

The Kimberley Coast trip is happening 11 years on...we've been wanting to get back to this part of the country since our magical road odyssey of 2007 but time, distance and other commitments (life, that is) have kept us away. Now it's time to do the craggy coastline by ship, Darwin to Broome.

Day 1. Sunday 5 August.

The Kimberley adventure is off to a good start. Craig arrived 2 minutes early, alleviating D's timing worries (and scoring some brownie points). Smooth flight to Sydney and a twenty minute walk to the Mantra Hotel then a train trip to Central to catch up with Phil and Helen.

Helen departed after one champagne, heading for the bus back to Canberra. Phil Ubered us to his pad at the rocks, and then cooked his famous pork Florentine dish derived from his travels years ago in Italy with his wife to be. A delightful, relaxed evening sharing just a couple of red wines. And Phil then arranged for the Uber back to Mascot, trusting that we will reimburse him in due course!

Grumpy alert. What is it about hotel guests that need to slam their doors late at night or early in the morning?

Day 2. Monday 6 August.

A damp morning in Sydney, but up to Darwin in 5 hours. T sat next to an older lady from Wodonga, heading for a family catchup in Katherine who shared her life story. Having breakfasted in the airport before embarking, we were somewhat surprised and bemused to be served breakfast at about 11AM – the Qantas staff were equally bemused, but later told us that they were submitting a report suggesting that something approaching a brunch be served instead (eg sandwiches rather than an omelette or yoghurt, which were our choices).

Arrived to a very warm public holiday afternoon (Darwin Cup Day). Shed the layers, then the shuttle delivered us to the Ramada Zen Quarter overlooking the working end of Darwin Harbour. Views are not inspiring, but pleasant nonetheless. The lap pool was a boon, and it was cool rather than tepid. A couple of beers before dinner, which we've decided to have in the hotel cafe. Overhead fans are whirring, but delightful to not be in airconditioning.



Day 3. Tuesday 7 August.

Apparently the stressful journey from Canberra to Darwin deserves a rest day – but all part of the package.

An omission from yesterday. On our Uber trip from Phil's Pad to the airport, the driver was distracted and was within centimeters (T has developed a sense of measurement from familiarity with fabrics) of rear-ending a car in front at some speed. It was T's 'Oooow' that alerted him to brake heavily and avoid the collision. Just noting that this Suzuki had very good brakes indeed.

Today was an opportunity to partly explore Darwin on foot, limited of course by our feet and the heat. But high on T's agenda was a visit to a fabric shop. It was not possible to get across on the ferry to the Tiwi Islands on a Tuesday, so a shop on the Esplanade would have to do. But first, there was a letter needing the Post Office and on the way there, T noticed a shop sign for Cloth. D said he'd fill in time in the camping store, T crossed over to the Air Raid Arcade and found Anna Reynolds, textile artist. T was having a deja vu moment...she had previously met Anna in a shop in Hesse St, Queenscliff (about 18 months ago). It had been a Sunday morning, T had been peering through the closed shop window, Anna arrived to do something in the shop and invited T in. At that time, Anna said how she was closing down and going north. Well, here she was in Darwin, things were going really well and, with cutting shears in hand, today Anna talked non-stop about her sometimes rocky and colourful journey from artist, through deck-hand on a fishing trawler, to artist working with indigenous communities, to Batchelor College, to New York.... and she's running late with that Masters thesis...showed T the abstract (very dense academic- speak) and there's a dress to be finished for NT's Indigenous Art Festival starting later this week. Exhausting! We'll be on the Kimberley Coast by then, so will miss NT's biggest annual event!

That was followed by coffee at the Bush Traders on the Esplanade, a terrific indigenous business that provides an outlet for high quality clothing, art work, fabric and accessories in conjunction with the cafe. Luckily, a purple frock had been snapped up by a customer just ahead of D&T – T reckons it would have been a better fit on her, but the colour wasn't right anyway. Nice coffee, though.

A few observations of the CBD...smoking is popular and there are plenty of empty commercial premises. Perhaps the hoped-for economic boom has not happened or has been and gone? The CBD was quiet – the only incident was an apparently very drunk man being placed (actually rolled) into a Police paddy wagon.

Then a rather long walk to the Botanic Gardens, through the lovely grove above, and a short stroll around the rainforest walk.



And on our way out, we looked up to see an origami peace crane that we'd walked under and missed on our way in. It was a sort of a blessing. Our thoughts and prayers have been with and for dear friends and relatives who are grieving at this time.



Then back to the Zen, via Woolies (!!!) to buy the makings for dinner -T said we'd have prawns and pawpaw but the prawns were all from Thailand. The fresh selection was barramundi, that will be pan fried and placed on top of a Thai salad with lime juice and chilli and washed down with a crisp Rose. And there'll be potato sides (of course).

Day 5. Thursday 9 August.

Headed into Indonesian waters for some bizarre requirement to make this an 'international' journey, with two Indonesian Customs officials on board, and our passports handed over for inspection, along with visa applications (the information supposedly copied from ours onto the form was incorrect, but we decided not to make a fuss). Interestingly, the two officials were still aboard when we left Indonesian waters and entered Australian ones.

Th morning was mostly taken up with briefings on safety, zodiac operations, and optional & included tours and then a lecture on the geology of the Kimberley, which was more geology 101 than specifically about this area. It was more interesting than the gentle snores of the elderly chap sitting next to us.

Lunch was a seafood buffet outside on the 6th deck, followed by a quiet snooze.

