

DRAFT: Green Kimberley Light: January 15-30, 2010

Experience the wonder of the Kimberley in the Wet without a full pack. Enjoy the waterfalls and wildflowers by day. Relax in comfortable accommodation at night. This is the only monsoon season trip we offer in the Kimberley where you do not need to carry a full pack. On sections one and two, you return to airconditioned accommodation at night. On sections three through five, you camp out at night.

The trip begins in Darwin and ends in Kununurra. Those who do not have the time to do the full trip may choose to do any single section or combination of sections. Those taking part will see an abundance of wild flowers and waterfalls in places which for most of the year are dry rock. The final night of each of the first four sections is spent in budget accommodation in Kununurra. The sections gradually increase in difficulty allowing you time to acclimatise.

Section 1: Darwin to Kununurra via Gregory: January 15-17

The drive from Darwin to the Victoria River Roadhouse where we spend our first night is about 500 km and will take most of the day. We will make a couple of stops en route to do at least one short walk and to have lunch. The following day we will do a walk to an almost unknown waterfall where there is a cool rock shelter and some Aboriginal paintings. Depending on how long our walk takes, we may return to the roadhouse or we may move on another 100 km to Timber Creek to spend the night. The next day we finish the long drive to Kununurra, stopping to do a short walk or two along the way. Unlike the easily accessible marked trails, our walks will take you to pools where you can have a swim.

Maps. The 1:50 000 Sullivan Creek map shows our full day Gregory walk.

Section 2: Hidden Valleys: January 18-19

We begin with a day walk along a creek and through our own Hidden Valley near town, stopping to view some Aboriginal paintings and enjoy swimming in a lovely pool, well-known to the locals (we spent the day swimming with a group of Aboriginal children on one trip), unknown to the average tourist. We spend the night in budget accommodation as we continue our acclimatisation.

The next day, a short drive brings us to the end of a 4WD track. A short walk from there brings us to Andy's Chasm, one of the most spectacular gorges in the Carr Boyd Range. We spend the day swimming and exploring the gorge before returning to Kununurra.

Maps. 1:50 000 Burt Range (the first hidden valley) and Deception Range (Andy's Chasm)

Section 3: The Deception Range: January 20-21

The following day, a relatively short drive and a three to five kilometre walk bring us to a pool in an area which bears a striking resemblance to the Bungle Bungles. We spend the rest of the day and the following morning exploring the gorges, looking at a wealth of Aboriginal art and enjoying the pools. This section finishes with a night in budget accommodation in Kununurra.

We revisited this area for the first time in many years in April 2008. The art site is one of the largest we have found anywhere. There is a shelter which is large enough for the group to pitch tents out of the rain if it should happen to rain. It's a magic spot.

Maps. 1:50 000 Tier Range.

Section 4: Ord River Canoe: January 22-26

Using canoes allows you to carry more with less effort — a good way to continue to ease yourself into the climate. It also allows you to get closer to large numbers of birds than is normally possible when you're on foot.

From Kununurra we are driven to Lake Argyle where we put the canoes in the river just below the main dam. The next five days are spent doing a leisurely paddle back to Kununurra, stopping to do a few day walks up into the hills through which we are passing. We plan to make our camps well off the main river, in quiet spots that we will have to ourselves. We might even camp a short distance from the canoes one night.

Above Spillway Creek, the water level is virtually constant through the entire year. Below Spillway, the water should be fast flowing but manageable at this time of year. As we will be going downstream, less effort is required than at other times. Previous canoeing experience is not necessary. If the Ord is flowing too fast below Spillway Creek, we can arrange for a larger boat to pick us up at that point.

If the weather is particularly hot, we plan to get picked up about ten km before the normal pull out point. This section finishes with a night in budget accommodation in Kununurra.

Terrain and difficulty. The waterfalls on the side creeks that flow into the Ord are at their best at this time of year. Our walks include steep climbs, rock hopping and some scrub bashing. The rewards are beautiful pools and waterfalls which we will almost certainly have to ourselves. These walks are optional. You may relax in the shade near the canoes if you prefer.

Maps. 1:50 000 Burt Range, Carlton Gorge & Deception Range.

Section 5: Keep River National Park: January 27-30

Nestled next to the Western Australian border on the Victoria Highway, Keep River is one of the least known jewels of the N.T. Parks system. Geologically part of the Kimberley, the orange and grey banding on the rocks cause some to compare it to a smaller version of the Bungles. It is an area of spectacularly rugged rock formations, so rugged that the map makers simply drew a dotted line around the main massif and labelled it "dissected rock outcrops." It was impossible to indicate most of the contour lines.

