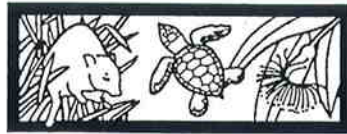


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LANDSCOPE EXPEDITIONS

Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management,
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in association with

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

**In the Wake of the Mermaid
- A Kimberley Voyage 1997
LANDSCOPE Expedition Report No. 22**

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 this expedition the success it was. Your cooperation with the complex logistics involving fixed wing aircraft and helicopters, not to mention the ten kilogram luggage limit was very much appreciated. This was our second voyage into the uncharted waters of the Kimberley coast. Your willingness to support this research project allowed us to gather some very important biological data, particularly information on the brittle star fish and their host jellyfish. We also acknowledge the professionalism of the crew of the *Sea Lion*, Alex Seppe (Skipper), Cameron Mackenzie and Luke Sibon for ensuring the success of the expedition and for getting us safely to and from our various destinations. We trust the expedition members benefited from the opportunity to visit this spectacular and wild region of Western Australia. We hope we have the pleasure of your company on future *Landscape* Expeditions.

Kevin Kenneally, Daphne Edinger, Kevin Coate and Chris Done



Members of the Wake of the Mermaid *LANDSCOPE* Expedition below the cycads at Careening Bay

PAM09061



Expedition members at the Bradshaw settlement site in the Prince Regent River Nature Reserve



Sue, Chris and Pat examining crystal outcrops on Boongaree Island

EXPEDITION HIGHLIGHTS

1. A number of bird and natural history 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. A number of plant collections were made and these have been incorporated into the Western Australian Herbarium.
3. Collections of the jellyfish and brittle stars from the Hunter River have been forwarded to the WA Museum.
4. The rediscovery of the ruins associated with Joseph Bradshaw's pastoral lease and settlement in the Kimberley and the discovery of the boab tree inscribed "Gunn" has highlighted additional heritage values of the Prince Regent River Nature Reserve.

EXPEDITIONER PROFILES

Suzan Brand was born in the United Kingdom and came to Australia as a child. She trained as a nurse/midwife and lived in Saudi Arabia for 11 years and Bahrain for 2 years. During that time she went on numerous camping trips into the remote desert. A career change saw her studying in London to become a lawyer. She sees this expedition as being the ideal combination of a break from work with something useful to do.

Bevan Buirchell is a plant breeder, with an agricultural background. He has a great desire to see the Kimberley and be involved in a botanical collecting mission. He has a reasonable understanding of botany and is familiar with most plant families in the south-west and is an experienced photographer of orchids.

Bill Busby has had some military experience, camped in wilderness areas and has visited the Antarctic. He hopes to gain knowledge, experience adventures in good company and see an interesting area.

Sue Clarkson has travelled extensively, been on two previous land-based *Landscape* expeditions to the Kimberley and camped in the Kimberley during a six-week visit last year. Her interests include photography, birds, botany and insects.

Ros Denny is a retired Director of Nursing from King Edward Memorial Hospital. She has been on *Landscape* expeditions before. She has been a member of the RAOU (now known as Birds Australia) for many years.

Bernd Gevecke is from Germany. He heard of *Landscape* expeditions through his local tour operator. He is interested in nature and describes himself as quiet, peaceful and open-minded.

Margaret Gillespie joined a party who walked the Overland track in Tasmania in 1996, and was with a party walking the Freycinet Peninsula earlier this year. She travelled to and camped at Cape York and across the Gulf to Roper Bar in 1989 and visited the Birdsville Track and Frazer Island in 1985. She is an active outdoor person who wishes to see the Kimberley region and is prepared to help in any way possible.

Sallie Green has participated in previous *Landscape* expeditions. She is a member of the RAOU (now called Birds Australia) and is very interested in the natural world generally.

Beth Hanrahan took part in last year's *Landscape* expedition to the Buccaneer Archipelago. She describes herself as a West Australian housewife with an interest in WA history, birds, animals and native flora.

Harry Leaver has followed in the steps of the explorers, locating their camps. He has followed the route taken by Alexander Forrest in the Kimberley, visited the Gibson Desert several times and retraced (walking) George Grey's route from Kalbarri to Perth.

Suzy Spiers is an outdoor person who loves bush camping in remote places. She is very interested in native vegetation, birdwatching, geology, ecology and environmental changes.

Andrew Spiers is a gynaecologist from Hawthorn, Victoria. A rock climbing instructor (in earlier days), he has done white-water canoeing, 4WD trips to the Kimberley and Northern Territory with his wife Suzy, and led canoeing and bushwalking trips.

Jane Venter is the daughter of Sallie Green and has participated in previous *Landscape* expeditions. She and her mother have travelled extensively.

DIARY OF IN THE WAKE OF THE MERMAID - A KIMBERLEY VOYAGE 1997

Monday July 14 We all leapt out of bed at 5 am!! Pulled on as many clothes as possible and filled all our pockets so our bags would weigh the required 10 kg. After a quick breakfast, we were bussed to the airport by Paul Foulkes, Broome resident and dinosaur expert.

