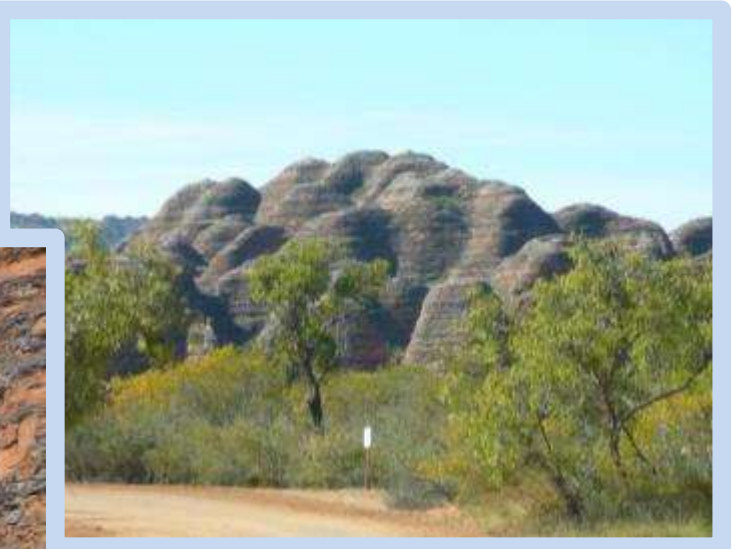


Our 2010 Australian Outback Safari

By Graeme Barker and Megan Swan

Newsletter Number Nine

It's hi from us again as we arrive at Purnululu National Park, known as **The Bungle Bungles**. The 53km track into the visitors centre from The Great Northern Highway was rough enough to exclude most



2wd's and caravans, and put sturdy camper trailers to the test! We were in 2nd and 3rd gear most of the way negotiating sharp rocks, deep river crossings and long stretches of corrugations.

This park was granted World Heritage status in 2003. The **Bungle Bungle Range** is renowned for its striking sandstone beehive domes, striped with orange and grey bands, that rise over 200 metres. The grey banding is formed by cyanobacteria (like algae) on layers where moisture accumulates. The orange Bands are due to the colour of oxidized iron compounds in layers which dry out too quickly for cyanobacteria to grow, according to the scientists. It's an inspiring tribute to Mother Nature, no matter how it as formed! Graeme likened these amazing rock formations to two of his favourite national parks in Utah, USA, namely Zion National Park, and the Bryce Canyon National Park. This was Graeme's 3rd visit to The Bungles.

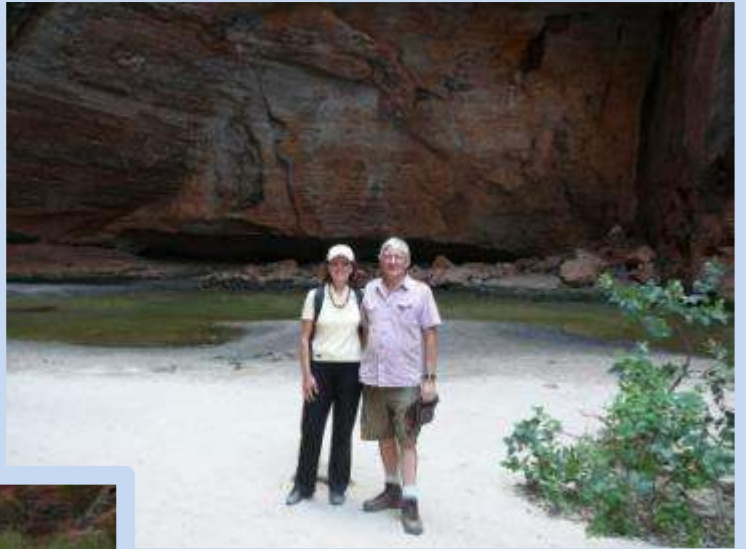
We promptly made camp in Walardi Camp at the southern end of the park, loaded up our backpacks and headed for Piccaninny Gorge. For me, seeing these spectacular domes for the first time was nothing short of amazing.

These domes stood as individuals, in groups, and also formed impressive ranges, with their unusual, striking and mysterious colour bands standing out boldly in the early morning sunlight. We eagerly began hiking amongst these tall domes on paths through the spinefix and along the track into Cathedral Gorge.



