

The wonders of the Kimberley

A glimpse at its unique environment – ‘Starry, starry night ...’ (by Brian Kane)



Sleeping under the starry dome of a Kimberley night is an awesome experience of beauty and wonder which can often overwhelm us. It can also provide us with a ‘reality check’ about our place in this universe. Taking time out from our busy lives to experience our cosmic dome can also reveal phenomenon which only occur rarely. For instance, a falling meteorite which lights up the whole area around your camp site in bright luminous pink for a few seconds is enough to scare you out of your wits. And we all hope and pray that we never come across a heavenly boulder as big as the one which hurtled to earth forming Wolf Creek crater along the Tanami track. The local Djaru Aboriginal people have long known it as ‘Kandimalal’ but Europeans only discovered it in 1947 during an aerial survey which revealed the crater to measure 900 metres across and 60 metres deep. This meteorite weighed thousands of tonnes and plunged to earth 300 000 years ago. The crater formed was a lot deeper then but now it is mostly filled up by windswept erosion. There are other events too from time to time associated with meteors such as Leonid’s meteor shower which displayed oodles of fiery streaks across the night sky in 2006.

Another rare event in the night sky is the appearance of comets. In March 1996 Hyakutake’s comet was spectacular across the Kimberley night sky, coming as close as 15 million kilometers to the earth. Another phenomenon is the ‘green flash’ which most people have not heard of; let alone seen in their lifetime. It occurs rarely when the atmospheric conditions are right and if this is the case the setting sun is followed momentarily by a green flash.

We could also do well to ask Aboriginal people how they understand and use the night sky throughout the yearly seasons and their stories associated with such marvels as the Emu in the Milky Way and the legend of the Seven Sisters.

Peace, wonder and beauty are essential in our daily lives and a Kimberley night sky can just do the trick.



Staircase to the sun – photo (A.Kelly)

Further information: BK's Kimberley nature web site:

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