

Kennedy Retrace Treks

Background

The Governor of New South Wales commissioned Edmund Kennedy to explore Cape York in 1848. This followed the success of the earlier Leichhardt Expedition. A committee comprising mostly naval explorers determined his objectives and the parameters of his proposed journey.

Kennedy had recently returned from an exhausting exploration into the Barcoo and Coopers Creek regions of Western NSW and commenced his preparations for Cape York with no time for he, or his party to recover from the exertions of the previous 18 months of privation.

Kennedy's party of 13 was landed on the North Queensland coast, on 24 May 1848. The place selected was Tam O' Shanter Point, Rockingham Bay, named for the vessel on which he sailed. His equipment included two spring carts and a small herd of sheep and supplies calculated to maintain the party for a journey to Port Albany, just south of the Tip of Cape York. Here Kennedy was to rendezvous with the Brig Ariel, resupply and augment his party before exploring the west Coast of Cape York, investigating the river systems south of the Gulf of Carpentaria, then "return to Sydney via the most convenient route".



The party very quickly ran foul of the country, finding themselves trapped between mangrove and freshwater swamps. There was no retreat as the Tam O' Shanter had already sailed for Singapore, and her escort HMS RATTLESNAKE commenced a marine survey of the inner passage through the Great Barrier Reef. The party battled through swamps, rainforest and steep gullies for six weeks, the carts and much heavy equipment was abandoned when an axle shaft broke due to the rough terrain. Remaining supplies were loaded on the horses using packsaddles included for this situation. The party crawled through dense jungle to the top of the coastal range on 8th August. Well behind schedule, the party struggled on to Princess Charlotte Bay, where an opportunity for rescue by the

Rattlesnake's tender, HMS BRAMBLE had expired. The schooner had sailed.

On 13 November, Kennedy was forced to divide his party, leaving eight men at Weymouth Bay in the charge of the botanist, Carron. Kennedy and four others, including the Aborigine, Jackey Jackey, pushed on to meet the Ariel at Port Albany. A couple of days later, further tragedy occurred; Costigan was severely wounded in the chest, when his gun accidentally discharged when the trigger was caught in a rope. This required that he be left at Shelbourne Bay with two others. Kennedy and Jackey Jackey then commenced a race to Port Albany to seek help.



Kennedy was speared when attempting to skirt around the mangroves of the Escape River and died in Jackey Jackey's arms after Jackey Jackey fought off the attackers. Jackey Jackey hid Kennedy's papers in a hollow tree and continued to Port Albany despite pursuit by the hostile local tribespeople. He was recognised by Dr Vallack from the Ariel and taken aboard to tell the tragic story. The Ariel departed on an urgent rescue mission, firstly to Shelburne Bay

Guided by Jackey Jackey the rescue party judged that Costigan and his carers had perished. The threat from the hostile aborigines made searching for their remains too dangerous. The Ariel continued to Weymouth Bay to rescue the other party. The only two survivors were Carron and

Goddard. The other six had starved to death.

Captain Beckford Simpson of The Brig "Freak" visited the scenes in May 1849, again guided by Jackey Jackey. The remains of only two of the dead; some articles of equipment and documents including some of Kennedy's journals and notebooks were recovered. The remains of Niblett and Wall were buried on Albany Island. Kennedy's body was not found.

Trek Overview

Our trek will trace Kennedy's route from near Mount Garnet (Camp K XXIX) to the intersection of the Bourke Development Road and Walsh River, (Camp K XLII) north of Chillagoe in two sections, or legs to enable trekkers to join either or both sections. Each section is quite different in the terrain and atmosphere.

Section One. We shake down on Day 1 by following the abandoned Lappa- Mt Garnet railway formation to the ghost town of Nymbool. Then over the Great Dividing Range into Reids Creek, then to Emu Creek. We continue to follow Emu Creek past Emuford, where there will be time to visit Green's Stamper Battery, (which has hardly changed since the turn of the century) to the site of Camp K XXXII, then to Long Waterhole on Emu Creek Station (K XXXIV) to complete Section One. We will pause to resupply and any changeover of our party at Emu Creek Station. Other explorers, including Mulligan, extensively prospected Emu Creek for gold and other minerals much later in the 1870's. Mulligan named Emu Creek after breakfasting on a clutch of emu eggs.

Section Two. This section starts from Emu Creek Station, continuing along Emu Creek, past the junction with the Walsh River. We will then continue down the Walsh through the ironically named "Featherbed Range" and gorge. This rugged and spectacular area is the remains of several ancient volcanic calderas some 35 km in diameter. We will negotiate a route through the boulders and deep creeks following brumby and feral cattle pads. We will search for Camp **K XXXIX**. We will finish at Camp **K XLII**, conveniently close to the Bourke Development Road. We will then transfer to Chillagoe by bus to settle back into civilization. There will be an opportunity to visit some of Chillagoe's sights before a celebratory dinner for our final evening together. Transfers to Cairns or the Atherton Tablelands are arranged for the next morning. Our faithful donkeys will be trucked home directly from K Camp XLII.

We will carry copies of Kennedy's Field sketch maps and Carron's Journal to faithfully follow the Kennedy party's route, and to identify significant locations and incidents along the way. There will be excellent opportunities for bird watching, wildlife sighting, native plants and flora study, geological interpretations and even some fishing and swimming in rarely visited waterholes. (We will be above the estuarine crocodile range but we are likely to see shy freshwater crocodiles in Section Two).

The trek is offered in two sections:

Section One.

- Mt Garnet to Long Waterhole, Emu Creek Station (Camp XXXIV)
- 9 days
- Dates:
 - 2018. 19 - 27 August

Section Two

- Emu Creek Station (Camp XXXVI) to Walsh River/ Bourke Development Road,
- Camp XLII, and transfer to Chillagoe & Cairns
- 14 days
- Dates:
 - 2018. 27 August - 10 September