

Kimberley Highlights No.1: May 23 - June 19, 2010

Section 1: Purnululu (Bungle Bungle) National Park: May 23-29

In mid 2003, Purnululu joined the list of Australia's World Heritage locations. Here's what the Department of Environment and Heritage has to say. "Famous for the 45 000 hectare Bungle Bungle Range, with its huge expanse of striking banded beehive structures, sandstone cliffs and towers, Purnululu has been listed as an outstanding landscape that is a superlative natural phenomenon, revealing the history of its formation over hundreds of millions of years. Purnululu National Park has such outstanding universal natural values that it enriches the world and should be conserved for the benefit of all people. Before 1982, when aerial pictures were first released, it was virtually unknown except to pastoralists, scientists and the local Aboriginal community. It is now seen as one of the scenic jewels of outback Australia."

There are many tours which will take you to Purnululu. No other tour will allow you to experience as much of the park in as intimate a fashion as ours.

The start of our walk is about 330 kilometres from Kununurra, the last 80 kilometres of which is a 4WD track. The drive takes most of the day but we should arrive in time to walk the first few kilometres up Piccaninny Creek.

The next day we continue upstream to a base camp about 12-13 kilometres up Piccaninny Gorge, where sheer red cliffs are silhouetted against the clear blue skies of the dry season. Piccaninny is by far the largest gorge in the Bungles. We spend three or four nights there using the days to explore the many fascinating side gorges. These gorges offer a variety of delights — some are palm filled, some are very narrow and require swimming, some have caves which require the use of a torch. There is at least one gorge that allows us to reach a high point. (We cannot climb to the actual top as climbing up the domes themselves is not permitted because of their exceptionally fragile nature. We can, however, follow watercourses as far as they will take us.) No words can do justice to the beauty of the area. The only way to appreciate it is to come and see it for yourself.

This section finishes with the drive back to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 2 have a night in backpacker accommodation included in the cost of the tour.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 3.

Climate Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30°C, average nighttime minimum is 14°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is unusual but we have had moderately heavy rain in June on two occasions since 1986.

Terrain **With packs** - level 2-3. The long walk up the Piccaninny Gorge, mainly over pebbles and sand can be quite tiring for many people. Walking through the upper reaches of the gorge requires some clambering over large rocks and includes edging along at least one narrow ledge several metres above the creek bed. On some trips we do this with day packs, on others we carry full packs and make our base camp beyond the first rough section. flat,

Daywalks without packs - level 4: includes serious boulder scrambling, steep climbs and at least one walk through a cave.

The climb up one gorge is particularly strenuous. Very few groups have had every member reach the top. If you don't wish to do the rock scrambling, you need to be prepared to relax and enjoy their surroundings while the others continue. Keen birdwatchers often find this especially pleasant. Some people become uncomfortable in the absence of the rest of the group. Please keep this in mind when choosing this trip.

Vegetation **With packs** - level 1: minimal vegetation

Without packs - level 2-4. Some walks include pushing through sharp and/or sticky spinifex, gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.

Hours You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.

Packs **Pack weight:** level 3 = one week's worth of food plus stove fuel. However, you do not normally carry a full pack on three of the days.

Art: Two minor sites, may not be seen by all groups.

Campsites Mostly on sand, might include rock ledges on some nights.

Swims	Generally very cold and not much water but there are always some pools. If you get past the difficult part on one of the walks, there is a compulsory swim of about 30 metres through a small section of the gorge.
Lowlights	Helicopters intrusive most of day, aircraft early and late.
Highlights	Incredible and spectacular gorge scenery; each gorge very different from the others.
Wildlife	Birds are often a highlight for those who sit quietly and watch. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	No
Map	1:50 000 Bungle Bungle or 1:100 000 Turkey Creek..

Notes for Section 1. Those who wish to do a half hour helicopter flight over the Bungles will have an opportunity to do so either on arrival or just before departure from the park. Which time we choose depends on when we arrive. (In May 2001, the helicopter flight cost \$180.)