We flew up the coast, marvelling at the huge expanse of white beach with not a soul or a building anywhere to be seen. Does it happen anywhere else in the world? We landed expertly at Cape Leveque for a quick refuel and then off again over the Buccaneer Archipelago. It is so beautiful, the sea a wonderful blue. The tide was going out and you could see the flow lines of the tide (tidal currents) racing out on its twice daily up to 11 m. On past many islands, defunct iron ore mines on Cockatoo Island and Koolan Island. On Cockatoo they have revitalised the tourist resort decorated with pink buildings. On Koolan Island, all buildings have been removed and a revegetation program is in place.

David, the pilot, circled twice over the horizontal waterfall. Some could get a good view. On to the Mitchell Plateau, past Prince Regent River, past Mitchell Falls and landed at the airstrip there after a 2 1/2 hour flight. From here we were ferried, three people to a helicopter, in two helicopters across to Naturalist Beach. This took three trips and quite some time as turn-around time was about 1 hr 10 min. It was a wonderful flight over Mitchell Falls and Merten Falls, circling both ways for excellent views. On past Donkins Hill and Falls (named after the inventor of canned meat and carried by Captain P.P. King on his expedition. We flew over Porosus Creek named after the estuarine or salt water crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*.

We were welcomed by some of the first group and Kevin Coate (KC) took us on a short walk up the beach to see the mound of a yellow-footed scrub fowl. He said it could be used by up to five hens. Then we transferred to the rubber zodiac to go to the *Sea Lion*. Imagine our surprise and delight to be met with tea and coffee and fresh scones.

While waiting for the third group to helicopter in, some of us returned to the beach with KC who led us up a gully through remnant rainforest. Passed many long thin black spiders with stripes on their legs (probably *Nephila maculata*, a large orb-weaver). Unfortunately we didn't see any birds - we were probably too noisy and it was the middle of the day. Back to the boat and we set off for Careening Bay. Lunch had not even been finished by everyone when Andrew, looking over the side, sighted jelly fish that KC had told us about, with brittle stars living "in". This started a frenzy of activity, with Kevin Kenneally (KK) saying, "We want one of those." Luke expertly netted one. He brought it on deck and it was much photographed. Then it was down onto the deck with it with eager fingers lifting out all the brittle stars and getting "up to their elbows" in jelly fish, but obviously to the delight and excitement of some. Twelve tiny fish were also discovered on this "living island". Examples of both of these were collected into small phials and half the jelly fish was slid into a large, well-washed mayonnaise container. All these will be sent to the WA Museum. We found 156 brittle stars in one of the jelly fish.

A "black" dingo was seen on a beach at Hardie Point (part of Kimberley mainland) where turtles go to lay their eggs. There were about six tracks up the beach. The dingo was probably eating the eggs (probably flat-backed turtles). A brown booby was seen. Just before sunset, we got the "boots on" order and we went in two shifts ashore at Careening Bay to see the "Mermaid Tree" in the afternoon light. It was amazing to see this tree carved "HMC Mermaid 1820". A beautiful sunset.

After the sun went down KK read to us from King's journal from both 1820 and 1821 voyages and also Cunningham's journals about what we will be investigating tomorrow. This was followed by a short "show and tell". KC proffered crab's eye beans and KK commented on their use for decorations but even one bean is fatal if the seed is ingested and the testa (coat) is broken, i.e. don't eat it! Daphne contributed red organ coral from Careening Bay. Pre-dinner chat concluded with KC going through the bird list and today's bird sightings.

Tuesday July 15 Rose early and consumed a hearty breakfast. Margaret's birthday today. Had a visit by the Customs boat last night - we didn't appreciate them leaving their lights and generator running all night - they could have anchored somewhere else!! We are all dying to get ashore and start the exploration.

The first intrepid explorers were whisked off to look at the "human made"? hollows in the rock shore - interesting holes which may have been used by the crew of the *Mermaid* for various unknown reasons. KC gave the call and all the "birdos" slowly crawled up the gully at the back of Careening Beach. The two hour walk was most rewarding and many local birds were recorded. Meanwhile, the plant oriented people stayed at the rear sighting many of the plants that Cunningham had identified in his original exploration. The green crystals of tourmaline were found in many places among the mygdaloidal basalt rocks on the shore and up the valley. A flower spider was discovered with its breakfast (a bush fly) firmly fixed in its jaws.

At 10 am we all gathered at the famous boab tree to have a team photo taken. It was noted that the inscription on the tree was in very good condition and one hopes will be recognisable and undisturbed by other graffiti for another 177 years.

A trek along the beach resulted in another photo in front of some cycads. The female cycads were in fruit. Some aboriginal artefacts were found - an arrow/spear head made from clear crystal or possibly clear glass and a knife with a serrated edge. The tide was out by the time we left the beach and you could see why P.P. King found this beach so fitting for his purpose of careening the *Mermaid*. On the left side of the beach was a long flat area where he

must have pulled his boat up - an extremely important historic site for European/Australian history and one hopes it will remain the same for many more years. We have weighed anchor and are now proceeding in a westerly direction to Bat Island.

