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### **Kimberley Adventure—Zonta meets the Ngarinyin women**

*Carole Theobald*

Eleven members of the club shared a week in the Kimberley with very special women elders of the Ngarinyin community. The Zonta members travelled in a 4x4 OKA coach and a Landcruiser along the famous unsealed Gibb River Road to the settlement of Mt Barnett, 400 kms from Kununurra.

We passed through magnificent plains, over hills that provided panoramic views of the superb Kimberley scenery and through wide rivers that had no bridges. This road is cut off for a few months every year during the wet season as the rivers become impassable.

We established our campsite just out of 'town' and around the campfire, the club members were welcomed by elders from the community.

Our campsite was very primitive - tents, campfires and bush toilets. This environment enabled us to bridge the gap between our cultures more quickly. Our first evening was warm in friendship but cold in temperature! We were grateful for our tracksuits and beanies to keep out the cold in our sleeping bags.

The next day Pansy, Gilgie, Kitty



*Zonta Club of Perth members, Ngarinyin elders and friends meet by the Gibb River.*

and Lucy slowly introduced us to their beautiful Ngarinyin country. Seated on a white sandy beach next to the idyllic waterway of Manning Gorge it was hard to believe we were hundreds of kilometres from the ocean. Our introductions enabled us to redefine ourselves in nature's terms - salt-water women, river women, mountain women...



*Introducing ourselves to Pansy and Lucy*

We learned and participated in smoking ceremonies necessary to show respect to the spirits of the area. We also learned which flowers to eat, caught frogs and even used them as bait to catch fish for dinner!



*This flower is sweet and crunchy!*

Lennie, under Lucy's supervision became a dab hand at finding frogs and Freda caught a fish, but Pansy was by far the best fisher-woman, catching a bream that must have weighed over a kilogram. The fish were nursed back to the site by Lennie and Margaret in the back of a car and tasted beautiful when cooked in the coals of the camp fire.

Slowly, over the next two days, we were able to shake off the pace of the city and appreciate just sharing space and time with these magnificent shy women. In true Zonta style we shared stories, listened, talked and learned. Even though we come from different cultures our concerns are similar - we all work in our own ways to make the world a kinder place to be in.



*Margaret and Lennie nurse the day's catch home!*

For the next stage of our adventure, we all left Mt Barnett and travelled up the Kalumburu Road, setting camp on the banks of the picturesque Gibb River. Here we were joined by Yvonne and her mother Maudie (86 yrs old), local Ngarinyin women from the Gibb River Community.

Our campsite was next to the road adjacent to the river crossing. This is the only road to Kalumburu, Drysdale Station and the Mitchell Falls, so the traffic ranged from four wheel drives, to caravans and huge two dog container trucks.

A few people camped on the other side of the road, but most rattled through the country unaware of the cultural riches of the area. This was probably just as well - our new friends told us sad stories of rock art paintings being cut away from the rocks and skulls being removed from burial sites to add to private collections around the world. They are desperate to find effective ways of protecting these sacred places from vandalism. It was hard to imagine vandalism existed in such a remote, beautiful location!

The bird life was diverse, colourful and entertaining. Above, two whistling kites guarded over our site, at eye level a family of bee-eaters darted between the trees and on the ground, a bower bird regularly foraged the campfire remnants to gather material for its bower!

If you weren't interested in birds before this adventure - you soon were hooked!! Between us, over 70 different species of bird were identified during the week and confirmed using Freda's bird-watcher's bible.



*One of the Whistling Kite's standing guard over us*

We took a trip out to Donkey Creek and, following traditional cultural practices of calling to the spirits and smoking ceremonies, Gilgie introduced us to her ancestors - immortalised in rock art that is thousands of years old. We admired the artwork, marvelled at its age and contemplated the people who made it and those who continue to preserve it.

The land is probably very similar to how it looked when the first artists collected the ochres to create these famous images. We fossicked in the streambeds of the



*Lucy and Lennie find frogs*



*Freda's fish!*



*Some of the magnificent rock art.*



area, seeing the natural ochres, collecting frogs and admiring the colours of the abundant butterflies and flowers.



