

The wonders of the Kimberley

A glimpse at its unique environment – *The age of the Dinosaurs*

(by Brian Kane)



Wouldn't it be an incredible adventure to go back in time and see what the Kimberley was like millions of years ago? What would we discover – an inland ocean, volcanoes, ice, rainforests, dinosaurs and other unusual creatures? We get lots of clues by examining the rocks and fossils formed in the Kimberley region which has remained above sea level for the past 250 million years. During that time sedimentary rocks had their beginnings in shallow seas while animals such as the dinosaurs walked across the shallow tidal flats or around fresh water lagoons and swamps. The largest dinosaur tracks in the rocks are those of the four legged Sauropods which were over a metre in diameter. These massive animals were 22 metres long and 3.5 metres high. Aboriginal people have their own stories associated with dinosaur prints such as *'Marella* or (Emu Man) a notable creator being from the Dreamtime.

Several types of dinosaurs are found around the Dampier Peninsula and they were carnivorous or plant eating dinosaurs that foraged in a rain forest which fringed the Kimberley coast at that time. Between 250 and 65 million years ago dinosaurs were the most successful animals on earth but they eventually became extinct. There are different theories as to why this occurred 65 million years ago. Was it an asteroid which caused their sudden demise or was it gradual – we don't know. Most scientists say that an asteroid or comet threw billions of tonnes of dust into the air blocking out the sun and plunging the earth into darkness for two to three years causing the temperature to drop drastically. This event in turn stopped the plants growing but their seeds remained intact so they could germinate when the time was more conducive. The end result of this drastic event caused the food supply to dry up and so the age of the mammals began as they didn't have to compete with the dinosaurs for food.

Today tourists can be seen scouring the coast for dinosaur tracks and some may well ask themselves how the environment could change so much to what it is today. Gone are the ice age, the volcanoes, the rainforests and the era of the dinosaurs.



Tourists standing in Sauropod tracks at 'Black Ledge' Broome – (photo BK)

Further information: BK's Kimberley nature web site:

<http://www.stmarysbroome.wa.edu.au/home/nature/aaopen.html>