

## King George River

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**Navigation.** Chart Aus 727. Lat 13°58.0S Long 127°20.1E. The river is navigable for approximately 7.5 NM.

**Tide.** The nearest tide chart is Lesueur Island. Tidal range up to about 3.0M.

The main navigation risk in the King George is the sand bar outside the entrance to the river in Koolama Bay. Koolama Bay is protected from the SE trade winds predominant in the dry season and heavy seas are calmed before they reach the river mouth, which makes it a reasonably easy sand bar crossing, but it should only be tackled in daylight at near high tide, preferably on a rising tide. Waypoints over the bar that the writer has used on many occasions are shown below. But be aware that the deeper channel through the sand shoals, which is washed out by the tide, changes position and depth from year to year, therefore, it is prudent for deep draft vessels to survey the channel in a tender before attempting the bar crossing. Surveying at low tide can make it easier to find the deeper channel. The channel and sand shoals can be clearly seen on the Google satellite photo below. When the water is reasonably clear, the channel can be readily seen from a high vantage point, such as a fly bridge, or up a mast. At LW springs the deepest part of the channel can be less than 0.5M deep.



**Figure 1. Sand shoals clearly visible outside the entrance to KGR. Note the channel cut through the shoals by the tide. The shallowest part of the channel is usually at the seaward end of the channel.**

The channel through the sand bar changes, caused by wet season runoff. Don't assume that entry waypoints used in previous years will be OK. It is wise to survey the depth in your tender before crossing, or gain recent waypoints used by other vessels in the current dry season.

Shallowest part of the channel is usually around here. About 0.5NM off the river mouth.

**Entrance over sand bar outside the King George River.**

Waypoint Number
1 – 13°56'.947S 127°19'.581E
2 – 13°57'.728S 127°19'.766E

Calamity Bay. (also known as Pangali Cove) Acceptable anchorage in west to north west breezes.
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Koolama Bay. Good anchorages in east to south east breezes anywhere along this east side of the bay. Ideal spot to wait for daylight and or high tide before crossing the sand bar.
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Figure 2. Koolama Bay Anchorages.

Tranquil Bay is an acceptable anchorage in light breezes, but expect to roll in 15 knots plus.
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Way point number 1. for sand bar crossing. Deep draft vessels should survey the depth of the channel by tender before
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Once over the sand bar into the river itself, the river can change depth from year to year due to silt build up after the wet season. This is most noticeable where the river widens in the first 1.5 NM in from the river mouth. This stretch can have shallow areas where deeper draft vessels may touch bottom. Favouring the western side is usually the better route in this area.

Also, beware of silt build up on the inside corner of the first turn to the right at about 2.2 NM in from the river mouth. Definitely keep to the outside of this bend and once around the corner, favour the eastern side of the river until the end of the mangroves, then take a mid stream course, but it's still a good practice to favour the outside of the bends. Depths over 6M will be found up river from this point.

Way point number 2.  
Just inside river mouth.

Inside the river mouth where the river widens can silt up and may be shallow in parts. This varies from year to year. Take care in this stretch. The green dotted line is the preferred path, favouring the west side of the river.



Figure 3. The first few miles of the King George River.

This corner can silt up and may be very shallow. Favour the outside of this bend and stay to the east side of mid river until the end of the mangrove lined bank.

Favour the east side until the end of the mangroves here, then stay mid stream.

### **Anchorage.**

The two most popular anchorages are near the river's main attraction, which are the East Arm falls and the Twin Falls. But anchorage can be taken almost anywhere in the river where depth allows. Other popular spots to drop the pick are near Bar BQ Beach and just inside the river entrance.

