

Our 2010 Australian Outback Safari

By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan

Newsletter Number Ten

At the conclusion of our last newsletter we had booked our return flights to New Zealand, and were about to explore the **Dampier Peninsular** (north of Broome) for a few days prior to departure.



At the northern tip of the Dampier Peninsular is **Cape Leveque**, a picturesque paradise which includes a fly in, fly out eco-resort, coastal camping, pristine beaches & great fishing.

The straight 4WD road leading to Cape Leveque was heavily corrugated with a number of washouts and wet boggy patches remained after recent heavy rain. We are always intrigued by the large number of tyres &/or their remains that are often strewn across tracks, roads & highways. <<< Like this example!

To reduce the possibility of this happening to us we fitted a tyre pressure monitoring system (supplied by Pete & Cas Spowart at hannibalsafari.com.au) which constantly displays our tyre pressures on the dash, sounding an alarm should any one of our tyres lose 5 psi or more.

Once at **Cape Leveque** we found stunning sugar-white sandy beaches flanked by the calm aqua blue waters of the Indian Ocean. The far reaching spectacular rich-red cliffs which had been sculptured over time looked simply stunning.



Over recent weeks we have walked on some lovely beaches but this one surpassed all others.

With the tide out and a warm 2 knot sea breeze, it was a thrill to take photographs and leave only footprints in this lovely virgin-white sand.



“Take time out to enjoy the moment” – that’s what my children, Alastair & Louise suggested that I do this year, and that’s exactly what Megan and I are doing.....

Oops, this is what happens when one relaxes and takes their eye off the ball, but what the heck! Nothing nibbled her toes – so all was well >>>



<< The beach at **Cape Leveque** is a true haven for photographers, especially as the sun sinks low each day and these red cliffs radiate their true splendour. This becomes more accentuated just prior to sunset.

We departed this idyllic natural landscape to make our way east to ‘One Arm Point’ (an Aboriginal Community) which became our camp spot for the night.

As we exited our tyres squeaked on this clean coarse white sandy beach. >>>

One Arm Point is known for it’s dangerous and fast flowing waters with literally hundreds of small round



rocks just below the surface. At high tide these rocks, together with the many sandbars, were truly a major hazard for fishermen in this area.

We were fortunate to obtain the most easterly camp spot here, just metres from the water's edge to observe these fast flowing tidal movements.



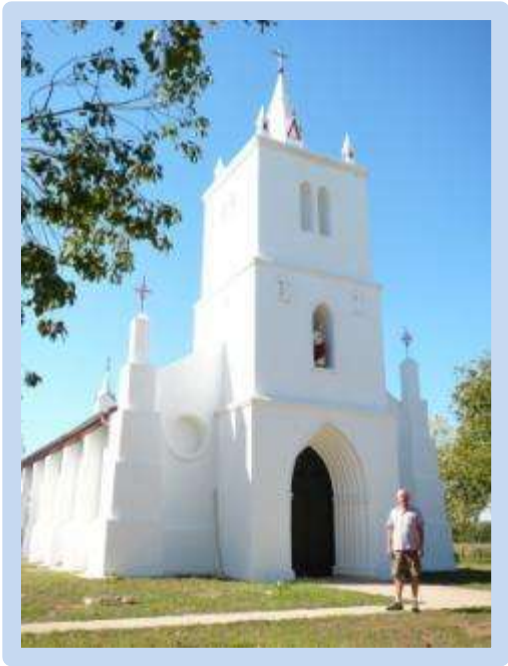
Our sunset at One Arm Point - and then our sunrise the following morning



Australians are well known for their intriguing signage. Here are two classic examples that caught our attention on the Dampier Peninsula. One of these was these was the camp ground road sign at Mercedes Cove, hand painted on to a fishing float, and another was used regularly to indicate a speed hump which always brought a smile to our faces!



As the weather gets warmer the **snakes** come out of hibernation. They regularly sunbathe on the warm roads, but flee quickly at the sound of an approaching vehicle. We always avoid hitting them in case they get wrapped up in the driveshaft or suspension and decide to come for a ride with us!



