

DRAFT Notes: Litchfield - Gregory Explorer: June 5-18, 2016

This trip is for adventurous people who wish to explore the unknown. The two parks might not sound unknown, but unknown they are.

Section 1: Litchfield National Park: June 5-11

Located less than 150 kilometres from Darwin, Litchfield National Park is a wonderful area full of permanent springs and waterfalls. Although the northern part of the park has been developed for intensive day use, the southern part remains an almost untouched wilderness. No more than one in a hundred park visitors goes anywhere near where we will be walking. Not one in ten thousand would go where we will do our walk. The tourist map at right shows what we mean. It doesn't even show the creeks we will walk along: Tableland Creek, surprise Creek, Mistake Creek, Red Rock Creek and perhaps the east branch of the Reynolds River.



Our final itinerary will depend on a variety of factors including, the fitness, interests and wishes of the group, the amount of water present, the state of the 4WD track through the southern part of the park and the number of participants. (With a large group using two vehicles we might be able to do a vehicle shuffle and a through walk. With a smaller group, we are restricted to loop routes.)

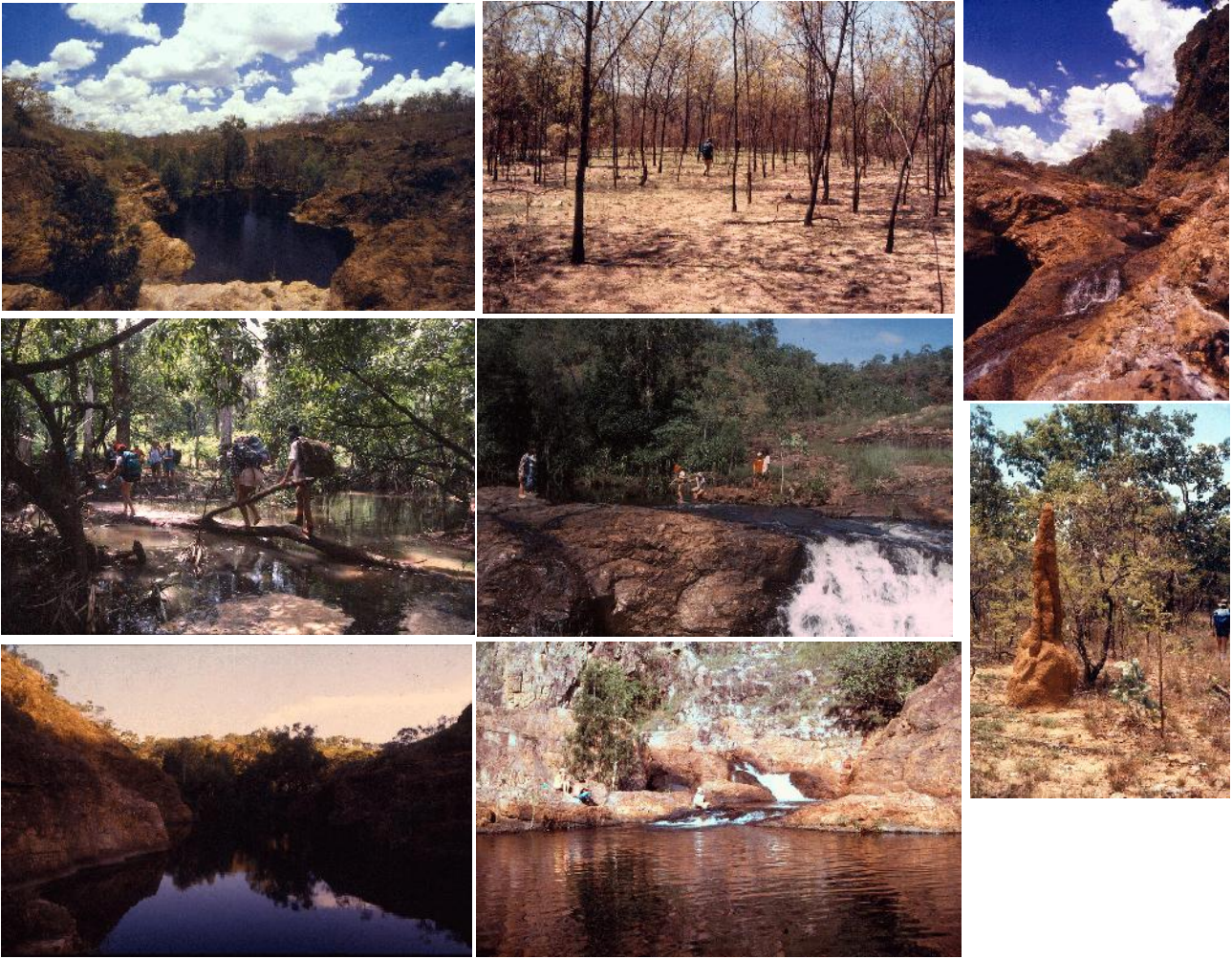
It has been a long time since we have been able to do this walk, so long that when we went to look for photos of the area, the best we could do was to scan old slides from the mid 1980s. (We have been in more recently but the guide on that trip didn't leave his photos.)



