



Karijini from the air



Capricorn Resort, Yeppoon



Camel off the airstrip

*Above: Giles Meteorology Station
Wirrilyerna Station*



TROPIC of CAPRICORN ADVENTURE

EAST COAST TO WEST COAST

They made it to from the Queensland coast all the way to Coral Bay, in Western Australia. And everything went as planned. **Bruce Fanning** described the journey as an awesome experience. He even swam with a whale shark.

The group was made up of 26 people from all over the country, with different skills and work background, but all sharing a love of flying and a sense of adventure. The medical fraternity was well represented, with six doctors, one dentist and a registered nurse. The weather was perfect, too. For a flying group, that is a great bonus. Barry Johnstone & myself arrived in Rocky, after a bit over two hours of flying from home, with two nights at the Capricorn Resort in Yeppoon with the group. This was a great way to get to know each other and get into holiday mode. We did our own thing, which included swimming, lazing around the pool, walking on the beach, tennis, golf, archery, a workout in the gym, and plenty of beer and wine at meal times.

From Rocky we headed west out over the huge central Queensland coal mining and farming areas which cover a large area of this part of the country.

Still showing the effects of recent flood rains which devastated the crops and flooded most of the open cut mines in its wake.

Arriving at Longreach you can't miss the sight of the Jumbo 747 and now parked beside it the first 707 operated by Qantas, and the first commercial fan jet sold outside the USA.

This aircraft was recently saved from being scrapped, and restored after 50,000 man-hours by volunteers and flown back to Australia. It is now permanently kept in Longreach, as part of the Qantas Founder's museum.

We booked into the Jumbuck Motel and were picked up by bus at 4pm to join the Thomson R. paddle boat cruise, which I wasn't greatly excited about, but it turned out to be a very relaxing and enjoyable evening.

Cruising down the river at sunset drinking wine and eating nibbles is a great way to meet and mix with total strangers, as well as get to know some of our own group, including Tony and Jan who run a medical practice in rural Bendigo.

They have had a lot of experience dealing with the effects of the drought on the rural population.

Barry and I left early next morning to visit a property 60m west of Longreach, called Dalkeith, where Barry worked for two years after leaving school.

We had both been to the Stockman's Hall of Fame etc, so left the others to



do their tourist thing and flew out to visit with Mac and Diana McClymont at Dalgeish.

Mac has connections with Warwick (the brother of Roslyn Hart), and also with aviation, as he worked with Ansett as a LAME before returning to the property and still does maintenance on light aircraft at the station.

We went on a bore run with Mac - Barry pretty excited to be back on the property and with people he enjoyed working with in his youth.

We then flew on to Winton. Some of the others had also left early for Winton to take in the Lark Quarry (dinosaur tracks) tour. We managed to have an hour at the Matilda Centre

before it closed, then back to the motel and ready for dinner.

Next morning we flew west again over very dry country to Boulia which is on the eastern edge of the desert country.

A short walk into town got us all into the pub for a light lunch then another walk to the historic "old stone house."

This house held a special significance for Barney, whose father was born in the underground cellar. Being the only cool room in town, it allowed 12 mothers and midwives to escape the desert heat to give birth.

Later we boarded a bus, drove out to Wirrilyenna Station for a camp oven dinner and overnight accommodation. It is very marginal country for farming.



Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach



Ayers Rock from the air



Whaleback iron ore mine



Patjarr strip

As it turned out, we could have all landed at the station airstrip, and avoided the 45 minute dusty drive back to Boulia, but as the condition of the strip was uncertain, Tony was not taking any chances.

Next stop was Alice Springs, and because it's a controlled airport, we were all told to keep in our groups, and maintain good separation approaching the control zone.

All went well with the very busy controller and we were parked on a very dusty, rocky pad, and fuelled up by a mobile tanker, which seemed to take forever.

Security here was at its most ridiculous. Barry was questioned by a Federal Police Officer, after walking about 20m away from the planes to take a photo. His crime? Not being accompanied by someone with an ATSI card.

We stayed at the Desert Palms Resort and spent the afternoon shopping, walking and looking. There is plenty to see and do at Alice, and at least three days are needed to take in the Desert Park, Telegraph Station, museums and lots more, to get a good appreciation of the "red centre".

Next morning was busy getting away, with a constant stream of heavy and light planes and helicopters all sharing a small airspace at the same time.