Our fellow expeditioners are an interesting demographic (average age 70?) and it seems from the few we've spoken to so far that quite a number might be regular cruisers. There have been some

interesting life stories and experiences: but more interesting are the young staff members who have in their relatively short lives done such adventurous things. Danni is a scuba diver now living in Port Lincoln (born in Canberra, raised in Adelaide) whose main job is on a research ship investigating Great White sharks – having had stints in places like the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic, & in South Georgia involved in feral animal eradication. Ri (Rebecca) is also a naturalist who has worked around Australia and in Mexico. They are both 30-something, at a guess. Lachie (or was it Toby?) is from Sydney and has taken off three weeks from his Honours year to be a staff member on this trip. There are 14 Expedition staff members, 13 of whom are youngish (compared to the guests) and with similarly interesting lives. Their brief introduction induced a slight feeling of envy for their lifestyle choices and opportunities. As our dining companion later commented ‘In our day, it was more like get a job and who cares about choice?’

The day was all blue...sky, sea, no land, no birds, no visible sea life, no other vessels and a different coloring at sunset.



Tonight was the Captain’s Gala Reception on the top deck. We stood around sipping Veuve Cliquot waiting for his welcome address, and introduction to key staff. The ship was rolling sideways through about 10 degrees (estimate – it might have been 2 degrees!) and quite a few folk needed to make an early exit. The pomp parade was reminiscent of the military lifestyle of our former life.

Dinner was a la carte in both restaurants for all tonight – there is a buffet most evenings in one. We were invited to join a table for 6 by a couple we’d met the night before – very surprised on getting there to discover that one of the others on the table was Dave Carpenter, who had been on the staff of Staff College at Queenscliff in 1985 when D was a student.

So we sailed on through the night, heading for Wyndham and a day of adventures – ours to fly over Purnululu NP and the Ord River. The briefing on Wyndham tells us it's seriously dying; 11years ago we had experienced a very sad hamlet, perched on a muddy coastline , with the confluence of 5 big rivers. The rivers are still doing their thing, but since the demise of the live cattle export trade, there is nothing happening in the town. The port remains open for the two or three cruise ships, otherwise it's a port for receiving diesel and ammonium nitrate.

Day 4. Wednesday 8 August.

With the airport on the close horizon, we were treated to a mostly sound display of noisy Air Force fighters and heavy transport planes taking off and landing in the dusk and dark. Fortunately the pilots had been given a curfew (probably by their mums) and were snug back in their beds at a reasonable hour. This slight distraction by the brave warriors training for our defence did not in any way detract from the meal, which was indeed as delicious as expected – or perhaps even better.



So today is in large part waiting to board, which is from 1530. A late check out and access to the baggage room allowed us a wander into the CBD. While there, a couple of ladies checking in as we checked out assured us the journey would be fantastic. The Ramada Zen Quarter hotel has been good to us – friendly staff throughout, good bed and pillows, good facilities and close proximity to the city centre by foot. T managed to slip a quick swim in before we got our taxi to the Fort Hill Wharf – a nice touch given the music played at SWUC a couple of times.



Needless to say, the process of boarding L'Austral was drawn out, but painless. We have joined 221 others on this trip, mostly Aussies, but some Kiwis, French, Japanese, Danish, English and British. Staff number 155, so a good ratio – better than at our schools! Once on board, we received the mandatory briefings on where everything is, security and safety, delivered in both French and English, introduced (aaargh) by the theme from The Love Boat. Departed Darwin at around 7 PM with a glorious sunset.



Dined a la carte and both chose the barramundi – three nights in a row! This version had a mussel sauce over it, which slightly overwhelmed the fish, but in a pleasant way. After dinner,

some soloists provided music- while voices were good, they were unfortunately passed through a karaoke system, so were over whelmed by digital accompaniment.

The ship rocked and rolled a bit like we do these day – a gentle motion to each side and a bit of a sigh. Unlike us, it did it all night. D slept soundly, T less so.



Day 6. Friday 10 August.

Sailed all night to Wyndham through the Cambridge Gulf. Docked around 6 AM, with no commitments until 9.15, so a leisurely breakfast and blog catch up. The port sees very little traffic and visitors see mud but the whistling of the kites soaring above was a welcome.

On the bus at the appointed time for the two hour trip to Kununurra airport, longer than usual because of multiple roadworks, where we boarded our Cessna 208 propjet Caravan aircraft for the two hour flight over the Ord River, Argyle Dam, Bungle Bungle Ranges and the Argyle Diamond Mine, with snapshots of the surrounds of Kununurra.

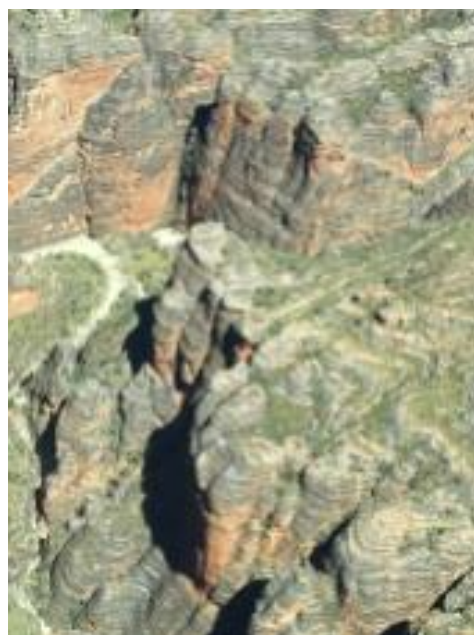


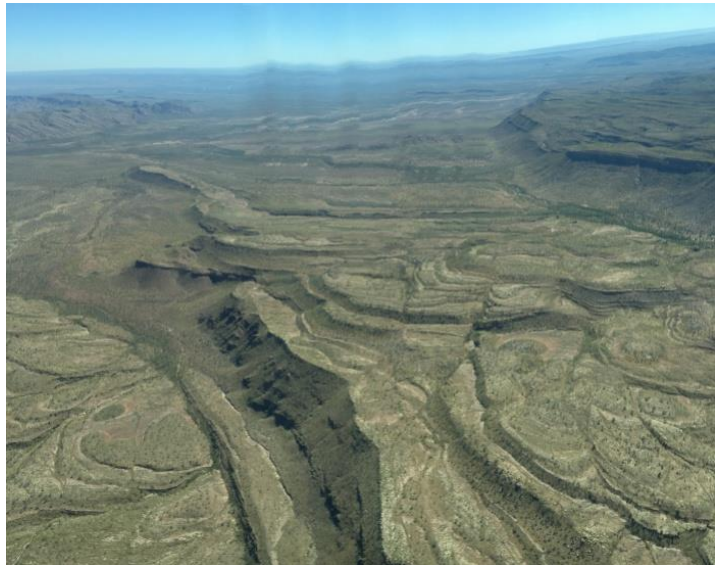
The produce gardens – melons, quinoa, bananas, mangoes, sandalwood trees – and more, were particularly impressive.



