

# The Journey



**In many ways, it is hard to believe there are still places left on the planet like the Kimberley. Remote, untouched, uncivilised and left to the care of the indigenous people for centuries.**

For boatowners today, many of whom have a trip 'thru the Kimberley' high on their bucket list of life priorities, the Kimberley remains an aloof, distant, often dangerous and always an extremely rugged environment, annually pounded by severe cyclones that are a 'normal' feature of the Kimberley Coast.

To make the trip in a trailerboat - as distinct from the more sensible, infinitely more comfortable commercial cruise ship - is a serious challenge.

The first problem is to grasp the sheer enormity of this area - its land mass is bigger than Victoria and Tasmania combined - and to realise there are only three points of commercialisation: Derby at the southern end, Wyndham in the middle (way down the Admiralty Gulf, in fact) and Darwin at the top. And apart from the odd resort or mining connection, there is nothing else.

This book is a compilation of two very well planned and run expeditions, one from Perth up, the other from Mackay in the East, across to the West.

Good charting is the key: C-Map NT for GPS plotters - but a suite of traditional paper charts covering this vast coastline is still strongly recommended.

- PW



# Contents

## Clint Earnshaw Expedition, 2008

Part One .....Pages 6 - 16

*Just getting there from Perth is a long haul; but they did well, launching at Wyndham and working down the Cambridge Gulf and 'around the corner' to Parry Harbour via the spectacular Lyne, Berkeley and King George Rivers.*

Part Two .....Pages 18 - 31

*This was the leg to join them - pure Kimberley Coast from Parry Harbour down to the Hunter River, and the mighty Prince Regent River via more falls, rain forest and good fishing.*

Part Three .....Pages 32 - 42

*Continuing down towards Broome, the team visit many renowned Kimberley favourites including the Horizontal Falls, Montgomery Island, Truscott airbase - in what has definitely been the trip of a lifetime.*



## Dennis Evans Expedition, 2012

Part One .....Pages 44 - 60

*In this vital first chapter Dennis concentrates a great deal on the logistics of the voyage, the outboard(s) and set-up of the Oceancraft, before they finally leave Darwin heading south for the Kimberley.*

Part Two .....Pages 62-82

*Our intrepid adventurers make spectacular progress as they work their way south to Talbot Bay, via the magnificent Berkeley and King George Rivers with a serious crocodile scare to keep them awake !*

Part Three .....Pages 84 - 108

*This leg runs the full gamut of emotions from the thrill of the Horizontal Falls, the beauty of the Rain Forest Ravine - to Joan suffering a serious hand injury, testing her husband's surgical skill in the bush - literally. But it all ends happily at journey's end in Derby, WA.*



ABM

# Ocean Roads' Kimberley Dreaming

Part One of Three Instalments, produced by Clint & Tracey Earnshaw

This is a story of an adventure by three families through one of the most remote, and certainly one of the oldest, and most rugged parts of the planet earth. Three families, three trailerboats, thousands of miles on the road, hundreds of miles at sea, for what can surely be described as the adventure of a lifetime. Join us now, and in the other two parts ahead, as we explore the waters from west around to the south, from Wyndham WA in the north, heading south to Broome WA in the nor-east corner of Australia. The story is recounted by the team leader, Clint Earnshaw, with pics from just about everyone.

**F**or 10 years, I have been dreaming of going through the Kimberley in a trailerboat.

Four years ago, my mate Darryl Helms and I set a date – April 2008 – to go from Wyndham in the far north of Western Australia down to Broome on the North-west Coast. It involved a journey of some 1400 nautical miles, and we estimated it would take approximately 3 weeks. Initially we thought we would do the trip in 5 metre dinghies, but as time passed, I decided (as I am a boat builder) to build my own boat especially for the trip.

We settled on a boat of 7.5m centreline length, with twin 2004 model 140hp Suzukis, which had 500 hours on the clock when I bought them.

The boat carries 750 litres of fuel under deck, and 130 litres of water. It has a 60 litre built-in freezer, 2 x 75 watt solar panels, 2 burner metho cooker, deck wash, 2 berth cabin and hardtop.

It was loosely based on a 680SF Haines Hunter using a walkaround configuration, and a 21.5 degree deadrise.

I made it with a 5mm bottom and 4mm sides, and put it on a heavy duty tandem trailer with 4 tonne suspension and stainless brakes, etc.

Empty of fuel, but with all normal safety gear, it weighs 3.9 tonnes BMT, so you could say it is "overbuilt".

We put in a Furuno GPS and sounder, and 27 MHz and VHF radios. All wiring was done using tinned wire. We achieved a top speed of 39.7 knots with 500 litres of fuel and one adult on board. With my family of 7 on board, 750 litres of fuel and full water, we can get it to 36.5 knots. Even loaded for the Kimberley trip with 1350 litres of fuel, 130 litres of water, 3 adults and 3 kids, plus full stores for 3 weeks, we still managed to get 28 knots – love my Suzuki's!