Fred was the only one who tested out the controller, when he was adamant he was tracking 273 for Ayres Rock, and the frustrated controller responding that the rock must have moved.

Fred claimed dyslexia, (or cockpit overload), as he was trying to say 237. Most planes tracked over the rock (just to make sure it was still there) then set course for Giles weather station.

The first planes in chased the camels off the strip, and we all landed safely and fuelled up ready for the next leg.

A short walk past the dozens of wrecked and overturned vehicles in the dump (some with current registration) and we were at the Warakurna Roadhouse, our destination for the night.

After lunch we walked up to the Met Station, were given a guided tour of the station, and saw the launching of the weather balloon at 02.15, which lifted up to about 45,000 ft.

Our rooms for the night were in the backpackers section. (Actually the only one), so all accommodation we stayed in was rated against Warakurna.

From Giles we flew to the remote community of Patjarr, where the kids were very much looking forward to our visit, however there was a death in the community and many had moved away into "sorry camp" for a couple of weeks.

I bought a shield, nulla nulla, paintings, a basket etc, from a "famous artist", called Nippy. I estimated we probably left about \$6,000 in the community. The kid's gave each of us a painted rock as a memento.

From Patjarr we headed off to Newman, but we, Geoff & Swampy (flying the other '182) diverted to Carnegie station to land and kick the dirt.

Carnegie is a 1,000,000 acre cattle station in very hostile and desolate country. We both took on some extra fuel when it was offered-just in case.

The others had fuelled up, and were ready to leave when we got in to Newman, so it was straight into the bus and in to town to our hotel-motel, and quite a lot of beer was consumed in a short time before dinner.

Newman is the home of the biggest Iron ore mine in the world, so we expected to see some big trucks around. This one parked not too far from our motel caught our attention.

“ Most of the group flew the pattern around the Olgas and Ayers Rock and many a good picture was taken before flying on without landing until reaching Giles. On arrival about thirty wild camels could be seen on the strip. One pass by Trevor Steel in his Conquest saw them off. ”

The mine tour next day was an eye opener to the wealth coming into the state from minerals and much more was to follow.

From Newman a short hop over more "iron ore ranges" and mines we landed in "Karijini National Park".

The park is huge in area covering over 2.5 million acres. We first visited the newly opened \$4m "Visitors Centre", which was only a short drive from the airstrip.

Our guides and bus drivers for our stay were Jeremy and Chris. Jeremy operates a business called "Global Gypsies" (.com of course) and takes tour groups all over the world from Kenya to Tasmania.

He is contracted to Karijini to look after the walks and tour groups. The trails are all graded as to fitness etc required to undertake them. To go on a grade 6 trail you would have to be qualified in abseiling, and rock climbing.

There have been some serious accidents at Karijini in the past. The most recent one being where a man hurt himself and was stuck in a gorge for 18 hours before he

could be taken out. The tragedy was that a flash flood came down the gorge before the rescue workers could get out, resulting in the death of one man.

At one of the lookout's, 100m above the floor, a steel gantry has been installed to winch up anyone who does get into trouble, and this is the only way out for the entire gorge. Helicopters cannot be used because the gorges are too narrow and too deep.

We stayed at Karijini two nights at the Eco Centre, which opened about this time last year. The accommodation units are quite unique semi permanent tents, with ensuite attached. Sixty of these units have been scattered around in circular loops connected to water and sewerage.

The only problem encountered by some, was finding their way back to the correct tent, on a dark night, out in the bush, after a great dinner, with much wine, and a (provided) torch which went flat. However we all survived much fitter than before and agreed this was a highlight of the trip.

Our guides were great, because time

management is important so you can see as much as possible and get the best overview of such a huge area. The Eco Retreat is over an hour's drive back to the airstrip, so it was an early start on Wednesday morning for our final leg to Coral Bay.

As it worked out our group was the first to depart Kirijini.

Heading west again the rugged Hamersley Range, eventually gave way to flat coastal plains and sand dunes.

The waters of the Indian Ocean soon appeared out of the haze, as did Coral Bay with the Ningaloo reef clearly visible close to shore.

After booking into the Ningarloo Resort, we joined a sunset cruise and dinner aboard a catamaran.

The next day I learned how to snorkel again, and swam with a 6m Whale Shark. The whale sharks come into these waters at this time each year to feed. Along this part of the west coast a cold current comes up from the south and meets a warm northerly current, forcing huge amounts of plankton to the surface.





