

Kimberley Crusaders – Part 6/a

Sept 14 -2018 – 10,755km (6,721 miles) from home

First target along the famed **Gibb River Road** is the equally famous ***El Questro Station***.

Gibb's easy bit: Our first 34km to the *El Q.* turnoff are sealed - from there into the heart of the station run 17km of corrugated gravel track. A little foretaste on what's in stall, just to the west from here, for the rest of the Gibb: **2000km of road wrestling** territory (including a detour right up north to the aboriginal settlement of Kalumburu – more about that later!).

El Questro lies at the banks of the **Pentecost River** and provides prime access to the area's largely unexplored wilderness. El Q., once a pastoral property, has since transformed into a lucrative iconic tourist destination. A bunch of organised tours are on offer from boating and fishing to hiking and explorations by helicopter. We opt for a sightseeing tour to *Branco's Lookout* and a cruise through *Explosion Gorge*; so named after a previous station owner's habit of using dynamite to fish for Barramundi. Thankfully, rather more environmentally friendly fishing methods are used nowadays!



Apart from doing our own exploring and hiking into **El Questro Gorge** we join one of their 4-Wheel-Drive explorations which covers a particularly rugged track rather than chancing our own gear.



Rough track indeed



Explosion Gorge/El Questro

Arrow: The guy used to land his chopper on this rock ledge to drop depth charges for raising Barramundi!

On the way we stumble across a **Great Bower Bird** nest which, in fact, is not a nest at all! The male Bower Bird constructs his intricately woven 'gateway to happiness' for one reason alone: Attract a female bird and mate with her. Kind of a one-night-stand! After that he has absolutely nothing to do with her ever again. She goes off, builds her own nest and rears the chicks. I guess, that makes the Male Bower Bird the 'true jerk' of the bird world. Nothing new here, really... who hasn't seen guys patrolling the streets with flashy sports cars or similar trinket tricks wholly designed for wooing the other sex with same intentions as our dear Bower Bird 😊



Great Bower Bird's "love shack" nest

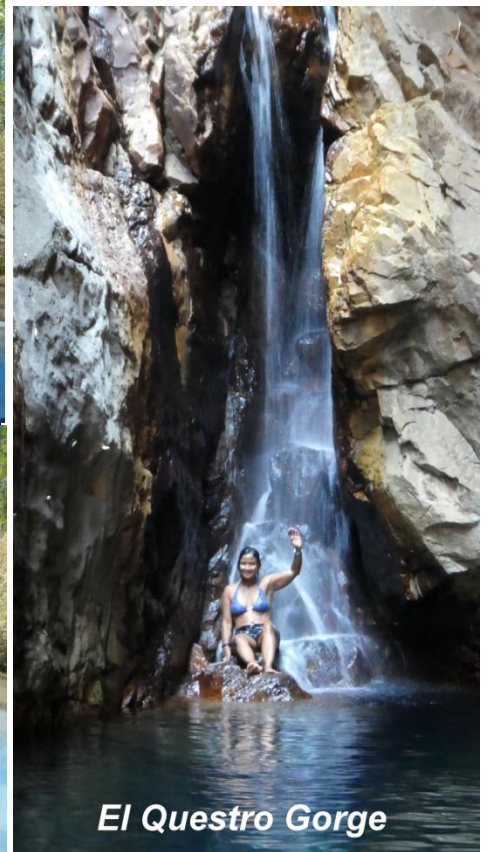
The *grade-5-rated* hike into El Questro Gorge is quite challenging as it entails lots of clambering over large boulders. Even reaching the start point first up requires a lengthy deep water vehicle crossing:



**Trekking
El Questro
Gorge**



El Questro Gorge - deep water crossing...



Many regard the Kimberley as Australia's most beautiful destination – an area rich in scenic splendour and diverse landscapes. It encompasses dissected sandstone and limestone ranges, spectacular gorges and escarpments, a rugged coastline with mangrove fringed estuaries and numerous offshore islands, riverine wetlands, pockets of rainforest and extensive grass- and woodlands.

Many of these natural features are protected by national parks and nature reserves.

