

Draft Drysdale River National Park # 2: June 17 - July 1, 2012

Drysdale River National Park is the largest and least accessible in the Kimberley. There is no public road leading to it. There is no airstrip inside it.

This inaccessibility is the key to one of the park's main attractions — few introduced pests and an ecology that remains relatively undisturbed in comparison to much of the rest of Australia. The park is a paradise for birdwatchers. It is usually easy to spot freshwater crocodiles in the pools below Solea Falls. Fishing is excellent, at its best below the falls. It's a bush paradise. Getting there is the problem.

We could use helicopters but the cost would be prohibitive. Driving takes the better part of two days each way. Fortunately, a new float plane operator has arrived in Kununurra to replace the one we used to use. We now plan to fly both ways and land on the Drysdale River in a huge pool several kilometres downstream from Solea Falls.

The notes below assume that our Drysdale No. 1 trip runs. If not, transport problems mean that the itinerary will be identical to that described in the Drysdale No. 1 trip notes.

If we are connecting with Drysdale No. 1, will use the float plane to fly in and land on one of the large pools upstream of Solea Falls. Exactly which one we use will depend on what earlier flights and the Drysdale 1 group have found. From there we will do a loop west toward the Carson River, Worriga Gorge and Morgan Falls.

Morgan Falls is one of the largest waterfalls in the region. Worriga Gorge is one of the best examples of monsoon rainforest, containing at least 13 out of the 25 known species of ferns in the park. The diversity of the flora and fauna and the great scenery are both good reasons to visit this area, but there is more. Something else very special appears to be the reason that public access to Theda Station has been closed.

Theda Station and Drysdale River National Park both contain an amazing concentration of Aboriginal rock art, especially the Bradshaw paintings, some of which are believed to be at least 17000 years old. We have been told unofficially that the new owners of Theda closed access because they wish to run their own exclusive trips to visit some of these art sites. We have seen some magnificent sites in the past and can still visit some of the best of these by doing this trip as planned. We plan to spend a some time looking at these art sites, exactly how much depends on how long it takes us to get to Morgan Falls from our drop off point. In any case, we rejoin the Carson River, then cross back to the Drysdale and work our way back below Solea Falls to where the first group was dropped off.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Average daytime max 30-31°C (86-88°F), average nighttime min 12-15°C (62-68°F) – averages hide the extremes, it can get close to freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

Terrain Level 2-4. The start of the walk is relatively flat and easy but there are some longish stretches of soft sand. As we continue toward Solea Falls, the terrain becomes more difficult with lots of rock hopping and some scrambling over large boulders. Above the falls, the terrain gets easier once more.

Vegetation Level 2-3. Most of the vegetation should be fairly open but it is likely that there will be some thick scrub to push through. It is not likely that there will be much. Scrub conditions vary dramatically from year to year so we can't say how much you will encounter.

- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours. On some days, you need carry your pack for only a couple of hours after which you can rest or explore without packs.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 4. You need to carry 13 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
- Art** This area contains one of the greatest concentrations of Aboriginal rock art in the Kimberley. We plan to spend a substantial amount of time visiting some of these. Those who have little interest in Aboriginal art should be prepared to relax near a pool or just watch the birds while others are visiting the sites.
- 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 above Solea Falls, smaller pools below.
- Crocodiles and swimming.** We have never seen a large crocodile anywhere in the area where we will be walking. Some local people have told us that there are only freshwater crocodiles in this portion of the Drysdale River. However, we have met someone who told us that he had seen a large crocodile. There **are** large crocodiles in the lower Drysdale. There is no barrier to their travel below Solea Falls. We recommend that you restrict your swims to the side creeks and small pools in the Drysdale until you are above Solea. If in doubt, ask the guide.
- Lowlights** Signs of cattle along the first section of the Drysdale River and some other places. Carrying 13 days food.
- Highlights** Solea Falls. Remote wilderness. Perfect weather. Good swimming. Large numbers of well preserved Aboriginal art sites.
- Wildlife** You see a variety of birds along the river and have a good chance of spotting freshwater crocodiles, tortoises and a variety of lizards. You are unlikely to see many large land animals.
- Fishing** Excellent in some places, little chance in others.
- Maps** 1:100 000 Carson (and Collison for a small section or a larger one if we go to Johnson Creek) or the new (issued in 2004) 1:50 000 Mount Connelly, Wallis Peak, Johnson Creek (very short section) and Mazzarol (if we do the long walk to Petrogale Falls on Johnson Creek).

Notes

Any one booking both Drysdale trips will receive a 20% discount on the total cost.

A day pack is very useful on this trip.

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Itinerary: Drysdale River National Park No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change

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, 6 p.m., outdoor area, Kimberley Croc Backpackers. **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 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 4.30 a.m.

Fly to Drysdale River. Begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 2–14 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 15 Pick up from Drysdale Pool and fly back to Kununurra.

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

Skywest began flying between Kununurra and Broome or Darwin in April 2009. Call 1300 660088 for flight dates and times or see www.skywest.com.au