

Reflections from Derby 2...

Windjana Gorge & Tunnel Creek

All ready and waiting,
today's 'gang' stood out
the front and chatted
while we waited for our 'bus'
which pulled up
right on time!

Menashe, our guide for today,
was bright and cheery
as he marked the roll.

The bus wasn't full
so we had plenty of room
to stow our gear
as Menashe took us
on a short tour of
the Derby back streets
before turning left
at the Gibb River Road.

He chatted about himself
by way of introduction,
an Israeli by origin,
a tour guide

who has worked
all around the world.
Canada, USA, Thailand
and other Asian parts
he's been in Australia
for 4 years.

Wife and kids
in Sydney
he works up here
in the dry



Boab nuts can vary in size
from about the size of an
orange to rock melon size.
The woody casing is similar
to a smooth walnut shell.

and in the Blue Mountains
while it's wet here.

First stop was at the boab
beside the road.

He cracked a boab nut
and gave us all a taste
of the flesh inside...

tart would be the word
to describe this very nutritious,
fleshy seed covering.

The outside covering
is hard and woody and
is often carved meticulously
after the 'fluff' is scraped off.

He told us how all
parts of the boab tree
can be used
and how they withstand
bushfires

by peeling off layers
from the outside
of the trunk to protect
the soft, inner core.

We left the Gibb River Road
about 100kms along
and turned toward
Fitzroy Crossing
and our first destination -
Windjana Gorge.

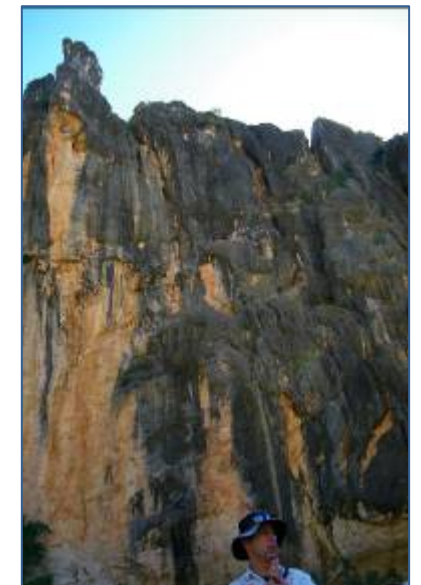
Cut into the ancient reef
by the river,
the gorge is entered
through a tunnel of rock and
through the ever present



sand that the river has dumped when the huge amount of water flowing through the gorge slows and drops tons of sand on what is now the shore... The water here is crystal clear and shallow as we look across to the sandy beach and rock walls on the other side. High on the rock wall across the river is a garden cave... way up there with flowers of yellow visible from way down here. Menashe points out the ancient fossils forever visible on the walls of white limestone left over from ancient seas. As we plough through the deep sand, I spy the first horizontal trees



I've seen in a while hanging over the now deepening, but still clear, river waters. The towering walls of the gorge are similar to those in Geike Gorge nearly 200kms to the south east which figures, as they are part of the same ancient reef. As we plough further along through the sandy shore Menashe tells us stories from long ago when Jandamarra, an aboriginal man, was shot by white hunters who had tracked him after he 'betrayed' their upbringing on a cattle station and killed a policeman at nearby Lillimur. Jandamarra made his way to Tunnel Creek and hid there for some time before expert trackers were brought in to hunt him down and kill him. Ugggg!



After the story
I soak up the surroundings
now
to quell my distaste
of life and death
long ago.
I come upon
a meeting of crocs..
sunning themselves
and snoozing
in the shallow water.
A last glimpse
along the beautiful
gorge
and morning tea
awaited at the bus
before we sped off
towards Tunnel Creek,
following the ancient reef
as we bumped and bounced
along the road.
The carpark at
Tunnel Creek
was filled with 4WDs
covered in red dust
but Menashe found
space for us
under a shady tree
and set up salads
for lunch
while we changed into
'tunnel clothes'....
The creek would be flowing
but not as high as it had



There were six crocs on the bank, all asleep and immobile...



and we checked out
those returning
whose tide mark
was around their waist.
Before we'd gone too far
in the clear,
warmish water,
shoes were full of sand and
exfoliating as I walked!
We scrambled over
fascinating boulders
at the tunnel entrance
and through the sandy
creek,
which,
as a raging torrent,
had made this tunnel
through the same
ancient reef
as we'd seen at the gorge.
Menashe took pictures
of us in our walking finery
as we accustomed ourselves
to the gloom of the cave
and just around the corner
we 'ditched' our hats
until our return.



The ceiling was low
in spots
and we had to watch
our heads
and the cave entrance
looking back
looked amazing!
Menashe had
warned of the fish
and crocs
who lived in the creek
and pointed out
red eyes
shining
in the glow
of his torch!
There were some
rocks on the bottom
but predominantly sand
and the water
lapped mostly
about mid-calf.
As we wound
our way around,
natural light
flooded in
through the remnants
of an ancient roof cave-in.
We paused for Menashe
to show us
the croc food-
hidden
for the moment!
We looked at the



'hidden' garden
from the inside
out
and at the intricate
patterns on the ceiling
the result of
water
both rushing through
and seeping down
through the reef.
Then the noise
of tinkling water
could be heard,
echoing quietly
through the silence,
and around another
corner,
water
running off
a ledge
and the
evenly spaced
droplets
at a place
some call
the croc
as it reminds them of
a crocodile's head-
the waterfall being
the teeth.
The water gets deeper
and children's hands
are held
as we make our way along



Around another bend
we see more
natural light
and realise
it is the other end
of Tunnel Creek...
We rest on the rocks

and wash sand
from our shoes
and breath in
the beauty
that surrounds us
while we regroup
for the trek back.
The first dragonfly
I've seen for a while
sits on a huge
tree root
beside me
and I marvel
yet again
at the tenacity
of the plants
that force their
roots
through impossible places
in order to survive...



Inside looking out ...
...outside looking in



As we return
to Derby
the smoke of a bushfire
away in the distance
looks purple
in the late afternoon
light
and we stop
yet again
at the boab
we stopped at first
to watch the sun
go down
before following
a slow road-train
all the way back
to Derby...

...to finish
off the day,
fellow 5th wheeler
owners
Mal & Baz
join me for
a glass or two
and invite me
to stay on their 300 acre farm
south east of Perth -
when I get down there.
I am stoked!!!