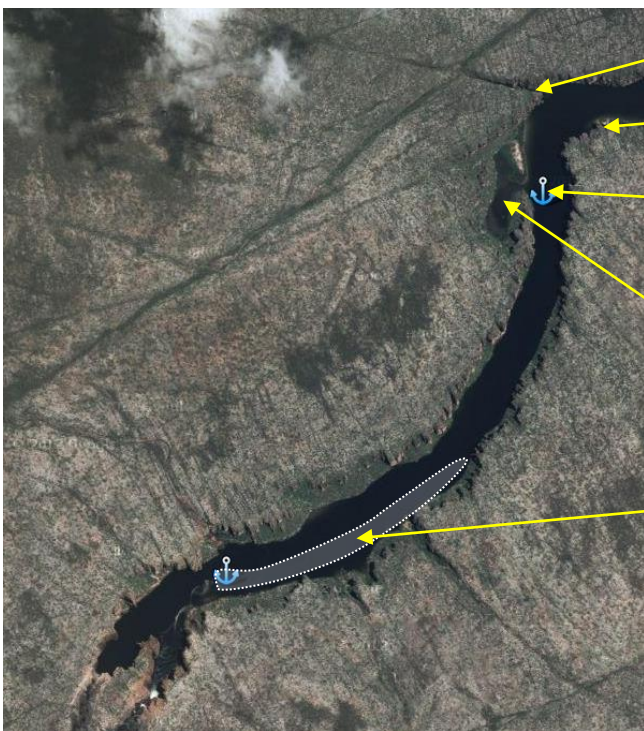
Anchor just inside the river mouth over sand. Fishing can be good around the rocks and creeks either side of the entrance.

Anchor just south of this corner to stay out of the SE breeze which is funnelled down the East Arm.

Anchor near the stretch of mangroves over good holding mud on the east side of the river. Handy spot for a dinghy trip to East Arm falls.



Figure 4. Anchorages near the river entrance and East Arm falls.



East Arm falls

Steep gorge.

Bar BQ Beach.

This is an attractive anchorage over mud, close to Bar BQ Beach and the steep gorge.

Shallow draft catamarans can anchor in the small mangrove lined inlet. The entrance dries at LW.

Twin Falls anchorage over sandy mud. Most skippers prefer anchoring close to the southern river bank in this approx. 600 metre stretch of the river. This is the most popular KGR anchorage.

Figure 5. Anchorages near Twin Falls and Bar BQ Beach.

## **King George River Attractions.**

The King George River is arguably the most popular natural attraction on the Kimberley Coast. Just cruising slowly up the river, taking in the scenery from the pure white sand bar, through the towering, weathered sandstone gorges, with precariously hanging rocks and lichen fringed waterfalls, is worth the trip to the King George River. It is a must see for the charter boats and passenger liners that cruise the east Kimberley. It's also within moderately close cruising distance for those Darwin based sailors who only have time for a short cruise into the Kimberley. This makes it the busiest place to visit on the Kimberley Coast. But don't let that discourage you – “busy” in Kimberley speak, means you



**Figure 6. Twin Falls still flowing strong with wet season run off in May 2010.**

might be unlucky enough to see up to 10 boats at any one time in the whole 7.5NM stretch of navigable river, and they will likely be spread out over the length of the river. You will always be able to find a quite anchorage by yourself, if that's your choice.

**Twin Falls**, WA's highest waterfalls are located at the limit of the navigable water. As the name suggests, it is a pair of spectacular waterfalls, both with a drop of around 80 meters over black and ochre coloured vertical sandstone cliffs into deep holes at the bases. Vessels can be nosed up under the falls for a refreshing shower on the bow. However, this is only advised from around June through to December, when the wet season run off has reduced from a thunderous, roaring torrent of smelly brown flood water, to a relatively tame trickle of crystal clear fresh water. This is



**Figure 7. View from the top of Twin Falls.**

by far the most popular KGR anchorage for cruising vessels and is the preferred anchorage for the small to mid size charter vessels, which typically only stay for the day, or overnight. Fortunately, the larger passenger liners must anchor in Kalooma Bay and ferry their passengers in tenders up river to Twin Falls. They are a minor annoyance in this otherwise tranquil and beautiful anchorage. Try to avoid the walk to the top of the falls when they are around, lest you get stuck walking behind a procession of elderly and perhaps, not so spritely, cruise liner passengers.

The walk to the top of the falls starts at the base of a gully about 200 metres to the north of the western falls. The tidal range here is about 2 meters, so beware of tying your dinghy off short if you leave it on a falling tide, otherwise, upon return, you may find it high and dry, hanging off the painter. Anchor off a bit, with another rope tied to a rock ashore is a good idea here. Beware, the rocks on the river bank are very slippery when wet.

This is one of the Kimberley Coast's iconic walks and should not be missed. The view from the top of the falls, back down the river gorge is worth the climb. There are plenty of bath size holes in the worn sandstone water course at the top of the falls to cool off in, or if you keen, a further kilometre up stream brings you to larger billabongs.



Figure 8. Dinghies left at the bottom of the walking track.