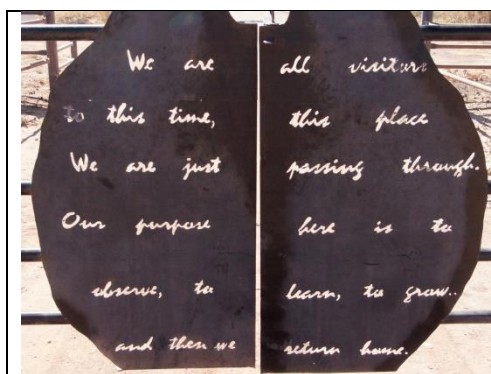
We move on to **Home Valley Station**, camping on the bank of the Pentecost River which we must cross to get there. Magnificent sunsets light up the escarpment on the far side in spectacular fashion - No better way of celebrating “beer-o-clock” taking in the breathtaking views!



Legendary Pentecost River crossing on route to Home Valley Station



Welcome at Home Valley Station



***We are all visitors
to this time, this place.
We are just passing through.
Our purpose here is to
observe, to learn, to grow...
and then we return home.***

**Home Valley
trademark Boabs**



Grand!!! Camp Matrix at Home Valley Station



Pentecost River with Cockburn Range as backdrop



Sunset over Cockburn Range



"Beer-o-clock" at Home Valley



Bindoola Gorge near Home Valley Station

The Bindoola Falls area consists of large slab layers of Pentecost Sandstone, some 3000ft thick. In other parts of the Kimberley these can be found up to 6000ft thick. Over countless millenia torrential rains and raging waters have carved through the landscape forming the many gorges and waterholes we see today. Though completely dry during winter, Bindoola is an example of this...

Bindoola Falls from above



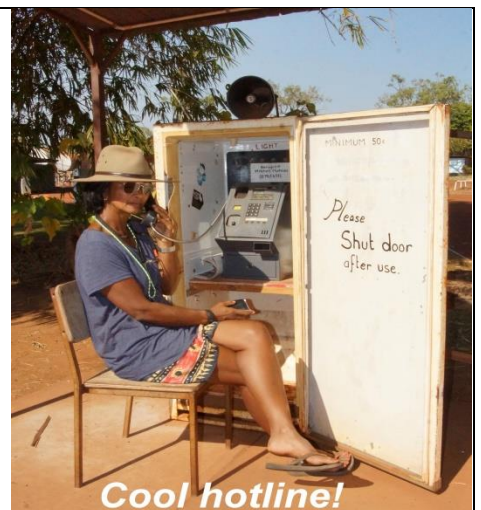
Pentecost Sandstone

Passing **Ellenbrae Station** for one overnighiter we decide to take the Kalumburu turnoff, leaving the Gibb for a time and move straight north to **Drysdale Station**:

It is here on August 21st that I receive the sad news of my mum's passing in Germany .
Thankfully my sister is on location, by chance spending her vacation there and able to take care of proceedings.
There is no way out of here for us being at such remote location as my mother's 'sending on' takes place within a couple of days.

Bless her soul, at 94 she had struggled for years in total incapacitation. It would have come as a great relieve to her, finally being set free from the body, meeting her maker and reconnecting with my dear dad whom we lost 4 years ago.

The fridge phone→



Cool hotline!

Remembering mum in our hearts we push north to **King Edward River Camp**.

This camp lies on the track that leads into Mitchell Falls. One of Australia's best known falls and on the bucket list of many but the hard yards reaching this utterly remote destination must not be underestimated.

The 76km track leading from camp to the Falls is reportedly atrocious...

We decide to leave the Matrix parked at the River Camp from where we launch our assault for the day... we manage the *arduous* drive in two hours!



At vehicular track's end it is a another 2 ½ hour bush hike to reach Mitchell Falls but not before thoroughly cooling off in the Mitchell River above the Falls...



**Mitchell
River
cool down**



Splendor of Mitchell Falls

Our lift arrives...



Cheat return back to base

A return (hike) by chopper makes the one-day dash to Mitchell Falls very possible!

By 1.30pm we are on our way back to Edwards River Camp; intime to inspect some aboriginal art sites along the way.