*Soaking up the atmosphere around the*

Later in the day, Yvonne followed traditional ceremonies and introduced us to the Ngarinyin's 'Crocodile Rock'. Unlike Elton's young version, this rock is very, very old. The rock is shaped like a crocodile and is adorned with adult and young crocodiles.

Nearby is another rock with long necked turtles and a variety of other animals and images painted on it.



*Crocodile rock and nearby rock paintings*

*Right: Our camp site on the other side of the river/bath/laundry!!*

Lucy spotted some native bees with her sharp eyes and followed them to their nest in the rocky ground.

Pansy and Yvonne started digging and Sciona continued the difficult task of removing rocks to reveal the sought-after sugarbag.



*Yvonne and Sciona dig for sugarbag*



*Sugarbag!*

Sugarbag looks like a drooling mass of black treacle with the golden pollen beneath encased in a black root-like sheath.

We followed an ill-defined track back to the river to discover our camp on the other side - we did not realise we were so close to our camp - how easy it would be to get lost in this country! We were hot, very hot and it was wonderful to bathe in the cold, cold river with our natural soap!



We had all been feeling the cold nights and the local women explained that the extra cold temperatures were because of the very wet, wet season.

One evening Pansy was in good form, leading the Ngarinyin women in traditional songs. One song did not seem to be very traditional though as the actions resembled women washing in the river with a bar of soap! It was so funny - we knew exactly what she meant though we did not understand one word! She imitated us so well!



*Rugged up around the campfire*

The locals slept by the campfire in mounds of blankets and doonas - we city slickers basically wore as many clothes as possible in our sleeping bags in our swags!

The days started before dawn. I am not sure who woke first - was it the birds that woke our Ngarinyin friends or did they wake the birds...?

Most Zontians snuggled back under the covers until the sun's rays shone directly on the campsite or they could not ignore Gilgie's "Wakie, Wakie" call any longer! We would then emerge from our cocoons...

One morning Wendy led us in an impromptu stretching/yoga session during which the heat from the sun seemed to enter every pore of the body - a wonderful start to the day!

Yvonne and Pansy are artists. The day before our visit they had just completed some large banners which have been sent to the United Nations in Geneva to use in a conference to mark the end of the decade of indigenous people. Kofi Annan had personally invited the Ngarinyin people to contribute to the artwork for the occasion. Yvonne is going to Geneva in a few weeks as one of four representatives of the Ngarinyin people at the conference - it will be interesting to hear about her experiences. We agreed to help her obtain suitable clothes etc for the event. (The Gibb River is not renowned for its boutiques!!)

Outside of Australia the Ngarinyin people are highly regarded. I think the large Wandjina at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games helped to put this community on the map internationally. Previous elders from the community have been overseas and helped scientists understand how rock paintings could have been made in European caves. Our understanding is the scientists marvelled that there were people on the planet that still used the skills!

We spent one day having great fun making clapping sticks. Clapping sticks are knocked together to provide the rhythm for songs. First of all we had to find the right sort of trees!



Yvonne and Marlene eye up the clapping stick tree!

Yvonne and her nephew Selwyn took us to a place where, armed with a small pruning saw, we cut off the appropriately sized branches from the correct species of tree. The branches were cut to the correct length to make a number of pairs of clapping sticks. The sticks were banged together to remove the outer bark - a very therapeutic, aerobic exercise!



Selwyn shows us how to knock the bark off the clapping sticks

Yvonne pointed out the clapping trees, the didgeridoo trees, the emu food trees, the medicine trees - it is a veritable supermarket out there if only you know where to look!

We tried to find a ripe didgeridoo tree, but to no avail - the beetles hadn't finished their work, so the inside of the branches were not yet fully hollow.



Unripe didgeridoo tree! The hole in it needs to be bigger.

We returned to camp and spent a lovely afternoon smoothing the sticks, sanding them down with

sandpaper (now how did Lennie know to bring that??) and Yvonne, Lucy, Gilgie and Selwyn painted them for us. We even made a special set of clapping sticks for the club which we can use instead of a gavel at meetings!



Preparing the clapping sticks for painting

We had underestimated the number of clapping sticks so Yvonne took a few of us to another site to collect a couple more. Marlene, Sciona, Wendy and Carole could not resist the inviting waters of this beautiful secluded fishing spot and had a quick swim among the small waterfalls. Freda and Yvonne stood guard and saw off some male tourists that had somehow found our secret spot, giving us time to get out of the water!



