

The wonders of the Kimberley

A glimpse at its unique environment – ‘*A precious gift*’

(by Brian Kane)



The Fitzroy River is the main fresh water artery of the Kimberley and is believed to be second only to the Amazon River in South America for the volume of water it pumps out to the sea. Rising at the southern end of the Durack Range it soon gathers momentum in the wet season flowing southwest through the rugged King Leopold Range and Geikie Gorge. Eventually it delivers millions of litres of water per second across the low lying floodplains to its final destination at King’s Sound where it empties into the Indian Ocean having travelled a total distance of 622 kilometres.



Kings Sound (photo B.K.)

Aboriginal people have depended on and respected this life giving river for thousands of years but it was only relatively recently in 1837 that George Grey located the river as he sailed the H.M.S. Beagle. Later, during an

expedition from 1838-41, a mapping explorer, Lt. Stokes, named it the 'Fitzroy' after the second Commander of his ship, Captain Robert Fitzroy.

A low level concrete structure was built along its water course in 1935 and was named, Fitzroy Crossing. At the peak of the wet season water can pass over the concrete crossing to a depth of approximately 13 metres and then fan out across the 15 kilometre wide flood plain. It is estimated that the flow rate is around 30,000 cubic metres per second which is an awesome sight in the wet season.

The Fitzroy River was diverted in the late 1950s in order to store water at Camballin which is located 150km upstream from the mouth. The aim was to irrigate crops of cotton, sorghum and other fodder crops but the project was plagued with problems and lately there have been similar proposals to dam the river further upstream at Dimond Gorge.

There is a diverse environment of flora and fauna along the Fitzroy River, for example, recent studies have recorded 24 freshwater species of fish which surpasses that combined for all the rivers of Western Australia.

The Fitzroy River provides unique power, beauty and life-giving energy to the Kimberley. It is a precious gift to be enjoyed and to be used wisely for the benefit of future generations.