These tracks wound along dry creek beds, through deep 'pot-holes', narrow ledges with high red rock faces and towering cliffs glowing vibrantly in the very hot afternoon sun. We reached the huge & spectacular natural amphitheatre with almost 360 degree vertical sandstone walls. >>>

Whispers echoed and voices reverberated in this huge and amazing natural rock formation known as **Cathedral Gorge**.



<<< After enjoying the cooler shadows of this gorge, we followed the **Piccanny Creek** up a fascinating sculptured lava flow creek bed to a breath-taking lookout.

The view from this lookout across the plains was flanked by a range of these stunning coloured domes.

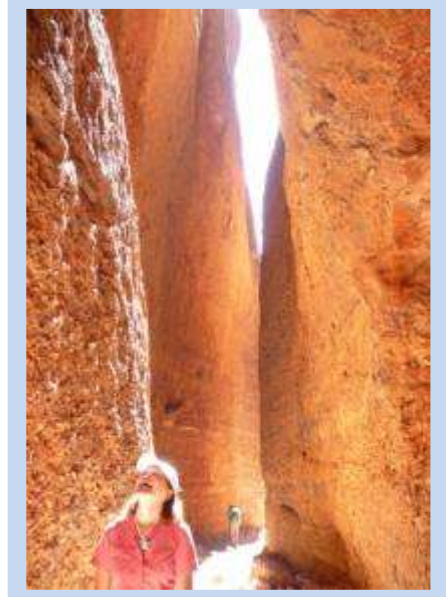
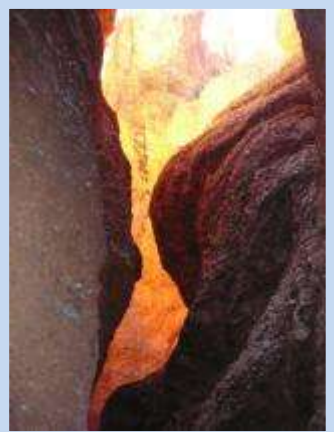
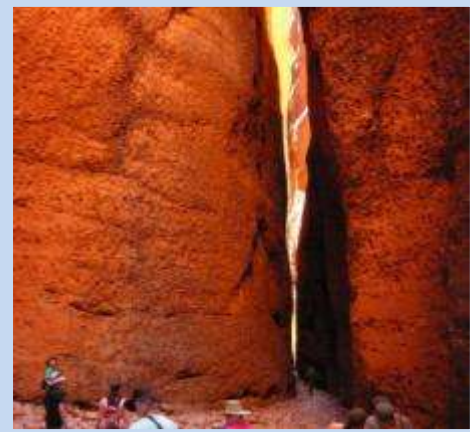
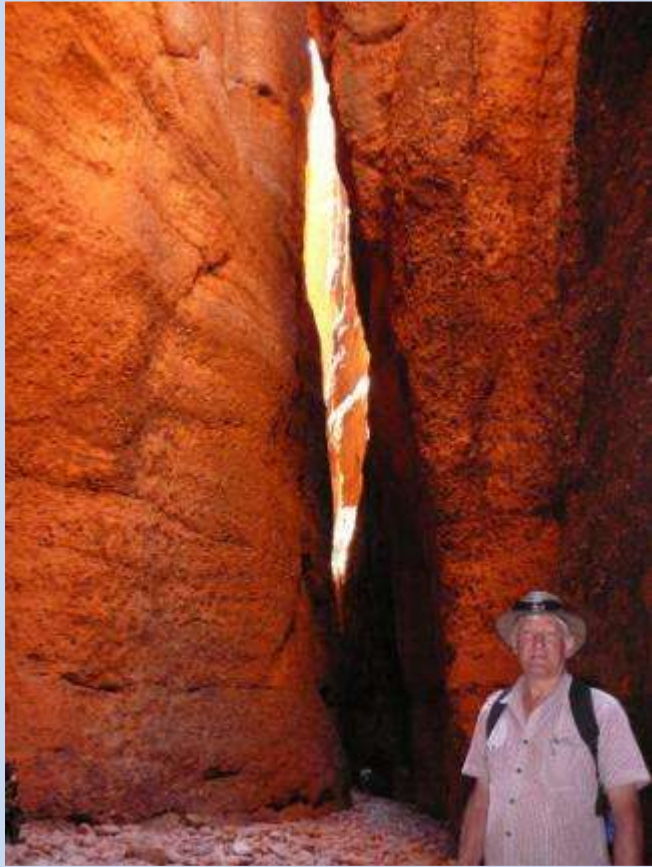


Mother Nature has sculptured many unusual and beautiful rock forms as illustrated by these three photos.

