

Drysdale River National Park No. 2: June 18 - July 1, 2017

Drysdale River National Park is the largest and least accessible in the Kimberley. There is no public road leading to it. There is no airstrip inside it.

This inaccessibility is the key to one of the park's main attractions — few introduced pests and an ecology that remains relatively undisturbed in comparison to much of the rest of Australia. The park is a paradise for birdwatchers. It is usually easy to spot freshwater crocodiles in the pools below Solea Falls. Fishing is excellent, at its best below the falls. It's a bush paradise. Getting there is the problem.

Driving takes the better part of two days each way. Float planes allow us to land on two of the larger pools on the Drysdale River but cannot land on any of the smaller ones. The only practical way to get to the western part of the park is to fly one way with a float plane and the other with a helicopter. This will be the first time we have used this combination.

The notes below assume that our Drysdale No. 1 trip runs. If not, transport problems mean that the itinerary will be identical to that described in the Drysdale No. 1 trip notes.

We use the float plane to fly in and land on one of the large pools upstream of Solea Falls. Exactly which one we use will depend on what earlier flights and the Drysdale 1 group have found. From there we will do a loop west toward the Carson River, Worriga Gorge and Morgan Falls.



Landing on the Drysdale



Morgan Falls on Palmoondoora Creek

Note. Most of the remaining photos in these notes are lo-res scans of old slides. Hopefully we'll have better photos for the next edition of these notes.

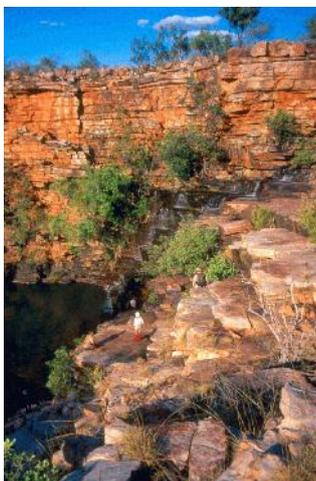
Morgan Falls is one of the largest waterfalls in the region. Worriga Gorge is one of the best examples of monsoon rainforest, containing at least 13 out of the 25 known



Morgan Falls campsite

species of ferns in the park. The diversity of the flora and fauna and the great scenery are both good reasons to visit this area, but there is

more. Something else very special appears to be the reason that public access to Theda Station has been closed.



Palmoondoora Creek tributary falls, late afternoon

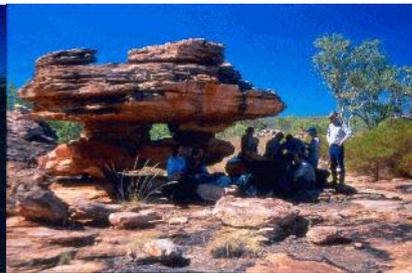
Theda Station and Drysdale River National Park both contain an amazing concentration of Aboriginal rock art, especially the Bradshaw paintings, some of which are believed to be at least 17000 years old. We have been told unofficially that the current owners of Theda closed access because they wish to run their own exclusive trips to visit some of these art sites. We have seen some magnificent sites in the past and can still visit some of the best of these by doing this trip as planned. We plan to spend a some time looking at these art sites, exactly how much depends on how long it takes us to get to Morgan Falls from our drop off point.

Morgan Falls is on Palmoondoora Creek. This in turn is fed by smaller creeks such as the one shown at left – well worth a visit. We will certainly take our time and do some exploring without full packs.

While Palmoondoorra is almost unknown, it is not a small creek. The photos at right show one of the large pools on the creek and one of the interesting rock forms that are nearby.



Palmoondoorra pool



Palmoondoorra rock formation

While Palmoondoorra is a 'creek' and the Carson is a 'river',

Palmoondoorra appears to have the larger pools so we will spend more time on Palmoondoorra than on the Carson. Depending on how we are going, we may spend more than one night in one or more campsites, doing day walks. As long as we have a flat area where the helicopter can land, it doesn't matter where we finish.



Carson River campsite near sunset



Aerial view of Morgan Falls



Carson River helicopter landing

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Average daytime max 30-31°C (86-88°F), average nighttime min 12-15°C (62-68°F) – averages hide the extremes, it can get close to freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

Terrain Level 2-4. Both options contain a mix of relatively flat and easy terrain and some sections of rock hopping. There may be a few stretches of soft sand but there shouldn't be many.

Vegetation Level 2-3. Most of the vegetation should be fairly open but it is likely that there will be some thick scrub to push through. It is not likely that there will be much. Scrub conditions vary dramatically from year to year so we can't say how much you will encounter. There will still be a variety of flowers in bloom.

Hours Generally 4-6 hours. On some days, you need carry your pack for only a couple of hours after which you can rest or explore without packs.

Packs **Pack weight** - level 4. You need to carry 13 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.



- Art** This area contains one of the greatest concentrations of Aboriginal rock art in the Kimberley. We plan to spend a substantial amount of time visiting some of these. Those who have little interest in Aboriginal art should be prepared to relax near a pool or just watch the birds while others are visiting the sites.
- Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.
- Swims** Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot above Solea Falls, smaller pools below.
- Crocodiles and swimming.** We have never seen a large crocodile anywhere in the area where we will be walking. Some local people have told us that there are only freshwater crocodiles in this portion of the Drysdale River. However, we have met someone who told us that he had seen a large crocodile. There **are** large crocodiles in the lower Drysdale. There is no barrier to their travel below Solea Falls. We recommend that you restrict your swims to the side creeks and small pools in the Drysdale until you are above Solea. If in doubt, ask the guide.
- Lowlights** Signs of cattle along the first section of the Drysdale River and some other places. Carrying 13 days food.
- Highlights** Waterfalls. Remote wilderness. Perfect weather. Good swimming. Large numbers of well preserved Aboriginal art sites.
- Wildlife** You see a variety of birds along the river and have a good chance of spotting freshwater crocodiles, tortoises and a variety of lizards. You are unlikely to see many large land animals.
- Fishing** Excellent in some places, little chance in others.
- Maps** 1:100 000 Carson, Ashton (Morgan Falls) (and Collison for a small section or a larger one if we go to Johnson Creek) or the new (issued in 2004) 1:50 000 Mount Keating, Laurie Creek, Wallis Peak, and possibly Gattenhof Hill; Johnson Creek (very short section), Mazzarol and Mount Connelly (if we do the long walk on Johnson Creek).



This small goanna was too cold to run away one chilly morning

Notes

Any one booking both Drysdale trips will receive a 20% discount on the total cost.

A day pack is very useful on this trip.

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Itinerary: Drysdale River National Park No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change

Day 0 Travel to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Connections to the eastern states are normally made through Darwin.

Pre-trip meeting, 6 p.m., outdoor area, **Kimberley Croc Lodge**. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 Early morning pick up 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 possibly as early as 4.30 a.m.

Fly to Drysdale River. Begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 2–13 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 14 Helicopter pick up and flight to the Mitchell Plateau airstrip, then fly back to Kununurra.

Important Note **Air North**, the main airline currently operating into Kununurra uses some relatively small aircraft with an official baggage allowance of only 13 kg on a few flights. See the Getting Here page on our website or contact Air North for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4001; email:

reservations@airnorth.com.au

If you are coming from Perth, it's worth checking Virgin Australia as well.

