

Middle Isdell River: July 25 - August 14, 2010

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.

Section 1: West of Bell Creek: July 25 - August 4

We begin with a flight from Kununurra to the Old Mornington or Silent Grove airstrip. From either, it is a relatively short drive to the beginning of our walk at Bell Gorge. Bell 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. Here we set up a base camp and wait for the helicopter which brings in our food drop.

Depending on numbers, those ending with this section may fly back to Derby with the helicopter or back to Kununurra in a light aircraft from the Silent Grove airstrip. We can arrange the flight to suit your preference.

Note on Section 1. The flight at the start of this trip depends on the Gibb Road Gorges trip which precedes it. If that trip doesn't run, we will drive.

Section 2: East of Bell Creek: August 4-14

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 day walking over to visit them, relaxing and enjoying the area before returning to our base camp to enjoy some of the special extras that come in with the food drop.

Rather than follow the Isdell River about 20 kilometres upstream through open woodlands to the middle Isdell Gorge, we plan to cut cross country and revisit some of the interesting smaller creeks and gorges we found on our 1998 trip. Some of the campsites on this section are among the best we have found. If time permits, we will spend a half or a full day exploring the upper reaches of the middle Isdell Gorge as well as doing several other day or half day walks without full packs along the way.

We leave the gorge about half way along its eight kilometre length, following a small spring fed creek for about seven kilometres through the dry hills. Another seven kilometres takes us across a small basin, through a dry pass, past some dense monsoon forest and into a small gorge at the end of which we find a large pool at the base of a long, gently sloping cascade. It's much too nice to resist so we will certainly stop for a swim, no matter what time we reach it.

We could easily take two days to do the final 15 kilometres from the cascade back to where we began as our route takes us along the edge of a small range which is cut by numerous small gorges, many of which hide lush pockets of vegetation and lovely pools, perfect for swimming. We plan to stop for several short walks to explore as many of these as possible as we work our way back to the vehicles.

The trip finishes with a short walk back to the vehicles followed by a drive to Drysdale Station where we meet the plane bringing in those doing the Mitchell Plateau trip which follows. However, if that trip does not take place, we will drive the full distance 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 garbags 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.

The helicopter which does the food drop can be used for scenic flights. These should cost about \$80 per person. Those who have done the flights in the past have all enjoyed it.

A day pack will be useful on this trip.

If you wish to bring in spare boots and/or clothes at the food drop, it will be possible to get them sent back to the vehicle or to Kununurra — **if we know that you plan to do this well in advance.**

The helicopter doing the food drop will be coming from Derby. If only a few are coming in and we do not use a fixed wing aircraft in addition to the helicopter, those beginning with section two would find it easier to spend the night before in Derby.

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

If we drive in either direction, you will need some money to buy drinks at one or more stops along the way.

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.

Two of our largest costs (our guide and the helicopter food drop) are not affected by the number of people on the trip. Rather than charge a high price which would cover us for four people, we prefer to offer the trip at a reasonable price with a surcharge for a group of four.

Itinerary Middle Isdell

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

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

Section 1 West of Bell Creek

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 Bell Gorge. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–11 Bush camping, Carrying full packs.

Day 12 Helicopter arrives with those doing only section two. Flight to Derby for those doing only section one.

Section 2 East of Bell Creek

Day 11 Those beginning with section 2 make their way to Derby or Kununurra. We cannot be sure which until we know how many are coming in and/or out.

Day 12 Early morning pick up for those joining. Flight to food drop point.
Day walk. Bush camp.

Day 12-20 Bush camping, carrying full packs most of the time.

Day 21 Finish walk. Drive to Mount Elizabeth.

Day 22 Early morning flight to Kununurra. Trip ends.

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: airnorth@regionallink.com.au
Skywest offers a limited number of flights between Kununurra and Darwin or Perth. Their aircraft are larger. Worth checking.