As we wish to allow as many people as possible to combine the Bungles with one or more other sections, we may limit the number of places available for those wishing to do only this section.

Section 2: The Cockburn Range: May 30 - June 5

Bounded by the King and Pentecost Rivers, the Cockburn Range is a relatively small plateau surrounded by massive cliffs. The view from the road has been described as the "most hauntingly beautiful" in the Kimberley. The interior is even better. The heavily dissected plateau hides deep gorges and spring fed creeks which flow long after the larger rivers in the surrounding countryside have dried to a few isolated pools.

After years of doing north to south through walks and loop walks from Emma Gorge, we finally tried using a helicopter drop off in September 2004. **Wow!**

Using a helicopter allowed us to visit more of the most interesting points than we had ever been able to get to on a one week trip before. It allowed more time for swimming (always a good idea in the tropics) and allowed more of the walk to be done with day packs. It cut out a long and somewhat tedious drive as well as the least interesting part of the original walk. It also gave everyone some fantastic views of the Cockburn gorges that could not be obtained in any other way. Needless to say, we're going to do it again.

The drive from Kununurra to Emma Gorge where we leave the car and catch the helicopter is less than 100 km. After a final cool drink, we fly deep into the heart of the Cockburns where a massive gorge system dominates the landscape. As we move south through the range, we find more gorges, pools, Aboriginal art sites, pockets of lush vegetation and an abundance of birds.

Each gorge has its own special character. Sometimes we carry our full packs, other times a day pack is enough. How much we explore will be determined by the speed and wishes of the group. Some wish to see as much as possible. Others wish to travel at a more leisurely pace allowing them to relax and enjoy their surroundings.

Our walk finishes with a steep descent to the Emma Gorge Resort. After a cool drink from the shop, we drive back to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 3 have a night in backpacker accommodation included in the price.

Notes for section 2. The local fire pattern means that the vegetation can vary so much that a route which is extremely difficult one month may be dead easy the next. If there has not been a recent fire, you may have to push through some long sections of thick grass where there is rough ground underneath. This was the case in June 2004 where it was so rough that what should have been a highlight was more like an endurance test for some of the group. On the other hand, if there has been a recent fire as was the case in September 2002, it may be so easy that you go through faster than expected.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30-31°C, average nighttime minimum is 15-16°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is very unlikely.
Terrain	With packs - level 3. The walk in or out at the north end is across a flat plain. In the range, most of the walking is relatively flat with moderate rock hopping. There are a number of short, steep climbs and one or two places where floating your pack may be easier than carrying it up a hill or along narrow ledges.

Terrain	Daywalks without packs - level 3-4. The optional side trips includes serious boulder scrambling and steep climbs.
Vegetation	Level 2-4. This can vary dramatically from year to year. There is normally little thick scrub but there may be some sections of thick grass and/or spinifex, gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
Hours	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 3 = one week's worth of food.
Art:	The Aboriginal art sites we have found are widely scattered. Two of the best sites require somewhat strenuous climbs and are not visited by all groups. Those who have the energy for the scrambles should be able to see some particularly good sites.
Campsites	Mostly on dry river bed and rock ledges. May include a grassy site.
Swims	Generally fairly cold. There are a many good pools and most camp sites will be next to a place where you can swim. Floating your pack is easier than trying to carry it around at least one of the pools. You should bring two or three garbage bags to waterproof the contents of your pack for this.
Lowlights	Occasional helicopters overhead. Thick grass if present.
Highlights	Spectacular gorge scenery. Great views of the plains below.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but may be hard to spot. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible only at the very north end of the range and unlikely to be particularly good there.
Maps	1:50 000 Mt Cockburn or 1:100 000 Erskine.