An early lunch was followed by the call from KK to be organised to go ashore. Two parties were formed - the first to attempt to find the bat cave mentioned by King and Cunningham on Bat Island - the second to land on a nearby beach and walk inland. Unfortunately, the cave was not found despite searching for some time, but various interesting rocks were collected and shown later, also the plants *Pterocaulon sphacelatum* (woolly tobacco) and a *Sarcostemma viminalis* (naked lady).

The beach group headed inland and were rewarded with many bird sightings. KC was excited to see a rufous fantail, which has probably not been recorded as far south previously. Along the beach were several turtle mounds - possibly flat back turtles. One had been disturbed and several broken eggs were scattered around. It was thought the culprit was a dingo as dog tracks were seen along the beach leading to the nest.

Leaving Bat Island we headed towards Rothsay Water and anchored for the night near the entrance. It was a warm, calm evening, enhanced by the surrounding rock formations and low hills.

Margaret's birthday was celebrated in style - champagne, party hats, terrific lasagne and a chocolate cake with candles. We had "show and tell" earlier on with Bevan producing a snake skeleton to add to his encounter with two pythons in a cave near the beach. Harry had found a native flint and unusual stones, plants and shells were handed around for inspection. We were feeling relaxed and thinking about retiring when Suzan excitedly shouted "crocodile" and there it was, cruising close to the *Sea Lion* and looking very innocent in the moonlight. It submerged and resurfaced several times, giving everyone a chance to see it and remark on its size and the silent menace it represented. Another great day, enhanced by the early diaries and their stories.

Wednesday July 16 Very early start today. Generator on about 5 am and weigh anchor before 6 am for rising tide into Rothsay Water. Very still and beautiful at this time of morning. We steamed into the unknown Rothsay Water where none of us had been before, all the way up and identified Mt Knight but didn't land, turned and came out again. Gathered at the map after breakfast for explanation of route out into Saint George Basin. Approximately 2 hours steaming to anchorage for assault on lower slopes of Mt Waterloo. Boat trip provided plenty of time for thoughts and contemplation of this wonderful land. Ferried ashore through mangroves - ascent through long dry grass to boab tree No. 1 - inscription A.J. Gunn, first time ever seen or reported, so much excitement; boab tree No. 2 - inscribed with the letters H.D.L. Scoured bush for evidence of previous occupation by Joseph Bradshaw who had selected the site for a pastoral station in 1891.

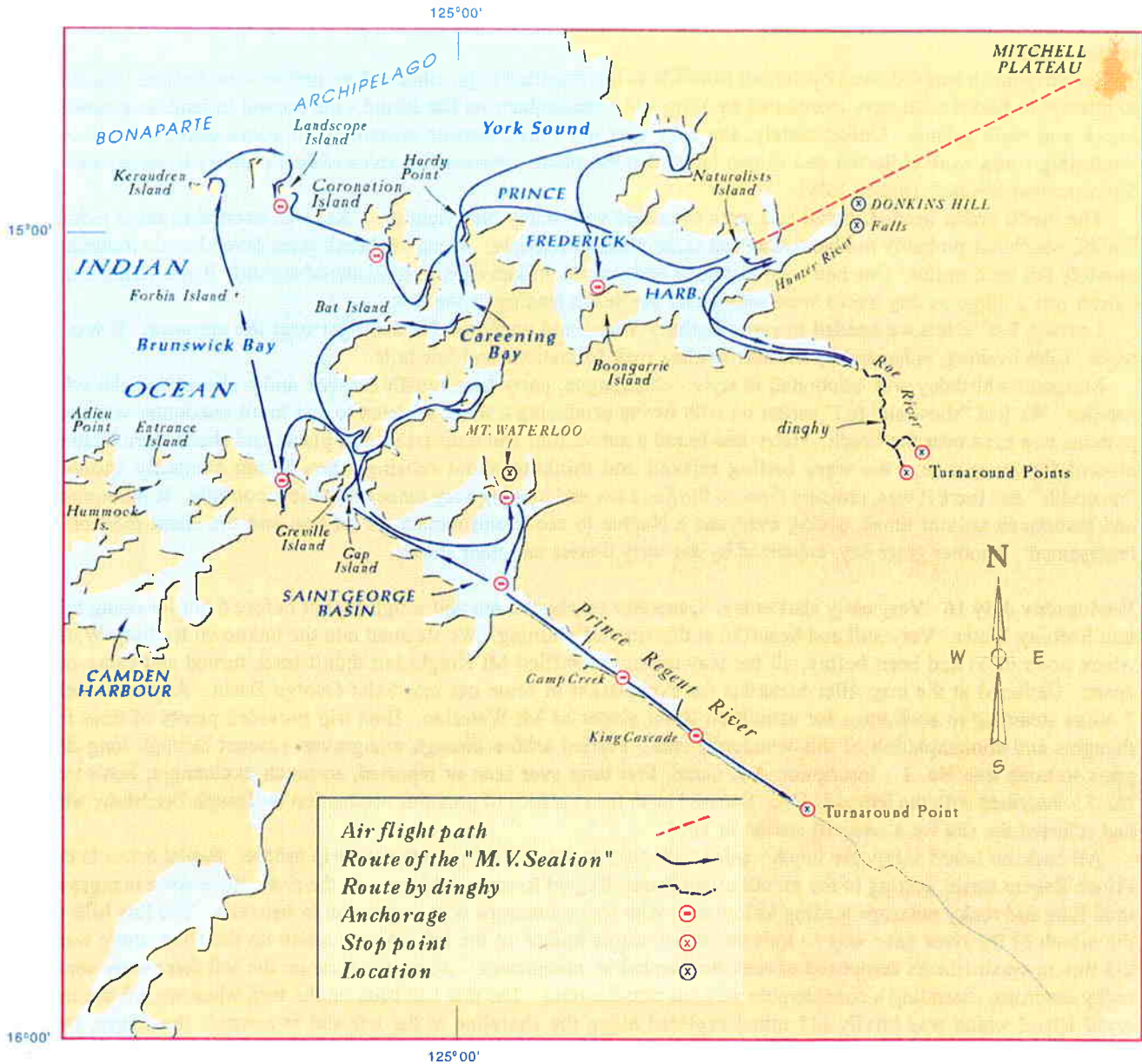
All back on board safely for lunch - salad with cold meats at 1.30 pm after the trip ashore. Sailed towards the Prince Regent Basin, getting to the mouth of the Prince Regent River at 3.15 pm. At the river, there were mangrove mud flats and rocky outcrops leading to low hills with rocky outcrops with vegetation in between. The low hills at the mouth of the river gave way to hills about two-thirds higher on the left. As we sailed up the river, there were 2-3 tiny to small islands composed of rock surrounded by mangroves. Along the river on the left there were some rocky outcrops, extending a considerable way out into the river. The tide had been on the turn when we left the last small island which was briefly (45 mins) explored along the shoreline to the left and in towards the centre, two different parties going either way. Here the botanists collected the common wattle, *Acacia plectocarpa*, *Acacia tumida* and *Grewia oxyphylla*. Very hot and hard work rock hopping.