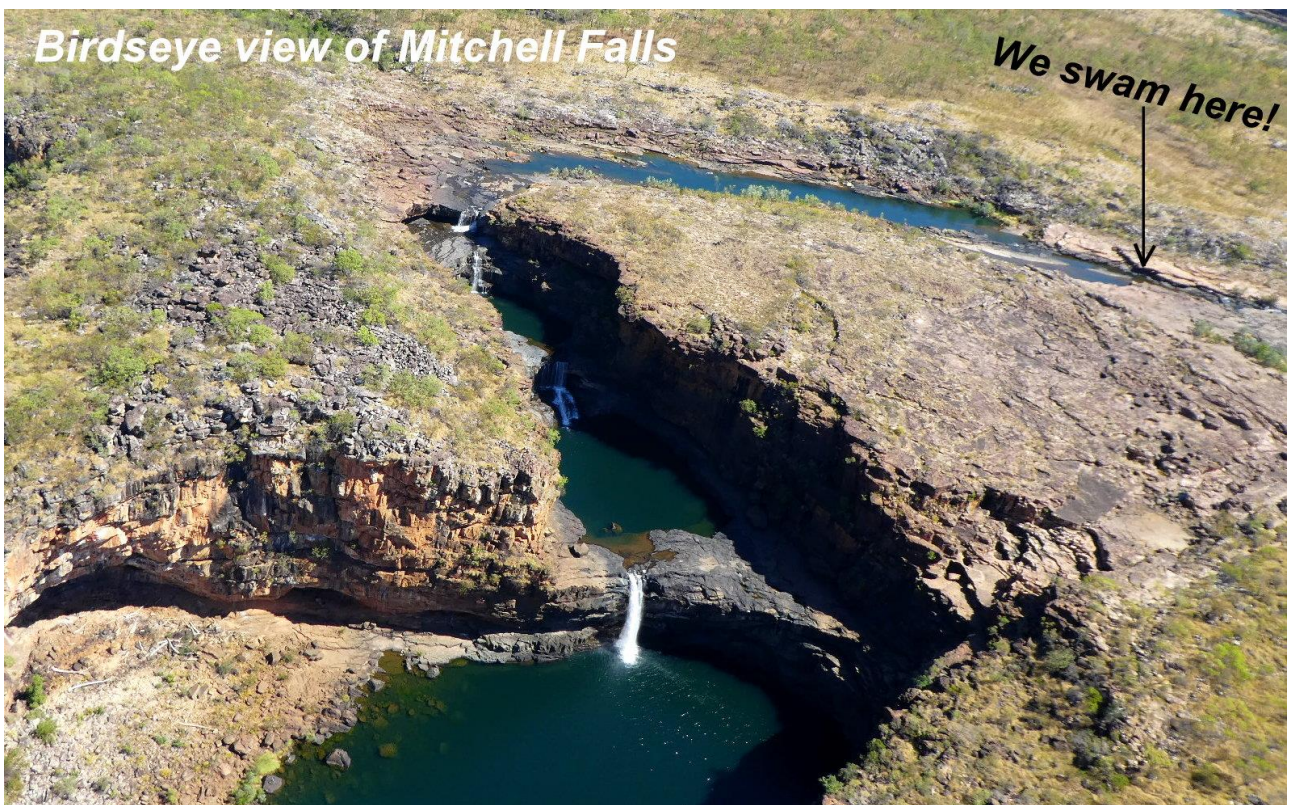
Crown this eventful day with a refreshing river swim and sundowner on the rocks.



...fast taxi back to Mitchell Air Strip



Love 'em whirrley flying machines



Birdseye view of Mitchell Falls

We swam here!

Arrow below: Find Katherine: End-of-day refresher after our Mitchell Falls excursion



King Edward River



King Edward River - water water everywhere in the Kimberley



King Edward River Camp - sundowner on the rocks

Aboriginal art and paintings: Various styles have evolved over time:



WANDJINA PAINTINGS

Depicts deities, often with elaborate headdress, large eyes and no mouth.

Age: around 1,000 years



IRREGULAR OR PARTIAL INFILL PAINTINGS

Typically these depict humans, plants and animal, some of which are now extinct (e.g. the Thylacine).

Age: 30,000 + years



CLAWED HAND PAINTINGS

Different to Gwion, this art style depicts humans and animals with clawed hands and feet. Usually a brown to red colour.

