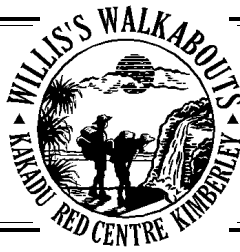

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24 November 2006

To all Willis's Walkabouts past clients and everyone else on our mailing list,

I hope you all have a great Christmas and New Year. This time I've managed to get the list out before the new year – a nice change. I hope the enclosed 2007-08 trip list encourages you to think about doing another trip or recommending one of our trips to your friends. Our brochure remains exactly the same as it has since 2001. Please let us know if you'd like a copy.

For those of you who don't have email, the sad truth is that you are inevitably going to be at a disadvantage in many things compared with those who do. Speaking solely from our own point of view, without email and internet access,

- You can't see the photo galleries on our website so you can't get as good a picture of the different areas as those who do have access.
- You can't click on links in our trip notes. These links give you far more information than I could possibly give you without them. (This letter would look very different if I could include links to websites.)
- You miss out on various special offers. Postage costs so much that we can afford to send out only one big mailing per year. Email costs only time, allows us to send out special offers and provide updated information on a variety of subjects. Besides information about coming trips and special discount offers, the five 2006 issues of our **email newsletter** included items about weather (the all-time driest February followed by the all-time wettest April in Darwin), accommodation in our departure towns, changing flights to Darwin, a map and book sale, a review of bushwalking in Kakadu, a company offering walks in the Tarkine in Tasmania and a story about how few Australians actually take their annual leave. (I still find this one hard to believe. One third of Australia's full time employed people took no leave last year. **Not one day!** 60% did not take their full entitlement. That's a sad comment on our society.)

Is our newsletter SPAM? I don't think so but a number of anti-spam programs do. We use a special program to send the newsletters which come from **rwillis@johnstonefamily.com**. If you want to be sure you get the newsletter, put this address into your "friends" list. It could be well worth your while. If you are not on our newsletter list and would like to be, please send us your email address and we'll add it on.

Changing times – can we cope? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. For many years there has been a trend for people to book holidays closer and closer to the date of departure. We can handle late bookings if we have a guaranteed departure; we can't handle them if we don't. Already I've had to cancel every trip which wasn't a definite departure through February. If you are interested in a trip, the sooner you book, the more likely it is that it will run.

Changing Prices. Good news and bad. Despite increased costs, I've managed to keep prices steady on many trips and have kept price rises to a minimum on most others. I've even managed to decrease them slightly in a couple of cases. However, on the Mitchell Plateau, increased fuel costs combined with new landing fees and the increased cost of getting the fuel to the Mitchell Plateau has forced the company that provides the Mitchell Plateau helicopter service to raise their prices. This in turn has forced most of our Mitchell Plateau prices up by 10% or more.

Changing Kimberley. The Kimberley hasn't changed but our trips have. We've got two completely new trips and three others have had major changes.

- **Mitchell Plateau 1: 1-14 April.** The helicopters are now arriving early enough so a delayed departure means that they will be there when we arrive. This provides a substantial saving and allows us to go places we couldn't have afforded to go otherwise. This is your best chance to see the Mitchell Plateau waterfalls at their spectacular best.
- **King George: 6-19 May.** We've done this as a charter twice in the last three years. Time to add it to the program. You get to see King George Falls from land and from a boat as well as visiting some of the best other spots in the area.

- **Gibb Road Gorges: 24 June - 15 July.** The Munja Track and Bachsten Creek walk are more like the short walks along the Gibb River Road than the big walk along the Charnley so we've added it to the Gibb Road Gorge trip and left the Charnley as a stand alone.
- **Charnley Explorer: 15-29 July.** This is now earlier and stands on its own.
- **Bungle Bungles: 15-28 July.** At last, a trip to the Bungles in the coolest month of the year. Fly in and out and avoid the long drives. Two weeks with a night in safari style accommodation between two very different sections.

The Wet. We've got two definite departures and nothing else available from now through the end of February. Marj King will be leading them both.

- **New Year in Kakadu: 27 December - 6 January** has been a definite departure since April. This is the trip that the winner of our \$1000 voucher competition chose. We'll probably have a second guide as he knows what the Wet is like and is so keen to do a good wet season walk that he's offered to come as an unpaid assistant. We're offering a special 10% discount as a wet season promotion.
- **Kakadu Light: 7-16 February.** I think this is one of the most underrated trips in our program. It is the only way you can begin to experience the wonder of wet season walking in the Top End without having to carry a full pack. You get off the beaten track, see waterfalls and swim in beautiful pools that no other tour operator visits. Everyone who has done the trip has agreed that it was a wonderful experience. Sadly, very few have done it, so

I'm now offering a discount of up to 50%. Conditions apply. See the website or ask for the trip notes for full details.