## Getting Started

We drove from Lake Grace (south-east of Perth) to Wyndham (a distance of approx 4,300km) arriving in Kununurra on Sunday night the 30th March 2008, where some of the family,



All three families came from the south of WA, and travelled several thousand miles north to Wyndham via Kununurra - that's the Kununurra Caravan Park below.

All told more than 15 people made the trip in three boats from three families with assorted friends and rellos. And they will each remember the trip forever more.



and was ruined. Ben also changed the starter motor on *Phoenix*, as the solenoid was getting sticky.

We saw quite a few crocs tonight - some of the boys saw a big croc right at the back of the boat in the middle of the night.

*Did only 28nm today (a nice lazy Sunday) - 513nm for 50 engine hours so far.*

#### Monday 7th April 2008

Travelling from Walmsley Bay to Terry Shoal we had a fish there as we were finally near some reef and the tide happened to be slack. Caught black jew (mulloway), black snapper, golden snapper and coral trout - a nice feed for tea.

Went to Shelter Bay, which was an excellent anchorage, but as it didn't have a beach, we continued on. Out of respect to the aboriginal people I can't say where we anchored up for the afternoon

and night, but we were on a beautiful sheltered beach and went for a walk and came across some awesome paintings.

We think some were of the early Dutch sailing ships and Dutch people with smoking pipes and hats on - must be 300-400 years or more old. We then found a burial chamber in the rock which had quite a few skulls and bones in it. They must have been there some time now. It was quite a moving experience for everyone there - we just hope others who visit these caves will respect these places if they come across them.

The tides are getting bigger now - approx 7 metres tonight. It's unreal how quickly they move in and out. Did 69nm today in no more than 5 knots of wind - that's 582nm travelled so far.

Incidentally, we found that most of the time, rocks and reef posed no problem. Even up a river, there were only a few places where rocks were a problem.



**Above:** Mike ferrying Chantelle, Cayson and Cody in the punt in Surveyors Creek

**Left:** Interesting anchorage (!) in Surveyors Creek where a very close watch has to be kept on the tides.

**Right:** Happy is Cody with his tuna!

**Below:** Washing the salt out of their tee shirts in the fresh water atop the creek. Collecting freshwater along the way proved quite feasible.



*Another interesting photo of the three boats - here, on the beach at Sheep Island, approx three quarters of the way around from Wyndham to Broome. It is one of the hundreds of islands, ledges and reefs in the Kimberley.*

*As we observed last month, readers interested in making their own expedition to the Kimberley or other remote areas in the far north of Australia, should study this picture really carefully as it contains an absolute wealth of information. Matters of note this time (the forward view) include comparing the hardtops, the requisite 'clutter' on the hardtops,*

*the different approaches to getting on to the beach over the bow(s), and the dire necessity to provide these boats with ample shade and all-weather protection from drop-down side and rear curtains. Which engine system invokes the great debate: Would you prefer a big single V-6 outboard, twin (moderate hp) outboards, or a single diesel? The jury is still out, but author Clint Earnshaw wouldn't part from his twin Suzie 140's for love nor money.*



# Operation Kimberley

## Part 1 of 3

Since the recent decision to hold over the extremely controversial Browse LNG Project on and offshore from the Kimberley Coast, this exceptional ancient land has won a timely reprieve. For Dennis and Joan Fitzsimmons, fresh from an amazing journey where few people will ever go, this was the news they wanted to hear. More than most, they KNOW what is at stake: they've just been there. . . .

**O**n Thursday 14th June 2012 two 6.0 metre open aluminium boats left the safe haven of Tipperary Waters Marina in Darwin to begin the journey to Derby on the western Kimberley coast.

Some 51 days and just over 4,100km later after hugging the coast line and investigating where practicable rivers, creeks and bays that were deemed interesting en route, the boats arrived off the public ramp at Derby on Friday 3rd August 2012.

My wife Joan and I were in one boat and Bob was the sole occupant of the other. Being older but still bold we have learned from previous endeavours to plan ahead carefully. Small boat handling demands some physical effort and as the length of the trip was considerable, the areas to be traversed

remote, we hoped our forward planning would keep our personal discomfort to a minimum. We were all in reasonable physical health but despite friends referring to our forthcoming adventure as "that suicide mission" we all thought that our mental health was okay as well. It is true to say that the overwhelming majority of friends, when acquainted with details of the trip, expressed interest in both its planning and outcome. They often gave very useful advice but showed no inclination to join us.

