

# Snail Mail



## June 2007 – A Kimberley Adventure

WOW what a month June has been – exceeding all expectations! Ginnie acted as Navigator on the 2+ hour drive to Derby from Broome. The trip was uneventful but of course we stopped for a cuppa at the historic “Boab Prison Tree” which is believed to be about 1500 years old. It was used as a staging point for prisoners being walked into Derby in the



**1 The trough could handle 500 bullocks at one time**

early days. Nearby was Mayall's Bore and Cattle Trough. The first bore at this location was dug in 1910/11. It replaced the original well sunk by Alfred Mayall in the early 1890s. The bore is 322 metres deep, had a residual head of 6 metres and cost 2,700 pounds. The cattle trough is 120 metres long and was built around 1917. The trough could handle 500 bullocks at one time. We located the One Tide Charters property where the Snail would be staying whilst we were on the water. Greg, the owner and our captain and Dylan the 'deckie', were preparing for our trip so we left them to it and drove into Derby. Our first stop was the hospital where the Navigator had 3 doctors to check out the throbbing ear infection. The right ear was so swollen it was impossible to see inside so with a script for antibiotics which was filled at the local pharmacy, we continued our quick look around town before heading back to the Gibb River Road to pack, not forgetting the large can of Bushmans sandfly/mossie spray!

Discovering the Buccaneer Archipelago with One Tide Charters - *'An experience that will touch your soul and awaken your senses.'*

**Day 1;** It was with great anticipation that we awaited our transport to take us to Derby

Wharf. Fellow passengers, Sue and Rob joined



**2 ..we waited patiently for White Lightning**

us at the property and we picked up our sixth member Dean from the Spini (Spinifex) Hotel. At the Wharf the muddy tidal waters were raging and we waited patiently for 'White Lightning' to pick us up. On the way out of the harbour we picked up some tangled fishing line on the anchor chain and had to make sure none of it had wrapped around the props of our 2 x 200 hp engines. We resumed our journey up King Sound and with wind and tide effects, were soon punching into big waves. White Lightning relished the conditions but some of the occupants were having trouble finding their sea legs and we all got a little damp. The Driver, not being a good seaman, was going a little green around the gills - the Navigator, with painkillers on board, snoozed throughout the 1.5 hours until we reached the clean, green, calm waters of the 'inland sea' for a spot of lunch. Our journey continued through Hell's Gate with its turbulent waters, across Cone Bay to Razor Beach where our tents and swags were ferried by dinghy to shore for our first campout. On our way past



**3 John is 'hooked' on fishing**

Razor Island Dylan caught us a tuna. After setting up we boarded White Lightning once more for a look at the Cone Bay Pearl Farm and then we fished. We caught heaps, and kept the largest Golden Trevallies for dinner. Greg filleted the fish and we returned to anchor off the beach for sundowners and dinner of fish seasoned with his secret mix of herbs and spices and salad. He kept us entertained with stories of past trips and imparted lots of local knowledge. After making White Lightning shipshape we piled into the dinghy and headed for shore. The campfire was the focal point for the crew although the Navigator, still in great discomfort with the ear problem, retired with more painkillers. With the moon almost full, we had plenty of light – no need for torches.

**Day 2;** With such a vast tidal range, we had to



**4 Silica Beach**

wait till 7:30 am most mornings, sometimes later, to board White Lightning. The tents were pulled down, the swags rolled and then we enjoyed a cuppa and a beach discovery walk (with shovel) before boarding White Lightning for a hearty breakfast. Back into Cone Bay, across Strickland Bay, around Hidden Island, up Margarets Passage, Goose Channel and we were in Yampi Sound. Greg stopped at Silica



**5 Looking into Crocodile Creek**

Beach where everyone got out for a swim except yours truly but Rob swam back out to the boat with a Native Hibiscus to make me feel better – aawwwh! Silica Beach has pure white, soft powdery, squeaky sand with lovely clear water and it was a beautiful spot to stay awhile but tides were always uppermost in Greg's mind when planning activities so it wasn't long before everyone was back on

