

Kimberley Highlights No. 2: August 23 - September 8, 2012

Section 1: Ord River Canoe: August 23-26

Since we first offered this canoe trip in 1994, those who have done it have all agreed that it was a worthy addition to our program. Using canoes allows you to carry more with less effort — a good way to carry a few little luxuries you wouldn't put into a pack. It also allows you to get closer to large numbers of birds than is normally possible when you're on foot and it helps you acclimatise before the next two sections of the trip.

From Kununurra we are driven to Lake Argyle where we put the canoes in the river just below the main dam. The next four 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. Where possible, we plan to make our camps well off the main river, in quiet spots that we will have to ourselves.

Value for money? On its own, this section is far more expensive than the three day do it yourself canoe trip. That's not good value. However, although we offer it as a stand alone, this section was designed as part of a longer trip. It provides what we believe is a perfect beginning to our taste of the Kimberley. You get acclimatised on the easiest of the three sections. You get a fourth day in the canoe so you can have a more leisurely trip and explore a bit, so that you don't have to stay in the often overused official camp sites. You also get four evening meals and a night's accommodation in Kununurra. Better still, when combined with other sections of the trip, the additional cost for doing this section is much lower. Do the sums yourself – if you are doing the full trip and booking well in advance, the additional cost for the first section is only slightly more than the three day do it yourself canoe hire. **That is good value.**

This section ends when we reach Kununurra and phone for our pick up.

Terrain and difficulty (general information after section three)

Overall	Level 0.
Terrain	Level 1-3. There is no walking with full packs. Some of the optional side walks go up steep slopes. The Ord offers especially easy paddling with enough current to keep you going without any rapids to threaten you with a spill. Crossing Lake Kununurra on the last day, when you are accustomed to the paddle, is the only time the current lets you down. Previous canoeing experience is not necessary.
Vegetation	Level 1. No vegetation to push through in the canoe but there may be a few small patches on a walk.
Hours	You normally paddle and walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 0. No need to carry a full pack.
Art:	None that we have found.
Campsites	Sandy patches or grassy open areas. We may use the fixed camp sites set up by the canoe hire company on one or two nights or we might try and get off the beaten track. Your choice.
Swims	Very good. You are on a permanently flowing river. It is, however, fairly cold as it is being fed from the bottom of Lake Argyle.
Lowlights	Sore arms and blisters from paddling. Gardening gloves prevent blisters, highly recommended.
Highlights	Lazy laid back time.
Wildlife	This section is the best for wildlife. Paddling slowly and keeping your eyes open gives you an excellent chance to see waterbirds, freshwater crocs, wallabies and other small animals.
Fishing	Possible but not easy – lots of people try their luck on the main river so the fish are harder to catch than where people seldom go fishing.
Maps	1:50 000 Burt Range, Carlton Gorge and Deception Range.

Section 2: The Carr Boyd Range: August 27 - September 1

Located south of Kununurra, between Lake Argyle in the east and the Dunham River in the west, the peaks and cliffs of the Carr Boyds will be familiar to anyone who has visited the region. From the roads they present a forbidding face, dry and barren, rugged beyond belief. Up close, they can show a different nature. Even after the driest of seasons, spring fed creeks trickle through deep, cool gorges and lovely pools bounded by a lush vegetation which stands in stark contrast to the dry plains outside the range.

After being dropped off close to the western edge of the range, we make our way up one creek system and down another. Along the way we will look for Aboriginal art, stop to enjoy numerous swims and take time out to simply relax and look at nature around us.

We exit the range near Packsaddle Creek where we will be met by the pick up vehicle. This section ends with a return to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 3 will have the opportunity to get lunch and a drink while we are picking up anyone joining us for section 3.

Terrain and difficulty (general information after section three)

Overall	Level 3.
Terrain	Level 3. 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 are few steep climbs, none of which is over 200 m. None are technically difficult. None require ropes or other special equipment. There will be some places where you have to step from stone to stone as you walk along the edge of a creek.
Vegetation	Level 3. This can vary dramatically from year to year. There are usually some sections of thick grass and/or spinifex which make for slow going. Gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
Hours	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 2 = four night's food.
Art:	Very little. Some groups don't see any.
Campsites	Can be dry river bed, rock ledges, sandy patches or grassy open areas. Some sites have a mix.
Swims	Excellent. There are a many good pools and most camp sites will be next to a swimmable pool.
Lowlights	Thick grass (most years).
Highlights	Boat through the Ord Everglades just after dawn (if we use the boat). Great views from the top. Waterfalls, pools and gorges.
Wildlife	The boat trip at the start gives an excellent chance to see waterbirds and freshwater crocs. It also gives a good chance of seeing wallabies. There are birds on the rest of the walk but you are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible only at the very beginning and end of the trip. Sooty grunter and catfish are the most likely fish to be caught.
Maps	1:50 000 Deception Range or 1:100 000 Kununurra.

Section 3: The Cockburn Range: September 2-8

Bounded by the King and Pentecost Rivers, the Cockburn Range is a relatively small plateau surrounded by massive cliffs. The view from the road has been described as the "most hauntingly beautiful" in the Kimberley. The interior is even better. The heavily dissected plateau hides deep gorges and spring fed creeks which flow long after the larger rivers in the surrounding countryside have dried to a few isolated pools.