The following morning everybody was up early, planning their hikes for the day and comparing notes from yesterdays treks. We left our camp at 7am and drove 20km to **Echidna Chasm**, enjoying the early morning sunlight on the delightful Bungle Bungle Range, accentuated by the grandure of the red rocky Osmand Range in the distance.

Extremely narrow cracks within these sheer sandstone cliffs rose 200 metres above us on each side, providing tiny corridors into the Echidna Gorge. These rock walls were all in shadow as we squeezed our way further into this chasm. It felt like we were walking into the very centre of the earth.

It was imperative that we timed our walk to ensure that the midday sun was directly overhead allowing us to catch the amazing colour transformations that flood into these deep chasms right down to the floor. This brings out a striking array of rich vivid colours on the sheer rock walls .



We think you will agree, these chasms are truly an inspiring wonderland of colour.

A Photographers dream!



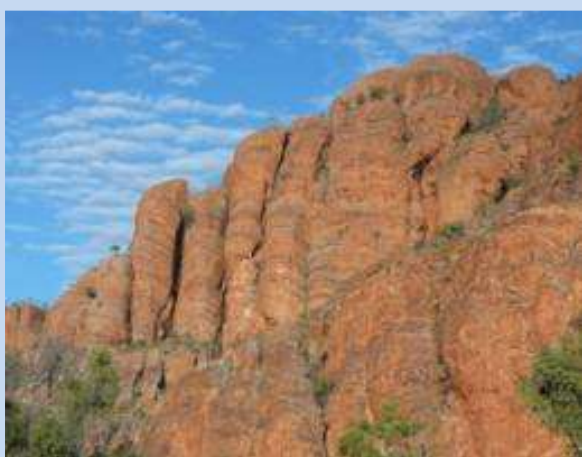
With temperatures now soaring above 30 degrees, we hiked 5km up another valley to the **Mini Palm Gorge** where the rocks above us were glowing red hot. This rocky creek bed was strewn with huge rocks which had fallen from the cliffs above littering the valley floor and hindering our path. We climbed up and over some enormous boulders and squeezed between some as the gorge narrowed.

As we drew closer we discovered an oasis of beautiful towering palm trees. These Livistona palms survive the threat of floods and fire by growing on or between the rocks. They form tiers as the juveniles grow up beneath these tall matriarchs that grow straight and reach for the sky. >>>



When reaching the end of this gorge we found a most awe-inspiring deep and narrow natural amphitheatre. A few palms growing on the floor were dwarfed by the 200 metre sheer rock cliff walls. The acoustics here were amazing and we could only imagine how it would sound if someone like Elton John (or someone of his ilk) performed in this very special atmosphere.

Thankfully the walk out of this gorge was cooler with the day drawing in and the shadows lengthening down the rocky gully. The last of the sun's rays brought out the very best of nature's colours as two tired but elated Kiwi's returned to camp, looking forward to a couple of cold ales!



<<< A stunning view of some wonderful rock formations as we walked out of this gorge for the last time.

The next day we were reluctant to pack up and depart this special place. We had conquered all the walking tracks – not too bad for a pair more used to 4WD challenges!

Returning to the Great Northern Highway we travelled south to **Halls Creek**, 107 km on the 'black-top' to replenish our fuel and supplies.

This small town struggles to meet the demands of travellers, often running out of diesel and basic food supplies. The liquor store is restricted to selling only low alcohol beer and no wine or spirits in order to curb the local alcohol problem. However, as you can see, the local butcher had kept his sense of humour and we bravely purchased some 'iffy seafood'! >>>



'Witty upmarket Aussie signage!'

<<< Halls Creek boasts its own outstanding natural rock feature 'The China Wall'. This amazing white quartz vertical protrusion rises 6 metres above the surrounding red surface. This rock wall is visible from the air at several locations between Halls Creek and the Bungle Bungle Ranges.