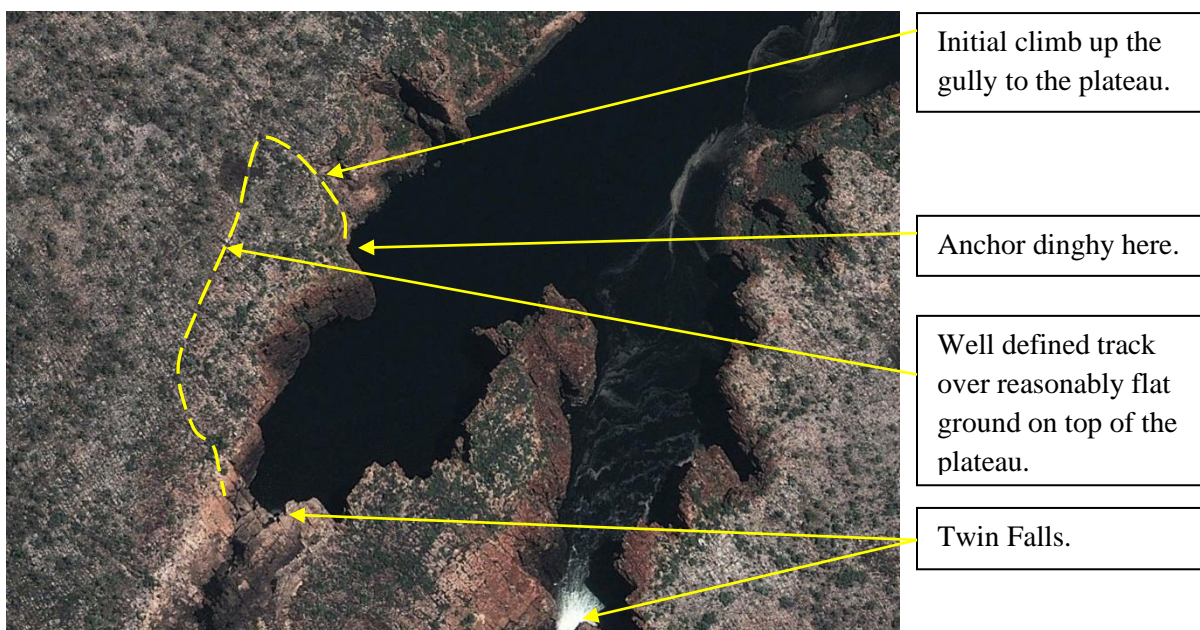


Figure 9. Gremlin Box

Look for the gremlin box about two thirds up the hill climb from the river. The box was left by a yachty with a sense of humour and a quick wit. It has been there for several years. The box contains a note book, with a story about how the yacht had

a gremlin on board and the skipper caught the gremlin and put him in the box, leaving the box and the gremlin inside a small cave. Other travellers have since left small gifts to keep the gremlin in the box. It is absolute fact that anyone who removes or damages the box will inherit the gremlin, along with its troubles and bad luck. So be careful when handling the box and make sure it goes back in its original position, well inside the shallow cave, out of the weather. (Unfortunately, in July 2013, the writer found only a few remaining scraps of the gremlin box. It appeared to have been burnt. Let's hope it was a bush fire and not a walker that did the damage. I replaced the box in 2014 with an upgraded, fire rated steel version. The gremlin is still there and loves his new home.)

The initial climb from the river up to the top of the plateau is rated at 5 - 6 out of 10. Once on the plateau above, the walk is rated at 2 – 4 out of 10.



Initial climb up the gully to the plateau.

Anchor dinghy here.

Well defined track over reasonably flat ground on top of the plateau.

Twin Falls.

### Swimming Hole near Twin Falls.



Figure 10. Swimming hole at the base of these falls when the falls are running.

Approximately 800 metres downstream from the Twin Falls, on the north side, adjacent to the popular anchoring area, there is a waterfall which flows up to early/mid dry season. At the base of the falls, hidden from view from the main river by a pile of large rocks, there is a hole that fills with water when the falls are flowing. Crocs can't access the hole due to the same rocks that block the view of the hole. Care is essential when climbing over the rocks when the falls are flowing, because the rocks can be wet and slippery from mist off the falls.

