

# Charnley Explorer July 9 - August 6, 2017

First draft: 13 March 2017

Section one is a modification of a walk we did in 2014. Section 2 is a repeat of the trip we have done several times, most recently in 2016.

## Section 1: Hann &/or Wunumurra Gorges: July 9-16

We did a walk here in 2014 based on the info on the Mount Elizabeth website. Wunumurra was the more interesting of the two. Depending on numbers, we may do a through walk including Barnett and Wunumurra Gorges or we may do down and back. At the end of the walk, we return to Mt Elizabeth to drop off anyone finishing here and to collect anyone joining.

You can see the information I have on the Mount Elizabeth attractions page.

[http://mountelizabethstation.com/attractions\\_wb.html](http://mountelizabethstation.com/attractions_wb.html) – scroll down to the bottom for information on the two gorges. The Kimberley Australia Mt Elizabeth page has photos from these two gorges.

<http://www.kimberleyaustralia.com/mt-elizabeth-station.html>

## Section 2: Bachsten Creek and the Charnley River: July 16 - August 6

At Mount Elizabeth Station we collect the key which will let us through the locked gate and onto the track which leads to our walk. Although the total distance is less than 150 km, the drive is very rough – some short sections are so rough that it may take ten minutes to cover one kilometre. We will, however, have the occasional stop for a stretch or to look at some of the art sites along the way. We expect to camp somewhere along the track. The two photos give you a taste of what's



Not the easiest section of track but far from the hardest.



Note the tilt on the car.



Bachsten Falls 1 – the one 4WD tours see



Bachsten Falls 2 – the one only walkers see

involved in the drive – the longest, slowest drive we do on any of our trips.

The next day, we finish the drive to a small safari camp near Bachsten Falls and spend the rest of the day exploring the surrounding area. That's nice enough but there is much better a bit further. We will do a five night, six day loop down the creek below the falls, through a pass to another creek, up a gorge to another waterfall and finally back to where we began. We'll use what we learned on our previous trips to make this one even better.

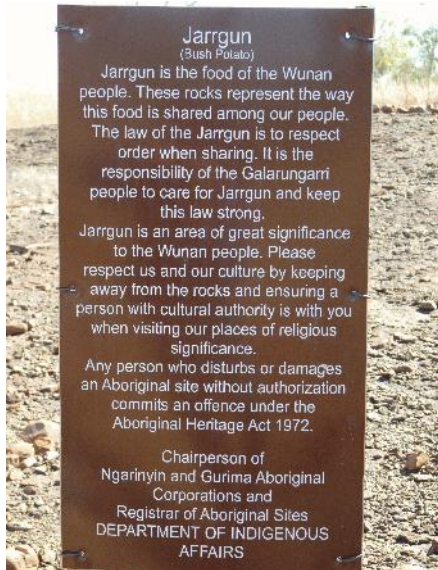


Photographing one of the main Bachsten art sites

The walk will visit a number of Aboriginal art sites, including two very spectacular Wandjina sites. For those who are interested, the fishing should be excellent.

We may spend two nights at the campsite shown at the top of the next page as we have done in the past or we may simply make the other days shorter.

From Bachsten, we drive another 35-40 km to the Brockman River and the start of the walk. On the way in or out, we stop to visit Wren Gorge and more paintings as well as an interesting Aboriginal stone arrangement.



Campsite above Bachsten Falls 2

From where we park the vehicles, a short walk of about one km downstream brings us to the much

larger Calder River, hitting it at a point where it passes through some particularly interesting rock formations. We spend the rest of the day exploring the lower Calder without full packs.

The following morning we walk to the Charnley. The walk is about nine km. This will probably be the longest distance we cover in one day with packs on this section. The terrain is moderately easy but it can be hot. We should get to the Charnley mid afternoon. The final descent can be tricky.

The Charnley is one of the most spectacular, but least accessible rivers in the Kimberley. The lower section goes through something like 30 km of continuous gorge. There is a wealth of Aboriginal art in a variety of styles showing that this has been a special place for thousands of years.

Walking along the Charnley is always slow and often not easy. We may sometimes choose to float our packs. The photos below show you what you need to be prepared for. This is as bad as it gets.



Crossing the Calder



One of the rougher sections midway between the Calder & Charnley



Having shown you as bad as it gets, we need to emphasise that most of the walking is much easier as shown by the photos at the top of the next page.



