

NINGALOO TRIP 2015

by Gail Priest

Trip participants: Geoff Palmer (leader)
Gisela Cannon
Colin Priest
Gail Priest
Aaron Gove
Andrea Reiss
Geoff Emery (joined halfway)

This was a six day trip from Coral Bay, north to Ningaloo Station at Cloates Point, to Point Edgar and back to Ningaloo Station – about 92 km in total.

Saturday 9/5/15

We all met at Coral Bay by midday. It was nice to catch up with ex club member, Andrea, who flew in to Carnarvon from Sydney and was picked up by Aaron, carrying their double kayak and gear. Geoff P had booked campsites at the caravan park, where we unloaded our boats and gear. Then the drivers set off to do the car shuttle to Ningaloo Station, while Andrea and I minded the gear and tested the blissful waters of Coral Bay. After three hours the drivers were back in Geoff P's car. Time for a sunset stroll on the beach before a bite to eat at the café and then early to bed.

Sunday 10/5/15 DAY 1 Coral Bay to Bateman Bay 10.7km

Beautiful morning. Carted all the boats and gear down to the beach by car and trolley. Then came the concentrated effort of stowing our six days supplies in every available bit of space in our kayaks. Andrea uncomplaining as she worked her sleeping bag through that silly, way-too-small hatch opening. So much water to carry – oh so heavy!!! And then we were away. Not long in and the NE came up, making us work hard. We decided to make camp where we stopped for lunch. Scurried to put up our makeshift sun shelters, then swam and vegged out. All of us tired after long drives and car shuttle and the preparation for the trip, so very nice to relax, even though short of our target camp.

We were sitting around when a couple pulled up in their rubber dinghy shouting that a manta ray was making it's way towards us if we wanted to get in the water with our snorkelling gear. Aaron, Colin and I grabbed our gear and next thing they were back telling us to hop on board as the ray had changed direction so they would take us out to it. They dropped us just ahead of the ray, so we could see it swimming towards us and then we followed it a little way. Another couple picked us up in their boat and dropped us back at camp. They were all tour guides on holiday. It was all very chop-chop, quick-quick and exciting.

Monday 11/5/15 DAY 2 Bateman Bay to Carter Hill 28.5km

Made an early start (8am) to make up some distance. Nice conditions (SE). Dolphin and turtle sightings. Had a lunch and swim stop. Ferocious sand-flies drove some of us to stand in the water to eat our lunch. Pushed on till late afternoon, just short of Carter Hill. The long paddle left us pretty tired, but we were very happy with our campsite. Set up our tents in the low dunes. A lovely, calm evening. Gisela produced a chocolate beetroot cake, unsquashed and delicious, that gave us all a boost.

Tuesday 12/5/15 Day 3 Carter Hill to Ningaloo Station to Norwegian bay 28km

Good conditions. Set off at 8.30am, heading towards Ningaloo Station and after a while started looking out for Geoff E who was planning to paddle south from Ningaloo Station to join us. Made contact with him by UHF radio mid morning, shortly before spotting him in the distance. Found him wide-eyed and shaken after receiving a massive bump to the front of his kayak, followed by a second, slightly milder bump to the back of his kayak by an alleged shark. The incident made more scary by the fact that Geoff was paddling without a spray-deck (Sorry Geoff, doxed in) and was having to do regular sponging out of his cockpit. Not a wise move, which we put down to boggle-brained Geoff after three days of babysitting three little grandsons and then leaving Perth at 3am to drive up to Ningaloo Station in one day. I'm sure there were some good expletives when Geoff discovered he hadn't packed his spray-deck. Oops!! We felt your pain, Geoff!! Luckily Geoff P had a spare spray-deck – only it was in his car at Coral Bay!! It was decided that the two Geoff's would paddle straight on to Ningaloo Station and set off to Coral Bay to pick up the spray-deck. The rest of us could paddle at leisure up to the station and then paddle on to the first suitable campsite. We had a lunch break in a scenic little spot, then did a brief stop at the station for a water top-up for some of us. We paddled on, scouting for a good campsite. There was rocky shore for some time, so we paddled about 8km before finding ourselves a beautiful spot. After setting up camp and having swims and cuppas it was getting late in the day and we started looking out for the Geoff's. Andrea made a good flag on top of the highest sand dune, using her brightest red dry bag on the end of her paddle. We made UHF radio contact and then spotted them. We got the billy on to have a cuppa ready. Nice to see them arrive tired but smiling. That pie and beer in Coral Bay must have helped. A big day for them!!! We agreed on a later start for the next day of 9am.

Wednesday 13/5/15 DAY 4 Norwegian Bay to Point Edgar 7km

Beautiful morning. Slow pack-up and then off again. Perfect paddling conditions. Stopped in a glorious spot for lunch and set up camp there in eager readiness for a lazy afternoon and a rest day to follow. Bliss!!!! Our shade shelters went up and the afternoon was spent on swimming, reading, nanna-naps, fishing, cuppas and snacks. There was a lovely, long stretch of beach for a sunset stroll. Then time for the overly-friendly flies to go to bed. A mild temperature evening and a beautiful sky, thick with stars. Entertained ourselves spotting shooting stars and satellites. Quite chilly late in the night.

Thursday 14/5/15 DAY 5 Rest Day

Point Edgar to reef and along coast towards Point Billie 4.6km

All enjoyed the luxury of not having to pack up camp and have an open-ended day ahead. Geoff and Gisela paddled out to the reef and then up to Point Billie. A little later some of us also paddled out to the reef, hoping to jump out and have a snorkel, but conditions were too choppy out there. We paddled along the shore for a while, enjoying watching the ospreys and wedge-tailed eagles soaring. Water so turquoise, dunes so white and sky so blue.

There was a strip of reef just off shore and if we walked up the beach a bit, armed with our goggles and snorkel and swam out to the reef, the current would carry us down over it, where there were plenty of beautiful fish and a few bits of coral. Well worth a number of goes.

Another stunning sunset in our little piece of paradise.

Colin got a weather forecast on his AM/FM radio and discovered there was a strong wind warning in place for the following day. Geoff P checked in by UHF radio with the homestead and they confirmed strong winds were due. We decided the next morning would have to be an early start, 7.30am to head back to the cars at Ningaloo Station.

Perfectly calm night.

Friday 15/5/15 DAY 6 Point Edgar to Ningaloo Station at Cloates Point 13.7km

A lot of beavering about by torchlight in the early morning, getting ourselves packed up. No sign of impending winds. Quick pose for a group photo before departure – quite a crusty mob we were by then. Lovely to be on the water with the sun just up and the boats gleaming in the early light. The peacefulness didn't last too long. As the sun rose, so the wind picked up and we soon had it coming in strongly onto our port side. As we rounded the bay we had the advantage of a following sea. Colin used his sail to great advantage and I rafted up to hitch a ride for a while. The wind got stronger and stronger and we were having a bit of a wild ride, catching some good waves - quite exhilarating for some, a little on the hairy side for yours truly, but exciting at the same time. By the time we landed the wind was fierce. High fives all round before a mighty wind-swept and sand-blasted unloading session. All hands on board for tying the boats onto the roof racks. Geoff E produced a round of luke-warm beers and Andrea some pre-melted but semi-recovered chocolate before all parting to go our separate ways, feeling salty, sun-kissed and satisfied.

A huge thank you to Geoff P for organising the trip and being our illustrious leader. Also thanks to everyone for their friendly company and for the TLC when my back played up and doing my share of the lifting and carrying. Great team, great part of the country and great trip.