We stopped at Camp Creek about half way up Prince Regent River, arriving at 4.10 pm. The scene: mud and mangroves in Camp Creek. The main river was lined with mangroves. There was a light warm breeze. Low hills studded the landscape composed of scrub and rocky outcrops - no real difference from what we had seen all day. Show and tell was based mainly around the rediscovery of the Bradshaw landing site and the discovery of the "Gunn Tree" and the "HDL" tree. Harry Leaver and Bill Busby expressed their appreciation of the historical day. Luke had seen a 10 ft (3 m) crocodile which lay at the side of the boat for almost the whole of the night. Various botanical and marine specimens were passed round.

Tomorrow's program was set out briefly - dinner tonight was a barbecue on deck. Sunset: Venus shone in the water - stunning. Anchored for the night at mouth of Camp Creek.

Thursday July 17 Engines on at 05.45 am - breakfasted reasonably quickly because we had 1 hour and 15 minutes before our arrival at King Cascade. The Cascade was in a creek to the right off the main river. Waterfalls were less than expected owing to the dry season. In order to secure the boat, the skipper brought the boat alongside the cliff/waterfall face. Luke Sibon jumped overboard onto the cliff face with the main rope to which was attached a lesser rope for the purpose of securing it around a rock. The water collection system was set up.

Two trips set off from the boat: one to bird watch and the other to botanise. The zodiac took the group to a mud bank - the tide was lowish - on the right side of the Cascade. A landing site was chosen. The first man ashore dived straight into the mud feet first up to his knees in mud. Thereafter, dead wood plus fresh branches were laid on the mud to form a carpet above so that the rest of us could have an easier passage ashore. Meanwhile, the remainder of the birders kept a crocodile vigil.



LANDSCAPE EXPEDITIONS

"Wake of the Mermaid"

SEA VOYAGE

along the

KIMBERLEY COAST

July 1997

"M. V. Sealion"



MAP by: John MASLIN
maslin@foxgold.net.au





Going ashore in the zodiac under the watchful eye of Cameron Mackenzie



Expedition members at the "Mermaid Tree", Careening Bay

Having got safely on land - dry land - we proceeded through the mangroves at a fairly rapid pace to a higher spot above some rocks where (a) the tide would not get us, and (b) we would be crocodile free. Having done so, we de-booted and re-booted, a routine by now that we had all become used to and had accepted. Life jackets were left on the rock. We then turned about-face to begin the slow climb to the top of the cliff face. We were careful to climb on rock rather than spinifex owing to the dangers of the gaps and holes between the spinifex. It was a solid but rewarding climb to the top along the ridge and over to the main stream which flowed to form the main branch leading to the Cascade.