We had an aerial overview of Kununurra, but didn't get into the town. Passed over the lake, where we'd stayed in 2007 in the caravan park and The flyover of the Ord River was a much easier journey than our three day canoe ride in that year – and it wasn't raining!

The aerial views did not disappoint and T ran her phone/camera battery below 20%. Flood plains gave way to the 'inland sea' which is Lake Argyle, then long wave-like folding ranges, to the beehives of Purnululu. 2 hours of Pure magic!





Slightly less than two hours on the bus back to the ship, marveling at T's almost favorite tree the Boab.



We followed up our day of sitting down with a short walk into the closest part town, keeping an eye out for hungry crocodiles. This part contains the Courthouse, Police Station, the old hospital and a few houses and several commercial enterprises of indistinct purpose. We recalled coming to Wyndham in June 2007 and at that time chatting to a young woman who had opened an art gallery. She specialized in printmaking and we bought a little piece with the boab tree image; her story had been one of going far from home to 'find herself' and it reminded us of our Jo who had gone to the UK. That gallery is no longer here. In fact the only retail outlets are a video shop and a cafe (both closed at 4pm). The motel (no longer in use) appeared in the recent TV series 'Mystery Road', something that the coach driver spoke about at length this morning. He had been delighted to have had a screen role.



The commercial and main part of this dying town is to south, at Three Mile, so called because...yes. The town as a whole is somewhat depressing, with little sign of activity, hardly surprising as the total population is now less than 700 people. However, Keith the bus driver, ex-pharmacist, loves living here and after 47 years, still can't get enough of the beauty. He pointed out the 'work camp/detention' facility and the alcohol drying-out facility – D is not sure what T's dig in his side signified.

The afternoon concluded with a fellow passenger telling a long and fascinating family story of Wyndham.

This may be the last post until Broome, on 18 August – but we'll try.

On the High Seas

Internet connection will be intermittent and definitely expensive for the duration of our expedition, so posts will be rather random.

Day 7. Saturday 11 August

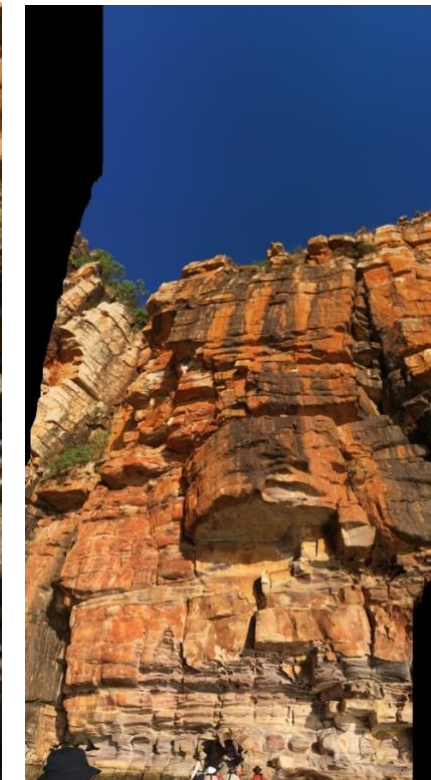
Another perfect morning: turquoise water, pink rock walls, but we are not alone. T had been marveling at the sense of 'owning the space' till D pointed out the presence of a neighbor at anchor. Of course there had to be, since this is 'the season'. But it doesn't feel like a Saturday without the word quiz that characterizes normal Saturday mornings as D&T race each other for the 11 letter challenge.

The first expeditioners of the day were in zodiacs and off to explore the King George River at 7 AM. We take the afternoon trip, hoping that the sun on the gorge face will be strong.

After breakfast, T ventured into the handkerchief-size pool for 'running practice' (her alternative to the stretch class, for which she has no Lycra). Then a short film about the maritime incident of 1942 in which the cargo & passenger ship Koolama was bombed, disabled, repaired and then bombed again, having limped up to Wyndham with a handful of crew after 'serious tension' between captain and senior officers. Yesterday we had been told by the bus driver that a ship was resting at the end of Wyndham jetty: today we learned the story through an ABC documentary 'Malice or Mutiny: The Koolama Incident', in which survivors, and relatives of both the Captain and the First Officer spoke of the incident. Multiple truths, various intents, interpretations, high emotions, jealousy, compassion and fear...a great story. But what is the real truth?

Another lunch – spoilt for choice – the cruise promised a French influence and it has delivered.