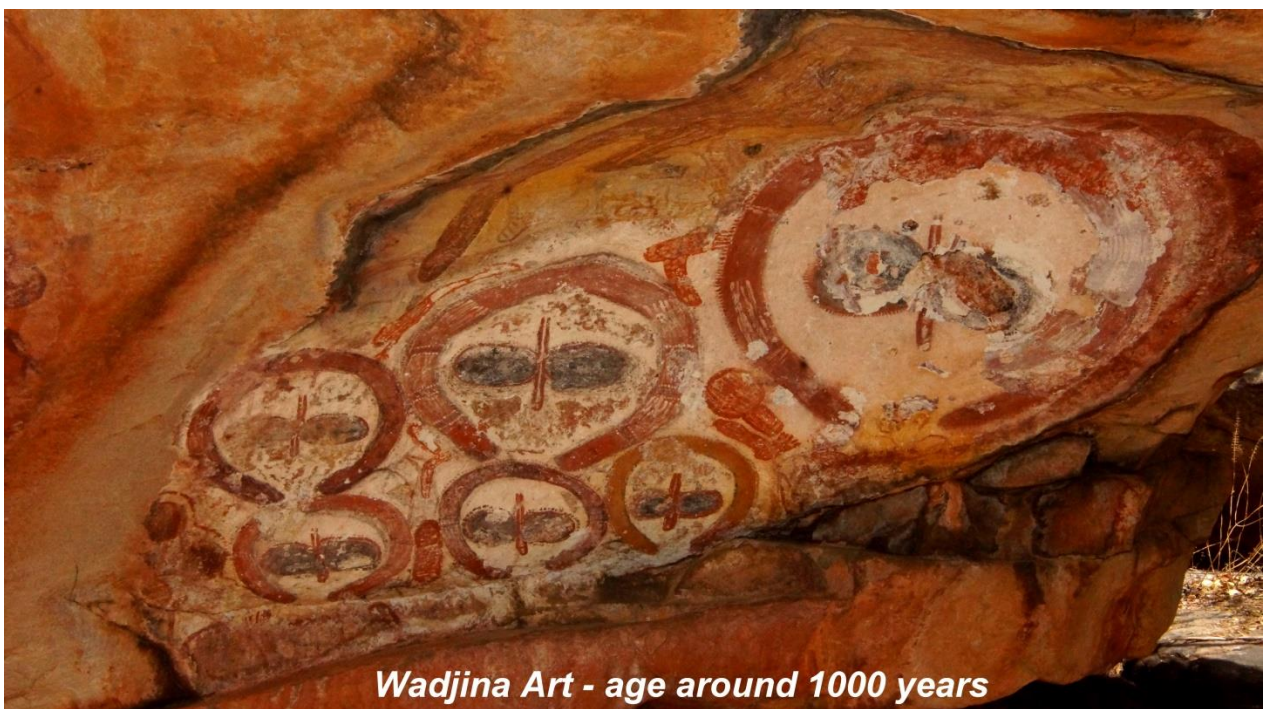
Age: 7,000 years



GWION (BRADSHAW) PAINTINGS

Dynamic, ornate, intricate human figures depicted with a range of weapons and cultural objects.