# Snail Mail



board heading to Crocodile Creek. The last



## 6 ..amazing array of boating memorabilia

300 metres were by dinghy which took us to a stainless steel ladder and some concrete steps supplied by the Koolan Island mining operations people who also use this spot regularly as a getaway. An amazing array of boating memorabilia is on display here since each passing boat leaves something hanging in the steel frame used for 'campers'. The highest tides get into the bottom pool so it is possible for crocs to enter. As one can't really be sure, most people climb up the side of the cascade to the top freshwater pool for a swim. A short



## 7 Greg did the dirty work of filleting the fish

distance away at Monument Beach we set up our homes and once back on the boat we enjoyed lunch and then sped across Yampi Sound to the western end of Koolan Island (Parrakeet Channel?) for more fishing. Rob and John caught a large scarlet perch each (4-5 kgs), a large fingermark, a blue bone and snapper. Greg did the dirty work of filleting the larger fish and left Dylan to do the smaller fish while we headed back to Monument Beach to watch the sun set. Our campfires were becoming bigger and the Navigator even stayed up to have a drink before bed – the antibiotics were slowly starting to weave their magic.

**Day 3:** We were able to leave our camp set up this morning and at 7:30 am were back on board White Lightning for breakfast. On our way to Horizontal Falls we passed through The Canal with good views of Koolan Island's iron ore mine and the new ship loading facility. Near the top of the tide, Greg decided to try a shortcut through some mangroves between two islands. Unfortunately the mangroves tried

to swallow the boat so it was back out into



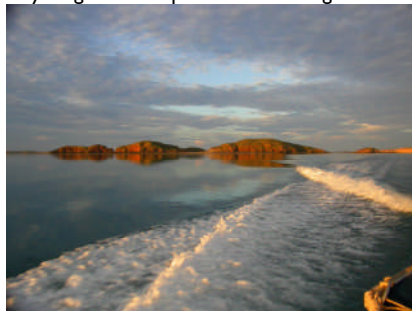
## 8 Horizontal Falls

Talbot Bay, skirting the Paspaley Pearl farm, arriving at the Horizontal Falls. We shot through the larger of the two openings (45 m deep) and had a close look at the narrower one (70m deep) which still had a metre drop and was raging. Dylan piloted us back through the



## 9 Dylan showing what the girls can do

wider falls, entering Cyclone Creek and the mini Horizontals with stunning rock upheavals towering above us. On our homeward journey we stopped in a small bay to get into some serious fishing and it was good! Greg hooked a very large scarlet perch and as it got to the



## 10 ..the last of the sun lit up the islands

surface it came off the hook. He leaned over the edge of the boat to retrieve the fish but Sue and Ginnie thought he was going to fall

overboard so Sue grabbed his legs. The fish got away – what a bugger! Greg was devastated. After that Sue and Ginnie showed what could be done by also bringing in good size scarlet perch. Good onya girls! We actually spent a little too much time here on the falling tide and almost came to grief when crossing a shallow reef. After that excitement we sat back and watched the last of the afternoon sun light up the islands before re-entering The Canal, heading back to Monument Beach for late sundowners, dinner and finally our return to the beach to relive our day around the campfire.

**Day 4:** By 7:45 am we were packed and



## 11 Remote BP servo

loaded enjoying our breakfast. We again entered Croc Creek and it was good to have a freshwater wash and launder some clothes. We called into Dogleg Bay for 200 litres of fuel at the BP servo @ \$2.50/litre and headed into Collier Bay for a 1.5 hour crossing between Wood and Kingfisher Islands, then back into open water to Raft Point. After setting up on



## 12 Water cascading off Montgomery Reef

the beach we had a quick lunch and headed approximately 20 kms NW to Montgomery Reef. The Reef is ~400 sq km in size and its top emerges up to 4m out of the water at low tide. A shallow lagoon drains out over the edges allowing the corals and algae found here to stay alive and therefore the reef grows higher above the water than most reefs will. It's an amazing sight to watch the water cascade off the reef as the tide drops. As this happened late in the afternoon we did not walk on the reef. It was also very overcast and unfriendly looking. The MV Orion, one of the larger cruise ships, was also in the area and it

# Snail Mail



was only the second tour boat we'd seen in



### 13 The Orion - a different style of travel

four days. We were hoping to watch the rise of the full moon; unfortunately the thick cloud obscured our view but didn't stop the party as we enjoyed our sundowners in the next bay around from where our tents were set up. The tides rage through Foam Passage between Raft Point and Steep Island, a significant aboriginal initiation site. By this time, Greg



### 14 Dorrie's Dishy Fishy Curry

thought we needed a change from fried fish and salad so after some discussion and a search for ingredients we came up with Dorrie's Dishy Fishy Curry made with onion, cubed fish, cubed potatoes, coconut milk and curry. It was a great success. Back on the beach we sat around the fire enjoying a few drinks and discussing how to tell the time by the Southern Cross with Rob and John arguing over 12 and 24 hour time - very interesting. With the possibility of rain, we attached tent flies, just in case, before retiring.