The three photos above show the main pool below Surprise Falls. This is the one place where we may meet other people. The photo at right shows a group heading off upstream en route to some of the other more interesting but less well known creeks. The three photos below are from Mistake and Red Rock Creeks. Sadly, our best photos used to be used in slide shows and could not be found. There are lots of wonderful pools and campsites we will have all to ourselves



Finally, there is Tableland Creek, the largest creek in the southern part of the park. Pool after pool, waterfall after waterfall, swim after swim, it is a magic spot. Most of the walking is fairly easy but there are likely to be a couple of wades as shown in the pictures at the top of the next page.



At the end of the walk, we drive to Katherine where those doing the full trip spend a night in budget accommodation. Those leaving the trip at the end of this section have the choice of being dropped off in either Pine Creek or Katherine.

Terrain and difficulty. Most of the walk is relatively flat. There are, however, a few moderate climbs and a fair amount of rock hopping. There may be sections of thick scrub. We cannot say for sure as this depends how recently the area has been burnt and on how much rain there has been since.

Maps. The 1:50 000 Prospect Hill map covers most of the route. A small part lies on the Mt Tolmer and/or Rum Jungle maps. The 1:100 000 Reynolds River map covers it all.

Section 2: NE Judbarra/Gregory National Park: June 12-18

Gregory is one of the largest yet least known national parks in the NT. It lies about halfway between Katherine and Kununurra and contains several creek systems where large permanent pools and shady rock shelters can be found in the depths of sheer, red-walled gorges. The southern and western parts of the park area paradise for four wheel drivers. (They also have some interesting bushwalks.) On this trip, we will stick to the northeast corner, highlighted on the map at right. It may look small, but you need to remember that the road distance from Katherine to Victoria river is 200 km.

You can find more information about the park at http://www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/parks/find/gregory#_VnJ5U7_EVtQ



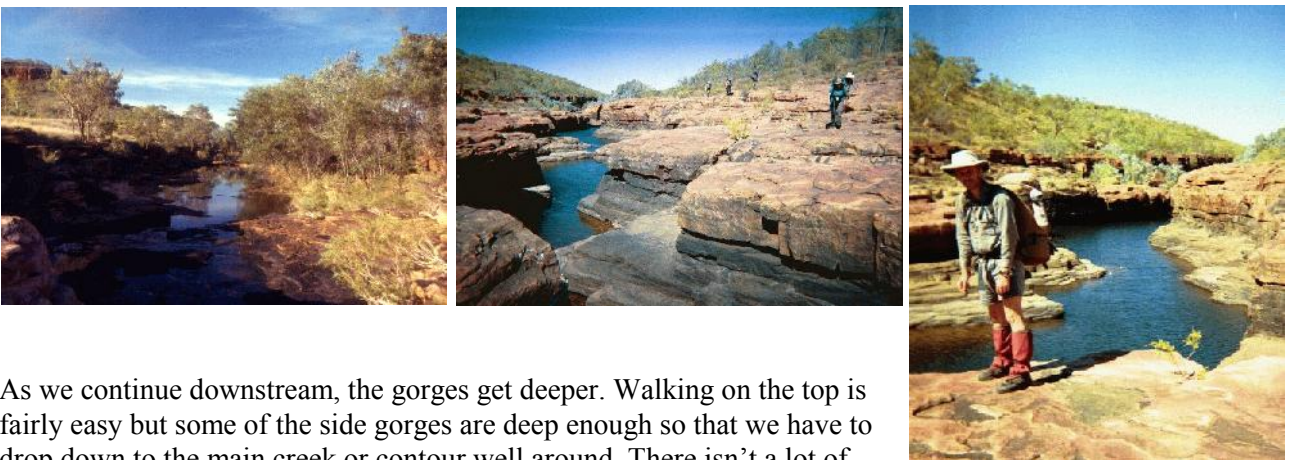
On this trip, we plan to do a loop along Matt Wilson and Ryan Creeks in the northeast section of the park. This area contains some of the most spectacular cliffs in the park. We do not visit it on any of our other Gregory trips. As with section one, it's been a long time since we've done this walk – but not as long as the Litchfield walk. The photos here are mostly scans of slides taken on our trip in 1991 with a few more from the 2001 trip. The three photos below were taken near the beginning of Matt Wilson. They show that the terrain is fairly easy but that there may be an occasional wade.



