

The Pilbara: Karijini National Park: April 11-24, 2010

This trip takes you into some of the most spectacular gorge country in Australia. It is divided into two sections, either of which can be done on its own. Our June 2002 local transport provider was so enthusiastic about April that we decided we had to offer a trip to take advantage of the best that the local climate has to offer. The April trip we did in 2009 confirmed that this was a great idea.

The best? The best is, of course, a matter of opinion. The average daytime maximum temperature is 33°C as compared to 24°C in June or July. On the other hand, the average nighttime minimum is 21°C with an all time record low of 9°C in April as compared with an average of 11°C and a record low of 1°C in June. In April, you should be able to leave your sleeping bag at home.

The water. This is the real reason why we call this the best. January through March are the three wettest months of the year. This means that the creeks are likely to be flowing much better in April than in June. October through March are the hottest months. This means that the pools are likely to still be warm enough so you can enjoy a swim. (This was certainly the case in 2009.) This is in sharp contrast to June and July when most of the pools are so cold that no one wants to have more than a brief splash.

Section 1: Munjina & Dales Gorges: April 11-17

Our local transport picks us up from our accommodation in Tom Price for a drive of about 150 kilometres to the edge of Karijini National Park where we begin a one week walk combining the Munjina and Dales-Dignam gorge systems. This will be much the same as the walks we did on our last Karijini trips in 2008 and 2009.

A short walk from the highway along a dry creek bed brings us to Munjina Gorge and the first of the many lovely pools and waterfalls we encounter. White tree trunks against a background of red rock and a deep blue sky are everywhere around us. Some of the walking is quick and easy, some is slow and scrubby. The ever changing landscape contains more than enough to keep us happy. We expect to do a very short walk to a base camp on the morning of day 2, followed by a walk without packs for the rest of the day.

We leave the Munjina system and climb onto the plateau for a fairly level walk across to a tributary of Dales Gorge. There are some amazing pools here, but the descent into the side gorge is very steep and must be done slowly. Our campsites in Dales will be determined by how fast we are going and the state of the pools at the time.

Dales Creek flows through a large gorge. It is fed by a number of small creeks, many of which have their own gorges, each with its own character. Dignam is by far the largest of these. Some groups have spent little time in Dignam; others have spent a full day. We are still exploring and hope to camp well up the gorge on this or some future trip. There are other potentially interesting side gorges which we may explore as well as or instead of Dignam.

Back in Dales Gorge, we work our way toward the tourist tracks at Fortescue Falls and Circular Pool. This is a stove only area, so there will be no camp fire on our final night. This section finishes along the marked trail from the bottom of the gorge near Circular Pool to the top of the gorge and the Circular Pool car park.

Section 2: Kalamina-Wittenoom: April 17-24

This section takes us into and/or along some of the most spectacular gorges in the park. The same company which dropped us off at the beginning will pick us up and bring in a food drop for those continuing. They will provide transport from or to Tom Price for anyone joining or leaving at the end of the first section.

We begin with a drive to the Visitor Centre where we repack for section two and have a look at the exhibits which give us a better idea of both the natural and human the history of the area. From there, we drive to the top of Kalamina Gorge where we get dropped off and are on our own once more.

The first part of the walk at Kalamina is as easy as anything we encounter on the trip. However, that doesn't last for long and, with normal water levels, we will soon be doing a fairly deep wade. You need to be prepared to keep things dry here as it's all too easy to drown things like cameras if you are not careful.

Kalamina is one of the most underrated gorges in the park. If time permits, we will spend two nights at our Kalamina campsite and do a day walk exploring further down the gorge. We then follow one of Kalamina's tributaries up onto the plateau and head across to the headwaters of Knox Creek.

If we get far enough, we can do a long day walk down Knox the following day. Knox is the only gorge we get to explore in its entirety (except for the last 100 m over the falls). If you want an amazing experience, you can take a big short cut and swim about 200 m through the gorge to join the tourist track at the bottom. To do this, you'll need a dry bag for your boots & clothes). The alternative is a longish walk back up the gorge to where we can climb out and cross the plateau (and a few gullies) to get to the main Knox look out.

Depending on how much time we have spent and what people want to do, we may do a 2nd day walk to Joffre Falls or we may continue straight across to Wittenoom Gorge and do a day walk from there. This section finishes with the climb out of Red Gorge and a walk across to the Weano car park. If time permits, you will be able to explore the tourist tracks in Weano and/or Hancock Gorge.

Getting to and Staying in Tom Price

To get to Tom Price, you need to fly to Perth and then to Paraburdoo. Lestok Tours, who provide our transport, provide a bus to get you from Paraburdoo to Tom Price (70 km). This should be booked in advance. In April 2009, the bus cost \$25 each way.

There are only three places to stay in Tom Price: the Caravan Park (which has some accommodation) (08) 9189 1515; the Tom Price Hotel, (08) 9189 1101; and Windawarri Lodge, (08) 9189 1110.

The Caravan Park is a half hour or more walk from the town centre. Although that's too far for most people without their own transport, some people do prefer the atmosphere there. It's also the start of the Mount Nameless walk which was a highlight for some of those on our June 2008 trip.

There is one taxi in Tom Price. It does not normally run on Sunday, but you might be able to make a special booking if you did it the day before.