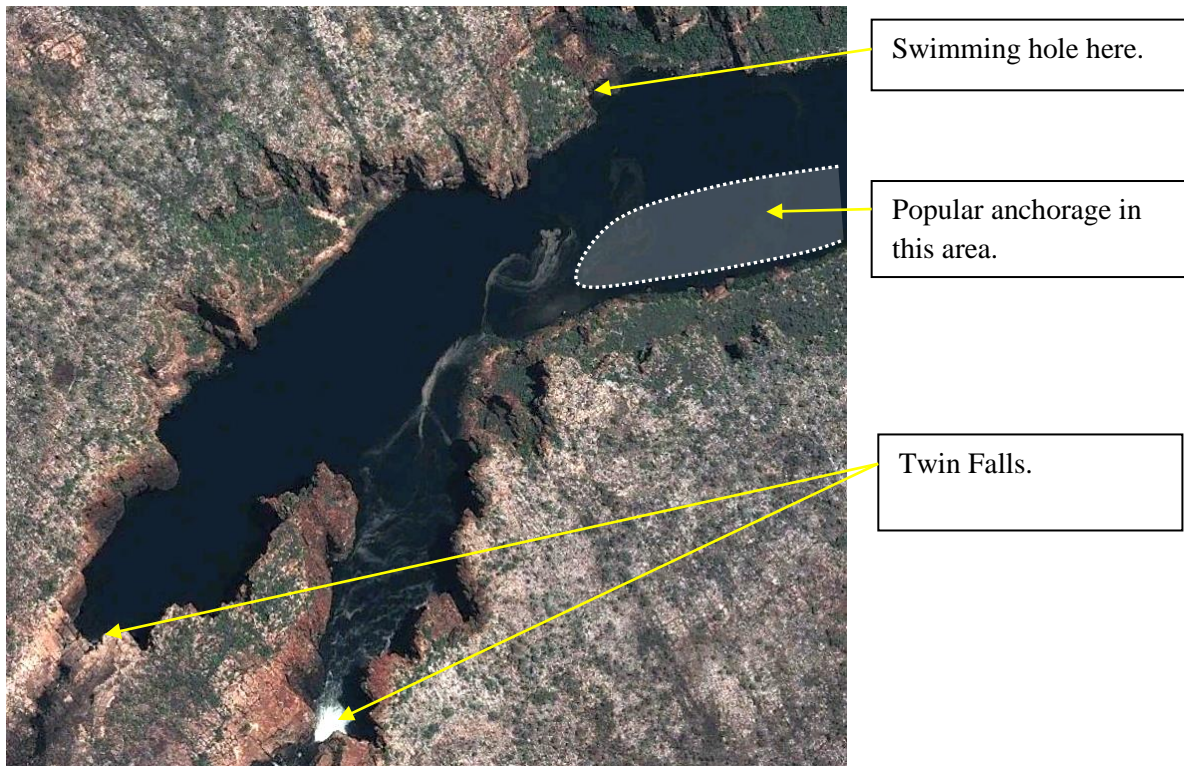


Figure 11. Swimming hole approx. 800 metres downstream of Twin Falls.

### Bar BQ Beach.

Bar BQ Beach is a popular meeting spot for a Bar BQ lunch with other yachties. About 1.8NM downstream from Twin Falls, the beach is easily accessible by dinghy. Make sure there isn't a croc sunning itself on the beach before you jump off the dinghy. This has happened before at this spot to someone's great surprise.

## Steep Gorge.

Steep Gorge is a narrow cutting in the cliff face near Bar BQ Beach. Early in the dry season the creek in the gorge cascades down several small waterfalls to a mini rain forest environment close to the river. A short walk from exiting the dinghy stops all but the keen rock climbing yachty at the base of the falls. This is a cool place to visit on a hot day.