After a brief stop to survey the view from the top of the falls, we then turned and started picking our way upstream - the usual Kimberley "rock hop". We had already spotted some northern rosellas on the climb up and then at the first major pool after the falls we were given a real treat with the sighting of a pair of pacific baza. We then walked on, passing back and forth over the stream and seeing many beautiful pools, very suitable for swimming, but we were assured by KC that the "showers" ahead were worth waiting for. Picked up numerous tracks left by northern quolls and also possible dog tracks. At one of the upper pools we spotted a varied triller alongside a female white-winged triller. Just up into the sandstone breakaway country - at long last - we saw our first black grasswrens! We counted 6 together with some variegated fairy-wrens. We then started back and found a small waterfall where we all "showered" before starting back towards the top of the falls. We had another excellent sighting of the pacific bazas. At the top of the falls we could see the tide had come in and floating along the thermals near the cliff face was a white-bellied sea-eagle. Just as we started off again towards our descent line we had an excellent view of a sandstone shrike-thrush. After clambering down to where we had left our "wet boots" we discovered we had a much "cleaner" access to the zodiac. Back on board, the *Sea Lion* was a hive of industry - washing hanging from every available space, people "showering" on the ledges under the falls, just a step off the deck, with mats provided! The ingenious method used by the crew to fill the freshwater tanks and provide a freshwater hose to clean the mangrove mud off clothing and boots. After far too short a time, we had to up anchor to catch the tide and head for our next stop.

Report of the walk up above Kings Cascades by those interested in plants. We five scrambled up a similar path that the birdos took, following a few cairns. We seemed to end up in a high position above the falls where we were unable to climb down. By retracing our steps we could cross a small valley, then make our way down a cliff to the creek. We searched the falls and creek area for ephemerals and found some interesting plants including *Drosera burmanni*, *Utricularia*, *Stylidium irriguum*, a *Striga* and *Burmannia juncea*. After spending about half an hour in this wonderful paradise, we made our way back up the small valley we had previously crossed. We returned to the boat at high tide which meant we could slip onto the zodiac straight from the cliffs without wading through the mud in the mangroves. We all enjoyed the freshwater shower on the back of the boat.

After leaving the Cascades at high tide, we proceeded back down the Prince Regent to St George Basin on a NW course. Passed Greville Island and Uwins Island to port, rounding Uwins to head for Hanover Bay. For the historians, this was of particular interest for we were now following George Grey's first landing in preparation for his inland exploration - 1838. Dropped anchor off the beach where the first camp was established by Grey. At 3 pm we set off at close to low tide in the Zodiac and alloy dinghy to follow the creek (since named Adenotricha Creek by KC after *Grevillea adenotricha* discovered there) nearby to attempt to reach the second and permanent camp-site. Luke led the way in the "tinnie" but we could not quite reach the freshwater section above which the camp was set so returned downstream at leisure to study the gorge for plant and bird life. We then landed on the beach where Grey first camped and inspected for signs of its location. All in all, a very satisfying conclusion to Day 4. Anchored in Hanover Bay overnight.

At show and tell Chris showed a fig *Ficus virens*, pollinated by a small wasp which lives inside the fruit. A few rock wallabies were noted. Harry identified a large skink at the back of the beach. Both Sues were thrilled by seeing black grass-wrens. Andrew showed a large shell (bailer) (*Melo amphora*) and a number of other shells. Berndt found a dead seedling of *Xylocarpus moluccensis* with the large seed still attached. KK showed us an *Ipomea pes-caprae* - beach morning glory, *Phyllanthus* sp. and a very prickly *Solanum cataphractum*. Sally picked up a barnacle on the beach. Ros had a collection of shells - cowrie, trochus, nerite and bivalves.

Daphne showed us the true spinifex - both male plants and female plants - *Spinifex longifolius*. Margaret collected a "bone-like" structure that may have been part of a stingray. KC enjoyed revisiting Walkers Valley as well as seeing the black grass-wren. The skipper, Alex, saw three Irrawady dolphins on the way out of the Prince Regent River.

Friday July 18 This morning those of us who wished were able to remain in our comfortable swags until normal wake-up call at 6 am. Up anchor at 7.15 am heading north toward Forbin Island in the D'Arcole Islands approximately 1 1/2 hours sailing time away and in a slightly choppy sea. Large flat-backed turtle seen from the bridge and whales were sighted ahead of us about 8.30 m. We veered off course in order to obtain better views - maybe three or four or more humpback whales in the distance. Passed the forbidding basalt cliffs of Forbin Island. Noted terns on the rocks but no signs of breeding sites. SE winds at 20-28 knots.

Headed toward Keraudren Island which was passed in approximately 1 hour, also Whitey Island. A mackerel fishing boat was seen in the area. Anchored in the lee of Rathbun Island at 10.15 am for morning tea.

Carried on through the scenic sandstone and basalt islands to lunch stop at 12 noon among two newly named islands. KK designated them Museum Island and Landscape Island. In discussion of the region before lunch, KK and Chris Done discussed the impact of ventures of various kinds on the N. Kimberley coast. Kimberley Regional Plan is well into the drafting stage and comments would be welcomed from the public, including ourselves, when the paper is made available.