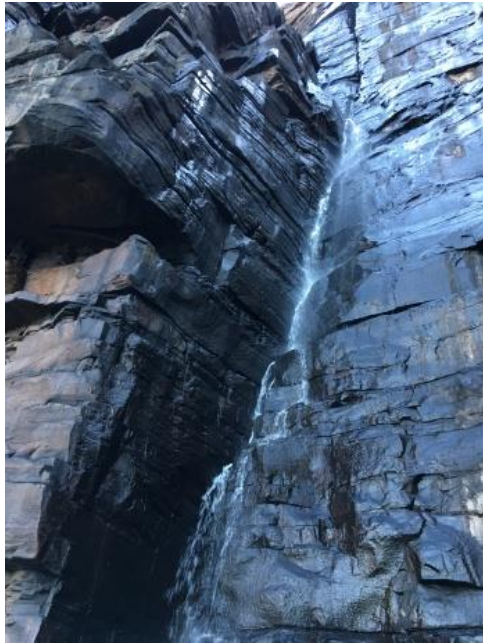
Onto our zodiac at 2 PM, captained by Lachie, the Honours university student who has ducked three weeks of his course to be here. Who wouldn't? He later disclosed that he'd also taken a year off to follow his passion, which was all wildlife, but particularly birds.



The Wharton Limestone walls of the gorge are many colored: the reds of the Iron Oxide (aka rust), the black of the algae, the purple of the Manganese, and the white of recently exposed limestone and deposits of guano. The colours changed in intensity and hue as the sun dropped. Hardy trees – little more than twigs – cling to the rock faces, probably seeded there by a passing bird. There were occasional splashes of green growth on the sheer walls, as well as abundant lush growth on rock falls, nurtured by the nutritious iron content.



Our first stop was a Koolama Cove, where the ship had been beached and the crew put ashore. Nothing there to indicate what had happened, but the landscape and scrub was a reminder of what they'd had to endure, particularly those who had walked the 150 kms from there to the Mission at Kalumburu. After detouring up a side gorge, on to the main falls. Two drops of about 80 metres side by side, separated by a bluff. Just a trickle of water from both of them, which meant we could get right up to the waterfall face- apparently in the wet, the water shoots out tens of metres and vessels can't get within about 50 metres of where the water falls.



We were a bit surprised to see a group of people on the top – turns out it was a party led by the ship's captain, who'd undertaken the extremely difficult climb from the river to the top. One of the zodiac drivers offered a sum of money to anyone of his colleagues who'd be prepared to move the captain's zodiac from the landing place to the other side of the river. There were no takers.

As we started to depart there were two zodiacs from the ship tied up to the rock wall, dispensing champagne to one and all. As noted earlier, the blurb does promise a French experience!



By now it had passed 5 PM, so with dark falling at 5.45 PM, it was time to make the 45 minute bumpy dash back to the ship while there was still light. A convoy of about 10 zodiacs headed for home, navigation lights on as dusk arrived.

The afternoon was an opportunity to observe wildlife as well as the natural splendor. Birds sighted: a White Bellied Sea Eagle, an Osprey (and two chicks in a nest), two Pied Oyster Catchers, a Beach Stone-Curlew, an Australian Bustard, a Peregrine Falcon (which was attacking the Bustard), a Darter, a White Faced Heron, a Brahminy Kite – and two Torresian Crows. In the water: a Dugong, a pod of Dolphins, jumping fish – but no crocodiles.



Day 8. Sunday 12 August.

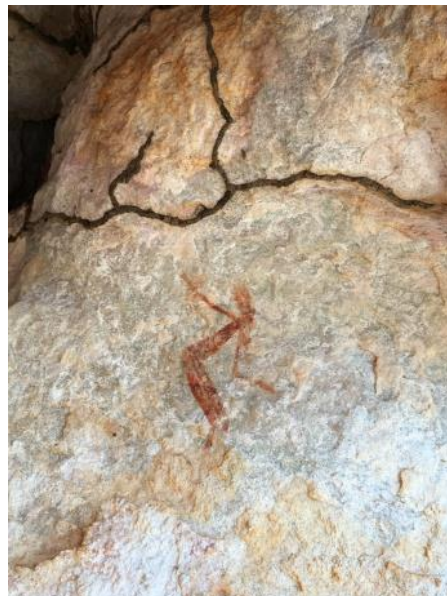
A disturbed night, partly from anticipation of an early start, partly from heavier weather as we transitted. An early wake up in Vansittart Bay as the anchors banged, rattled and creaked to the bottom and the zodiacs were off-loaded. We were in the first group to go ashore to Jar Island (so named because of the discovery of Chinese pottery shards) to have a welcome to country smoking ceremony, view the rock art and watch some traditional dances. Although cruises have visited here in the past, this was the first time the traditional owners from the Wandjina culture would conduct a welcome to country ceremony. And we smiled at the cultural contrast: the indigenous hosts had arrived for today's important event in shifts by helicopter.



Because there were more welcomers than expected, the day's programmed activities were delayed by half an hour, which meant nothing to many, but resulted in the cancellation of this evening's wine tasting function. We weren't going anyway.

The zodiacs ferried us the couple of hundred metres from ship to shore, in quite a significant swell. We'd been advised to wear spray jackets – good advice as there was plenty of spray in both directions: T copped it going in, and D had his turn on the return.

The rock art is in what was called the Bradshaw style after the grazier that found it, but is now usually described by its indigenous name as the Gwion Gwion style (the name derives from a small bird with a distinctive call that sounds like 'gwion'). It's origins are unknown, as there is no evidence of cultural continuity : the Wandjina, now the traditional owners, disown this art, describing it as 'rubbish art'.





We'd heard about the mystery of this art: unknown artists, unknown culture, age anywhere between 17000 to 40000 years old, regarded as the oldest depiction of humans in the world. The

elongated figures wear long stripped grass garments, tasseled headdress, bracelets, and are painted in fine detail with some kind of brush.

A visit to a crashed WWII aircraft is on offer in the afternoon, but there is a lack of enthusiasm, due the strengthening winds forecast to be up to 30 km/hour, and with an even heavier swell. Being the hardy adventurous types, we'd both decided to go anyway: the zodiac rides are a lot of fun. It turned out that the wind died down, making the trip quite pleasant. The wreck of the aircraft just reinforced D's views about the unnatural nature of man's attempts to fly. The good news is that all crew and passengers survived the crash landing, in better condition than the aircraft.