In addition to its interesting geological features, Keep River is noted for its distinctive vegetation and Aboriginal art. Numerous Livistona palms give the landscape a tropical touch. With swollen trunks and contorted branches, the Kimberley boabs bear little resemblance to any other tree in Australia. Boabs drop their leaves in the dry season so this is the only time you can see them looking green.

The Aboriginal art is particularly interesting. In one small area, you have everything from stone petroglyphs, so old that the local Aboriginal people do not recognise them as having been created by their ancestors, to paintings depicting the arrival of the first white men and their animals. In another, there is a single painting about 20 metres long. In yet another, there are some rare beeswax figures. No group is likely to be able to visit all the sites we know of. Perhaps your group will find more.

The roads we would normally take to reach the massif will be closed, so we do it the easy way, taking a helicopter from Kununurra to a point near a large pool where we will set up a base camp. (If the group is large enough, some may drive to the Keep airstrip and fly in from there.)

From our base camp, we explore some of the beautiful gorges and other parts of the rugged massif. We see several small waterfalls as we wander through the area visiting art sites, taking refuge from the heat of the day in the same rock shelters and pools that the Aboriginal people have used for thousands of years. Our explorations will be leisurely ones. This ancient land demands time. Every turn brings a new vista, a new opportunity for a photograph, or perhaps a broad panorama of spectacularly contrasting light which no camera can ever hope to capture. All too soon, our visit comes to an end and we reboard the helicopter for the return to Kununurra.

Maps. 1:50 000 Beasley Knob or 1:100 000 Keep.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 2.

Climate Level 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid. There will be some nights in air conditioned accommodation.

The average daily maximum is 35°C (95°F). If we get a spell of relatively dry weather, the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F). The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is almost certain.

On average it will rain every second day, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. Occasionally, it might rain for days at a time. (This makes it somewhat harder to walk but it also makes the waterfalls more spectacular and keeps it relatively cool.) Occasionally, it may rain very little. This makes it substantially hotter than normal. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.

Terrain

Section 1. Level 2-4. Almost all of our walking is off-track. There are likely to be a few short, but sharp climbs. There will be some rock-hopping and there may be some fairly thick scrub.

Section 2. Level 1-3. Almost all of our walking is off-track. There are likely to be a few short, but sharp climbs. There will be some rock-hopping but there is unlikely to be much, if any, thick scrub.

Section 3. Level 1-4. The length of the walk into the Deception Range depends on the condition of track. On our last trip, we were able to drive two km in. In a wetter year, we might have to walk the full five km. The walk above the main falls is quite steep and rugged. Those who do not wish to do this can relax at the pool below or in the shade of one of the rock shelters.

Section 4. Level 0-4. The waterfalls on the side creeks that flow into the Ord are at their best at this time of year. Our walks include steep climbs, rock hopping and some scrub bashing. The rewards are beautiful pools and waterfalls which we will almost certainly have to ourselves. These walks are optional. You may relax in the shade near the canoes if you prefer.

Section 5. Level 1-4. The walk from the helicopter landing to our campsite should be short and fairly easy. The day walks in the park will include a fair amount of rock hopping and may include some steep climbs. If weather conditions are cool enough for a long walk, some of the walks will pass through some very rugged terrain and tall (2 metres and more) grass.

All sections. Even in the boggiest of seasons, Kakadu has nothing that can compare with the mud of Tasmania. However, if you have a particularly wet year, you may find yourself sinking up to mid calf regularly on some places.

Little of the walking on any section is on a marked trail. If you have never done any off-track walking through moderately rough terrain, nothing we can say can adequately describe the experience. The photos on our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au, can give you a partial picture, but they cannot substitute for the real thing. Most of those who have not had any off-track walking experience find it more difficult than those who have done it before.

Anyone who does not regularly (average twice a month) go bushwalking carrying a full pack would benefit from doing some pre-trip training. Do this and you will almost certainly enjoy the trip. If you are not an experienced off-track bushwalker and you don't do any training or any other form of strenuous physical exercise, you might feel that the trip is more of an endurance test than the pleasure most people experience.

Vegetation

Level 1-4. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understorey. Some short sections of grass may hide a broken rocky surface where you will have to be particularly careful. There may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. Much of section two is on trails where the vegetation is not much of a problem.

The spear grass normally reaches its peak in March, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We may encounter short sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass during some portion of the trip, but this early it is unlikely that there will be very much.

Hours

Generally 4-6 hours, not including breaks. A few days might be longer.

Packs

Pack weight - level 0-1. Day pack on some sections. The only time you carry food for more than one night, you carry it for only a few hundred metres.

Art

Although there are not many art sites on this trip, we will visit a good variety.