On our first short visit to this part of the river in 2001, we found that we had to climb up out of the gorge on a number of occasions. In 2002 and 2009, we had groups who were better at rock climbing so we didn't need to climb out at all. The climbs out aren't particularly difficult, but thick spinifex on top can make the walking there very slow. Whether we have to climb or not will depend on the group.

In order to explore the area properly, we will do a number of day or half-day walks, the first of which will be down the Charnley to near where it empties into Walcott Inlet. Other walks will be along some of the larger tributaries, all of which were flowing in July or August on all of our previous trips into this area. Our aim is to cover about 10 km moving upstream with packs, then do another daywalk further still, before following another tributary stream back toward the Calder. Our previous experience shows that following this particular creek is much easier than any of the other possible paths. We will probably take two days to do this walk.



No big packs here – on a day walk on one of the Charnley's smaller tributaries.

Everywhere we go, we find Aboriginal rock art, some of which is different to anything we've seen elsewhere. Those who are interested



in the rock art can have a wonderful time at the sites. Those who are not as interested can relax next to a nice pool while the others visit the sites.



The point where we return to the Calder has a number of small cascades and potential campsites so we may spend a final night there or we may do the short walk back to the vehicle and begin the drive back to Mount Elizabeth for the flight back to Kununurra if the Mitchell Plateau trip scheduled to follow this is running. If not, we will drive.

### Terrain and difficulty.

**Overall** Level 3.

**Climate** Level 2. Average daytime max 30-32°, average nighttime min 14-16°. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

**Terrain** **Section 1.** Unknown. We expect it to be the easiest part of the trip  
**Section 2.** Bachsten Level 2. Although there are some rough parts, there is a substantial amount of flat, easy walking.

**Charnley.** Level 3. This trip has a bit of everything. Lots of rock hopping and scrambling, flat rock, boulders, sand, thick scrub, open woodland and almost anything else you can name. Some days will be long and fairly hard but we there will be short, easy ones as well.

**Vegetation** Level 2-3. Vegetation can vary dramatically from year to year. This may make the trip easier or harder than we expect. While we were there in August 2001, a major fire came through on the south side of the gorge. This made the walking easier in 2002. On our last three trips, the vegetation was somewhere in between. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. It may be necessary to push through thick spinifex in some places.

**Hours** Level 2-3. Generally 4-6 hours. The first full day's walk is very long and may take 8 hours not counting breaks. On some days, you need carry your pack for only a couple of hours after which you can rest or explore without packs.

**Pack weight** **Bachsten.** Level 2, you need to carry 5 days food.  
**Charnley.** Level 4. You need to carry 12 days food.  
The other nights will be near the car so you won't need to carry that food.  
In all sections, you need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.

**Pack float** (Section 2). All but one of those on the 2002 trip and all on the 2009 trip chose to float their packs for a short distance rather than climb out of the gorge. Come prepared if you would like to do this. (The climb was faster but more strenuous.) There was also an optional swim of up to one km with daypacks on the last day in the gorge.

**Art** We visit a large number of art sites. Many are in a style we haven't found elsewhere.

**Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.

**Swims** Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.

**Lowlights** The long, rough drives. Carrying food for two weeks.

**Highlights** Beautiful gorge scenery. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites. Exploring the side creeks without packs.

**Wildlife** You see a variety of birds along the river and have a good chance of spotting freshwater crocodiles. You might see big crocs in the tidal section of the river we visit on a day walk. You are unlikely to see many large land animals but you can be lucky. We spotted the dingo at right on the 2009 drive in.

**Fishing** Excellent along the Charnley.

**Maps.** The 1: 50,000 Artesian Range covers most of the Charnley walk. We will probably do small amounts on Munja as well.

## Notes.

**The flight at the end of this trip depends on our connecting trip.** If it doesn't run, we will drive in both directions.

Make sure you keep a water bottle with you during the drives as it is unlikely to be easy to get into your pack. If we have to drive to or from Kununurra, keep some money with you as well as it may be possible to buy cold drinks.





Where we have two vehicles, one or more of the clients normally drives one of them. Due to the extremely rugged nature of the Munja Track, we cannot allow anyone who has not had extensive 4WD experience to drive these sections. This may mean limiting the number of participants or having the guide drive across the rough section and walk back to take the second vehicle through.