As we arrived at the site, the 'boys' re-enacted the crash story, to the background commentary of a Movietones announcer of the era. Very funny amateur theatrics!

Tonight is the All White Night for dinner: needless to say, we have nothing that is all white, nor even the allowed alternative of black. It coincides with the Officers Dinner, an opportunity to mix and dine with the ship's officers. T reckons we've done more than our share of 'officer dos'(and we are yet to be invited to join the Captain's table).

Day 9. Monday 13 August.

The ship (luxury yacht, if you please) makes all sorts of noises as it transits overnight: the rushing of the sea, the hum of the engines and generators, the rattle of the balcony screens, the flushing of the vacuum toilets and the occasional sounds of people movement in the corridor or overhead. Just what you need when you have a 6.30 start for a zodiac ride up the Hunter River.

We arrived in Prince Frederick Harbour, at the mouth of the Hunter River at a bit after 6 AM. Pretty much on time we boarded our zodiac, piloted by Rebecca, aka Re, one of the naturalists. Like all of the expedition crew that we've met so far, she has an interesting life story. She's keen to stay on the ship for the next voyage, but has to check with her boss, difficult to do with such limited, slow and intermittent satellite internet. The other complication is that if she does stay on she'll be away from her partner for 3 months, and she's not sure how that will go down! Her speciality is marine animals, in particular sharks, and her work has taken her to places as diverse as Mexico and Fiji – and Australia, of course.

Spotted several crocodiles on the two and a half hour expedition, including one 'adorable' baby. Also spotted were an Eastern Osprey, two Western Reef Egrets, two Grey Plovers and two Striated Herons. The mangroves were remarkable, more so as we learned of their role in the ecology and in providing a nursery for young marine animals. The Life of Pi was brought to mind as we passed one section of mangroves that the high tide had created what looked like a floating island.



A short turn around for coffee and pastries and we were back on the zodiacs for the quick trip to the beach where the helicopters would pick us up and deliver us to the Mitchell Falls. There were two elements of this cruise that we were particularly focussed on: the Bungle Bungle Ranges and the Mitchell Falls. As we've recorded, the first on the bucket list was outstanding. We are pleased to report that this adventure was equally fulfilling and perhaps more so.

D is not a fan of flying – helicopters only make his phobias worse (about flying – the others stay the same). There were three seat options: front, next to pilot; rear, in the middle of three; or rear on the outside, with no doors.





T commandeered the front seat and a Frenchman who had greater fears than D grabbed the middle seat. This was not a good start, but the sight of the Frenchman's white knuckle, vice-like grip on the central pillar was a boon for D, as he was able to lord it over this scaredy cat. In the event the flight was smooth and the vista over the harbour, the Hunter River, the Mitchell Plateau and the Mitchell River was magnificent. We flew over several birds: T identified a Sea Eagle, D a (probable) Brahminy Kite, and we weren't able to positively identify two long-necked white birds, probably some sort of Ibis. And again we saw two Torresian Crows.





We were off-loaded for about an hour at the falls. A reasonable trek along a rocky path took us to a viewing platform where we could appreciate the beauty of the falls. A man from Adelaide, who was on his way to see his son in Meekathara, said he'd been there for an hour just soaking up the experience. When asked how he'd got here on his way from A to M, given that it was somewhat indirect, he said he'd just taken a wrong turn at Alice Springs. That is a very significant, let alone intentional, wrong turn! There is access to the falls off the Gibb River Road, and there were two couples who'd driven in and were spending a couple of nights in the area – our pilot had told us that there is a four kilometer walk in from the camp ground.



By the time we were zodiac-ed back to the ship, the two restaurants had closed, so we'd now missed breakfast (early start) and lunch (late return). And to add to our hunger woes (warning: first world problem alert) we could only have the 24/7 Room Service in our room rather than in the outdoor deck area with our fellow flyers in the same plight. So that's what we did. The meal was delivered by a Filipino waiter, a reminder that our indulgent cruise was being serviced by workers from The Philippines, Indonesia and the like, all on 10 month continuous contracts, working 10 hour days, no days off, involving separation from their families for all of that time, and no doubt on wages that we'd not be prepared to accept. The angles on this set up are many – there are pros and cons, but we are still left with this lingering 'guilt' that why has an accident of birth given us so much advantage?

And tonight – a movie binge: *The Darkest Hour* (about Churchill at the time of Dunkirk) followed by *Paulette*, a delightful French comedy about a granny who deals hash.

Day 10. Tuesday 14 August.

Another overnight sail, and for some reason it seemed a lot quieter than the night before. Arrived in Freshwater Cove (Wijingarra Bard Bard), named (in English) for obvious reasons. The fresh water runs from several springs constantly, even through the dry. There is an aboriginal community there from the Worrorra people, although only a few permanents. The location on the beach had been set up as a premier fishing lodge, with access by float plane, but that venture has been superseded by organized tour groups to the aboriginal rock art, in the Wandjina style (a cultural belief system that includes the Worrorra, Ngarinjin and Wunambul tribes), along with sales of more recent art works, sourced from the main gallery in Derby. Wandjina is their supreme spiritual being who created the land.

We were given a traditional welcome on the beach on arrival, with a daub of red ochre. This was explained as a welcome to us, but also our undertaking to respect the land, the culture and the people.



The walk in to the cave was about 40 minutes over a mostly even path, although there were some rough patches and the last 50 metres or so were downhill, rocky and with some large steps. The art itself, which had been retouched a few years ago by an elder, was explained to us by a member of the traditional owners. They reflected stories from Dreamtime (called Lalai in this area) legends similar to other regions (and to Genesis, for that matter!). Although we were permitted to take photographs we were not given permission to share them on social media, or use them for commercial purposes.

As we left we were 'smoked' to ensure that the spirits were left behind.

