



Save the Nature of the Kimberley

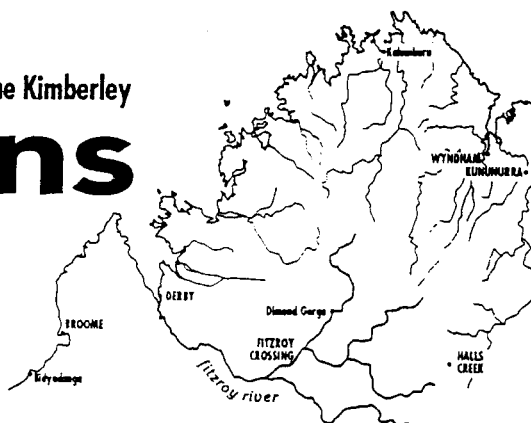
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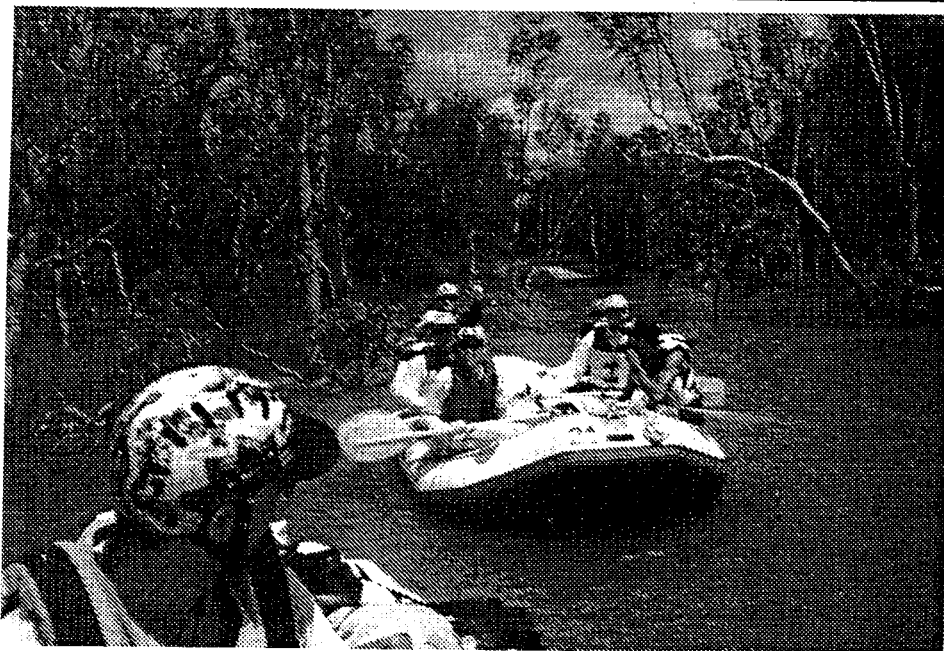
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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

FITZROY RAFTING EXPEDITION MAKES HISTORY



The rafters set off on their 15-day expedition. (More photos on page 5).

On 1st February 1999, 25 people from around Australia left Broome for the adventure of a lifetime, the first of its kind in the Kimberley. The intention of the trip was to experience the beauty of the upper reaches of the Fitzroy River while exploring the commercial viability of a joint tourism venture between Headwaters Rafting from Melbourne and the Bunuba Aboriginal Corporation, based in Fitzroy Crossing. The expedition turned out to be a success in both regards.

The rafters passed through remarkable country. The journey started on the Barnett River where it crosses over the Gibb River Road, then onto the Hann River before joining the mighty Fitzroy River. In 12 days, we passed through Ungaditha Gorge, Moll Gorge, Sir John Gorge, Dimond Gorge and Geikie Gorge. We were astounded by the number and beauty of the ancient rock art in the gorges; and surprised at the size and

strength of the river flow, particularly in Sir John Gorge.

Sir John Gorge had a profound effect on people. Running for more than 10km, it contains an abundance of significant sites, rock art, incredible rock formations, massive whitewater and is outstandingly beautiful. Anyone who has spent a few days and nights in Sir John Gorge would be horrified at the thought of flooding it. As Brett Barlee from Headwaters said: "It would be like flooding the Sistine Chapel".

The expedition included two young Bunuba men and a Ngarinyin man. They treated us to local bush tucker including goanna, black bream, catfish and a variety of bush fruits. Having local Aboriginal people as part of the expedition team was of great importance to our other participants, particularly those from the southern cities. Their presence offered an insight into the culture of the area, and a chance to learn about local ways. For

many of the participants it was a major reason for coming on the trip: to experience the mighty Fitzroy River, or Bandarlngarri, with and through the knowledge of its traditional owners.

A few days after the completion of the first rafting trip, a second trip was conducted. This served to introduce nine young Bunuba men and women to the art and excitement of rafting, with a view to employing them as river guides on commercial ventures in the future. Throughout the year these young Bunuba people and others will be provided with further training: in rafting skills, river safety, first aid, cultural and heritage interpretation, PR skills, cooking for large groups, and more.

Next wet season Headwaters and the Bunuba Aboriginal Corporation will commence a commercial rafting venture of the river. This will consist of several seven-day trips out of Broome, entering the Fitzroy River above Sir John Gorge and exiting either just below Dimond Gorge or at Fitzroy Crossing.

The Fitzroy River is unique. It runs through some of the most spectacular country in the world. I believe rafting on it has the potential to become a commercially viable venture if conducted in a sensible and sustainable way.

Kali Balint is a member of the Environs Kimberley Management Committee. He went along on the rafting expedition as one of the cooks. He is an experienced whitewater rafter

VISION STATEMENT

Environs Kimberley seeks to preserve and respect the intrinsic values and qualities of the Kimberley region.