In town, the hotel is cheaper than the lodge, but the price of the lodge includes meals. Dinner at Windawarri is a buffet, but some people feel that it's too much like a cafeteria (which it is for some of the miners). Senior's discounts may be available in some places. It's worth asking if you are over 60. contact the Tom Price Visitor Centre for more up to date information; phone: 08 9188 1112, email info@tompricewa.com.au .

April or June?

We offer trips in both April and June. In April, the water is warm enough for most people to enjoy the swims. This makes things like the swim through Knox much more enjoyable. In June the water is too cold for most people to enjoy. . In April there are fewer people at the tourist sites but there are often many more flies (bring a fly veil). The day time temperatures are, on average, cooler and more pleasant in June than in April when they often reach the mid to high 30s.

Notes

There will be an important pre-trip meeting for all those taking part the night before departure. This will probably be at 6 pm in the Beer Garden at the Tom Price Hotel. Please contact us to confirm this before beginning your journey.

It is usually possible to buy cold drinks and ice creams at the Visitor Centre at the halfway point.. Bring a bit of money with you just in case.

You should keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives as you cannot easily get into your pack during the journey.

Although the average nighttime minimum is 21°C, April temperatures have been known to drop as low as 9°C. Rain is unlikely, but it is certainly possible. Past experience has shown that some people don't study the Bushwalking Guide section on extra essential items for the Pilbara and Red Centre.

Those people are often very uncomfortable.

Pack float. We haven't had to float packs anywhere before, but it could be possible. Wading through deep water is likely. In 2008, one person destroyed a camera when he dropped it during a wade. Please make sure you bring something with which you can waterproof your gear during pack floats and wades. If you don't have proper dry sacks, one or two new, heavy duty, large garbages inside your pack should suffice for your pack when combined with some new snap lock bags for cameras and electronic gear.

Spinifex. The original trip notes said, "The vegetation can vary dramatically from year to year. If, as is likely, we have to walk through unburnt spinifex, you will need heavy duty gaiters as the spinifex easily penetrates long trousers and lightweight gaiters." The 2008 group had bad spinifex. In speaking with that guide recently, he stressed that people were not adequately prepared. He recommended leather gloves in addition to long pants, gaiters and leather boots. It wasn't quite as bad in April 2009, but there were some bad patches. One person on that trip preferred shorts in spite of the scratches. Most people would prefer the protection.

Food drop. Don't forget that you need to have your food for the second section packed so that it can come out with our food drop.

Last minute shopping. The Coles supermarket has a good selection and should be open until 6 or 7 pm on the Saturday before we go. Prices aren't much more than in capital cities. The hardware shop should be open until about 2 pm on Saturday.

Group size. In order to keep the price as low as possible, we require a minimum of six bookings to run this trip.

Terrain and difficulty.

Overall Level 3.

Climate Level 3. Usually very dry, but rain is possible – be prepared.. Average daytime max 31-33°C, average nighttime minimum is 17-21°C but can get down below 10°C.

Terrain Level 3: The terrain is a mix of open woodland, rocky and swampy watercourses and spinifex scrub. There will be a number of short but steep climbs and one long, steep climb down into Wittenoom gorge. Some of the optional day walks will include sections where you need to go along narrow ledges. Some sections go through thick grass that hides rocks so you need to watch every step. If it weren't for the fact that we often do day walks from base camps, this trip would rate as level four rather than level three.

Vegetation	Level 2-3. Mostly quite open but the vegetation can vary dramatically from year to year. If, as is likely, we have to walk through unburnt spinifex, you will need heavy duty gaiters as the spinifex easily penetrates long trousers and lightweight gaiters.
Hours	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
Packs	Waterproofing. Bring something to keep your gear dry if you get rain. This can be as little as a heavy duty garbage bag. Be prepared to waterproof a day pack plus your boots and clothes on section two.
Pack weight	Level 3 = one week's worth of food.
Art:	A few minor sites and one or two major ones. Not as good as Kakadu or the Kimberley. The best sites are on section two.
Campsites	Mostly quite roomy. Some on gravel, some on rock ledges, some on hard ground.
Swims	Some large and many small pools but generally very cold.
Lowlights	Walking through sharp spinifex. Crowds at the tourist spots.
Highlights	Incredible and spectacular gorge scenery, each one uniquely different from the others.
Fishing	Not much but it might be possible in a couple of places. If so, the fish are all fairly small.
Maps.	1:50 000 Mt George & Mt Windell cover section 1. Joffre covers section 2. 1:100 000 Mt George covers section 1, Wittenoom covers section 2.

Itinerary Karijini National Park

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure

Note 2 All itineraries may be subject to change

Section 1 Munjina, Dales & Dignam

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting, evening, details to be advised.

Day 1 Drive to Karijini. Begin walk carrying full packs.
Bush camp.

Day 2-6 Bush camps carrying full packs.

Day 7 End of first walk. Those finishing with this section will be driven back to Tom Price, arriving late that evening. Those continuing can have their food for the second section brought in with the vehicle.

Section 2 Kalamina-Wittenoom

Day 6 Those beginning with this section need to arrive in Tom Price.

Day 7 Those beginning with this section are picked up early from their accommodation in Tom Price. The bus brings the newcomers and food drop out to meet the group.
Drop off at the start of the walk. Bush camp.

Day 8-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 14 Finish walk. Drive back to Tom Price. Drop off at your accommodation.