



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***On Australia's Rim: JC de Lancourt's Travels in Australia 1924-1929.* Edited by WJ de Burgh, Hesperian Press, 2006, 132 pages. ISBN 0 85905 361 X. RRP \$26.**

JC De Lancourt, born in France and raised in England, for a bet attempted to walk around Australia keeping within 10 miles of the coast. (I suppose that nowadays such an unlikely enterprise would be done for cancer research). This slim volume details the part of his trip from Perth to Arnhem Land whence he seems to have disappeared under the unlikely suspicion of being a Japanese spy and leaving substantial unpaid debts. Most of the story is related in articles de Lancourt sent to the *Western Mail* and there are substantial excerpts from relevant letters and reports concerning the man and his trip.

Inevitably I was fascinated by his time in the Kimberley: with a young companion EC Francis and various Aborigines he went from Broome to Derby, (he saw that Beagle Bay mission was having problems—nothing changes!—and there is a spirited rebuttal from the mission itself). Then to the Walcott inlet, Port George IV Mission, Kalumburu and Darwin, terrain well known to the walkers of the Kimberley Society.

Most intriguing was an account of the death of Frederick Easton, “Killed by an Alligator” close to where three of your Kimberley Society Council members frolicked in 1983! Included are facsimile copies of de Lancourt’s account, his sketch maps, the police report and a summary from the Coates’ *More Lonely Graves of Western Australia*. There are also some interesting observations about rock art and Aboriginal burial customs which were new to me. Food was a problem at times — “we were all pretty hungry...so I decided to kill the dog we had brought from Port George. She was a great thief and was quite useless for hunting so was no great loss. The meat minced and curried, served to feed the party for a couple of days.”

Apart from the travelogue, de Lancourt gives his opinions on both mining and agricultural prospects in the Kimberley (not the first or the last to get those wrong!) but he also prophesises that it would become one of the world’s great tourist destinations. He has forthright views on flies, missions, government policy and funding, all expressed in the delightful style and fluency of his era.

WJ de Burgh, who met de Lancourt as a teenager, is to be congratulated on his research and selection of articles. This is not only a valuable historical document but also a telling social commentary on white-Aboriginal relations which still resonates strongly today. With a bit of detective story thrown in for good measure, this is a good read.

Hamish McGlashan (June 2006)