**Day 5;** We crossed Doubtful Bay and entered



### 15 Picturesque Sale River

Sale River for a 20 km cruise upstream between beautiful towering rock formations,



### 16 Low tide Sale River

some with aboriginal art galleries. It was a stunning clear day and although we were on the lookout for crocs we didn't sight any but they were probably watching us. We anchored and traversed the last kilometre by dinghy to a



### 17 Raft Point Bluff

lovely freshwater creek flowing through monsoonal rainforest. After cooling off in the creek and lunch on the beach we returned to



### 18 Steep Island

White Lightning for a lazy cruise back up the river. Crossing Doubtful Bay was a little rough



### 19 Stunning Wandjina art



### 20 Wandjina figure and Dugong

but we headed to a sheer cliff in calm waters for a fish. John was really 'hooked' and couldn't get the fishing line out fast enough and as always the fishing was superb. After catching a few Fingermark and the sharks moved in, we headed back across to Raft Point late in the afternoon to climb up the side of an escarpment to a Wandjina art gallery. The main art site here is part of the 'Great Fish Chase' series which has links to sites to the north at Langgi and on the Prince Regent River. The Wandjina art here is spectacular in size, quality and content, showing large Dugong, fish, Wandjinas, crocodiles, snakes and some obviously much older art of a turtle and sugar bag. The location of the site is in some of the best real estate locations you could ask for. Raft Point is ESE of Montgomery Reef and about 2km ESE is the spectacular Raft Point Bluff, which is 188m high. Almost due north is the unique



### 21 Steep Island from art gallery

149m-high Steep Island. Raft Point was named after the Aborigines who were seen here with numerous rafts. Stories abound of these rafts being set adrift to send food to the boys on Steep Island during their isolation as part of their initiation, or used to carry trade goods for exchange with those on Montgomery Reef and Islands, simply for traveling short distances or hunting of Dugong, turtles and rays. The Raft Point Bluff is an incredible mixture of spectacular scenery and the mystery associates with the mangroves, mudflats and seawaters all overshadowed by red sandstone massifs and Carson volcanic rocks, with whales cavorting in the bay during the right season! A 'natural cathedral', this is an important site for Aboriginal people. The escarpment glowed in the setting sun lighting up the magnificent images created long ago - a truly spiritual experience. Safely anchored back in the bay,

# Snail Mail



discussion again turned to menu variety so with



## 22 Preparing the Fish Stir Fry

Sue's and Dylan's help we concocted a stir fry meal of fish, rice and vegetables. The campfire on the beach provided another perfect end to another perfect day.

**Day 6;** We headed across Doubtful Bay to Red Cone Hill and entered a huge mangrove area to try our hand at crabbing. We found a croc basking in the sun, not a bad size for a couple of handbags and shoes! We cruised into the mangroves while Dylan showed John



## 23 Dylan showed John how to rig up crab pots

how to rig up crab pots. Once the pots were baited they were loaded into the dinghy and Dylan, John and Rob set off. Rob and John



## 24 Nice handbags and shoes

took turns standing in the boat to attach the floats high in the mangroves - not an easy task when the tidal flow is strong - and were mindful of crocodiles watching the proceedings with interest. They managed to get 15 crabs in 3 runs. Covering the crabs with mangrove branches we continued deeper into Red Cone Creek to Ruby Falls. While White Lightning

was anchoring crocs took a great interest in



## 25 Ruby Falls

the activities. We were extra careful getting in and out of the dinghy at this spot! Under an overhanging rock we discovered tiny bats on our way to the Falls. While we explored the area, Greg and Dylan ferried fresh water to White Lightning. We experienced light drizzle and were a little concerned at how fast the tide was falling wondering how we were going to safely get back into the dinghy and the



## 26 A bucketful of crabs for dinner

manoeuvre wasn't too easy as the receding water had left the rocks covered in greasy mud. We were very glad to be back on board White Lightning, still under the gaze of curious crocs circling the boat. Greg had prepared our lunch and we ate on the run to beat the falling tide. Anchored in front of our 'home' beach Greg prepared the crabs with the help of Dylan, Sue and Ginnie, steamed them and sent us to the beach with a bucketful for dinner as well as a plate of cheese, kabanossi and biscuits. We sat beside our campfire and relished our catch of the day.

