

Middle Isdell River: Jul 29 - August 12, 2012

This is a major expedition with a minor exploratory component based on our previous trips to the region plus information we have obtained from other people who have walked through or flown over the area. Our route takes us through beautiful gorges, lush valleys and a variety of vegetation. For those who take the time to look, there are lots of birds and a number of Aboriginal art sites.

The helicopter food drop on the three week version of this trip was difficult to organise and made it very expensive. For these reasons, we have cut the trip back to two weeks and dropped the price in the hope that this will encourage more people to visit this amazing area.

If the Charnley trip which precedes this is running, we will fly to the Mont Elizabeth airstrip and drive to Silent Grove from there. If not we will drive to Silent Grove from Kununurra. That drive will take a full day, or perhaps a couple of hours into the 2nd day. Our walk begins at Bell Gorge. The gorge is about 15 kilometres long but few people get more than a kilometre beyond the waterfalls and pools at the top of the gorge. Once we have walked that kilometre, we should have the rest of the walk to ourselves. We plan to make our first camp about 1½ km below the falls.

Most of Bell Gorge is choked with pandanus and very slow going. We plan to avoid this by exploring a system of creeks slightly further west. On our last trip we discovered a series of interesting gorges, waterfalls and Aboriginal art sites. Far too nice to leave out. Following the creeks, it should take us about a week to get to the Isdell River where we turn upstream and walk up to where Bell Creek joins the Isdell.

One of the real highlights of our previous trips has been the gorge on the final few kilometres of Bell Creek before it enters the plains. The pools, the cascades and the views are too nice to leave out so we will spend a half a day or even a full one walking over to visit them, relaxing and enjoying the area.

From the Bell-Isdell junction, we plan to cut cross country and revisit some of the interesting smaller creeks and gorges we found on some of our earlier trips. As part of our route will be new, we cannot be certain what we will find. Our final campsite should be relatively close to the vehicles, but still well off the tourist route.

If the Mitchell Plateau trip which follows this is running, we will drive to Drysdale Station and fly to Kununurra from there. If not, we will drive all the way back to Kununurra.

Maps. 1:50 000 Isdell, Mt Vincent & Spider Hill or 1:100 000 Isdell.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 3. Generally dry, average daytime max 29-30°C, average night minimum 14-15°, but can get below 10°C on occasion. This is an average . We once had heat wave with a couple of 35°C days in July. Rain is extremely unlikely, but not unknown.
Terrain	Level 3. Some of the terrain is quite rugged and there is a considerable amount of rock hopping. There is also a considerable amount of relatively flat and easy walking. Although some of those who have done our previous Isdell trips have been in their late 60's or early 70's, almost all were highly experienced bushwalkers. People who have not done a considerable amount of off-track walking will almost certainly find it more difficult than those who have had such experience. We do not recommend this trip to people who have not done any off-track walking unless they consider themselves to be exceptionally fit.
Vegetation	Level 3. Mostly open woodland but there are likely to be some sections of thick scrub or thick grass but this can vary dramatically from year to year depending on when last burnt. Gaiters or long trousers and seed socks strongly recommended.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours walking per day.
Packs	Pack float. Not too likely but it is a good idea to bring a couple of garbages to keep your options open. Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 11 days food on each section. You need a sleeping bag but not a tent. There will almost certainly be some days or half days where you carry only a day pack.
Art	There are a moderate number of art sites, some of which are excellent.
Campsites	Mix of sand, rock ledges and grassy areas. You are very unlikely to see anyone else at any of the camps.

Swims	Good to excellent. There should be big pools next to almost every lunch spot and camp site as well as several other opportunities for swims each day. Crocodiles and swimming. There are almost certainly large estuarine crocodiles in the lower reaches of the Isdell River. Do not swim in any large pool unless your guide has indicated that it is safe.
Lowlights	Lots of tourists at the start of the walk at Bell Gorge. Possible thick scrub in some places.
Highlights	Waterfalls, gorges, art sites, the complete wilderness experience. Scenic flight at the end of the trip.
Wildlife	You will see a variety of birds and small animals (mostly lizards) but you are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Some good possibilities on the Isdell and its main tributaries. If you like fishing, we recommend that you bring a lightweight fishing line — not too light, some of the fish are too big for a really light line.

Notes

As mentioned above, the flights at the beginning and end of this trip depend on connecting trips. If either does not take place, we will drive in one direction. If neither takes place, we will drive in both directions. This is the only way we can keep the price down.

A day pack might be useful on this trip.

Bring a couple of garbages to waterproof your packs in case we do a pack float.

We expect some of the terrain to be quite rugged. We do not recommend this trip to people who have not done any off-track walking unless they consider themselves to be exceptionally fit.

There will be some room to store extra clothes or whatever in the vehicle during the walk.

You should always keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives as it is likely to be difficult to get into your pack during the drives.

Itinerary Middle Isdell

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Day 0 Those beginning with section one travel to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Most connections to the eastern states are 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. Pick up is 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 or near Silent Grove.

Day 2 Drive to Bell Gorge, begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 3–13 Bush camping, Carrying full packs.

Day 14 Drive to Drysdale Station or part way back to Kununurra.

Day 15 Finish the drive back to Kununurra or fly back depending on connecting trips. You should arrive in time to catch late afternoon flights.

Important Note **Air North** (part of Regional Link), the main airline currently operating into Kununurra uses some relatively small aircraft with an official baggage allowance of only 13 kg. See the Getting Here page on our website or contact Regional Link for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4000; email: aimorth@regionallink.com.au
Skywest offers a limited number of flights between Kununurra and Darwin or Perth. Their aircraft are larger. Worth checking.