After lunch we headed off in calm waters south-east for an hour to Coronation Island. The basalt precluded any aboriginal cave paintings being seen. We sailed into very protected waters and made a mud landing on a beach on Coronation Island. The tide was out and we trudged through the mud to make the usual change from our wet shoes into our dry ones and out of our life jackets - yet again - but gladly to make whatever discoveries there were in store for us. KC immediately spied a mound of an orange-footed scrubfowl - very large and active (late in the year for this mound builder). Up the beach there was another huge boab inscribed with initials, RDA, LG and a date 4.4.29. Boab carving appears to have a long tradition in the Kimberley.

KC led a party up a dry rocky creek bed through remnant rain forest. We had good sightings of a rufous fantail, spangled warbler and gerygone. Almost reached the summit when time ran out and we returned to shore. The botanists went collecting. Sailed on into the soft sunset through a passage and anchored for the night at Hardy Point.

Show and tell: Green crystals of Tourmaline (large piece) admired by Daphne, *Cassine melanocarpa* - rainforest plant with fruit; mermaid or sand dollars; Kimberley Rose (*Brachychiton viscidulus*) - gum is edible; fruit of *Pandanus aquaticus* found on beach at Coronation Island which would have washed there from mainland as it requires fresh water; *Wrightia saligna* seed - parachute seeds and sap can cause skin irritations/blindness; very rare *Hibiscus peralbus* - small white flower and only described into 1980s from Mitchell Plateau; only found around edges of rainforest. KC pleased to see rufous fantail but otherwise not many birds today; KK and Chris Done noted tracks and diggings and speculated that they could be wild pigs which are known to be on some islands and possibly Coronation Island. Luke saw two black-tipped reef sharks while he was in the dinghy whilst we were ashore.

KK spoke of the French explorers who came through this area between 1800 and 1820. They considered the botany very important and had horticulturists on board and so there are important collections in Paris (which KK has examined). Some sets of plant collections were sold to finance the voyage, therefore, many plants have a French connection with their names. The French preferred to stay further out on the coast and as a result of the French presence King was appointed for his voyage. KK read further excerpts from the journal. Anchored for the night off Hardy Point.

Saturday July 19 We weighed anchor and left Hardy Point. The wind increased again and made things a bit choppy.

We entered a large enclosed bay where it is proposed to start up a cultured pearl industry. Going to the bottom of the bay, we went ashore to three little beaches of clean sand with plenty of shells for the seekers. This bay is now known as Osprey Bay, for on many large rocks standing off the land and on a peak some 20 ft (6 m) above the water was a very well constructed osprey nest. Within it there was a single chick nearly ready to leave the nest while its parents circled about. We landed and went the way of our interest - either flora or birds, but photography was for all - multi-coloured rocks of various shapes and little bays with beautiful blue sea, probably the most photographed shot being a tall coloured rock about 20 ft (6 m) tall standing in the water with a backdrop of the nest. The *Sea Lion* sat in the background awaiting our return. Cake and tea were soon despatched by the hungry explorers. We were soon underway. Much to our pleasure, the wind and waves had abated and the temperature was rising. At 12.30 pm anchored in a bay off Boongaree Island, the object being to go ashore looking for cave paintings. No luck.

While we relaxed over lunch, the valiant Chris Done and KC explored the cliffs to the east of the beach at the head of the deep bay on the north of Boongaree Island. They found no caves of significance (although one deep cleft did sport a bat) and no rock paintings. For their efforts they returned bleeding from arms and legs. They succeeded in finding some spectacular quartz crystal veins and gardens in the lower sandstone blocks that form the cliffs above a metre or so of basalt base. We also noted a small stream of fresh water draining amongst the rocks, perhaps 200 m to the east of the beach.

We soon returned to the *Sea Lion* and cruised over to Naturalist Island where we borrowed the most helpful engineer from the Coral Princess. He took our failed toilet pump apart and removed a great wad of brown seaweed (*Sargassum* sp.) from the one-way inlet valve.

Show and tell was interrupted by several camera breaks for the wonderful sunset and also a possible cruising croc. Anchored off an unnamed island in Prince Frederick Harbour for a BBQ tea. A beautiful still night with the moon almost full.

Sunday July 20 Up at 6.15 am and away in dinghies by 7.20 am. Brown boobies feeding while we breakfasted on bacon and egg. Torres Strait pigeons seen. Now we're going to land on the beach opposite. Still blowing from SE-NE. Stronger winds now to the north according to the forecast.

After breakfast we landed in a small sandy cove surrounded by ramparts of strange shaped sandstone. Collected *Acacia delibrata*, *Sterculia quadrifida*, *Brachychiton viridiflorus* and beans of the *Canavalia rosea*. Only had an hour there unfortunately. Found a ring of stones and a very old cave painting. Steamed into the mouth of the Roe

River, anchored and we all piled into the two dinghies to travel up to the confluence. By then the tide was dropping, so didn't land but came straight back; took three hours total and ended up tired and sore and hungry. Saw many birds, including several species of raptor, and rock wallabies and about 24 crocs at least. Had travelled 38 km up river, 11 in the dinghies. Alex had to up anchor and steam further out as the tide dropped. Our feet were in water all the way as the Zodiac was leaking. Spotted and photographed a small group of grey teal, 12 in all, got very close; they weren't at all afraid of us, probably never seen humans before.

