in all stages from eggs to almost mature young. Little has been previously recorded of the Booby population of this island.

Volunteers assisted in counting the nests of Lesser Frigatebirds on West Island. This was achieved from a vantage point where the birds would not be disturbed. Sections for counting were allocated to four groups of two people using binoculars. Numbers were then checked for accuracy and there were surprisingly few discrepancies. The birds were nesting on top of small spinifex covered ridges and these have been plotted on an aerial photograph. Frigate Bird numbers fluctuate quite a lot from year to year and it is hoped that with future counts, there will be a better understanding of breeding patterns on the Lacepede Islands, of this most aerial of sea birds.

A breeding colony of Caspian Tern was observed and counted from the far side of the lagoon, so that predatory Silver Gulls would not attack the eggs. Some birds were sitting on eggs and others had large downy chicks.

Two partly fledged Roseate Tern with the parent birds, were seen near the Caspian Tern colony. A little later others were found in a breeding area away from the lagoon on the seaward side of the island. Little is known about Roseate Tern movement in the Kimberley and whether the birds here come from the south or from Indonesia or Eastern Australia is still undecided. Photographs taken of breeding birds at the Lacepedes on this expedition show more black in the wing than those from the Abrolhos Islands in the south, which may help unravel some of the mystery.

About 200 Little Tern, a Gull-billed Tern and a large number of waders including one Asian Dowitcher - an uncommon bird in Western Australia, were also observed around the lagoon.

Mulgudna Island, just to the south of Montgomery Island had one pair of Caspian Tern sitting on eggs. Two pairs of Little Tern in full breeding plumage had young hiding in jumbled sandstone slabs at the east end of the island as evidenced by their aggressive behaviour and the way they returned to the upturned slabs as we departed. The nesting platform of an Osprey, and a fully fledged youngster still in company of its parents were nearby.

Osprey nesting stacks were checked at several locations where birds were noticed sitting on them. Several nests were seen near Traverse Island on the way to Secure Bay. One nest difficult to access on a craggy cliff top had three recently hatched chicks in it, which was an indication of a plentiful food supply.

It would have been wonderful to have had time to check out the bird life more thoroughly on Montgomery Islands. However, as it turned out we nearly became stranded between the islands on a sandbar at the peak of spring tide

We had good views of Great-billed Heron at King Creek in Secure Bay, and at Jinunga River off The Graveyard. They are not common and are generally thought of as shy and solitary birds.

At Freshwater Cove, amongst the reed beds and colourful flowering herb fields we saw a Buff-banded Rail.

A Brahminy Kite was sitting on a nest in a *Sonneratia alba* mangrove tree at the bottom end of Talbot Bay. A White-bellied Sea-eagle was vigorously attacked when it ventured too close to the nest and was seen to execute a 360 degree aerial manoeuvre in a bid to escape.

Bald Rock, a granite island in Cone Bay, one kilometre from the mainland, had been referred to us as a breeding place for Short-billed Corellas. When approaching the dome shaped rock, 30-40 Corella were seen sitting amongst jumbled rocks near the top. A hazardous landing was made from the zodiac while "Sea Lion" stood by, to check this unique rock and Corella breeding site. There was plenty of evidence of nesting occurring with hollows dug out under rock slabs, as well as an old abandoned egg. Corella are often known to nest in crevices in cliff faces and have previously been recorded nesting on offshore islands in the Buccaneer Archipelago. Two pairs of Pied Oyster Catcher with downy young were also there and not at all impressed with our approach. These youngsters were eventually shepherded by the parents to shelter under overhanging rock slabs. Mystery circles of stones, obviously arranged by human hand, were also discovered on the rock. It is hoped that as a result of this expedition, Bald Rock will be gazetted as a nature reserve. Also found at Cone Bay was a Wedge-tailed Eagle nest with two recently laid eggs sitting on a bed of freshly collected leaves. The nest, which was quite large, had been used for a number of seasons. It was placed in a small stunted Boab tree no more than 3 metres above ground level, just under the brow of a cliff face. Cone Bay with its 1800 million year old Archaean granites was a fascinating place.

At the hermits camp, there was an excellent bower of the Great Bowerbird, decorated with white snail shells, bric a brac from the ruins and several green fruit off an introduced lime tree. *Buchanania obovata* trees were heavily infested with the mistletoe *Decaisnina petiolata*, which was flowering profusely and there was no shortage of the Mistletoe Bird. A pair of Tawny Frogmouth were also found. Some freshwater shrimps were collected for identification. They were identified by the WA Museum as *Caridinia* sp. (family Atyidae).

On the return trip, rafts of Silver Gull were seen sitting on the water between the Lacepede Islands and Broome. There seems to be a big increase in Silver Gull numbers in this area of recent years, which may need monitoring, as they could be a threat to sea bird breeding on the Lacepedes.

A total of 108 birds were recorded.

Kevin Coate

The group on the beach on West Island of the Lacepede Nature Reserve



Wading out to the zodiac through the morning mist at Middle Lagoon

Preparing to climb the track from the boat ramp at Koolan Island