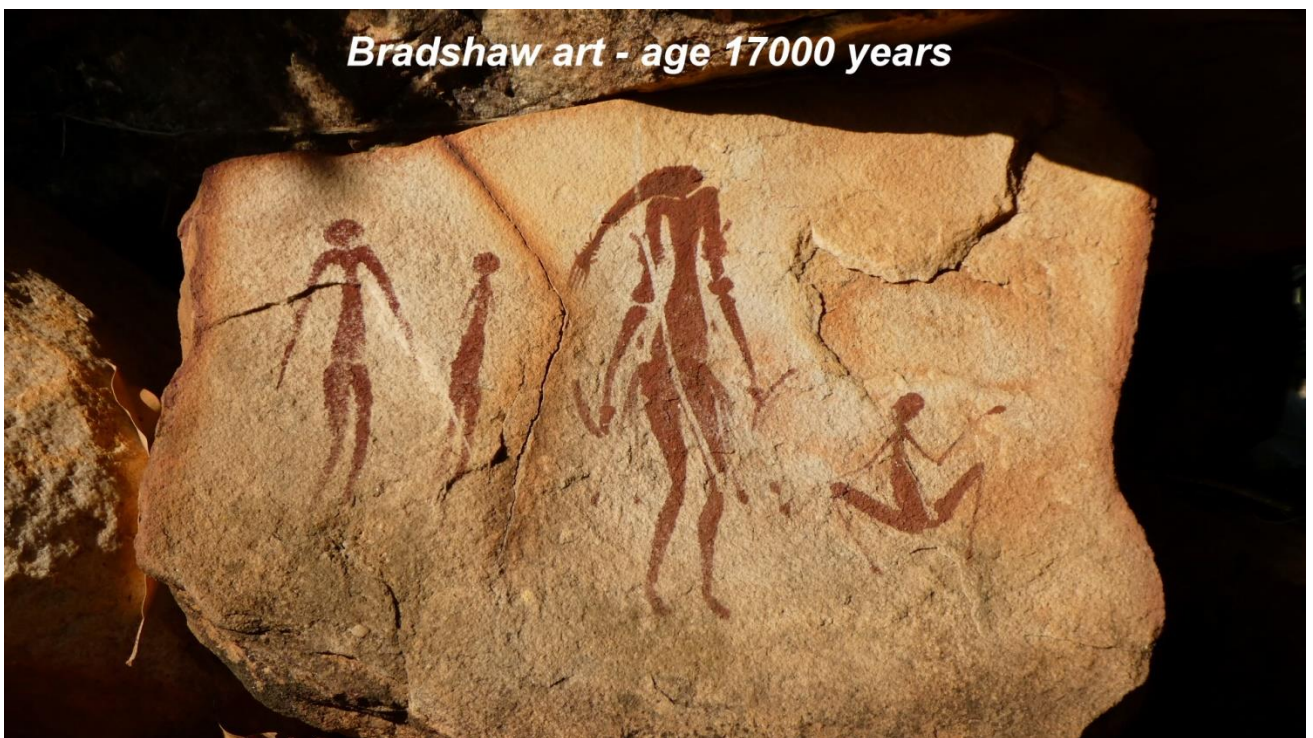
Age: 17,000 years



Wadjina Art - age around 1000 years



Bradshaw art - age 17000 years



After much deliberation as to the state of the track north of King Edward River camp we decide to *"bite the bullet"*: Tow the van all the way to the aboriginal settlement of **Kalumburu** and beyond to **McGowan's Camp**.

Yes, we are super-excited as this is going to be our first contact with the ocean since our last saltwater swim at Caloundra/QLD on June 3rd. Admittedly, we ARE 'sea side' bods at heart!!! The haul this far is **taxing and tiring**, the track tries to knock us out (flat tyre on the Matrix) but what should we find?? - **We are awestruck** as the McGowans vista opens up before us:

Awestruck at McGowans/Kalumburu



The original plan was to stay for three nights but **McGowans captures us hook, line and sinker!** We end up hanging out for seven - Simply cannot get enough soaking up this glorious view... There is a village vibe here, only a handful of determined campers make it this far! It creates that special feeling of common bond and we meet some wonderful folk, visitors and locals alike. We chill, we fish, pick palm-size oysters off the rocks, we croc-watch, chill some more and toast our sunsets over the watery horizon.



New day dawning at Kalumburu

McGowans rock pools: Safe from crocs and sharks



McGowans



Turns out, on August 25 my 65th birthday, I end up on a fishing charter out of neighbouring **Honey Moon Bay**. We get lucky 'bagging out' on Red Snapper. Snagging a few Trevally (Common and Golden). An 88cm 'Queenie' Queenfish adds to the day's action... **Bring on those delicious fresh fish dinners!**



Birthday dinner sorted with bag limits of Red Snapper!



Tasty Red Snapper



Common

Golden

Bunch of Trevally

"Happy birthday bendy rod!"



Queenie's landing...



No better way to celebrate a sixty fifth 😊😊😊

Oh yeah!



Into the boat you go...



**Starting Entré with a few freshly shucked oysters
off the rocks at McGowans.
We collect twenty in half an hour at low tide...**



Finishing off course... with a sweet tasty bite!

Katherine keeps surprising me, not only with daily gourmet meals but also, most astonishingly, by organising a freshly baked carrot cake. Call this **"roughing it in the Kimberley"**...



