

Drysdale River National Park: May 29 - June 13 2009

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. We used to get to the park via the 4WD track that passes over the Aboriginal owned Carson River Station. Getting formal permission to do this has proved almost impossible in recent years.

This inaccessibility means that there are 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. The only way we can guarantee that we'll be able to get in is to use helicopters. This is very expensive, but this year, we are able to offer a special price and a special trip.

We have a confirmed charter going to Drysdale River in early May. They will be flying out on Friday 29 May. By using the aircraft bringing them out to bring this group in, we can minimise the cost to all concerned. Unlike our normal Drysdale trips, we will have a food drop in the middle so you don't need to carry more than a week's food.

Our exact starting point will be determined by exactly where the first group finishes. This should be on the upper reaches of Planigale Creek. This large creek has a number of nice waterfalls as well as a large number of Aboriginal art sites. If the first group doesn't get too far, we may do a day walk upstream from where we get dropped off. It's too nice to miss.

From our drop off point, we move downstream to the Drysdale River. We expect to drop packs and do some side walks of up to half a day along the way. Once at the Drysdale, we head downstream to Solea Falls where we find our food drop.

We spend second week making our way downstream to the edge of the park, stopping to explore several side creeks and climb the nearby hills. There will be at least one full day walk from a base camp and several other walks of up to half a day. Our final pick up point will be determined by how fast we travel.

Notes

A **day pack** will be useful on this trip.

Cost. This is a special trip with a special price. Our normal discounts do not apply, but, if enough people book, there will be a discount based on the number of bookings. For five people, the cost per person will be \$5000 each. This is the maximum that anyone will pay. If more than five book, we will give a discount based on the number of flights we need. For eight people, we expect the price to drop to about \$4000 each.

Weight is a key factor. The number of flights we need will be determined by the weights of the people and their backpacks. The helicopter can take a max of 310 kg on the way in (probably 3 people), but 420 kg on the way out when it doesn't have as much fuel on board.

Deadlines. If five people have committed and paid by 20 February, the trip will be a definite departure (barring cancellations). If three or four have paid, we can leave it open for a bit longer and try to get others. (If the price drops because of additions, we'll make a refund.) If we don't have at least three people committed by 20 Feb, we'll have to cancel the trip this year.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3
Climate	Level 2. Average daytime max 30-31°C (86-88°F), average nighttime min 11-14°C (61-65°F) – averages hide the extremes, it can get close to freezing.. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.
Terrain	Level 3. Most of the walking should be on relatively flat terrain. There will, however, be some short but steep climbs and some rock hopping. A good mix.
Vegetation	Level 2-3. Most of the vegetation should be fairly open but this can vary dramatically from year to year depending on when last burnt. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out.

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 3. You need to carry up to 7 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 paintings 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 in the early part of the trip. Smaller pools toward the end.. 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 the portion of the Drysdale River where we will be. However, we have met someone who told us that he had seen a large crocodile. There are large crocodiles in the lower Drysdale River. There are no barriers to their travel to some of the areas we will be. We recommend that you restrict your swims to the side creeks and small pools in the lower reaches of the Drysdale. If in doubt, ask the guide.
Lowlights	Signs of cattle along the Drysdale River and some other places.
Highlights	Remote wilderness. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art.
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 and Ashton or the new 1:50 000 Mount Connelly, Wallis Peak, Mount Keating, Laurie Creek and Gattenhof Hill.

Itinerary: Drysdale River National Park

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 Backpackers. **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 Mitchell Plateau airstrip. Helicopter to the park. Bush camp.

Day 2–13 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days. Collect food drop on day 7.

Day 14 Fly back to Kununurra probably arriving in time for flight connections to Darwin.

Important Note **Air North the,** only airline currently operating into Kununurra, uses relatively small aircraft on some flights and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg. 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