

Gregory Stokes Explorer: May 31 - June 13, 2009

The Gregory region is a transition zone with similarities to the three main regions where we operate: Kakadu, The Kimberley and the Red Centre. It contains things in common with all three. The combination makes it unique in its own right.

If the area has had a reasonably good wet season, we plan to do a single long walk. If not, we expect to divide the trip into two walks of approximately equal length. If permission is again received, we will spend most of our time in the Aboriginal owned Stokes Range, the rest in the part of the park which borders it. If we do not get that permission, we will spend most of our time in the western portion of the park.

Gregory National Park, one of the largest parks in the NT, lies about halfway between Katherine and Kununurra. It is divided into two sections separated by the Aboriginal owned Stokes Range, one of the most spectacular bushwalking areas in the Top End of the NT.

Picture gently rolling hills covered with spinifex and a few small to medium eucalypts. Here and there you see a line of dark rock where there is some sort of discontinuity. It's a moderately barren and slightly forbidding landscape. You walk along and slowly you get a hint of deeper depression ahead. Suddenly you come to the edge of a huge red-walled gorge. Down in the depths there are large pools and palms. You climb down and enter a hidden world, hardly a hint of which could be discerned from 500 metres away.

This trip is 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 few people to have explored this fascinating area, then this could be for you.

Terrain and difficulty.

Overall	We rate this as level 4 to take account of the worst possible conditions.
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 a substantial amount 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.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 4. You may need to carry two weeks food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Art	We visit a number of art sites 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 almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Highlights	Beautiful gorges, walking on Aboriginal land which has remained virtually unchanged since before European settlement.
Lowlights	Carrying food for two weeks. 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. We have had fresh fish on most of our previous trips to the area.

Stokes Range maps: 1:50 000 Cow Creek and Stokes Range, possibly also small parts on Kidman Springs and/or Bobs Grave; 1:100 000 Gregory Creek and Stokes and possibly a small part on Humbert.

Notes

We cannot obtain permits to enter Aboriginal Land until we have enough people to guarantee departure. The sooner you book, the more likely it is that we can run the trip as scheduled.

In September 2006, we found one of the two largest Aboriginal art sites we have found in the park to date. We will include this in the trip.

There are many other good bushwalking areas in Gregory National Park. If we cannot get permission to do the walk in the Stokes Range, we will do our walk or walks there.

If we do a through walk, we may need to do a car shuffle at the beginning. This could take several hours. If we have a small group and only one vehicle, we may not be able to do a through walk. The final decision on the route may not be made until we begin.

Although we intend to run the trip as one or two long walks, conditions beyond our control might mean that we have to split into three or four shorter walks.

If the trip is broken into two sections, it will be possible to leave some food and equipment in the vehicle so that you do not have to carry more than you need for the particular walk. Please check prior to departure and come prepared to do this if the opportunity arises.

The trip may include a number of day-walks from a base camp on a long 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.

Our walk or walks are about 5–600 km from Darwin. Be prepared for the long drives to and from the park.

Gregory Explorer trip reports from two of our past clients are on our website as are two Gregory photo galleries. Many people find that looking at these is very helpful.

Itinerary: Gregory Explorer

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

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

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn, 122 The Esplanade.
This meeting is important. If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

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 Gregory. There will be at least one stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc. Bush camp, possibly near vehicle, possibly after a short walk carrying full packs.

Day 2-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days, day packs on others.

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.