

DRAFT: Russell's Light Wet Special: January 17-26, 2010

The original itinerary has been modified and the dates changed to suit the first person who booked.

The Top End wet season is **spectacular** and, more importantly, **enjoyable**. This is, in many ways, **my favourite time of year**. I wanted to do this trip so much that I agreed to run it for one person. More would be welcome.

Coming back from the Bungles in the Wet trip in 2008, I got stuck overnight by flooding at the Victoria River. (The [web page describing this trip](#) will show you what that was like and why this is unlikely to happen again.) I had a quick look and want to go back to do it properly so we'll begin with the 500+ km drive to Victoria River. If we get there early enough, we'll do a short walk. Otherwise, dinner and bed.

We'll spend the next day doing some short walks, seeing some of the waterfalls that only flow at this time of year and visiting one of the largest Aboriginal art sites in Gregory National Park. We plan to spend a second night at Victoria River before driving to Kununurra across the border in the Kimberley. After checking into our accommodation, we spend the rest of the day exploring our own Hidden Valley near town, stopping to view some Aboriginal paintings and enjoy swimming in a lovely pool, well-known to the locals (we spent the day swimming with a group of Aboriginal children on one trip), unknown to the average tourist. We spend the night in budget accommodation as we continue our acclimatisation.

The following day, a relatively short drive and a three to five kilometre walk bring us to a pool in an area which bears a striking resemblance to the Bungle Bungles. We spend the rest of the day and the following morning exploring the gorges, looking at a wealth of Aboriginal art and enjoying the pools. If time permits, we will visit some of the waterfalls near Kununurra in the afternoon.

We revisited this area for the first time in many years in April 2008. The art site is one of the largest we have found anywhere. There is a shelter which is large enough for the group to pitch tents out of the rain if it should happen to rain. It's a magic spot. This section finishes with a night in budget accommodation in Kununurra.

If you want a better idea of what the hidden valleys are like see the [Hidden Valleys photo gallery](#) on our website.

The final part of the trip is done in canoes. From Kununurra we are driven to Lake Argyle where we put the canoes in the river just below the main dam. The next five 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. We plan to make one camp in a bush spot and the other two in formed camps with some shelter.

Above Spillway Creek, the water level is virtually constant through the entire year. Below Spillway, the water should be fast flowing but manageable at this time of year. As we will be going downstream, less effort is required than at other times. Previous canoeing experience is not necessary. If the Ord is flowing too fast below Spillway Creek, we can arrange for a larger boat to pick us up at that point.

We plan to get picked up about ten km before the normal pull out point, avoiding the hottest and hardest part of the paddle. We spend the final night in budget accommodation in Kununurra.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 1 – you carry a full pack for only one night.

Climate Level 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid. There will be some nights in air conditioned accommodation.

The average daily maximum is 35°C (95°F). If we get a spell of relatively dry weather, the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F). The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is almost certain.

On average it will rain every second day, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. Occasionally, it might rain for days at a time. (This makes it somewhat harder to walk but it also makes the waterfalls more spectacular and keeps it relatively cool.) Occasionally, it may rain very little. This makes it substantially hotter than normal. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.

Terrain Level 1-4. This trip has it all, from easy marked trails to off-trail rock scrambling and a couple of short but sharp climbs. If you have never done this before, you may find this fairly difficult. Much of the walking is through open woodland with a spear grass understorey.

The waterfalls on the side creeks that flow into the Ord are at their best at this time of year. Our walks include steep climbs, rock hopping and some scrub bashing. The rewards are beautiful pools and waterfalls which we will almost certainly have to ourselves. These walks are optional. You may relax in the shade near the canoes if you prefer.

Anyone who does not regularly do any off-trail bushwalking 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.

Vegetation Level 1-4. 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 may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. Much of section two is on trails where the vegetation is not much of a problem.

The spear grass normally reaches its peak in March, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We may encounter short sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass during some portion of the trip, but this early it is unlikely that there will be much.

Hours Generally 4-6 hours, not including breaks. A few days might be longer.

Packs **Pack weight** - level 1. Day pack only except for one night in the Tier Range.

Art We visit several art sites., including two major ones.

Campsites One sand bar, two canoe camps, and one rock shelter. The other nights are spent in accommodation.

Swims This is the best time to see the local waterfalls, many of which flow only during the Wet. There will be a chance for several swims per day. Many of these will be in pools we have all to ourselves.

Lowlights Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can force a change of itinerary.

Highlights Several waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine.

Wildlife Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. The Ord canoe trip may give you a chance to see one or more freshwater crocodiles but they are harder to spot at this time of the year than during the cooler months.

Fishing Possible in the Ord River.

Maps The 1:50 000 Sullivan Creek map shows our full day Gregory walk near Victoria River.
1:50 000 Burt Range (the first hidden valley)
1:50 000 Tier Range.for the overnight hidden valley
1:50 000 Burt Range, Carlton Gorge & Deception Range.

Itinerary: Russell's Wet Light Special

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change if weather conditions are extreme.

- 16 Jan** Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn Darwin, 122 The Esplanade. **Note.** There are two Holiday Inns next to each other on the Esplanade. The meeting is in the taller one, closer to the roundabout at the end of the street. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.
- 17 Jan** Drive to Victoria River. Short walk in the late afternoon if time permits. Overnight at the Victoria River Roadhouse motel.
- 18 Jan** Exploring the area near Victoria River. Overnight at the Victoria River Roadhouse motel.
- 19 Jan** Drive to Kununurra. Visit the hidden Hidden Valley near Kununurra. Overnight at the Kimberley Croc.
- 20 Jan** Drive to the start of the track to the unnamed valley. Carry packs 3 to 5 km along a 4WD track to a camp in a rock shelter. (How far we walk depends on the condition of the track.) Swimming and exploring the rest of the day.
- 21 Jan** Return to the car and drive to Kununurra. Visit some of the waterfalls near town if time permits. Overnight at the Kimberley Croc.
- 22 Jan** Bus to Lake Argyle, begin canoe trip down the Ord. Side walks and a bush camp.
- 23-24 Jan** On the Ord, overnight at fixed camps. Side walks to waterfalls.
- 25 Jan** Pick up from Zebra Rock Gallery, return to Kununurra. Overnight at the Kimberley Croc.
- 26 Jan** Return to Darwin.

Cost The price is \$1495. All our standard discounts apply.

If the first people who book want to extend the trip or camp out overnight, we'll adjust the price accordingly. Please contact us for details.

walkabout@bushwalkingholidays.com.au