Section 3: The Carr Boyd Range: June 6-10

Located south of Kununurra, between Lake Argyle in the east and the Dunham River in the west, the peaks and cliffs of the Carr Boyds will be familiar to anyone who has visited the region. From the roads they present a forbidding face, dry and barren, rugged beyond belief. Up close, they can show a different nature. Even after the driest of seasons, spring fed creeks trickle through deep, cool gorges and lovely pools bounded by a lush vegetation which stands in stark contrast to the dry plains outside the range.

Depending on the conditions at the time, we may be dropped off close to the western edge of the range by vehicle or we may be dropped off close to the eastern edge by boat. In either case, we then make our way up one creek system and down another. Along the way we will look for Aboriginal art, stop to enjoy numerous swims and take time out to simply relax and look at nature around us.

We exit the range near Packsaddle Creek where we are met by the pick up vehicle that brings us back to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 4 have a night in backpacker accommodation included in the cost of the tour.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30-31°C, average nighttime minimum is 15-16°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is very unlikely.
Terrain	Level 3. 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 are few steep climbs, none of which is over 200 m. None are technically difficult. None require ropes or other special equipment. There will be some places where you have to step from stone to stone as you walk along the edge of a creek.
Vegetation	Level 3. This can vary dramatically from year to year. There are usually some sections of of thick grass and/or spinifex which make for slow going. Gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
Hours	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 2 = four night's food.
Art:	Very little. Some groups don't see any.
Campsites	Can be dry river bed, rock ledges, sandy patches or grassy open areas. Some sites have a mix.
Swims	Excellent. There are a many good pools and most camp sites will be next to a swimmable pool.

Lowlights	Thick grass (most years).
Highlights	Boat through the Ord Everglades just after dawn (if we use the boat). Great views from the top. Waterfalls, pools and gorges.
Wildlife	The boat trip at the start gives an excellent chance to see waterbirds and freshwater crocs. It also gives a good chance of seeing wallabies. There are birds on the rest of the walk but you are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible only at the very beginning and end of the trip. Sooty grunter and catfish are the most likely fish to be caught.
Maps	1:50 000 Deception Range or 1:100 000 Kununurra.

Section 4: Keep River National Park: June 11-15

Nestled next to the Western Australian border on the Victoria Highway, Keep River is one of the least known jewels of the N.T. Parks system. Geologically part of the Kimberley, the orange and grey banding on the rocks cause some to compare it to a smaller version of the Bungles. It is an area of spectacularly rugged rock formations, so rugged that the map makers simply drew a dotted line around the main massif and labelled it "dissected rock outcrops." It was impossible to indicate most of the contour lines.

For most of the year, much of the park is nearly a desert. The palms and boabs which add to the interest of the area are adapted to a climate in which rain is unlikely for six to eight months at a time. Water is scarce and restricted to a few permanent waterholes. We know where these are and will base our walks around them.

The Aboriginal art is particularly interesting. Within a three km radius of our base camp, you have everything from stone petroglyphs which are so old that the local Aboriginal people do not recognise them as having been created by their ancestors to paintings depicting the arrival of the first white men and their animals. In another, there is a single painting about 25 metres long. In yet another, there are some rare beeswax figures. No group is likely to be able to visit all the sites we know of. Perhaps your group will find more.

We begin by walking in to a base camp. From here, we explore some of the beautiful gorges and other parts of the rugged massif as we wander through the area visiting art sites, taking refuge from the heat of the day in the same rock shelters and pools that the Aboriginal people have used for thousands of years.