A treat after lunch as a Humpback whale and her calf were spotted just ahead of the ship, and stayed on the surface as we slowly passed by, with the calf continuing to feed.

We relocated to Langgi, a fairly short distance, to go ashore to look at limestone ‘sculptures’ in Pentecost limestone that had been created by fissures in the rock being weathered away, and then the remaining rock being eroded by nature, primarily the tide. This area we visited was protected from heavy weathering influences, so had remained erect – similar structures close by had tumbled into heaps of rocks.

The rocks have a Dreamtime story attached. In this (shortened version), two of the largest rocks are a warrior and the wife of another man he ran away with (or, alternatively, he killed the husband to get his wife). They were chased by a group of warriors from the tribe and speared to earth and thus turned into stone: because the naughty warrior was a spiritual being, all the other warriors were turned into stone at the same time. A salutary tale.



Day 11. Wednesday 15 August.

A 6.15 AM departure on the zodiacs for a visit to Montgomery Reef, promised as the highlight of the expedition. The reef, hundreds of kms long is covered by 6 to 9 metres of water at high tide, but 'rises' from the sea as the tide changes. It is spectacular. The coral is adapted to cope with exposure to air, with a coating that retains moisture and protects it from the sun. Scientists are apparently experimenting with this coating to develop it for use as a sunscreen for humans.

As the huge tide was running out this morning, the reef was a series of massive waterfalls. It is now a protected area. I asked about a history of shipwrecks on the reef????



Then, a bit of excitement for us when the steering cable on our zodiac broke, so we were tillerless! Fortunately, the tide was on our side. The rescue boat arrived, but as the mechanic was unable to fix it, another boat was summoned and we transferred across and continued on our

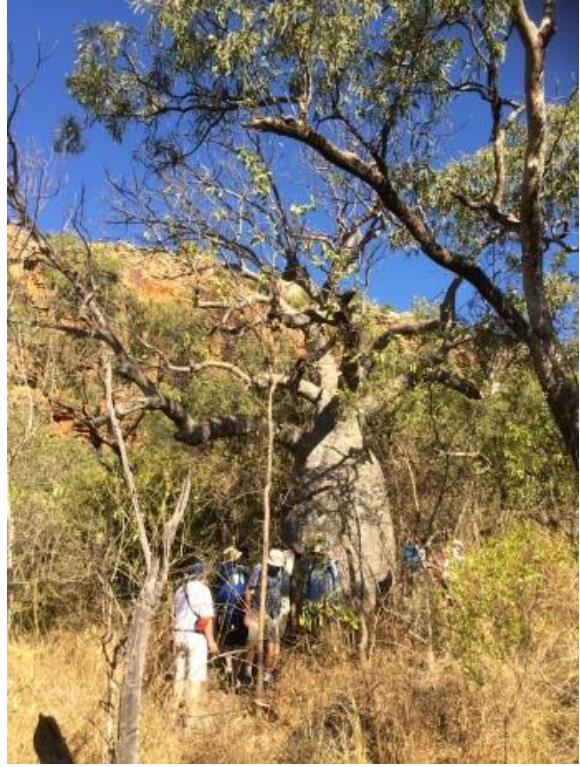
way. Our driver Jorge was apologetic, but was reassured he was not at fault: that didn't, of course, stop the ribbing from the passengers and his fellow crew members.



Although wildlife is not abundant we had many very brief sightings of green turtles as they poked their heads out of the water and quickly submerged: as they are still hunted by the indigenous people they are quite sensibly wary. Bird sightings included a White Bellied Sea Eagle and many Egrets: Western Reef, Intermediate and Great.

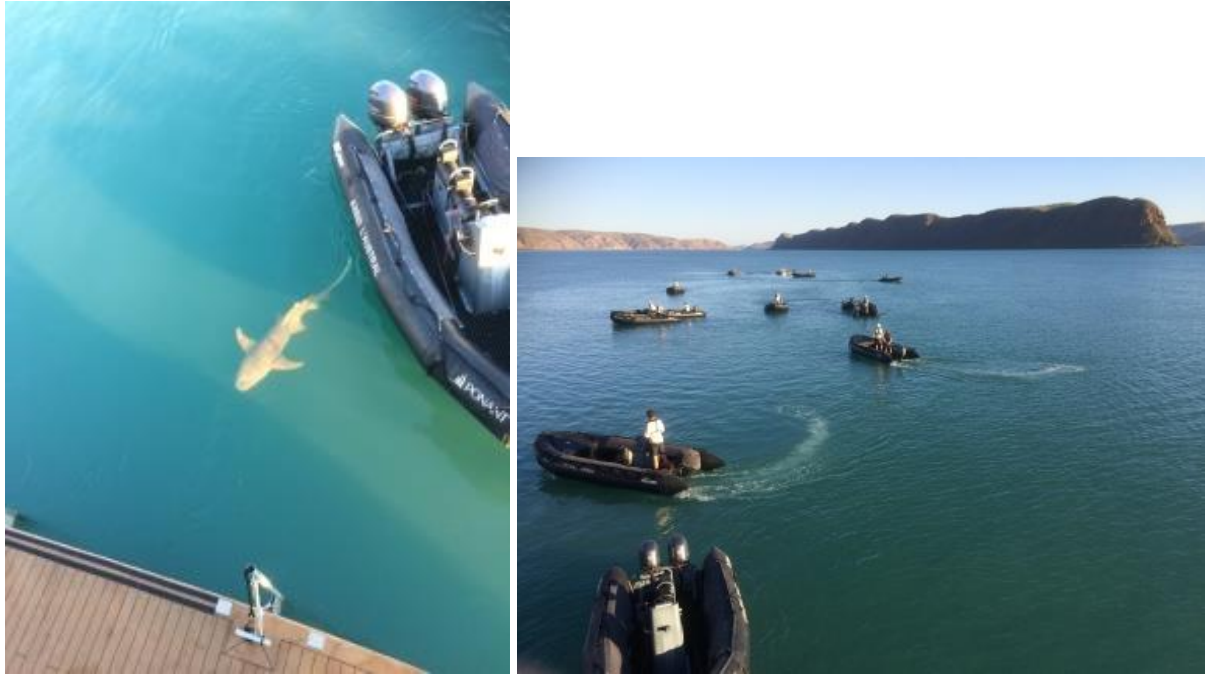
The morning concluded with a lecture on 'Rewilding', a program in the 'foot' of Yorke Peninsular re-introducing native species (quolls, barn owls, and possibly Tasmanian Devils) to environments which will predate on feral animals (foxes, rabbits, mice) in order to provide healthier, more sustainable ecosystems. Being a non-scientist, T found this fascinating in its simplicity/complexity.

