

BUSH WALKING ON THE MANNING CREEK AND CHARNLEY RIVER

At the Society's well attended first meeting for 2014, held on 5 February, Society members **Roger Passmore** and **Peter Buck** presented well illustrated talks on their bush walking adventures in the Kimberley during the 2013 dry season.

Roger spoke first about a 10-day trip he led into the Charnley River Gorge. The Charnley River rises in the Caroline Ranges at an altitude of nearly 700 m ASL and essentially flows in an east-west direction before it joins the Calder River and discharges into the Walcott Inlet. The river initially follows the geological contact between the King Leopold Sandstone and Carson River Basalt before entering a major gorge about 30 kilometres from the Walcott Inlet. The gorge, carved into the King Leopold Sandstone, is one of the Kimberley's largest and most spectacular gorges. It is extremely remote, difficult to access and challenging for those who want to descend its length. However for those looking for an adventure it offers wonderful views, spectacular camp sites and some very good rock art sites as Roger's presentation clearly demonstrated.



The Charnley River Gorge

Photo: Roger Passmore

Roger and his group flew by helicopter from [Derby](#) into the gorge and spent 10 days exploring parts of the gorge and some tributaries to the Charnley River which involved moving their camp three times. Although great distances were not covered everybody enjoyed themselves. This section of the Charnley River contains a number of significant [Aboriginal rock art](#) sites. The area is at the very southern extremity of the distribution of the Bradshaw or Gwion Gwion figures (See Morwood, 2002, p. 144) and only a few rather primitive "clothes peg" figures were found. However a number of significant art sites with animal, fish and anthropomorphic figures were located.



Large, well painted fish

Photo: Roger Passmore



The walking group in front of a large anthropomorphic painting

Photo: Roger Passmore

Being such a closed and inaccessible environment, wildlife was not prolific in the gorge but the party saw a large [python](#) wedged in a rock crevice and a cluster of [flying foxes](#) suspended from the roof of one of the rock overhangs.

The party returned safely to Derby by helicopter after a very enjoyable trip.



Cluster of flying foxes hanging from a roof of a rock overhang

Photo: Roger Passmore

In the second part of the Society's meeting, **Peter Buck** talked about a bushwalk in the Manning Creek area to the west of Mount Elizabeth Station. His presentation comprised a series of excellent photos of the landscape, people and aboriginal rock art with evocative background music by Gurrumul Yunupingu.

Like the Charnley River, Manning Creek also rises in the Caroline Ranges near Mount Lacy. It flows in a general north-south direction before joining the Barnett River. It was named by the explorer [Frank Hann](#) in 1898. The surveyor [Frederick Brockman](#) traversed some of the creek in 1901.

A large party (at one stage 17 people were camped on Manning Creek) found their way, courtesy of Peter and Pat Lacy of [Mount Elizabeth Station](#), to Manning Creek approximately 25 km west of the homestead. A track had been pushed through for mustering purposes some years ago but, having been left unused, it was difficult to follow at times. When the party eventually got to Manning Creek, a base camp was established at a lovely location. A series of day walks followed, exploring the area for rock art. Many fine sites were located including the large Wanjina site described by Crawford (1968).

Most of the party then travelled down Manning Creek with their packs and established another camp approximately 6 km south of the base camp that provided access to the so-called Brockman Wanjina site. This site was discovered by Brockman's party in 1901 and was visited by Crawford in 1964 and documented in his book of 1968.

After returning to the base camp some of the party set off upstream on a 3-day trip and eventually found their way into the headwaters of the Charnley River, approximately 70 km upstream from where Roger Passmore and his group had established their base camp in the Charnley Gorge. An interesting discovery in the headwaters was a panel of paintings of numerous "sugar bags". The "sugar bag" is reputedly the portrayal of the honey made by [wild bees](#).



The magnificent "double" Wanjinna near Manning Creek

Photo: Jeff Gresham



Superb panel of Wanjina figures first documented by Brockman in 1901

Photo: Jeff Gresham



Some of the numerous "sugar bags" recorded in the upper reaches of the Charnley River
Photo: Jeff Gresham

After 11 nights in the bush the party found its way back to the Mount Elizabeth Station homestead, stopping along the way to inspect another major rock art site that contained both Wandjina figures and fine paintings of serpents. A most pleasant evening meal was enjoyed by all at the homestead and the party would like to thank Peter and Pat Lacy for their hospitality and for allowing them access to the Manning Creek area.



Serpent heads painted on a white background.

Photo: Jeff Gresham

For more photos of the Charnley Gorge, Manning Creek and rock art in these areas see Donaldson, 2013.

Jeff Gresham

References:

Crawford, I.M. 1968. *The art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal cave paintings in the Kimberley, Western Australia*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Donaldson, M.J., 2013. *Kimberley Rock Art Volume 3: Rivers and Ranges*. Wildrocks Publications.

Morwood, M.J. 2002. *Visions from the Past: The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art*. Allen and Unwin.