Our explorations will be leisurely ones. This ancient land demands time. Every turn brings a new vista, a new opportunity for a photograph, or perhaps a broad panorama of spectacularly contrasting light which no camera can ever hope to capture. All too soon, our time is over and we walk over the massif and back to the vehicles. This section finishes with the drive back to Kununurra and a night in budget accommodation for those continuing on to section 5.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30-31°C, average nighttime minimum is 15-16°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is very unlikely.
Terrain	Level 3. The walk in with full packs is relatively flat with minimal rock hopping and climbing. The day walks include a fair amount of rock hopping, some climbing and scrambling over large boulders, walking through some scrubby gullies and spinifex. On the way out, we often go across the main massif. There is more climbing than on the way in, but most of the terrain is nearly as flat as it was on the way in. Because much of the walking is done without a full pack, this is one of the easiest walks we offer.
Vegetation	Level 3. This can vary dramatically from year to year. Tall grasses can, however, make the going moderately difficult in some years. There are usually some sections of thick grass and/or spinifex which make for slow going. Gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
Hours	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 2-3 = four night's food plus stove fuel.
Art:	There are a number of interesting art sites, including one set of petroglyphs and some wax figures. Many are not well preserved but some are excellent. Few groups manage to visit all the sites we know.
Campsites	Can be on dry river bed, rock ledges, sandy patches or grassy open areas. Some sites have more than one option.

Swims	Good. At this time of year, few creeks will still be flowing. There are, however, a number of large, permanent pools and most camp sites will be next to a place where you can swim.
Lowlights	Pushing through thick grass in one or two places (most years).
Highlights	Great views from the top. Interesting rock formations. Pools and gorges.
Wildlife	Birds can be a highlight for those who sit quietly and watch. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	No
Maps	1:50 000 Beasley Knob or 1:100 000 Keep.

Section 5: Ord River Canoe: June 16-19

Since we first offered this canoe trip in 1994, those who have done it have all agreed that it was a worthy addition to our program. Using canoes allows you to carry more with less effort — a good way to carry a few little luxuries you wouldn't put into a pack. It also allows you to get closer to large numbers of birds than is normally possible when you're on foot.

From Kununurra we are driven to Lake Argyle where we put the canoes in the river just below the main dam. The next four 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 our camps well off the main river, in quiet spots that we will have to ourselves.

This section ends when we reach Kununurra and phone for our pick up.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 0.
Climate	Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30-31°C, average nighttime minimum is 15-16°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is very unlikely.
Terrain	Level 1-3. There is no walking with full packs. Some of the optional side walks go up steep slopes. The Ord offers especially easy paddling with enough current to keep you going without any rapids to threaten you with a spill. Crossing Lake Kununurra on the last day, when you are accustomed to the paddle, is the only time the current lets you down. Previous canoeing experience is not needed.
Vegetation	Level 1. No vegetation to push through in the canoe but there may be a few small patches on a side walk.
Hours	You normally paddle and walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Pack weight: level 0. No need to carry a full pack.
Art:	None that we have found.
Campsites	Sandy patches or grassy open areas. We may use the fixed camp sites set up by the canoe hire company on one or two nights or we might try and get off the beaten track. Your choice.
Swims	Very good. You are on a permanently flowing river. It is, however, fairly cold as it is being fed from the bottom of Lake Argyle.
Lowlights	Sore arms and blisters from paddling. Gardening gloves prevent blisters, highly recommended.
Highlights	Lazy laid back time.
Wildlife	This section is the best for wildlife. Paddling slowly and keeping your eyes open gives you an excellent chance to see waterbirds, freshwater crocs, wallabies and other small animals.
Fishing	No.
Maps	1:50 000 Burt Range, Carlton Gorge and Deception Range.

Notes for all sections

Day packs are particularly useful on sections one, four and five and may be useful on the other sections as well.

Keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives, especially going to and from the Bungles, as it may be difficult to get into your pack before the vehicle has stopped for the day.

Those doing more than one section will have a chance to do some shopping in Kununurra between sections. (Both supermarkets are open fairly late.) You should allow extra money for this. (Cold drinks are almost irresistible.)

Those doing more than one section will have to carry only what they need for each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in Kununurra. It may be possible to leave a few small items in the vehicle.

For those doing two or more consecutive sections, the price of the trip includes budget accommodation in Kununurra between sections. Motel type accommodation is available for an extra charge.

Restaurant meals are included in the price of the trip where you spend the night in town accommodation. Your drinks, however, are not included in the price.