At this point, we've had a few enquiries about the **Kimberley Coast Explorer** beginning on 18 March but no confirmed bookings on that or the **Baroalba - Hill 420 Circle** beginning on 11 March. If you think you might be interested in either, the sooner you contact us, the more likely it is that they will run.

Plan Ahead! We've already got two people interested **Kakadu Super Circle No. 1** in January 2008. This is the only trip where you can see Jim Jim and Twin Falls at their wet season best, the only trip where you can see dozens of Kakadu's other wet season waterfalls. The food drop in the middle means that you don't need to carry food for the full three weeks. **What's it really like?** It's a great trip but you don't have to take my word for it. Someone who did our 1992 trip put their experience onto two of their own web pages. If you go to our website and click on "Trip Reports by Clients" in the left menu and scroll down, you'll get links to those pages.

Walking with children. We ran two family trips this year (3 generations of one family) and had some older children come along on two of the other trips. If you have young children (or grand children) you'd like to introduce to the wonder of walking in Kakadu, you should have a look at our Kakadu Family walks

Walks with Aboriginal Guides. We now have a total of seven different walks with Aboriginal Guides in our program. Two of the trips go into Arnhem Land and take you into parts of Kakadu where you cannot otherwise get a permit to go. One of the others is a special trip concentrating on Aboriginal rock art.

Traditional Aboriginal culture is at its strongest in northern and central Australia. The people who have done our trips with Aboriginal guides in the past have been unanimous in their praise. I had thought that these trips would be especially popular but not one of them ran this year. (We do, however, already have two bookings on the Aboriginal guided second section of **Kakadu Highlights No. 7** next August.) Our being able to offer trips like these depends in part on whether or not they run. Our being able to offer them in 2007 is no guarantee that we'll be able to offer them again.

If you'd like to know more about these, go to our website www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au and click on **Trip List** in the left menu. In the middle of the page which will come up is a link to a page describing all the trips with Aboriginal Guides.

Other Australian trips worth a special mention.

Kakadu Circle No. 1: 7-27 May. After a gap of ten years, this trip finally ran again this year. It's not only running again in 2007, it's almost full. I'll be leading it again — how could I resist another chance to visit Jim Jim and Twin Falls when they are flowing well and the tourists have yet to arrive. If you'd like to see what this year's trip was like, click on Photo Galleries in the left menu on our website and scroll down to the bottom of the Kakadu section for two galleries showing the two halves of the trip.

Mitchell Explorer: 13 May - 10 June. Our first Mitchell Explorer this year gave us a good idea of the best way to go so 2007 should be even better. Outstanding Aboriginal art and a whole new river system we'll be visiting for only the second time. If I weren't doing the Kakadu Circle, this is the one I'd be on. We already have two bookings so it's looking good.

Carr Boyd Explorer: 20 May - 2 June. Lake Argyle is many times larger than Sydney Harbour. We begin this trip with a boat across the lake and wander back through the Carr Boyd Ranges. Although the southern and northern ranges are only a few kilometres apart, they are surprisingly different. We've already had half a dozen people ask about this trip — but no one has confirmed with a deposit.

Kakadu Circle No. 2: 24 June - 7 July is one of a couple of Kakadu trips where we changed the dates to try and avoid the hassles we had with the late opening of Jim Jim and Twin Falls this year. It is one of our most popular trips and already has three bookings.

Drysdale River Nos. 1 & 2: 10 June - 8 July. One person has already taken advantage of the big discount we offer on the combination and booked both trips. This is one of the best areas we've ever found for Aboriginal art. Landing float planes on the river is a lot less expensive than the helicopters we used to use.

Kakadu Health Retreat Nos. 1 & 2 in July and September. These are **not** our standard bushwalks. They are **not** your standard Health Retreats. They are bushwalking health retreats of a kind we haven't seen anywhere else. They were developed by guide Cassie Newnes. In her words, "This trip has been specifically designed for people seeking to combine an exploration of nature's wild, magnificent beauty with a healthy living experience that revitalises body, mind and spirit." The experience Cassie gained on her first trip this year should make the 2007 trips even better.

Finke-Watarrka: 9-29 September. This is one of only three Red Centre trips in our program. The other two run most years but this one hasn't run since the late 1990s. I wish I knew why. The temperatures are, on average, more pleasant. You can actually enjoy stopping for a swim. If I had the bookings to run this trip, I'd give the South Africa trip to another guide and lead it myself. What more can I say?

Overseas. We've had a big win — our public liability insurance hassles are over so I can happily continue to offer the trips.

Southern Africa is becoming a more and more popular destination for us. We've got bookings on both 2007 trips. No two trips will ever be exactly alike, but based on the ones we've done, they'll all be great.