Proceeded up to the Hunter River mouth, past Porosus Creek where there were the same two yachts anchored, past the Ninepin, then turned around as the tide was at its ebb. At 4.30 pm were anchored off the beach at Naturalist Island and settled in for the night. A busy, interesting day, as always.

Had a happy socializing on the top deck as the sun set in a blaze of crimson and the full moon rose over the cliff opposite - all admiring the sight. A balmy, warm evening. Our final meal was a merry one with speeches of thanks to all who had made this such a successful and enjoyable expedition. We were briefed on the procedures for tomorrow when we fly out.

Monday July 21 Very little sleep was had by any as an easterly gale blew up gusting to 40 knots, and those on the top deck were almost blown off. The strong winds and the late arrival of the incoming party delayed the helicopters' arrival at Naturalist Island. This resulted in the last flight out from Mitchell Plateau arriving in Broome just prior to sunset. An informal dinner was held at the Continental Hotel to celebrate our safe return from an amazing voyage.

BIRD AND OTHER NATURAL HISTORY OBSERVATIONS

Although we did not expect to see large numbers of bird species on this trip, we did hope for some unusual sightings and were not disappointed in this respect. In all, we saw a total of 84 species.

Large nesting mounds of orange-footed scrubfowl were examined on Naturalist Beach and at Coronation Island. It was explained that when temperature in the mounds reach around 33 degrees the birds dig a tunnel into it for the female to lay eggs. Like the mallee fowl, on emergence the chicks are completely self dependent.

We saw an excellent variety of birdlife in the region of the "Mermaid Tree" at Careening Bay, due to fresh water in the creek. These included varied triller, northern rosella, little shrike-thrush and northern fantail. Pied imperial-pigeon were recorded here, as well as on the island near the mouth of the Roe River where we went ashore. On the last morning Chis Done and I saw a flock of about 60 of these birds at the entrance to the Hunter River.

The migratory movement of square-tailed kite in the Kimberley is not well documented and are considered to be uncommon in the area. We saw one at Mt Waterloo near the ruins of Joseph Bradshaw's "never to be" cattle station and another in the crocodile infested upper reaches of the Roe River.

The King Cascades area has some of the best diversity of birdlife in the Prince Regent Reserve. There are always surprises at this spot. A raptor seldom seen in the Kimberley is the pacific baza or crested hawk. While walking back from the cascades, good views were obtained not only of two of these birds flying and at rest, but also of a spangled drongo harassing them. Black grasswren sightings had been ordered by everyone - especially Susan Clarkson, who had failed to see them on the 1995 Landscape Expedition to Backsten Creek. We found six of them about a kilometre from the cascades, in habitat they like best - a boulder strewn gully of desiccated King Leopold sandstone. Not only did everyone have excellent observations, but as a bonus a family of variegated wren were seen with them.

We recorded rufous fantail in thick vine thicket on the Coronation Islands and the mainland near Bat Island. The sightings of this beautiful flycatcher was at the western extremity of their range and consequently are interesting distribution records. Two beach stone-curlew were disturbed when ashore on the small island at the mouth of Prince Regent River (most beaches on our trip had their tracks). Red-headed honeyeater, some males in breeding plumage, were in abundance in the mangroves near the landing at Mt Waterloo.

While anchored at sunset off Hardy Point, we had a call from the *Coral Princess* at Careening Bay, as they were seeing hundreds of red-tailed black cockatoo flying to the mainland from the Coronation Islands. When at Careening Bay three days earlier (on the morning of 15th), we had seen the unusual sight of hundreds of these birds streaming in the opposite direction - from the mainland across to the Coronation Islands. We surmised that there must be a good food source for them to make this trip each day. It would be interesting to know just what it was, as cockatoos are often seen island hopping. When in Rothsay Waters we saw between 200-300 little corella feeding on an island.

On a small rocky island in York Sound, an osprey stack contained one almost fully fledged youngster. It was apparent that this nest had been used over many seasons. Nearby on the mainland was an old disused nest. At anchor off Keraudren Island, we saw another large stack being used as a roosting platform.

Some of the most interesting birding on the trip was in the upper reaches of the Roe River, that is when people were able to lift their eyes from the crocodiles watching. There was an abundance of the heron family. Nankeen night heron were plentiful and we saw the occasional pacific and white-faced heron. At one time up to eight striated (or mangrove) heron flew in front of us. Egrets, including quite a few eastern reef egret, were also to be seen. As we proceeded up-stream, white-quilled rock pigeon with the distinctive white markings showing in their wings,

frequently took to the air with a clapping of wings or landed on rock ledges along the sandstone cliff faces. For some time an inquisitive white-bellied sea-eagle followed above. Waders seen were - whimbrel, an eastern curlew and a well camouflaged common sandpiper perched on a rock ledge, its colour almost indistinguishable from its surrounding.