After years of doing north to south through walks and loop walks from Emma Gorge, we finally tried using a helicopter drop off in September 2004. **Wow!**

Using a helicopter allowed us to visit more of the most interesting points than we had ever been able to get to on a one week trip before. It allowed more time for swimming (always a good idea in the tropics) and allowed more of the walk to be done with day packs. It cut out a long and somewhat tedious drive as well as the least interesting part of the original walk. It also gave everyone some fantastic views of the Cockburn gorges that could not be obtained in any other way. Needless to say, we're going to do it again.

The drive from Kununurra to Emma Gorge where we leave the car and catch the helicopter is less than 100 km. After a final cool drink, we fly deep into the heart of the Cockburns where a massive gorge system dominates the landscape. As we move south through the range, we find more gorges, pools, Aboriginal art sites, pockets of lush vegetation and an abundance of birds.

Each gorge has its own special character. Sometimes we carry our full packs, other times a day pack is enough. How much we explore will be determined by the speed and wishes of the group. Some wish to see as much as possible. Others wish to travel at a more leisurely pace allowing them to relax and enjoy their surroundings.

Our walk finishes with a steep descent to the Emma Gorge Resort. After a cool drink from the shop, we drive back to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 3 have a night in backpacker accommodation included in the price.

Notes. The local fire pattern means that the vegetation can vary so much that a route which is extremely difficult one month may be dead easy the next. If there has not been a recent fire, you may have to push through some long sections of thick grass where there is rough ground underneath. This was the case in June 2004 where it was so rough that what should have been a highlight was more like an endurance test for some of the group. On the other hand, if there has been a recent fire as was the case in September 2002, it may be so easy that you go through faster than expected.

Terrain and difficulty (General information after this section)

Overall	Level 3.
Terrain	With packs - level 3. The walk in or out at the north end is across a flat plain. In the range, most of the walking is relatively flat with moderate rock hopping. There are a number of short, steep climbs and one or two places where floating your pack may be easier than carrying it up a hill or along narrow ledges. Daywalks without packs - level 3-4. The optional side trips includes serious boulder scrambling and steep climbs.
Vegetation	Level 2-4. This can vary dramatically from year to year. There is normally little thick scrub but there may be some sections of thick grass and/or spinifex, gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
Hours	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 3 = one week's worth of food.
Art:	The Aboriginal art sites we have found are widely scattered. Two of the best sites require somewhat strenuous climbs and are not visited by all groups. Those who have the energy for the scrambles should be able to see some particularly good sites.
Campsites	Mostly on dry river bed and rock ledges. May include a grassy site.
Swims	There are a many good pools and most camp sites will be next to a place where you can swim. Although some of the creeks are unlikely to be flowing at this time of year, others are permanent or nearly so. Floating your pack is easier than trying to carry it around at least one of the pools. You should bring two or three garbage bags to waterproof the contents of your pack for this.
Lowlights	Occasional helicopters overhead. Thick grass if present.
Highlights	Spectacular gorge scenery. Great views of the plains below.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but may be hard to spot. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible only at the very north end of the range and unlikely to be particularly good there.
Maps	1:50 000 Mt Cockburn or 1:100 000 Erskine.

Terrain and Difficulty – General Information

Climate Level 4. Although September is cool compared to the three months which follow, it is hot. The average daily maximum during the first half of the month is about 35°C (95°F). It is, however, still reasonably cool at night. The average nightly minimum is about 20°C (68°F). However, it is not uncommon for the temperature to drop as low as 15°C (about 60°F). Occasionally it goes lower still. We recommend you bring a light sleeping bag. Rain is highly unlikely but it can get dewy at night. A fly over a mosquito net or dome can help keep you dry.

Terrain Almost none of the walking 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.

Notes for all sections

Day packs are particularly useful on sections one and three and may also be useful on the section two.

Keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives, as it may be difficult to get into your pack before the vehicle has stopped for the day.

Those doing two consecutive sections have a night in budget accommodation in Kununurra included in the price of the trip. Motel type accommodation is available for an extra charge. They will also have a chance to do some shopping in Kununurra between sections. Cold drinks are irresistible. Make sure you bring money for this.

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 the vehicle or in Kununurra.

Restaurant meals are included in the price of the trip between sections and at the end of section three. Drinks, however, are not included in the price.

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

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.

Itinerary: Kimberley Highlights No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Ord River Canoe

Day 0 Those beginning with this section travel to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Connections to the eastern states are normally make through Darwin. Pre-trip meeting for everyone doing the Ord River section, 6.00 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 Pick up between 7.30 and 8 a.m. 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.
Bus to Argyle Dam. Begin canoe trip. Bush camp.

Day 2-3 Bush camping. Canoeing and day walks.

Day 4 Finish paddle. Return to Kununurra, arriving early to mid afternoon. Drop off at your accommodation. Those continuing on to section 2 will have a night in budget accommodation.

Section 2 Carr Boyd Range

Day 4 Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

Day 5 Pick up between 7.30 and 8.00 a.m. 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 Carr Boyds. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 6-9 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 10 Return to vehicles. Drive to Kununurra. End of section 2.
Those continuing on to section 3 will have a night in budget accommodation.

Section 3 The Cockburn Range

Day 10 Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

Day 11 Those beginning with this section will be picked up from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre sometime between 7 and 8 a.m. Drive to Cockburn Range. Begin walk carrying full pack.

Day 12-16 Bush camping. Carrying full packs most days. There will be several half to full day walks without packs.

Day 17 Walk out to the Emma Gorge Resort for a cool drink. Drive to Kununurra. Drop off at accommodation.

Important Note Air North, a part of Regional Link is the main airline currently operating into Kununurra. It uses relatively small aircraft and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg on some flights (20 kg on most). 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 also offers a few flights to Kununurra from Darwin, Perth and Broome.