Every evening our camp literally is overrun by hundreds of Hermit Crabs. Not sure where they're all coming from but we observe some clusters of them seemingly discussing possible house swaps:

Hermit crabs' house swap meet



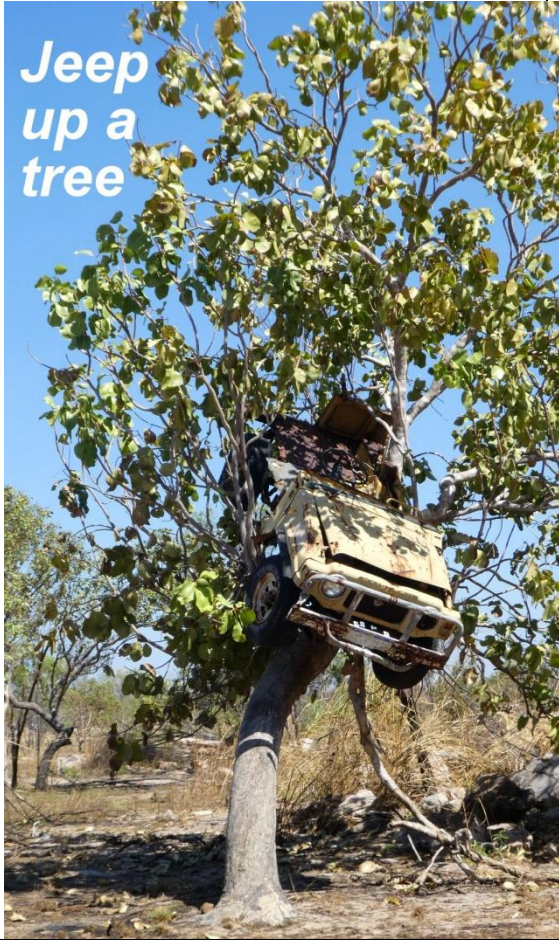
Looking for the perfect size abode



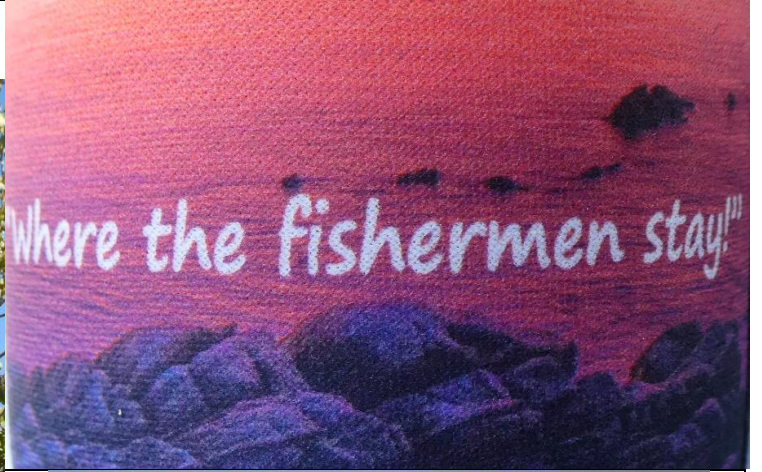
Two long-term drifters...

**Never park too long over
a fast growing sapling!!**

**Jeep
up a
tree**



Where the fishermen stay!!!



Garfish dinner for two

Katherine, as usual, blends in perfectly with indigenous locals Les "Lancho"(left), his mother Helen and cousin Frank who run the Honeymoon fishing charter.

One happy family at Honeymoon Bay 😊



Ask anyone up here “*when are you leaving?*” The standard answer seems to be: “*Possibly tomorrow!*”.

Ask that same question three days later and the answer remains: “*Possibly tomorrow!*”
Spellbound, we too find it *almost impossible* to tear ourselves away from captivating McGowans but... push on we must!