### Why ?

Why did we decide to travel this section of the coastline by small boat? Over a lifetime exploring Australia by vehicle and on foot we had been unable to access most areas of the

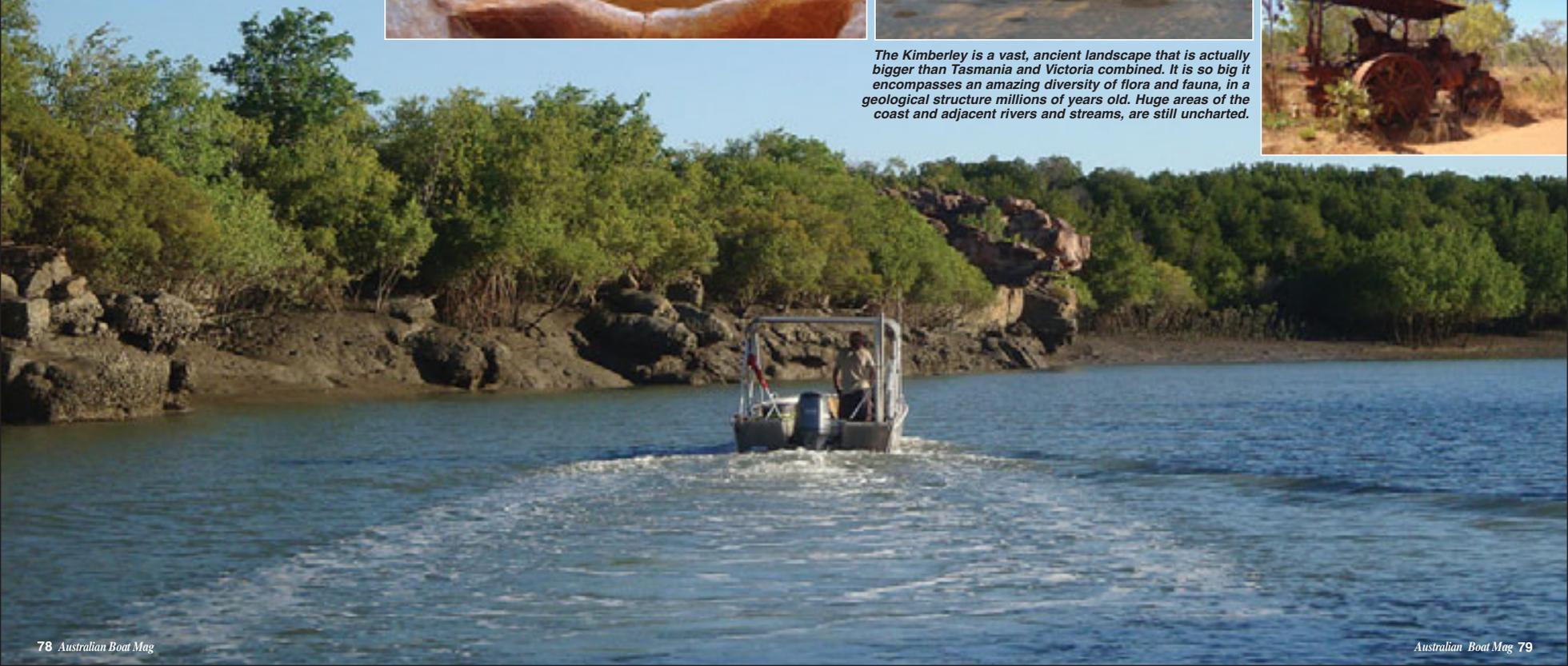




*Main Shot: Exploring pretty Gurribirri Creek off the Mitchell River.*



*The Kimberley is a vast, ancient landscape that is actually bigger than Tasmania and Victoria combined. It is so big it encompasses an amazing diversity of flora and fauna, in a geological structure millions of years old. Huge areas of the coast and adjacent rivers and streams, are still uncharted.*



# Operation Kimberley

Part 3 of 3

The Kimberley has always been a remote part of Australia few have ever seen or understand. More Australians have visited Bali or Disneyland than this vast, remote, uninhabited and quite hostile piece of their own country. Amazingly, it occupies an area larger than Victoria and Tasmania combined, and most of it still can't be accessed by land. Only in recent years, has its value as an international tourist mecca, and arguably, the ultimate trailerboat fishing destination, been realised.

In this leg of their 4,100 km voyage, Dennis and Joan enjoy many of the high points of the voyage, experiencing the unique Horizontal Falls (above), Montgomery Reef, Rain Forest Ravine, and the King Cascade Falls. Then there was the low point, with a nearly calamitous accident to Joan, reminding us of the potential danger of travelling in small craft in such a rugged, potentially dangerous location . . . let's join them now for the third, final leg of their remarkable journey.