The tidal section of the Roe River, like other rivers in this part of the Kimberley (mangrove lined with two fast flowing tides a day), is always clouded with sediment and not the ideal place to find waterfowl like ducks. Therefore, an unusual sighting was a tight cluster of twelve grey teal, which were reluctant to fly, appearing to be frightened and unsure of themselves. In dinghies we approached them to within a few metres. They paddled in front of us to the mangroves, which they entered and then vacated again for the open water. These birds did not appear fully mature and were many kilometres from suitable habitat. We could only conclude they had lost their way. There has been a very good rainfall in the Kimberley this year and waterfowl generally have dispersed away from their normal haunts and bred over a much wider area.

MAMMALS

Short-eared rock wallaby (*Petrogale brachyotis*) were seen on several occasions. The best views (where everyone saw them), were on rock ledges along the Roe River. There were also some good sightings in Walker Valley at Hanover Bay, where the explorer George Grey set off for the first inland exploration of the Kimberley in 1838. Hanover Bay is where the type specimen of short-eared rock wallaby was collected.

On the walk back from King Cascades, a large common wallaroo (*Macropus robustus*) unhurriedly made its way up a sandstone embankment. It may have been the subspecies *woodwardi*. Tracks and scats of northern quoll and rock rats were at most places.

From the *Sea Lion* approaching Hardy Point, we were lucky to see a black dingo (*Canis familiaris dingo*) on a beach, where there were fresh turtle tracks. We surmised it may have just finished breakfasting on turtle eggs. Ashore on the beach near Bat Island, where a number of flat-backed turtle had recently nested, two nests had been excavated by dingo. On this beach was found a good specimen of an unusual shell (*Pterynotus bednalli*), considered to be rare. This shell belongs to the Muricidae or Murex family.

At least three Irrawaddy dolphin were in the Prince Regent River and some distant humpback whale surfaced toward Coronation Island.

REPTILES

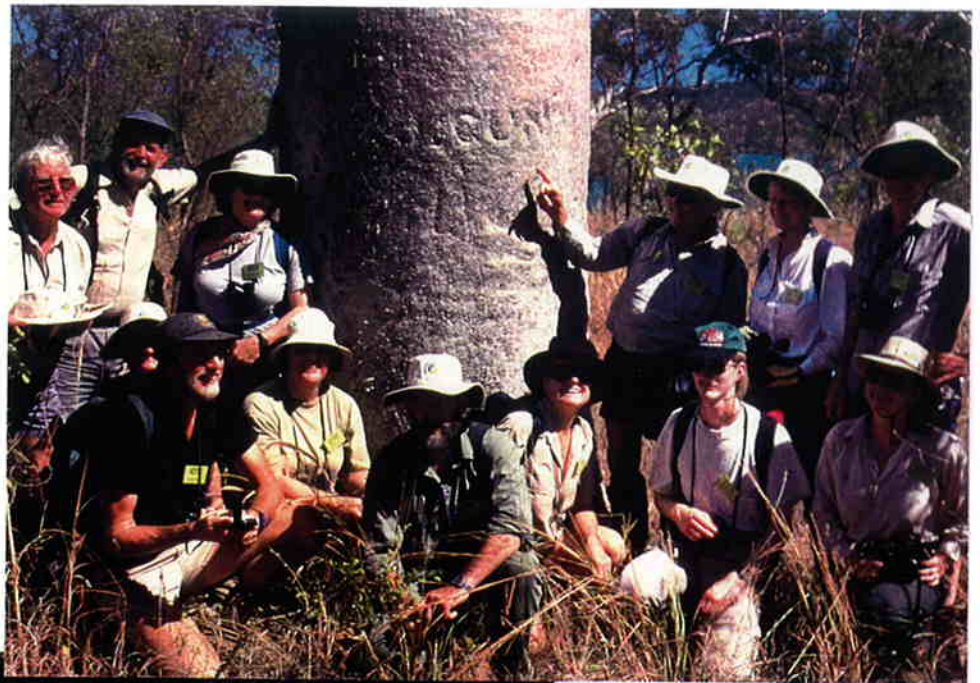
Two large pythons discovered by Bevan on the mainland near Bat Island, were coiled up on a rocky ledge of a cliff face at the back of a patch of dense vine thicket. Investigation to further determine the species, was deterred by the thorny nature of the vegetation.

Flat-backed turtle were seen on several occasions in the rivers and estuaries. Salt water crocodiles were frequently observed. In a small bay near the entrance to Rothsay Waters, we had the company of a 3.5 metre crocodile for most of the evening. (It was here, one attacked a zodiac three years ago.) The highlight of our day to the upper tidal reaches of the Roe River, was seeing 28-30 crocodiles, several of them large. We wondered how many were hidden in the muddy waters and at the back of the mangroves. There have always been many crocodiles in the Roe River, but on this trip there was indication of a dramatic increase in their numbers.

Several water monitors were seen and thought to be either Merten's *Varanus mertensi* or Mitchell's *Varanus mitchelli*.

Kevin Coate

Expedition members at the "Gunn Tree", Prince Regent River Nature Reserve



Heading ashore at Hanover Bay

The horizontal waterfall in Talbot Bay

