

130 KM WILDERNESS - PADDLE FROM THE GREGORY BRIDGE TO ESCOTT STATION

THIS PADDLE TOOK 4 DAYS, THE FIRST 2 DAYS WERE QUITE IDYLIC WITH PADDLING IN GOOD RUNNING WATER.

THE FIRST DAY STARTED ON THE TUESDAY AFTER THE 1981 GREGORY RACE, PAST PLANET DOWNS THE GREGORY RIVER SPLITS INTO BEAME BROOKE WHICH FLOWS ALONGSIDE THE BURKETOWN ROAD, WHILE THE GREGORY RIVER CONTINUES INLAND, WE FOLLOWED THE LATTER UNTIL WE REACHED OUR LANDPARTY AT 20 MILE HUT ON GREGORY DOWNS STATION PROPERTY.

THE 2ND DAY BECAME SLOWER PADDLING WHEN THE GREGORY BRANCHED OFF IN CROCODILE CREEK AND TOZER CREEK, WE FOLLOWED THE LATTER AS THIS WAS A YOUNG CREEK FORMED IN THE BIG WET OF 1974 AND ALTHOUGH SHALLOWER HAD LESS OVERHANGING PANDANUS PALMS. WE ARRIVED NEAR PUNJAUB STATION AT ABOUT 4 PM.

THE 3D DAY PROVED TO BECOME THE MOST DIFFICULT. THE FIRST PART IN THE FAST FLOWING TOZER CREEK WAS QUITE EASY, BUT SOON WE REACHED THE AREA WHERE THE ELIZABETH CREEK, LAWN HILL CREEK AND GREGORY COME TOGETHER TO FORM WHAT IS CALLED BY THE LOCALS: THE EVERGLADES. JACK SCHOONES OF PUNJAUB STATION TOLD ME THAT CATTLE DID NOT LIKE TO CROSS THERE, I THOUGHT THE WATER WOULD BE TOO DEEP FOR THEM, THE TRUTH HOWEVER WAS THAT THE CREEKS CONTINUED TO SPLIT INTO SIDE-CHANNELS STREWN WITH SNAGS AND LOGS WHICH MADE PADDLING IMPOSSIBLE AND FORCED US TO PORTAGE OUR KAYAKS FOR MOST OF THE DAY.

WE WERE FORTUNATELY PADDLING CLUB-TOURERS WHICH IS A SHORT STURDY KAYAK WITHOUT A RUDDER AND A ROPE-LOG AT THE FRONT, WHICH ENABLED US TO PULL OUR KAYAKS QUITE EASILY THROUGH THE SAND AND SPEAR-GRASS.

THE PORTAGES SLOWED US DOWN SUFFICIENTLY, THAT WE RAN OUT OF DAYLIGHT, DUSK STARTED TO FALL, WE GOT CUT OFF GREG VAN RYT WHO GOT A BIT TOO FAR AHEAD, WHEN REALISING THIS, GREG PUT HIS KAYAK UPRIGHT IN THE FORK OF A TREE, STARTED TO RUN UNTIL HE HIT A FENCE, THE FENCE TOOK HIM TO A TRACK WHICH TOOK HIM TO DOOMADGEE MISSION CROSSING WHERE HE WAS VERY RELIEVED TO FIND THE CAMP OF OUR LANDPARTY AT ABOUT 8 PM.

THE REST OF US COLLECTED FIREWOOD BEFORE DARKNESS SET IN AND STARTED A NICE WARM FIRE, WE CUT HEAPS OF GRASS AND IMPROVISED MATTRESSES NEAR THE FIRE.

WE WERE LOW ON PROVISIONS HAD GREG HAD TAKEN OFF WITH MY EMERGENCY-RATIONS: A FEW TINS OF IRISH STEW AND BAKED BEANS, WHILE KEVIN WOODHOUSE HAD HALF A PACKET OF BISCUITS LEFT. WE HAD A RESTLESS NIGHT OF SLEEP BEING WOKEN UP A FEW TIMES BY HOWLING DINGOES AND FURTHER UNFAMILIAR SOUNDS.

WE STARTED OUR 4TH DAY AT DAYLIGHT BY DRAGGING OUR KAYAKS THROUGH KILOMETERS OF SAND AND GRASS UNTIL ALL THE SIDE ARMS OF THE CREEKS SEEMED TO MERGE INTO A MAIN CHANNEL AND WERE QUITE RELIEVED TO BE ABLE TO PADDLE OUR KAYAKS AGAIN.

WE HEARD THE WELCOME SOUND OF A GRADER FURTHER DOWNSTREAM, DOOMADGEE MISSION CROSSING CAME INTO VIEW, WE ARRIVED AT OUR LANDPARTY AT ABOUT 10 AM AFTER A WELL DESERVED MEAL AND REST. WE PREPARED FOR OUR

WAY TO ESCOTT LODGE WHERE WE ARRIVED AT ABOUT 5PM. WE CELEBRATED THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF OUR TRIP WITH A BARBECUE AT THE LODGE AT NIGHT, WHERE FRIED BARRAMUNDI-FILLETS AND CHOICE PRIME BEEFSTEAKS OF THE STATION WASHED DOWN WITH THE FEW NECESSARY COLD BEERS SOON HELPED TO ERASE THE MEMORIES OF HARDSHIP AND DEPRIVATIONS OF THE TRIP. THE PARTY RETURNED TO MOUNT ISA THE FOLLOWING DAY, WHILE GREG AND MYSELF STAYED AN ADDITIONAL DAY TO CAMP AT GIN ARM CREEK WHERE WE CAUGHT 2 SMALL BARRAMUNDI BEFORE ALSO RETURNING HOME THE FOLLOWING DAY.

P.S. BEFORE EMBARKING ON OUR TRIP I MADE SOME INQUIRIES WITH THE SURROUNDING STATION OWNERS. DIGGER CLARKE OF ALMORA STATION SAID THAT THE OCCASIONAL SALTWATER CROCODILE IN THE NICHOLSON RIVER WOULD BE AS FRIGHTENED OF US AS WE OF THEM, BUT WE WOULD BE PAST THEM BEFORE WE KNEW IT. LUCKILY WE DID NOT SEE OR ENCOUNTER ANY AND WITH THE DRAMATIC INCREASE OF "SALTIES", I DOUBT IF I WILL REPEAT THIS PART OF THE VENTURE EVER AGAIN.

P.S 2: LAND PARTY WAS KEN SHAW.

MAY 1981.

JAN VAN RYT.