BEST CAMP to date - no questions asked - *Some stay here for months!*



Postcard from McGowans

Goetz's “snow teaser” pic from the south side



Winter reminder from the far South

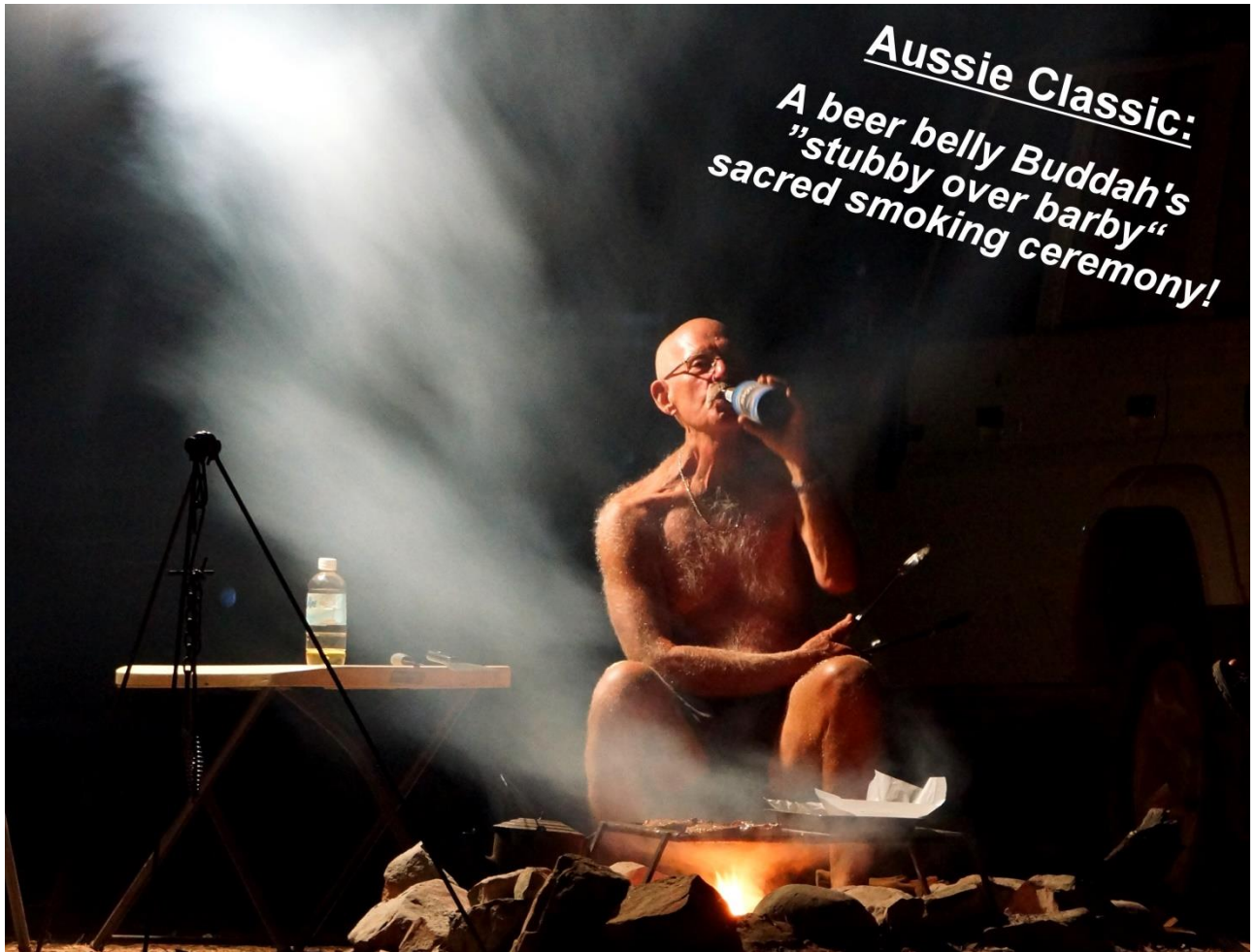
While we are sweating it out in the Kimberley my valued skiing buddy Goetz is carving up the slopes at Perisher on a 2.3m snow base, skiing 15000m/vertical in three days!

Staggering to think we are in the same country at the same ‘winter’ season of the year. We always have good fun in the mountains and I do regret a little not sharing the snow with him this time ☹️

Australia's landscape in July - Snowy Mountains 4850km south of McGowans



At Mount Barnett Camp we observe an age old tradition we frequently celebrate ourselves:



The attraction here is the bush hike to **Manning Gorge** which involves dragging a punt across the river at the start of the track.

As is the case with most walks into Kimberley gorges: The wonderful reward at each destination is a 'jump into the drink' to cool off; most welcome as daytime temps begin to reach into the mid-thirties °C by now.



Mornington Wilderness Lodge sits roughly 80km south of the Gibb River Road. Loving our detours, we decide to check this one out as well and spend three nights there.





King Leopold Range on the way to Mornington Wilderness Camp

The **Fitzroy River** runs through here. The main attractions are **Dimond Gorge** and **Sir John Gorge**. We hire the latter for a full day, meaning we are the only ones allowed in – a **private gorge all to ourselves!** Pay a little extra and the Lodge throws in a tasty lunch pack as part of the deal. There are three stretches of river to paddle through (4km altogether each way) with three hiking sections over river rocks in between stages. *The scenery is breathtaking!*



Dimond Gorge



[Continued in Part 6/b - See separate email](#)

Paddle on the Fitzroy River