The photo at near right shows how the valley around Matt Wilson Creek opens up in its upper reaches. The photo at far right shows a campsite – good shade with a big pool just visible through the trees.



We climb up out of the Matt Wilson Valley and cross the plateau heading west toward Ryan Creek. We find a number of high, shallow gorges on the small creeks that feed into Ryan.



As we continue downstream, the gorges get deeper. Walking on the top is fairly easy but some of the side gorges are deep enough so that we have to drop down to the main creek or contour well around. There isn't a lot of difficult terrain, but as the photo shows, there is some.



Eventually, we get to a point where we climb up over a ridge and drop down into the Matt Wilson Valley again. From there it is a short walk back to the vehicle where we begin the 530 km drive back to Darwin.



Terrain and difficulty. The walk along Matt Wilson Creek is relatively flat and easy as is the lower portion of Ryan Creek. In between there are a few steep climbs and a fair amount of rock hopping. The amount of scrub varies depending on the recent history of bushfires and rainfall.

Maps. 1:50 000 Ryan Creek and Sullivan Creek or 1:100 000 Hogarth and Gregory Creek.

Terrain and difficulty – both sections

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 2. Average daytime max 30°C, average nighttime min 14-16°C. It can, however, drop below 5°C. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.
Terrain	Level 3. Most of the walking will be along relatively flat terrain on the top of the range or along creeks. There will be some of rock hopping. There will be a few relatively short but steep climbs. As the trip is partly exploratory, we can't be 100% sure that we won't encounter some rougher terrain than expected.
Vegetation	Level 2-4. Varies from year to year depending on when last burnt. In June, most of the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. Based on past experience, we expect some sections of thick scrub and or spinifex which will make some days much harder than others. There are always flowers in bloom.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 6 days food on each section. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Art	We visit some art sites on both sections but the art we have found previously has not been as plentiful or as well preserved as much of what we have found in Kakadu and parts of the Kimberley.
Campsites	Mix of sand, grassy areas and rock ledges. Most sites are good; some are excellent, some no more than average. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.
Swims	Good pools at most campsites and lunch spots.
Highlights	Beautiful gorges, walking on Aboriginal land which has remained virtually unchanged since before European settlement.
Lowlights	Carrying food for a week. We may encounter thick, sticky spinifex and/or ground hugging vines that make some of the walking difficult.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible in some places.



Turkey bush – *Calytrix extipulata* – common throughout the Top End

Notes on both sections

Explorer trips are the least structured and most adventurous of those we offer during the dry season. They are not endurance tests. They are intended to be run at a reasonably leisurely pace so that we can have a really good look at the areas we choose. It is, however, likely that there will be some long days when it will be necessary to cover a considerable distance. Those taking part will need to be fit enough to do this.

If you wish to be among the first people to explore a particular area, possibly opening it up for future visits by others, then this could be the trip for you.

Although we intend to run each section as a single long walk, conditions beyond our control might mean that we have to split one or both sections into two shorter walks.

Those doing both sections have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

One or both sections of the trip might include a day or half-day walk. You should either bring a day pack or be prepared to use a full size pack on day-walks.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the journey.

Crocodiles and swimming. Most of the creeks along which we walk present no problem. There are, however, a few places in the lower reaches of some creeks where large crocodiles could conceivably present a danger. Please ask the guide before you swim in any large waterhole.

Itinerary: Litchfield Gregory Explorer

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

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

Section 1 Litchfield National Park

Day 0 **Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street, the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance. Both Double Tree hotels were Holiday Inns until early 2013.

Day 1 8 a.m. pick up. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street.

Drive to Litchfield. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc.

Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Return to vehicles. Drive to Katherine. Those ending with this section may choose to get off in Pine Creek or they may continue to Katherine, arriving in the late afternoon. Greyhound offers twice daily bus services to Darwin from Katherine and Pine Creek. We recommend booking in advance. Please check the bus timetables when you book. Those continuing spend night in budget accommodation in Katherine.

Section 2 Gregory National Park

Day 7 Those beginning with this section have the option of meeting the group the night before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where the group will be staying. Both Greyhound-Pioneer and McCaffertys offer daily bus services between Darwin and Katherine.

Day 8 Section two begins. 7.30 to 8 a.m. pick up at the Katherine Visitors Centre on the corner of Lindsay Street and the Stuart Highway for those beginning with this section. Drive to Gregory and begin walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 9-13 Bush camps, carrying full packs. We may choose to return to the vehicle on the final night.

Day 14 Return to vehicles if we have not already done so. Drive to Darwin via Katherine. Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon or early evening.