**Day 7;** We packed and waited for the



## 27 Waiting for the tide

incoming tide. After breakfast we hauled the dinghy onto the back of the boat and headed across Collier Bay in rough seas, getting soaked in the process (part of the Extreme + Adventure package). We reached calmer water when Greg took White Lightning behind



## 28 Python Cove

Traverse Island to a lovely beach. As it was low tide, White Lightning nudged the sand and Dylan carried the anchor onto the beach. We jumped off the back of the boat into the water to enjoy the seclusion of this lovely natural amphitheatre beach. Greg crawled into a multi-level cave and discovered a large python curled up at the back so we named this beach Python Cove. After lunch we continued through the islands, entering The Canal and back to Dogleg Bay for another 200 litres of diesel. The young couple running this facility enjoys a chat when cruisers pull in for fuel. We asked about mud crabs in the mangroves at the end of the bay and they told us that a very large crocodile lives there and they agreed it could



## 29 Photographer taking a break

have the crabs and they'll fish elsewhere. Good decision! We made our way down Goose Channel and then through Whirlpool Pass, which can achieve flows of 20 km/hr and create



## 30 Sitting around the campfire

metre-deep whirlpools and boils of rising waters 10-20cm higher than the surrounding surfaces. We arrived in Strickland Bay and Front Beach for our last night. With our camp set up, we lit the campfire and sat around for a few drinks before going back out to White

# Snail Mail



Lightning for a steak dinner with Greg regaling us with more of his funny stories. Back on shore we enjoyed a few more drinks before retiring. The night turned cold and it was the first night the Navigator actually got inside the swag.

**Day 8;** We packed up for the last time. On board White Lightning we enjoyed a cooked breakfast and then headed across Strickland Bay, around Mary Island and across Cone Bay



### 31 XnX creek

to a place locally known as XnX. This is a natural spring once occupied by XnX (his name by deed poll) who grew plants for supply to interested people. He no longer lives here and has spent time in an establishment in Perth. The house was built with 4 gallon drums stacked on top of one another, tied together with mesh and cement walls and bottles used for windows. There was also a banana plantation. We enjoyed a swim in the Pool of Bathsheba a pretty rock pool surrounded by monsoonal rainforest and then hurried back down to the boat to beat the incoming tide. With the wind opposing the tide we crossed Cascade Bay into the rough waters of King Sound. The waves were fierce and pounded over White Lightning – very exciting and another Premium Adventure + and for those of us who missed out on copping a full-on wave, Dylan was going to throw buckets of water. Once through this patch, we cruised along slowly while we enjoyed our final, pre-prepared lunch, arriving at the wharf at 2:15 pm. In all we covered 800 nautical miles in the Buccaneer Archipelago. Dylan took our bags to shore where Anna, Greg's partner was waiting to drive us back to The Snail. We said our goodbyes and drove into Derby to the caravan park where we had a long hot shower, changed into dry clothes and drove to the Derby Wharf to watch the sunset. We met Sue and Rob

there and enjoyed a lovely dinner at "The



### 32 Derby sunset

Point" restaurant overlooking the wharf – a fitting end to a wonderful experience that truly *"touched our souls and awaked our senses"*.

The following day Ginnie and the Navigator spent some time in Derby after finishing the laundry and that evening the 3 of us had a meal together at the Spini Pub. At 4:30 am next morning we waited at the Information Centre for the coach to take Ginnie back to Broome for her flight home.



### 33 Raft Point

*Note: Reference to the Wandjina art gallery and Steep Island at Raft Point comes from 'Wild Discovery Guides Kimberley Coast' by kind permission of the author Len Zell. This book is highly recommended reading for anyone contemplating a cruise along the Kimberley Coast or wishing to know more about this magical place and can be purchased from Len's website [www.wilddiscovery.com.au](http://www.wilddiscovery.com.au)*