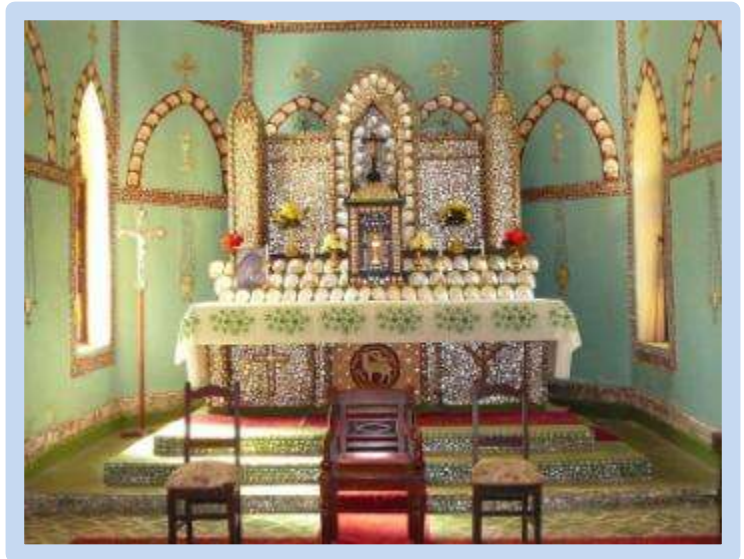
<<< The stunning **Sacred Heart Church at Beagle Bay** half way down the Dampier Peninsular.

This church was built in 1915 by German priests who were under house arrest during WW1. Construction utilising hand-made mud bricks and locally collected **Mother of Pearl** shells to decorate the interior has created an amazing and unique ambience. We were impressed with the artistic detail especially around the windows and the Altar area.

When Graeme was here 10 years ago, the exterior was covered in scaffolding as work had begun to repair the collapsed bell tower recently damaged by a cyclone. The adjacent photo shows the task now completed.

Restoration work to preserve the decaying interior plasterwork has commenced. We watched some of the painstaking attention being taken by skilled tradesmen specialising in historical restoration.

These Mother of Pearl Shells create a striking window frame and Altar.



Visiting **The Willie Creek Pearl Farm** would have to be every woman's dream! Their show-room was full of exquisite pearl jewellery to suit the most discerning buyer.



In the early days these **Mother of Pearl shells** were the prize of the sea, and natural pearls were quite rare (but very valuable). The clear nutrient-rich turquoise waters surrounding this coastline provide the perfect feeding grounds for the famous *Pinctada Maxima* oysters found here. This shell was used worldwide primarily for the manufacture of buttons, jewellery & decorative inlay in fine furniture or on musical instrument key boards etc. Broome supplied 80% of the worlds Mother of Pearl shell harvested from the sea using 420 registered 'Pearl Lugger' vessels.

They say “Broome was built on Buttons” The prolific use of plastics in the 1960’s replaced the need for Mother of Pearl shell and the industry almost collapsed. Cultured pearl farming then began to flourish as Miki Moto mastered the art of inserting a seed or irritant into the gonad of these huge oysters, encouraging them to naturally coat this foreign particle and thus creating a pearl (on average this takes 2 years)

The resulting pearl is harvested, and the oyster used again (up to 4 times) to grow another pearl. A pearl’s five virtues are: size, shape, colour, lustre, and complexion which establish the quality and value.



Over 65% of the large cultured pearls in the world are produced in Broome.



We cruised up **Willie Creek** to see the pearl farm in action and then had a bird’s eye view of Willie Creek and the lovely coastline south to Broome from a helicopter. This was Megan’s first helicopter flight, and with no doors this was a breath-taking experience for her, to say the least!



Sadly this whirl-wind tour of the Dampier Peninsular came to an end, and we returned to Broome, put the Landcruiser into storage for the 3 week period we were going to be in NZ and then headed to the airport.

Goodbye clear blue skies and 33 degree days - Hello Rotorua NZ in the midst of winter!

Upon our return from NZ we will thaw out in Broome and take time to explore this historic town before commencing our next expedition. We look forward to sharing our experiences in Broome and beyond when we write next!

Goodbye for now,

Graeme & Megan