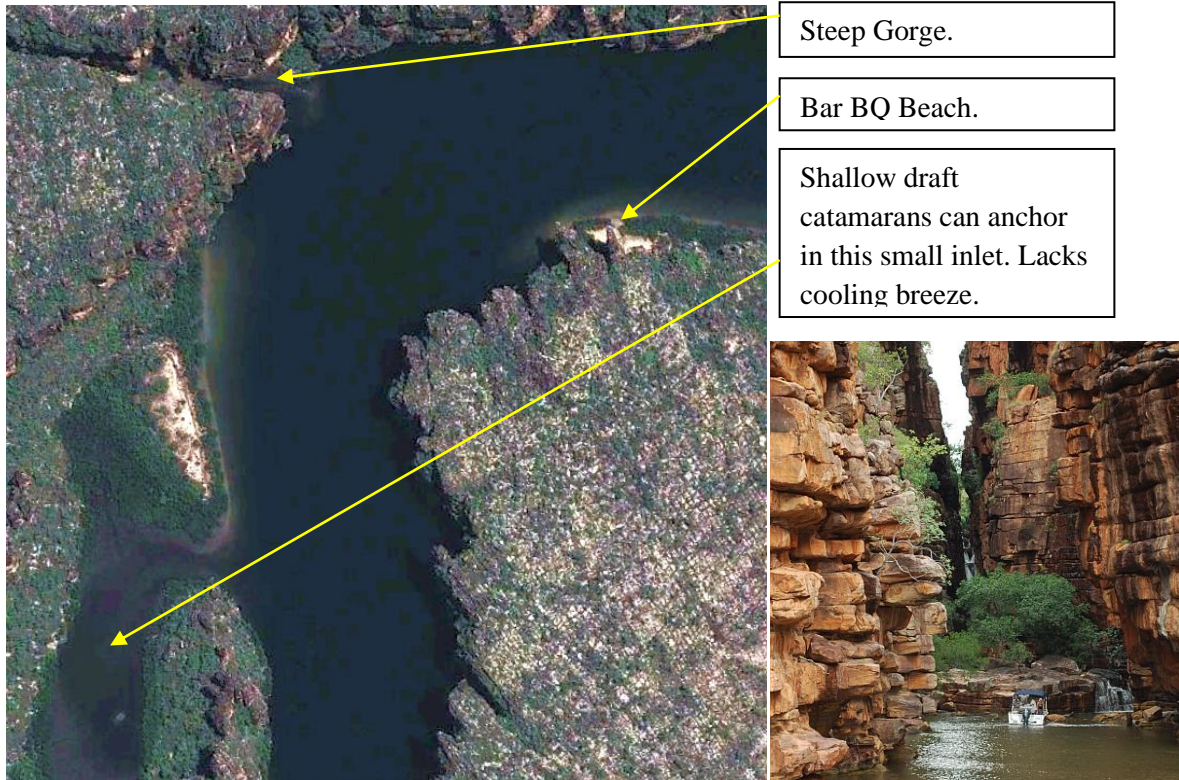


Figure 12. King George River. Bar BQ Beach and Steep Gorge.

Figure 13. Steep Gorge.

## East Arm Waterfalls.

The location of East Arm Falls is shown in Figure 4 above.

East Arm falls can only be accessed by dinghy from about half rising tide over the shallow mud flats of the East Arm, although, the writer has heard about shallow draft sailing cats anchoring in deeper holes in East Arm. The falls are located at the end of the southern fork at the farthest point of East Arm. The falls rise about 15 meters up a vertical sandstone cliff from a deep hole at the base of the falls. There is a rope ladder and a heavy rope slung from the top of the falls to assist climbing up the face of the falls.

From the dinghy approach, the climb looks daunting, even with the help of the ladder. But there are several flat ledges and cracks in the sandstone to make the climb far less perilous than it looks. There are plenty of accounts of elderly charter boat passengers making the climb. Without the rope and ladder, this would be a 9 out of 10 climb, but



Figure 14. Rope ladder and rope up East Arm Falls.

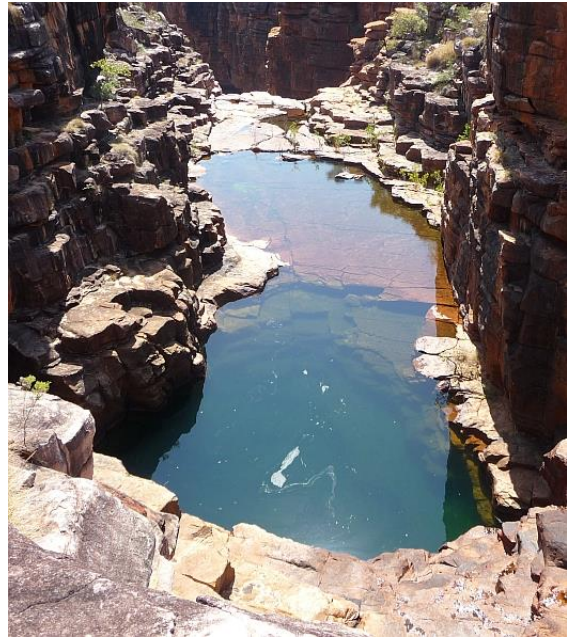


for those with confidence in their abilities and a head for heights, the rope and ladder make it a more undemanding task. This is one of those situations where each person must make their own decision to give it a go, or not. **Unfortunately, someone removed the ropes and rope ladder in 2022 and it is now not possible to climb the falls by this method.**

Early in the dry season, up till around early June, there can be quite a volume of water flowing over the falls, creating a constant mist around the falls, which makes the rocks wet and slippery. Climbing the falls in these conditions would be very risky.