This afternoon is a zodiac ride across to Raft Point and then a steep hike (for D) over rounded boulders, scree or rocks to a rock art site. T will go part way, staying at beach level, where the ground is flat and has ordered good photos from D – which again we don't have the permission of the traditional owners to use on social media.



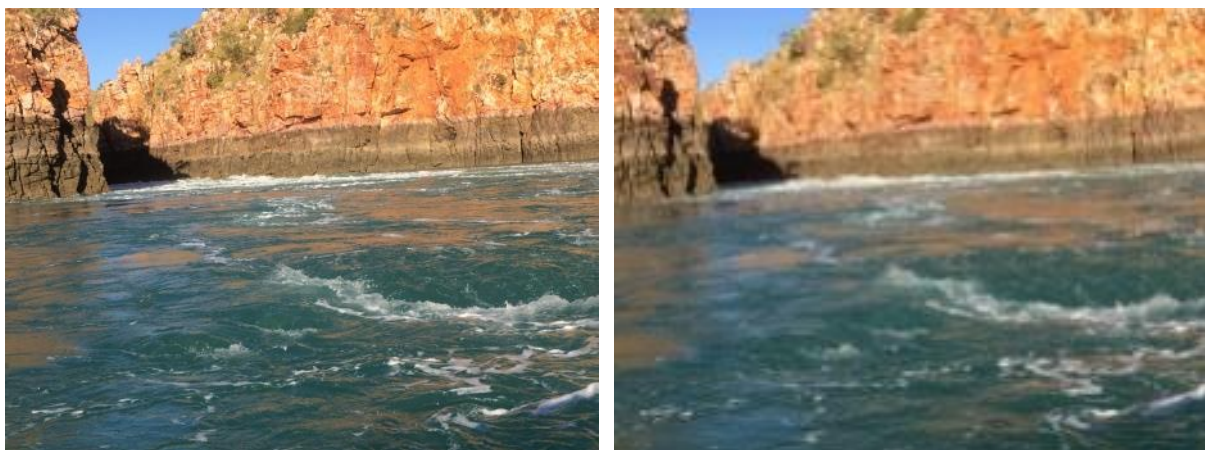
Day 12. Thursday 16 August.

D started the day with a bonus zodiac visit to the Horizontal Falls on the outgoing tide. A 2 metre visitor before the zodiacs loaded created great excitement, particularly for Re (Rebecca) and Danni, our two shark specialists in the naturalist crew.



The falls, and there are two about 300 metres apart in line, are created by the tide entering and leaving huge landlocked embayments through two narrow gaps in the cliffs of the McLarty Range. The seawater builds up faster on one side of the gaps, the massive banking up resulting in the waterfalls. The waterfalls can be as high as 5 metres apparently; we saw drops of about 2 metres and that was impressive.

The zodiacs from L'Austral took it in turns to enter the area just before the fall and face into the oncoming flow. Great whirlpools, eddies and occasional waves made the trip just a bit exciting, but the craft were remarkably stable – less bumping than crossing the choppy water we'd faced on a few trips previously. This didn't seem to matter in one boat – man overboard, although he retained his grip on the side ropes and wasn't completely immersed. The rescue boat and the tour leader's boat were there promptly!





We've shared most of the locations in the past few days with a vessel named "True North". Our safety guidelines have been explicit and comprehensive and very sensible. We've watched with horrified bemusement as people in tinnies, including children, have not bothered with life jackets or PFDs – they are mandatory for us. On one occasion we were told, a vessel was observed underway at speed with children sitting on the bow! L'Austral crew are frank in describing some other tour operators as 'red-neck cowboys'.

Perhaps the most annoying incident occurred at the falls this morning. The L'Austral zodiacs were waiting to enter the falls in turn in an orderly manner for obvious safety reasons, when three True North tinnies appeared, and when asked politely to wait a minute for a gap, just replied 'Nup' and arrogantly barged through at speed. Not a good look, True North, and definitely not a good advertisement for your business.

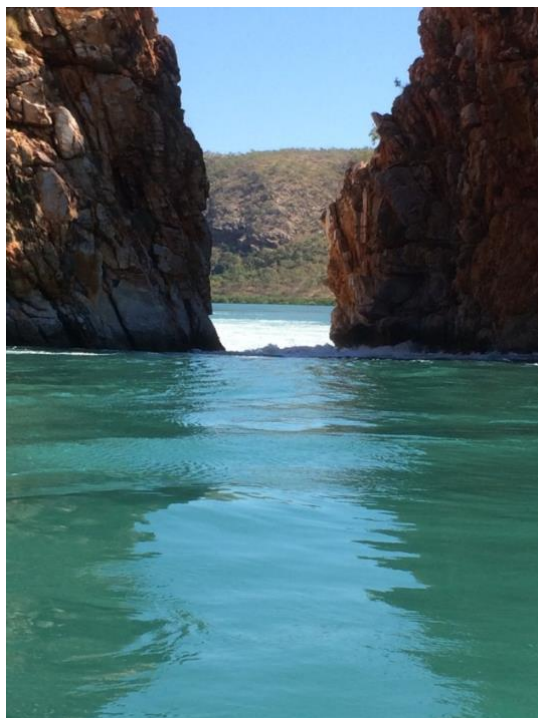
A late morning zodiac trip back to the falls and beyond for both T & D. The tide had turned, so we were now observing the water entering the bays with reverse urgency. Our zodiacs, powered with a single 60 HP motor, do not attempt to cross the waterfall, an adventure only attempted (usually) by specialist boats.

