

Adventure out



Journeying through time and space at Geikie Gorge National Park

Geikie Gorge National Park (Danggu), located 25 minutes from Fitzroy Crossing, is recognised as one of the best places in the world to view limestone reefs or cliff systems. An event to launch the newly appointed tourist vessel, the *Ms Casey Ross* provided DBCA audio-visual production officer Shem Bisluk with the opportunity to experience this magnificent part of the world and hear about its fascinating history.

by Shem Bisluk



Warm light from the late afternoon sun projects itself onto the large, limestone rock formations, painting the landscape in rich tones. The still, calm water reflects both the sky and gorges above, and is disturbed only by the movement of the newly appointed tourist boat in which I'm travelling as part of its launch event. There's an overwhelming feeling of tranquillity here, and yet you can sense the history and culture of this sacred area, as though the ancient stories of the Danggu Dawangarri people, the traditional owners of the area, are being whispered through the stillness.

Located in Geikie Gorge National Park (locally known as Danggu Geikie

Gorge National Park), the gorge has been carved by the Fitzroy River Crossing and boasts some of the most spectacular examples of limestone reef and cliff systems in the world. I was charged with documenting the launch of a new Parks and Wildlife Service vessel that guides visitors through the gorge – a daunting assignment, as no photos or footage I've ever seen do justice to this spectacular and awe-inspiring landscape.

MAIDEN VOYAGE

The new vessel – commissioned and operated by Parks and Wildlife Service – can accommodate 88 guests and two crew members. It leaves from a newly erected boat ramp in the national



Main The *Ms Casey Ross* guides visitors through the stunning Geikie Gorge National Park.

Photo – Jesse Murdoch/DBCA

Inset top and inset bottom Friends and relatives of Ms Ross gathered to celebrate the launch of the new vessel.

Photos – Shem Bisluk/DBCA



See more of Geikie Gorge National Park (Danggu)

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.



park, which is a short drive from Fitzroy Crossing and is accessible by two and four-wheel drive vehicles. Built in Perth by Cordina Marine, this vessel replaces the department's longest serving vessel, *Miss Geikie 2*, which has been in operation since the early 1990s.

Like its predecessor, the vessel guides visitors down the Fitzroy River, providing guests with an opportunity to spot wildlife, such as wallabies, and birds such as sea eagles, broilgas and rare purple-crowned fairy-wrens, while being awed by the changing colours and forms of the gorge walls. One side of the river is fringed by sandbars with Melaleuca trees, where freshwater crocodiles can occasionally be spotted sunning themselves. On the other side, the multi-coloured rock formations soar towards the sky and frame the landscape beautifully. There's a honeycomb effect, created by sand being buried by both floods and river currents. And every now and again you see a cave-like structure nestled between the water's surface and the underneath of the rocks, which appears to go deep inside the water. The landscape is truly breathtaking and the vessel itself is impressive, and certainly provides a comfortable way to spend an hour. But, for me, what's really special about this whole experience is learning the history of the vessel's name.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The vessel has been named the *Ms Casey Ross*, after the matriarchal leader of the Danggu muway or clan when the national park was first created in 1967. At

the launch of the *Ms Casey Ross*, Ms Ross's daughter, Mary Aitken, together with other Bunuba people, gave a stirring welcome to country and shared her mother's story, which in turn became her own.

Mary held back tears as she spoke at the launch about how her mother believed that life was one big circle, and that her spirit lived on and she would never leave this special place. She said Ms Ross would be proud to see Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together in partnership to maintain cultural values in all national parks and conservation reserves on Bunuba country and described how her mother was a strong custodian of her culture.

Later she gave those aboard the *Ms Casey Ross* a commentary of the landscape. She explained that the Danggu Dawangarri stories weren't intended for either men or women in particular, but rather, could be shared with children and future generations. She recalled how when the river flooded many years ago, her uncle built a raft and crossed the water, and was the only person to do so. She also described how Ms Ross had forged an enduring friendship with park senior ranger Ron Holland.

It was certainly humbling to be present for such an important event and to be given a special insight into the beauty and magic of this area. It's such a gift to visitors that, as traditional custodians of the land, the Danggu Dawangarri people want to share their story and their connection to the land which dates back to the Dreamtime.

Do it yourself

Where is it? Geikie Gorge National Park (Danggu) is 20 kilometres north-east of Fitzroy Crossing.

What to do: Canoeing and kayaking, gorge boat tour, bushwalking, fishing, Indigenous tours.

Facilities: Toilet, visitor centre, boat ramp. Geikie Gorge boat tours operate daily from 1 May to 16 October.

Cost: \$45 adult (16 years and over), \$32 concession, \$12 child (six to 15 years), \$100 family (two adults, two children). No fee for children five years and under.

Tours can be booked online. For information and bookings visit parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/event/geikie-gorge-boat-tours

Above left The stunning geology of the gorge can be enjoyed from aboard the *Ms Casey Ross*.

Above DBCA Parks and Wildlife Service staff were on hand at the launch to provide visitors with information about the park.

Below The new vessel guides visitors down the Fitzroy river.

Photos – Shem Bisluk/DBCA



Shem Bisluk is a DBCA audio-visual production officer. He can be contacted on (08) 9724 6170 or by email (shem.bisluk@dbca.wa.gov.au).