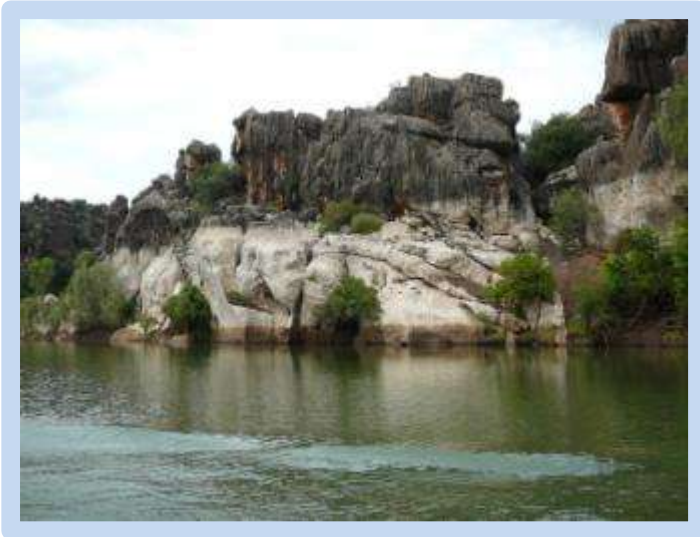
From here we continued south west on the Great Northern Highway to **Fitzroy Crossing** where we were expecting a change of pace.



Graeme was looking forward to taking me on a river cruise up the **Geike Gorge**, a river cruise that he had done 10 years earlier. The tourist boats used are long, wide flat-bottomed alloy boats with two of these being linked together to accommodate approx 60 tourists. The helm at the stern of the boat is manned by the tour guide who gave a great commentary. The weather was overcast and the water of the Fitzroy River was slightly discoloured due to recent flooding.



We cruised through this ancient limestone gorge with scenic multi-coloured rock faces towering high above us. Huge caves, shelves and holes have been eroded into these rock faces over millions of years as these photos indicate. Some of these caves contained traces of early Aboriginal art and the local Aboriginals regard this gorge as sacred.



After the cruise we packed up and were ready to head west out of Fitzroy Crossing when we received a call from Graeme's NZ real estate agent to say that we should curb our departure as she believed Graeme's house would go unconditional within the next two hours, so she needed Graeme to remain in cell phone range.

We decided to make ourselves comfortable on the terrace at the Fitzroy River Lodge whilst she concluded these negotiations. At 6pm the deal was complete and Graeme was now homeless! He had accepted a commercial building in Rotorua as part payment on this transaction. (He was familiar with the commercial building being offered by the purchaser as a trade.)



Fearing heavy rain in the next 4 hours, and knowing that road closures would be imminent, we headed west as fast as possible. We were prepared to drive all night if need be to avoid having to pitch tents in torrential rain during the hours of darkness.



Sure enough, minutes later we drove into heavy rain as this photo shows. >>>

Lightning lit up the sky so we decided to press on towards Derby arriving at 9.30pm. By now Derby was flooded with 150 ml across the main road, and every street in the township.

We discovered very quickly that all accommodation was totally booked out as wet campers fled into all remaining motels, backpackers etc. Realising our plight the manager of the hotel came to our aid and offered us the spare bedroom in his own flat, dislodging his large hound dog! We unpacked our gear and waded through deep water, with our pants rolled up and bare feet!



The following morning this horrific storm had subsided and the rain that had fallen in the last 48 hours in Derby had begun to subside. This deluge of rain was unseasonal and totally unexpected.

At day break the sky was clear so we took the opportunity to have our breakfast at the end of the land-mark jetty at the north end of town setting up our camp chairs to enjoy our breakfast whilst watching the fishing trawlers going out to sea.



Derby has the second highest tidal movement in the southern hemisphere.

After leaving Derby we headed towards Broome and stopped off to view a long cattle trough built in 1916 for watering stock being driven to the Derby jetty for export.



Five hundred bullocks could drink from this trough at one time. >>>

When arriving in Broome later in the day we found all the campgrounds and the 4 'overflow caravan parks' were full to capacity due to thousands of campers flocking here for the idyllic weather and fabulous beaches. Due to this overcrowding we headed 30km out of town and found a secluded spot down a one way bush track where we made camp for the night.

The following day we headed back into Broome to arrange storage for our vehicle and purchase airline tickets to NZ in order that we could complete the packing, arrange storage, sell 3 vehicles and evacuate Graeme's home in time for settlement.

Not counting on the school holidays totally booking out many flights, we had to wait several days before we could depart from Broome. We took this opportunity to spend a few days exploring the lovely **Dampier Peninsular** north of Broome, visiting **Beagle Bay and Cape Leveque**.

In our next newsletter we look forward to telling you more about our trip to the Dampier Peninsular once we've returned from New Zealand.

Another beautiful day and another adventure! >>>

Wishing you all a lovely spring and blue skies!

Kind regards and best wishes

From Graeme & Megan