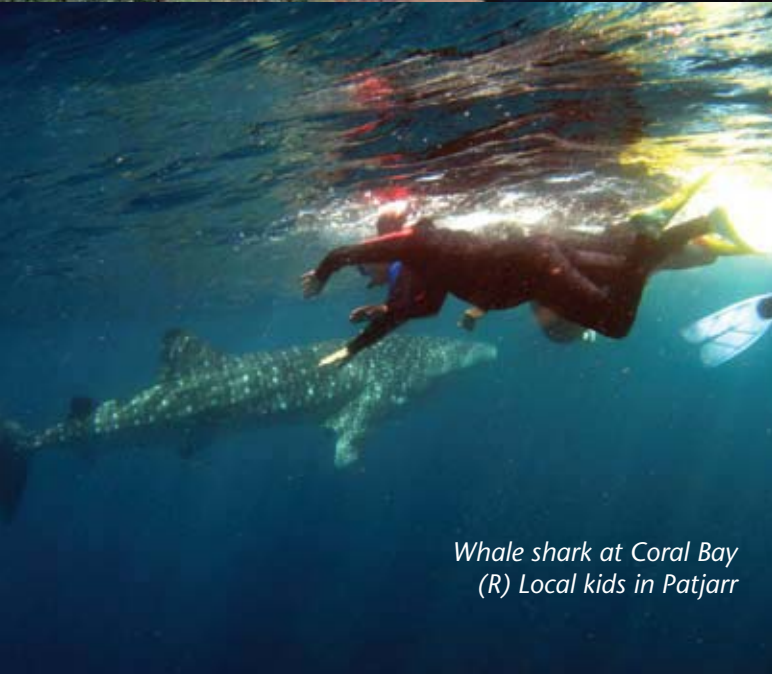
The huge docile whale sharks swim along the surface with mouths open (up to 3/4 of a metre wide) straining out this tiny food supply with their gills. Their only predators are sharks and humans. They can escape the sharks by diving deep (up to 1500 metres) where no other fish, or sharks can survive, but they have no fear of humans.

Even though they are protected worldwide they are sold on the black-market and many are caught by just swimming beside them and slipping a rope through their gills. It was a once in a lifetime experience and a great way to end a journey I will never forget. We had made the east to west crossing along the Tropic of Capricorn. ■

*Do you have an adventure you want to share?
Email editor@aopa.com.au
(Send photos as separate jpegs)*



Karajini gorge



*Whale shark at Coral Bay
(R) Local kids in Patjarr*

THE CAPRICORN GROUP:

Fred Morgan (Doctor from Nanango) Qld and his wife Marcia - **Piper Comanche PA-24 250**

Tony & Jan Van der Speck (both Doctor's from Bendigo) Vic - **Piper Twin Comanche PA30**

Geoff Nicholson (Doctor from Highton) Vic - **Cessna Skylane 182Q** (VH-KFR)

Lindsay (Swampy) Marsh (semi retired flying instructor from Perth) WA

Barney Davoren (milk run from Nanango) Qld

Veronica Howlett (Registered Nurse from Nanango) Qld

David Kenny (dentist from Nanango) Qld

Jim Barry (doctor from Swan Hill) Vic - **Piper Comanche PA24-250**

John Ward from Swan Hill (Vic).- **Piper Comanche PA-24-250**

Spider Webb & Yvonne Robinson (retired air force mirage pilot) - **Piper Comanche PA-24 180** (VH-EOH)

Ian Tompson (retired engineer from Mt Martha) Vic - **Piper Twin Comanche PA30** (VH-MMN)

Irene Lawson (accountant from Melbourne) Vic

Michael Wilson (Ear Nose & Throat specialist from Swan Hill) Vic

James Connell (Real estate sales from Melbourne) Vic

Geoff Stockdale (management consultant) Melbourne) Vic

Trevor & Denise Steel (retired-Suncorp Golden Beach) Qld - **Cessna 303 Conquest (twin)**

Barry Johnstone & Bruce Fanning - **Cessna Skylane 182T** (VH-BVF)

Team leaders - Tony & Angela Reed from Sandringham, Vic - **Piper Twin Comanche PA301** (VH-MEG)

The tour was organised by Tony and Angela Read of **Aussie FlyAways Pty Ltd** who will be repeating this trip and many others equally as interesting. For more info ring 0395983320 or see www.aussieflyaways.com.au