Campsites	Mix of flat rock ledges, sandy beaches (if not flooded) and grassy ground. Some nights are in accommodation.
Swims	This is the best time to see the local waterfalls, many of which flow only during the Wet. There will be a chance for several swims per day. Many of these will be in pools we have all to ourselves.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can force a change of itinerary.
Highlights	Wet season waterfalls. Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. The Ord canoe trip may give you a chance to see one or more freshwater crocodiles but they are harder to spot at this time of the year than during the cooler months.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Notes

Extreme flooding occasionally closes the road between Darwin and Kununurra. If this happens at the wrong time, we will have to cancel section one and fly across.

Day packs are particularly useful on all sections.

Those doing more than one section will have a chance to do some shopping in Kununurra between sections. They should allow extra money for this. (Cold drinks are almost irresistible.)

Those doing more than one section will have to carry only what they need for each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in Kununurra between sections.

To take advantage of the hot showers in Kununurra between sections, you should bring a towel and some clean clothes.

Motel type accommodation may be substituted for the budget accommodation provided between sections for an extra charge.

We cannot be certain what time we will depart for each section until the night before. It is absolutely essential that everyone contacts the guide the night before their first section departs. Kununurra Backpackers will be able to inform you where to meet the guide between sections.

Bringing fresh fruit, vegetables or honey into WA is illegal whether you come by road or plane. (You cannot even bring in boxes or other containers that once contained fruit or vegetables.) Bags are checked both on the highway and at the airport. There will be time to do some shopping in Kununurra.

Important Note **Air North**, (part of Regional Link), the main airline currently operating into Kununurra uses relatively small aircraft and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg on some flights. Unless special arrangements have been made, if you are flying to Kununurra and your baggage weighs more than 13 kg, it may not get on the plane with you. (This would be very unusual but it is possible.)

Contact Air North for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4000;

Fax: (08) 8920 4095; email: airnorth@regionallink.com.au

Skywest flies between Darwin and Kununurra twice a week, between Kununurra and Perth four times a week in the dry season. Wet season schedules may vary.

Itinerary: Green Kimberley Light

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change. Exceptionally severe flooding can cause route changes and could conceivably cause a delay in the return to Kununurra at the end of any section. If you can afford the time, try not to book a flight on the day after the trip finishes.

Section 1 Darwin to Kununurra

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting for everyone doing the first section, 6.30 p.m., Tracy's Bar, Holiday Inn on the Esplanade. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 Early morning pick up from your accommodation in Darwin, provided you have given us the address at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. The exact departure time will be fixed at the pre-trip meeting. If you are unable to notify us where you are staying, you will need to be outside the Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street from 7 a.m. Drive to Victoria River, stops en route. Overnight in motel accommodation.

Day 2 Gregory day walk. Overnight accommodation.

Day 3 Finish drive to Kununurra. Short walk or walks en route. Overnight in budget accommodation.

Section 2 Hidden Valleys

Day 3 Those joining this section will need to meet the group the night before. Arrangements for this meeting need to be made before section one departs Darwin.

Day 4 Drive or walk to beginning of Hidden Valley day walk. Day walk. Overnight in budget accommodation.

Day 5 Drive to beginning of Andy's Chasm walk. Day walk. Overnight in budget accommodation.

Section 3 Deception Range

Day 5 Those joining this section will need to meet the group the night before. Arrangements for this meeting need to be made before section two departs Kununurra.

Day 6 Drive to deception Range. Carry pack to camp. Afternoon walk without pack. Bush camp.

Day 7 Morning walk. Return to vehicle and drive to Kununurra. End of section three. Overnight in budget accommodation for those continuing to section four.

Section 4 Ord River Canoe

Day 7 Those beginning with this section need to meet the group the night before. Unless other arrangements have been made, meet at 6 p.m. at Kununurra Backpackers.

Day 8 7 a.m. pick up from your accommodation in Kununurra provided you have given us the address at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. If you are unable to notify us where you are staying, the pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre. Drive to Argyle Dam. Begin canoe trip. Bush camp.

Day 9-11 Bush camping. Canoeing and day-walks.

Day 12 Finish canoe trip to Kununurra. End of section one. Overnight in budget accommodation for those continuing to section five.

Section 5 Keep River National Park

Day 12 Those beginning with this section need to meet the group the night before. Unless other arrangements have been made, meet them at 6 p.m. at the Kununurra Backpackers.

Day 13 7 a.m. pick up for the helicopter flight to Keep River. Carry packs to bush camp site. Afternoon walk without packs.

Day 14-15 Bush camping. Day walks. May be option to carry packs to a second camp site.

Day 16 Helicopter pick up. Return to Kununurra. End of trip.