

Drysdale River National Park # 2: June 24 - July 8, 2007

Update 29 April 2007

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. On previous trips, we have gone to the park via the 4WD track that passes over the Aboriginal owned Carson River Station. In July 2004, we were informed that the Aboriginal community at Kalumburu had decided to close this access. We have been told that it is open again and hope that it remains open for this trip

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.

We had planned to use float planes to go into the park. Sadly, Alligator Airways did not have enough work for their float planes so they disposed of all but one and can no longer offer this service. At this point we plan to drive in via Carson River for the start of the Drysdale No. 1 trip — assuming that we can get the same permission that a private group has got. Those doing only this trip will fly in by helicopter and light aircraft and drive out in the vehicles we left at the start four weeks earlier.

We expect to begin this trip somewhere near Morgan Falls and work our way back to the northern edge of the park from there.

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 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.

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 new 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 substantial amount of time looking at these art sites.

We will probably begin near Woorakin Creek and Euro Gorge where we found some interesting Aboriginal paintings and, on some trips, an abundance of wildlife in the pools on previous trips. From there it is a relatively short walk to Morgan Falls, so spectacular that we will spend at least a day there. We then follow Palmoondoora Creek down a short distance before crossing to the Carson River and exploring parts of the Carson Escarpment as we work our way back to the northern edge of the park where we will board our vehicles for the long drive back to Kununurra.

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. The start of the walk is relatively flat and easy but there are some longish stretches of soft sand. As we continue toward Solea Falls, the terrain becomes more difficult with lots of rock hopping and some scrambling over large boulders. Above the falls, the terrain gets easier once more.
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.
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	Solea Falls. 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 (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 Connelly, Wallis Peak, Johnson Creek (very short section) and Mazzarol (if we do the long walk to Petrogale Falls on Johnson Creek).

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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If neither of the connecting trips run, there will be a surcharge to cover the cost of two empty planes. That surcharge should be somewhere between \$100 and \$200.

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 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.

Float plane flight to Drysdale River. Begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 2–14 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 15 Fly back to Kununurra early morning. Trip ends. Drop off at your accommodation.

Important **Regional Link** (formerly Air North), the only airline currently operating into Kununurra

Note uses relatively small 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 Regional Link for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4000; Fax: (08) 8920 4095; email: airnorth@regionallink.com.au

Qantas Link cancelled their peak season direct flights to and from Perth in late 2006. Call 131313 to see if they are running again.