The reward for the climb is a magnificent, crystal clear, deep, croc free swimming hole just over the top lip of the falls. The writer hasn't ventured further than the water hole, but it appears that climbing past the waterhole would get into the 8 - 9 out of 10 difficulty classification.

Don't even consider jumping off the falls into the deep hole in the river below – there is a 4 meter croc that calls this home. The alternative to the rope ladder is to walk up the gully about 130 meters north of the falls. This walk has a couple of difficult spots requiring a few short climbs, and is not recommended for children or people without a



**Figure 15. Beautiful swimming hole at the top of East Arm Falls.**



**Figure 16. This large croc calls East Arm Falls his home. This photo was taken 170 meters from the falls.**

reasonable degree of strength and fitness. Once at the top of the 30 - 40 meter scramble up to the plateau, there is a rugged 200 meter walk over large boulder and spinifex country to reach the creek above the falls. The view of the rocky creek with its many small falls and pools is worth the walk, but it is a difficult decent down to the creek for a dip. This is as far as the writer has

walked, and walking further up the creek banks looked like it would require more effort than I was willing to give. But perhaps younger and fitter yachties could give it a go and report back the findings for this page. There are reportedly several galleries of rock art further up the creek.

This walk is rated at 6 – 7 for the initial scramble up to the plateau, and 5 – 6 on the plateau to the creek.

### **Koolama Bay.**

If you are killing time anchored in Koolama Bay waiting to get over the bar into the river, the white sand beach along the east side of the river mouth is well worth a beachcombing walk, with all sorts of interesting flotsam and jetsam to discover. Rated at 1 out of 10.

### **Calamity Bay.**

Originally called Pangali Cove, the name Calamity Bay stuck after the ship Koolama was beached near the bay after being bombed and crippled by three Japanese float planes on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1942. After the Captain beached his stricken ship, some one hundred and sixty souls took to the lifeboats and established a camp in this remote cove. This group, which included a six month-old child and injured men, lived as castaways, enduring hardship, while tempers stretched to breaking point and a near mutiny. A rescue bid was launched by monks from the remote Benedictine Mission at Pago, led by Aboriginal guides through one hundred and fifty kilometres of extremely harsh terrain. Others escaped by lugger and seaplane after the patched up vessel was taken on to Wyndham by her gallant Skipper and a handful of men. The Koolama later sunk just off the current Wyndham wharf. Learn the fate of Koolama in the book *The Koolama Incident* by Bill Loane. (1.) This book is an invaluable contribution to the documentation of Australian history and has been made into two documentary programs by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The bay is open to the south east breezes, which makes it a fair weather day anchorage only, until the



**Figure 17. Calamity Bay lagoon late in the dry season. Early in the dry, there are fresh water falls flowing into the lagoon. Beware of crocs in the lagoon.**

westerlies arrive late in the dry season, and then it is an acceptable overnight anchorage. The bay has no uncharted navigation obstacles.

Ashore, there is a very pretty beach, with a salt water lagoon left by low tide at one end of the beach. A fresh

water creek runs into the lagoon to mid dry season. The other end of the beach has some interesting rock formations weathered by the tide and behind the rocks there is a plaque commemorating the Koolama incident and the rescue of its survivors.

This walk ashore is rated at 1 out of 10.

### **Fresh Water.**

Fresh Water can be collected by dinghy from Twin Falls and East Arm Falls. However, early in the dry season, the water from both falls is dirty. Until they dry up around June, there are many smaller falls running directly into the river where water can be collected.

## **Fishing.**

Fishing in the King George is average, with the odd Barra caught around the mangroves, usually early in the dry season. Jacks, Bream and Golden Snapper can be caught around the rocks near the river mouth.

## **Photographs.**

Google Maps

Ross Squire

Rod Baker

Greg Frey

## **Acknowledgment.**

(1). Google Books review of *The Koolama Incident* by Bill Loane.

## **Disclaimer. Read before using the above information.**

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