

Mike and Margaret's Road Trip

Broome to Kununurra

We had a very pleasant 4 days in Broome during which we did the tourist things. This included having a couple of drinks watching the sun going down over Cable Beach whilst the camels traversed in front of us.



We were also fortunate to be there the night of the full moon where the "stairway to the moon" occurs as the moon rises over the ocean. Unfortunately for us the tide was out so the view was not as spectacular as it was over the sand flats rather than the ocean. The tides in Broome are about 10-12 metres so when the tide is out there are a lot of sand flats.

From Broome we headed up the Dampier Peninsula towards Cape Leveque. About 14 km from Broome the road changes to a rough gravel road for 100 km before reverting to bitumen again for the last 100km. We

travelled to the tip and stayed one night in a bush aboriginal owned camp and then headed back down before turning off to Middle Lagoon. This was 35km of gravel and sandy track but was beautiful when we got there. We stayed for 2 nights and I fished the rocks for several varieties of fish including Queenfish, Bluebone and Spanish Flag, which are prized eating fish here.



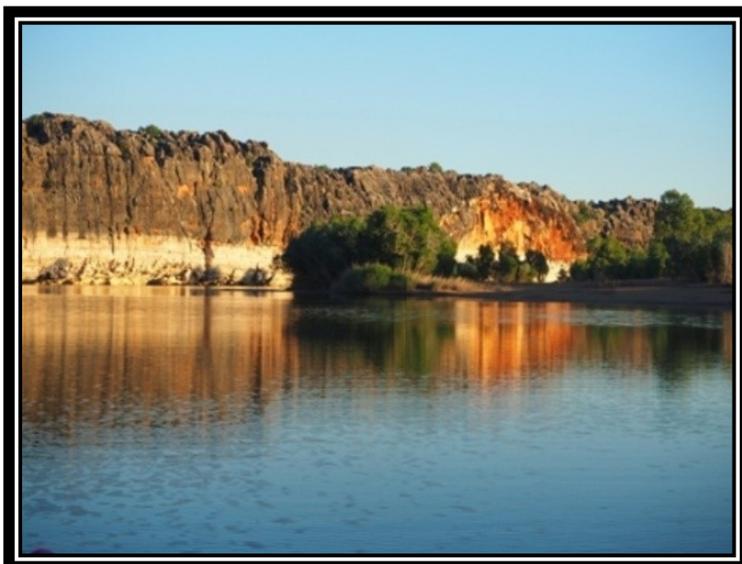


There were also spectacular sunsets here.

From Middle Lagoon, we headed back down the gravel road, which they had started to grade, to Broome again for one night before heading east towards Derby. There, we were told that Tunnel Creek, Windjana Gorge, Bell Gorge and numerous other gorges we had wished to visit on the Gibb River Road were closed due to the severe damage to the areas and the roads, caused by this year's wet season, which had the highest rainfall for many years.

Therefore, we decided it was a waste of time going along the Gibb River Road and rethought our route. We decided to use the bitumen road and visit Gieckie Gorge near Fitzroy Crossing and the Bungle Bungles then

to go to Kununurra before El Questro on the Eastern end off the Gibb River Road, which we knew was open.



We had a night at roadside stop before going to Fitzroy Crossing and Gieckie Gorge. We wanted to do the sunset cruise at Gieckie so booked into a caravan park at Fitzroy crossing before heading to Gieckie. We did a couple of walks and then did the sunset cruise which was excellent. We saw several freshwater crocodiles and the scenery was spectacular.

We moved on from there to another overnight stop called Mary pool which was lovely and whilst you are only supposed to stop there for 24 hours, like many others we stayed for 2 nights. We had intended to stay at a campground just outside Halls Creek but when we arrived it was not very nice. We had intended to stay there and go down to Wolfe crater on the Tanami Road. However, at Halls Creek we met someone who had just done that road and he said it was the worst road he had ever been on (and had not been graded for a long time) and he had stuffed a couple of tyres and managed to limp back to Halls Creek. Therefore, we decided to give the crater a miss and we carried on to another free 24 hr campsite at Spring Creek. This is at the turn off to the Bungle Bungles. Like everywhere else in this area the 24hrs rule is ignored and no-one polices it. You are really out in the sticks in this area.

We set up the van and left it being watched by others in the camp, next morning when we set off at 5.45 a.m. to go into the Bungle Bungles. The road in is gravel and there are 27 creek and river crossings each way. We left early so we could walk before it got too hot and arrived around 7.30 a.m. We went to the Southern end and did both the Cathedral Gorge and Domes Walks which were about 4-5km and spectacular. We then went to the northern end of the park and walked Echidna Gorge for about 3 km. All of these walks were grade 4 but the Echidna walk was much harder because it was all over different sized river stones.