- **Namibia, Botswana, Zambia and South Africa by 4WD** and on foot on day walks. This is a definite departure. We'll leave in early March and return toward the end of April. I've already sent out more than 20 pages of information. See the website or ask for the trip notes if you want details.
- **Great Walks of South Africa:** September-October. It's probably already too late to book onto every one of the walks listed on our original itinerary so I've added some other possibilities and will base the final itinerary on what's available. See the website or ask for the trip notes.

Patagonia and other places in South America. We are limited only by our imagination and lack of Spanish speaking guides. In a couple of weeks I'll be taking my first family group to Patagonia. In early 2008, we may have a special charter combining Patagonia with some off-the-beaten-track places in Peru. Watch the website for details. If you speak Spanish and think you might be qualified to lead a trip, please contact us. With more qualified guides, we could offer a better selection.

The Canadian Arctic: 2008. Somewhat surprisingly for someone as acclimatised to the tropics as I am, I really enjoy my arctic trips, the first of which was way back in 1969, well before I'd even thought about moving to Australia. I plan to offer two trips in 2008.

- **March: dog sledding in the Yukon** combined with short walks in southeast Alaska. This will be much the same as the trip I did in March this year. One of these days, I'll get the photos onto the website so you can see exactly why we all had such a great time.
- **July-August, option A, Baffin and Ellesmere Islands.** I've led two trips to Baffin. That's twice more than most Canadians have visited the area. Ellesmere has been a dream of mine for the past 15 years. Hiking in the northernmost national park in the world (80°N) in a surprisingly green landscape. It won't be cheap, but a reasonably large group would bring the cost down to not much more than some of our other overseas trips. Drop me a line or send me an email if you'd like to be kept informed as this develops.

- **July-August, option B, the Dempster Highway.** I've been dreaming about this one since the road first opened back in 1979. It begins near Dawson in the Yukon and goes north to finish at the town of Inuvik in the Northwest Territories. There are lots of relatively easy, one to four day walks that we can do along the way. As with option A, drop me a line or send me an email if you'd like to be kept informed as this develops.

The Website. This is our main selling tool. I've been working on a major redesign for the past two years but one thing or another has kept it from happening. In the mean time, it has grown ever larger as I add things like new photo galleries. (More are coming, have a browse now and then to see what's new.) With hundreds of different pages, it can be hard to find things. Without the right words in the text, it can be hard for potential clients who don't know about us to find it at all. I'm looking for suggestions.

- How do I make things on the website easier to find? The website should be searchable but I don't know an easy way to do this.
- How do I make the website easier to find? **I don't know what people look for** when they are looking for trips like these. If you have ever tried to search for our website and failed, I'd love to know what words you typed into your search engine when you were doing the search. "Bushwalking Kakadu" and "bushwalking Kimberley" both find us. But bushwalking is an Australian term. "Trekking", "hiking", and "adventure" combined with "Kakadu" or "Kimberley" don't get us a useful mention. I don't even know if these are combinations that people look for.
- How about a **links page** showing other tour operators that operate under a similar philosophy and have some similarities between their tours and ours? Three which come to mind are Tarkine Trails in Tasmania, Gecko Canoeing in Katherine and Wilderness Expeditions who offer donkey supported treks in northern Queensland.

Can you help? I'll give a voucher valued at a minimum of \$100 for the best suggestion. Come up with a fantastic suggestion that really works and I'll give you a free trip.

Bushwalking in Kakadu is under review. Many of you who receive this letter have done extended walks in Kakadu. Many more may wish to do so in the future. Where you will or will not be permitted to walk and what you will or will not be permitted to do is going to be determined by a coming major review of bushwalking in the park.

Bushwalkers in Kakadu are restricted to certain approved routes, the number of which has dropped over the years. New restrictions have been placed on day walks. Carrying a satellite phone might become a requirement on long walks. Penalties may apply to those who ignore these restrictions. What next?

I was recently appointed to the Kakadu Tourism Consultative Committee as the first and only representative of the bushwalking community. As a founder, past president and life member of the Darwin Bushwalking Club and as the sole bushwalking tour operator in the park, I want to see better conditions for all bushwalkers. Comments and suggestions from as many interested individuals as possible would help me ensure that things get better rather than worse.

Have your say. Drop me a line and let me know what you think should happen with bushwalking in Australia's largest national park. I'm in the process of preparing a short paper on the history of bushwalking in Kakadu. Please let me know if you'd like a copy.

That brings me to the end and a special offer.

Book now and save! The first five people who quote this letter when booking any Australian trip will get an extra 10% discount on any trip where their total discounts are 10% or less. They'll get an extra 5% off if their total discounts are 15% or more. **Note.** There has to be a limit. The maximum total discount on any trip is 35%.

That's all from me for another year.

Best wishes and regards to all,

Russell Willis