Irresistible swimming spot!

When we returned to the camp site, Pansy had found some white ochre and was painting everyone's faces in traditional style.



It was lovely watching her paint her own face afterwards using a small hand mirror to guide her.



*Judy has her face painted by Pansy...*



*So does Carole...*



*So does Pansy!*

We all looked magnificent and went to the river to have our photo taken by Brownie our coach driver.

It was a wonderful afternoon - women of the world relaxing, enjoying being together...

Beside the river, as the sun was setting, we chatted about Zonta, the Ngarinyin and how we can continue our friendship.

Around the campfire on the last night we discussed the logistics



*Pansy and Karen seal the friendship between Zonta and the Ngarinyin people*

for the next day as we were all going in different directions and even set them to music using our clapping sticks so we could remember who was doing what!

It was a happy evening, but sad as we knew it was our last on this visit. After dinner, we looked at the marvellous clear skies and explained to Yvonne that the stars will look different in Geneva as they will be viewed from the other side of the world. She would see new stars as well as many familiar ones - providing the skies are clear!



*Marj holds her torch so we can serve ourselves to dinner—notice the coats and beanies—it is so cold!*

We retired early as we had to break camp early in the morning. Meanwhile, Sciona took Maudie, Yvonne and Selwyn back to the Gibb River Community and two hours later returned to the camp quietly so as not to disturb us...

Gilgie woke us before dawn with a persistent 'wakey wakey' and after breakfast we broke up the camp and started loading the OKA.



*Our campsite next to the river.*

It was a sad farewell as we hugged these warm women who had shared their lives with us.



*Pansy and Karen say farewell....*

Sciona drove Pansy, Lucy and Gilgie back to Mt Barnett and Lyn led the singing in an impromptu 'guard of honour' to see them off!

We met up with Sciona later in the day on our return to Kununurra at Emma Gorge.

We were privileged to see Ngarinyin country with Ngarinyin guides.

This was no tourist visit - it was an experience that hopefully will be the start of a longterm relationship between the Zonta Club of Perth and the Ngarinyin women.

## DIARY DATES

### 6th July New Members Evening

Lori Grech is pleased to confirm that we have 3 new prospective members who have confirmed their attendance at our wine and cheese evening on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>. Please advise Lori if you have any other people you would like to invite.

### 8th July Club Meeting

On Thursday 8th July the meeting will focus on the experiences of the members that visited the Ngarinyin people in the Kimberley

Please bring any preloved costume jewellery to the meeting (see *Jewellery for Ethiopian Women*).

## Meet your PR Team



L-R Helen Margaria, Isobel Wilson (PR Chair) and Leonie Collison-Bryant

Pictured here are three members of the PR Team at the last PR meeting held at Isobel's place.

Now see if you can guess what these women are up to in their lives by matching the 'goss' to the correct woman!

#### The 'Goss'

A) I often visit my sister who lives on Manhattan Island

B) I fly to Africa a couple of times a month with the UN.

C) I regularly visit mine sites out bush wearing my steel toe cap boots and bump hat.

Answers: A = Helen, B = Leonie, C = Isobel

Don't forget to check out our club web site at its temporary home of:

<http://members.powerdsl.com.au/theobald/index.htm>

## Jewellery for Ethiopian Women

You may be aware of the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin, an Australian who was named an Honorary Zontian in 1996 for her marvellous work as a gynaecologist and co-founder (with her husband Reg) of a hospital in Ethiopia which treats outcast women suffering complications from childbirth—the fistula hospital.

She was a keynote speaker at Convention in Hawaii in 2000 and told a very moving story of her work.

Zonta International has provided funds for the work of the hospital and is mentioned in her book "The Hospital by the River" published in 2001.

When the young women leave the hospital to return home they are given a new dress and costume jewellery.

Through 'Tricia Summerfield's book club contacts we have an opportunity to send pre-loved costume jewellery

to Ethiopia through a friend who will be travelling there in a couple of months' time.

So please bring along any no-longer-required items - necklaces and bracelets are most popular - to the next club meeting on 8 July and 'Tricia will ensure they are sent along to these very needy young women.