On the way back out of the park we came across a couple who had punctured 2 tyres on a creek crossing and only had one spare. We used the sat phone to contact the RACQ but nothing could be done until the next day. The husband stayed with the car and we ran the wife back to camp where she had their van. We decided to stay the next night because we had had such a big day in the gorges. She got up early and sent food and water with anyone going into the gorges early. Around 10.a.m she had heard back from RACWA and before anyone would go out to help her husband they wanted \$1500 because the road into the Bungles is not a gazetted road. They would not send a recovery vehicle because of the creek crossings but

would drive out from Halls Creek some 100km away, pick up the wheels take them back, fit new tyres (additional cost) and then take them back out to her husband.

We decide to help her out so I drove her back out to her husband, where the creek crossing had deteriorated due to the big APT etc. buses using the road, picked up the wheels, drove them into Halls creek, where they bought new tyres (expensive in the back blocks at nearly \$400 each) and then drove them back to camp. It was late afternoon by the time we got back to camp and someone who was going out the next morning offered to take him back out to fit the wheels next day.

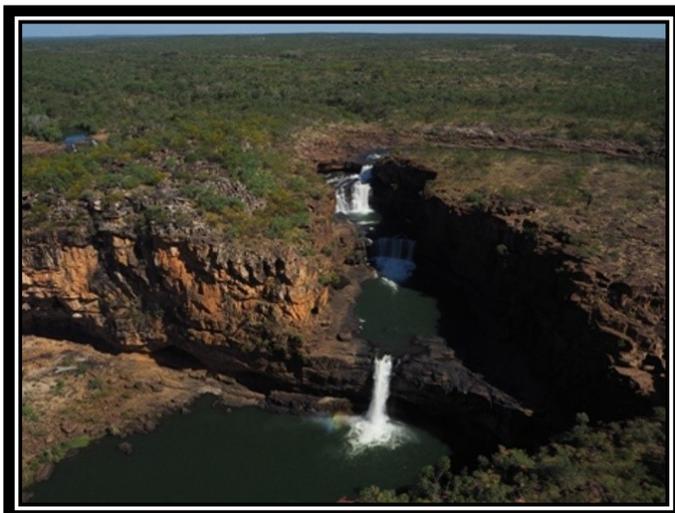
We left camp the next morning and headed into Kununurra where we needed to catch up on washing and fill up the water tanks having bush camped for nearly a week. We intended to spend about 4 days in Kununurra but finished up spending a week because we could not get onto one of the tips we wanted until the following Wednesday. We did a sunset cruise on Lake Kununurra and drove out to Lake Argyle for the day but on the Wednesday, we did a flight out to the Mitchell Falls.

Just after 7 a.m. we were in a 6 seater plane out over the magnificent Kimberley Coast and landed at the Mitchell Plateau airfield.

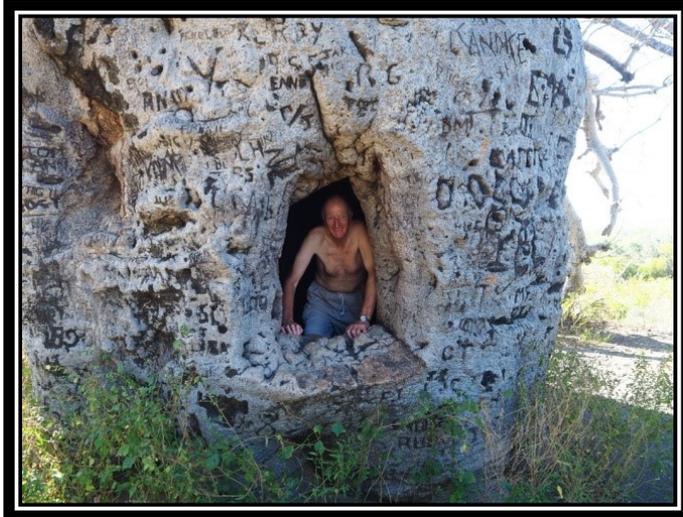


Then it was a 35 minute 4WD out to the national park where we had morning tea before starting a 4.5 km grade 5 walk out to the falls. Along the walk we stopped to see small waterfalls and aboriginal art. I was pleased I had worn my hiking boots until about half way the sole came off one foot. Fortunately, the sole stayed on the other one until the end, when it fell off too! It was very hot at around 38C and towards the end of the walk Margaret did not feel too well, along with some of the others in our group. At the river, which was about 100m wide, we waded across and then walked about 5 minutes to the lookout

over the falls, where we had lunch. At 1.30 pm we boarded the helicopter which took us on several passes in front of the falls before taking us back to the 4WD. I am glad we were not walking back! We then had the trip back to the airfield and a flight of about 1.5 hrs back to Kununurra, where we arrived home about 5.15 p.m. It had been a big day but fantastic and worth every cent it had cost.