Talbot Bay was busy...seaplanes, helicopters, a couple of houseboats and a small yacht kept us company. We must be getting closer to civilization!

At the entrance to the falls we were treated to a good overview of the size and strength of the flow: in the larger gap which is 22 metres wide and 40 metres deep, a million litres of water flow in one second. During this activity another man went overboard: apparently in both cases the boat had been caught in turbulent waterfall and tipped up, throwing one person overboard and others to the floor. Sod's law that the careful and safe operation should have mishaps, but in both cases the ejectee was quickly, if not easily, hauled back on board.

After the visit to the falls we investigated other parts of Talbot Bay, specifically Cyclone Creek. We were privileged to catch several fleeting glimpses of a Rock Wallaby, plus some interesting fauna: the Kimberley Rose and an unusual yellow leaved Mangrove. The rock formations here

are very different from the flat layered sandstone which we've been seeing. Here, the layers are tilted at 80 degrees, having been forced upward millions of years ago. The scale of time is hard to take in. The effect reminds us of rock formations at Karajini, which we visited 11 years ago.



Then on to our short fast boat ride to and through the falls – although only the first, wider one, as the second, at half the width, was deemed too dangerous at that stage of the tide. So, after a bit of a look and a couple of circuits around the bay in front, we zoomed through like kids in drag cars, and zoomed back to do it all again a couple of times! Good fun, but also a demonstration of the volume and power of the water. The fast boat, carrying 40 or so passengers, was powered by four 300 HP outboard motors.

T has discovered the bikes in the gym and has been grateful for generous explanations on how to use them. Short sessions working the horrible foot give her a wee sense of dealing with a sedentary lot and the sciatica from bumping in the zodiac.

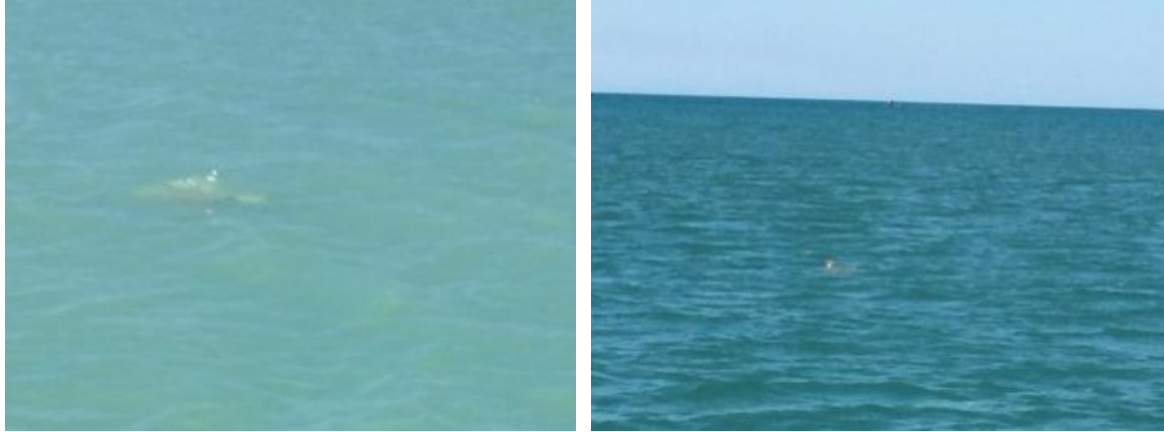
Day 13. Friday 17 August.

Whales all around for the morning! Cows And calves, pods and solos, just basking and rolling, diving and blowing. A marvelous lazy morning for passengers.

Our last expedition day – tonight we sail for Broome. We have a slow start – the first activity – actually our last – is a 2 hour zodiac trip to the Lacepede Islands leaving at 2.15 PM. We have been promised something special in this location, a protected nesting area for many species of birds. There were birds in the thousands – more than we could count. The one that pooped on T's hat made a quick getaway and was not clearly identified! We saw Brown Boobies, Crested Terns, Capped Plovers, Red Legged Stilts, Pied Oyster Catchers, Frigate Birds, Pied Cormorants and Common Gulls. The Brown Boobies, which numerically dominated, were curious about us, and flew with, across and over us for most of the time. Needless to say, the combination of moving birds and a bobbing zodiac meant that most of the photos taken were blurred!



We also saw many Green Turtles, as this is also a year-round breeding area for them. Apparently the noise of the outboard motor either doesn't bother them or they can't hear it: we could see them rise to the surface, poke their heads out of the water, see us, then immediately disappear. I took multiple shots of clear water without capturing a single picture of a turtle. This is as good as it got.



Fascinating to watch the zodiacs being winched from & to the top of the ship – an operation that occurred before and after each stop.



So tonight is the Gala Night. We don't think that we'll have the energy to be celebrating for long! The activities started with the Captain's Cocktail Party on the open deck: all the crew – marine, maintenance, room service, naturalists, cooks, stewards – 150 of them, were introduced

individually and thanked in their own language (French, Italian, Ukrainian, Polish, Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia, Spanish....and English).



Shared a delightful buffet meal after the formalities on the deck with two gentlemen from Melbourne, then finished the evening with a taste of Deck 4 entertainment: Paris Express can can dancers. In these times of PC culture, the teasing suggestiveness of the girlie lineup (with one boy) is amusing but a bit jarring. No photos.