**Insects.** We found that the flies were more of a nuisance than normal in 2002. That wasn't the case on some of the later trips. However, in 2002, those who had fly veils were glad they had brought them. On the other hand, there were so few mosquitos that

some members of the group never bothered to set up their tents or mosquito nets. This varies from year to year.

**Crocodiles and swimming.** Our 2002 group saw one large estuarine (saltwater) crocodile in the tidal area near the end of the Charnley. None of our groups has seen any further upstream. They all saw numerous freshwater crocs, usually a good indication that the large and dangerous ones are not present. However, there is no barrier to estuarine crocs moving upstream along the Charnley below major waterfalls. We recommend that you restrict your swims to side creeks and small pools unless your guide tells you otherwise.

#### **Optional accommodation extras.**

- **Mount Elizabeth.** The drive to Mt Elizabeth is a long one. You might want to relax at the end of the trip. Staying in their accommodation would make it easier to get an early start the next morning. This would cost an extra \$120 per person and would include dinner & breakfast. (The actual cost is higher but I may include the dinner anyway.) If section one runs, we could spend the night at the end of that section in their accommodation. The timing is unlikely to work right to stay there at the end of the main walk.
- **Drysdale River.** If the Mitchell Plateau trip at the end of this is running, we will spend the final night at Drysdale River. Twin/double rooms would cost an extra \$60 per person. [www.drysdaleriver.com.au](http://www.drysdaleriver.com.au) has info about the camping and accommodation at Drysdale River Station.

## **Itinerary: Charnley Explorer**

**Note 1** Day 0 is the day before departure.

**Note 2** This itinerary is subject to change

### **Section 1 Exploring the Hann and/or Wunumurra Gorges**

**Day 0** Travel to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Connections to the eastern states are normally made through Darwin. Pre-trip meeting for everyone doing the first section, 6.30 p.m., Beer Garden, Hotel Kununurra. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance. **Note.** If Air North changes their timetable so that their flight from Darwin arrives after 6 p.m., we may delay the start of the pre-trip meeting.

**Day 1** 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 possibly as early as 7 a.m. Drive to Mount Elizabeth. Overnight at the campground if we drive, continue to the walk if we fly.

**Day 2-6** Exploring the Hann, Barnett and/or Wunumurra Gorges

**Day 7** Finish walk, return to Mt Elizabeth. Refuel at Mount Barnett.

**Day 8** Those leaving here fly back to Kununurra.

## **Section 2    Bachsten Creek and the Charnley River**

- Day 7**            Those beginning with section two travel to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and both Darwin and Perth.
- Day 8**            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. Time to be advised.  
Early morning flight to Mt Elizabeth Station. Begin drive along Munja Track. Look at (explore for) art sites along the way.
- Note.** If section 1 does not run, we will spend the first day driving to Mt Elizabeth. This would require us to take one day off the Bachsten or Charnley walks.
- Day 9**            Finish drive to Bachsten Camp. Begin walk.
- Day 10-13**        Bachsten walk, camping from packs.
- Day 14**            Finish walk at Bachsten camp. Overnight at camp.
- Day 15**            Drive from Bachsten to the Brockman River, stopping to visit Aboriginal stone arrangement on the way. Walk to the Calder and spend the afternoon exploring the lower Calder.
- Day 16**            Walk to the Charnley.
- Day 17**            Day walk to the tidal area on the Charnley.
- Day 18-24**        Walking along the Charnley and exploring the side creeks.
- Day 25**            Begin walk back to the Calder River.
- Day 26**            Finish walk to the Calder River. Camp on the Calder or walk to cars and begin drive.
- Day 27**            If not already done, return to vehicle and begin drive to Mount Elizabeth, stop at Wren Gorge on the way. Visit art sites not visited on the way in.
- Day 28**            Finish drive to Mount Elizabeth or Drysdale Station where we camp the final night if catching a flight the next day. Or continue driving toward Kununurra if we have to drive the whole way.
- Day 29**            Early morning flight to Kununurra, or finish drive, arriving in time to make afternoon connections to Darwin that day. Contact us to be sure if you wish to make a same day connection.
- Important Note**    **Air North**, the main airline 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](mailto:airnorth@regionallink.com.au)  
If you are coming from Perth, it's worth checking Virgin as well.