From Kununurra we headed back west and after a relatively short drive of about 80 km camped at Parry's Creek Farm for the night. We were there early so in the late morning we drove up 20 km to Wyndham where we had lunch and went up to the 5 rivers lookout which is very interesting but hard to take a good photograph because it is a 360 degree vista over the rivers. From there we did a 16 km dirt track out to the Prison Boab Tree. This is a huge very old boab tree with a hollow centre that you can climb into and was used as a prison in the 1800's.



From Parry's Creek, we headed down towards El Questro, on the Gibb River Road. On the way, we stopped at the Grotto which is a deep gorge where someone has carved 140 steps down the side of the gorge to the river below. We took photos but did not climb down. The road out to the El Questro turn off is bitumen and then there is a 16-km gravel road into the resort which includes 2 river/creek crossings. The crossings were running about 400mm deep and did not present any problem.

We set up camp in the non-powered area because power was \$22 per day extra, and the camp site was dear enough. You could use a generator there if the solar was not giving your batteries enough charge, but we did not need the generator.

After lunch, we went to two lookouts. The first was saddle back and very steep and real 4WD using low range to get up the slope and through the rough track. The last 200m looked really awful with jagged rocks and 400-600mm drops so I walked that rather than risk my tyre. The other lookout at Pigeon Hole was steep but much easier than Saddle Back but there were nice views from both. Back at camp we met a couple we had camped next to the previous night so had drinks again with them. They were travelling in a hired 4WD with the tent on the top so we asked them if they would like to come with us the next morning on one of the gorge walks, since they would have had to pack up everything to go anywhere.

The next morning, we drove out to do the El Questro Gorge walk, crossing a 100m wide river on the way. It was 2.6km return the half way pool but a difficult walk, walking through a creek and up and down boulders etc. When we got to the pool we had a swim with the Sooty Grunter that called the pool home before heading back down the gorge. When we had reached the pool, there was a young couple who had just finished their swim and intended to carry on to the end, a further 1.2km on. However, after about ten minutes they returned saying the walk was too hard and would take too long. They had 40 years on us!

We worked out that in the last week or so we had done over 20km of difficult bushwalking.

When we got back to the car we drove around to the thermal springs and after a 5-minute walk climbed in and rested our weary bones. It was very nice in the warm water. Then it was back to camp for lunch.



After lunch I wanted to go back out to the main road and head west for awhile so I could at least say I had driven some of the unsealed Gibb River Road. We did this but suddenly the car dropped out of high range into neutral. I succeeded in putting it back into high range but it did the same thing several times on the way back to camp, culminating in doing it just as we were coming out of the Pentecost River and refusing to go back in and grinding noisily. Fortunately it would engage low range so we crawled back into camp in that. I took the car

up to the small mechanical workshop at El Questro and the mechanic tried to get it in high range but could not.

We left the next morning to head back towards Kununurra and had to use low range, which meant a top speed of around 40km/hr. We were worried that the car would stop in the middle of the river crossings but it did not. We crept back the 120km to Kununurra without incident and decided to book into the Town caravan park which is close to the shops. We had to find the Toyota dealer and fortunately he was across the road from the park. We set the van up on site and then took the car across to him, but he could only look at it the next day. He said he would call us when he located the problem.

The next day around 2 p.m. I walked over to find they had just finished pulling out the gear/transfer box and several parts were stuffed. He had just finished getting the prices for the replacement parts and when he added them up he also got a price for a complete new box. Almost the same price for the parts as the new box and there would be more labour in rebuilding the box. The problem was the parts had to come in dribs and drabs from around the country and would take a couple of weeks or the new box was from Japan and would also take 14 days. We decided to go with the new box so are now in Kununurra until it arrives and can be fitted.

I had chatted to a couple of local fishermen who had said the Barramundi were scarce now as the water was getting too cold. However, I decided I could not just sit around waiting for the car so set up a rod and went to somewhere I had been told about, only to find it was already occupied by another fisherman and it was a place only suitable for one. Therefore, I went back into the deviation dam and with the rest of the trespassers went down below the dam and started to cast a lure from the rocky bank, all the time keeping a close lookout for saltwater crocodiles which are plentiful in the area. I had been casting for about half an hour when suddenly a barramundi hit my lure, jumping out of the water. I subdued it after a short while. It was only my second Barramundi ever and the first from the shore.



This morning the refrigeration mechanic came out, as our fridge had stopped working on Friday night, so we had had to move everything into the portable fridge/freezer. Fortunately, it was only the fan that had stopped working and after installing a new fan it was OK.