To take advantage of the hot showers in Kununurra, you should bring a towel and some clean clothes.

Bringing fresh fruit, vegetables or honey into WA is illegal whether you come by road or plane. (You cannot even bring in boxes or other containers that once contained fruit or vegetables.) Bags are checked both on the highway and at the airport. There will be time to do some shopping in Kununurra.

Terrain and Difficulty — General Information, all sections

Rain is very unlikely, but it is possible. If you wish to keep your pack as light as possible, leave your tent fly at home. If you wish to be absolutely certain that you won't get wet, bring it.

Almost none of the walking is on a marked trail. If you have never done any off-track walking through moderately rough terrain, nothing we can say can adequately describe the experience. The photos on our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au, can give you a partial picture, but they cannot substitute for the real thing. Most of those who have not had any off-track walking experience find it more difficult than those who have done it before.

Anyone who does not regularly (average twice a month) go bushwalking carrying a full pack 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.

Itinerary: Kimberley Highlights No. 1

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

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

Section 1 The Bungle Bungles

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting for everyone doing the Bungles section, 6.00p.m., outdoor area, Kimberley Croc Backpackers. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 Pick up between 7.30 and 8 a.m. Pick up is 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.
Drive to the start of the walk.
Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–6 Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs at other times.

Day 7 Return to vehicles. Helicopter flights if not already done. Drive back to Kununurra.
Late afternoon drop off at accommodation for those finishing here.
For those continuing, overnight in backpackers. Opportunity to do laundry and shopping. Bring towel and toiletries to take advantage of hot showers.

Section 2 Cockburn Range

Day 7 Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

Day 8 Morning pick up for those beginning with this section. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you will be staying at least a week before section one departs. Otherwise pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre sometime between 7 and 8 a.m.

Drive to Cockburns. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 9-13 Bush camping. Carrying full packs on most days, day packs at other times. There will be several half to full day walks without packs.

Day 14 Finish walk at Emma Gorge Resort. Drive to Kununurra. Drop off at accommodation for those finishing here. Overnight in budget accommodation for those continuing.

Section 3 Carr Boyd Range

Day 14 Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

Day 15 Pick up for those beginning with this section. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you will be staying at least a week before section one departs. Otherwise pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre sometime between 7 and 8 a.m.
Drive or boat to Carr Boyds. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 16-18 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 19 Return to vehicles. Drive to Kununurra. End of section 3.
Afternoon drop off at accommodation for those finishing here.
For those continuing, overnight in backpackers. Opportunity to do laundry and shopping.

Section 4 Keep River National Park

Day 19 Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

Day 20 Morning pick up for those beginning with this section. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you will be staying at least a week before section one departs. Otherwise pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre sometime between 7 and 8 a.m.
Drive to Keep River. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 21-23 Bush camping, carrying full packs some days, day packs on others.

Day 24 Return to vehicle, drive to Kununurra. Afternoon drop off at accommodation for those finishing here. For those continuing, overnight in backpackers. Opportunity to do laundry and shopping.

Section 5 Ord River Canoe

Day 24 Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

Day 25 Morning pick up, time to be arranged the night before. Pick up is from your accommodation in Kununurra provided you have given us the address at least a week before section one departs. Otherwise the pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre. If you have not contacted the guide the night before, you will need to be ready by 6.30 a.m. as we may leave anytime between 6.30 and 9.30 a.m.
Bus to Argyle Dam. Begin canoe trip. Bush camp.

Day 26-27 Bush camping. Canoeing and day walks.

Day 28 Return to Kununurra, arriving early to mid afternoon. Drop off at your accommodation.

Important Note

Regional Link (formerly Air North), the only airline currently operating into Kununurra sometimes uses relatively small aircraft and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg. (It's normally 20 kg on their larger aircraft.) Unless special arrangements have been made, if you are flying to Kununurra and your baggage weighs more than 13 kg or 20 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.