

Watarrka National Park: June 22 - July 5, 2008

Though many people have heard of Kings Canyon, relatively few have heard of Watarrka, the park which contains it. The park occupies a transition zone between three different landscapes and contains more than 600 species of plants, 60 of which are rare or relict, making it the most botanically rich area in Australia's arid centre.

No other area in central Australia gives you an experience of EVERY major habitat - and art sites as well. High ranges, desert dunes, riverine, gorge country and culture. This trip has all of it in one walk.

We begin with a drive of about four and a half hours from Alice Springs to Kings Canyon. If the weather has been dry, the guide will do a helicopter flight to check out water supplies at our proposed campsites and drop off extra supplies if needed. Anyone wishing to pay an extra fee is welcome to come along for a spectacular scenic flight.

We then don our packs and set off along the marked tourist trail, climbing up through sandstone domes and beside deep gorges which bear a striking resemblance to Bungle Bungles in the far off Kimberley. When we reach Kings Creek, we leave the tourists behind and begin the wilderness section of the longest single walk we do in the Centre. Our water supplies are guaranteed because we have been given permission to use helicopter water drops if we should have an exceptionally dry year. Even so, the route described below may be varied because of the availability or lack of water, park management requirements and the wishes and abilities of the members of the group.

From the tourist trail, we move north along Kings Creek where there are normally a number of good waterholes, some deep in gorges, others almost in the open. We plan to camp along the upper reaches of Kings Creek and walk to the northern or western edge of the range where steep cliffs drop down to the valley below. Range after rugged range marches along toward the distant horizon. The views are incredible. There is so much to see that we may spend two or even three days in the area before moving east toward the headwaters of Stokes Creek with its interesting rock formations and spectacular views.

We follow Stokes Creek downstream to a permanent waterhole never before visited on any of our trips. We then turn east, heading back toward where we began. A half day brings us to the top of Kathleen Creek with its beautiful gorge and permanent water, a good spot for an afternoon walk. From Kathleen Creek plan to continue along the bottom of the range via Wanga Gorge as we aim for Reedy Creek, perhaps doing an overnight walk out among the red sand dunes that cover the central part of the plateau.

The lower portion of Reedy Creek is one of the nicest places in the park, passing through a deep gorge containing a number of waterholes, often larger than those at Kings Canyon. We should have plenty of time to spend a day here, enjoying the scenery before moving on along a marked trail back to Kings Canyon where we began.

At Kings Canyon, we meet our transport and begin the long drive back to Alice Springs. The trip is over, but the memories will last a lifetime.

Map. 1:250 000 Lake Amadeus.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Overall we rate this as level 3.

Climate Level 2. Average daytime max 20°, average nighttime min 4-5°. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

Terrain	Level 3. The walk begins with a steep climb along a marked trail. Much of the walk is along flat rock ledges, but there is some rock hopping where you have to move over fairly broken country. Some climbs are steep, all are short. Portions of the walk go over soft sand which is generally slower and more tiring than walking over rock. As part of the walk is exploratory, we can't say for sure exactly how much of this we will find. Although there are some moderately difficult sections, overall, the terrain is as easy as you can find on a long walk in the Centre.
Vegetation	Level 1-2. Based on past experience, the scrub should seldom be a problem. This can, however, change from year to year and there may be some sections of fairly thick scrub or spinifex which will slow our progress. We strongly recommend you bring gaiters.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 7 days food. You need both a sleeping bag and a tent. Although rain is unlikely, it is possible and if it comes, it will be cold. You need to carry rain gear. The group will need to carry a stove and fuel for most nights. (If conditions are not too dry, small campfires may be permitted.)
Art	Minimal but there are a couple of sites..
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
Swims	Swimming is likely to be possible but very cold at some camp sites.
Lowlights	Tourist crowds at Kings Canyon. Long drive from Alice Springs.
Highlights	Greatest variety of landscapes and vegetation of any walk of the same length in the Red Centre.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but you are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Not possible.

Notes

The outline above is subject to change depending on the availability of water and the fitness and the interests of the group. Exceptional rains can make some roads impassable. Exceptionally dry conditions can make some walks almost impossible. Flood waters can deposit or remove sand, completely changing the nature of some camp sites. It is never possible for us to be 100% sure what we will find in a particular place until we get there.

Water supplies are limited. We may find as little as one waterhole per day. In drought conditions, that water may be muddy or green with algae. Boiling makes it drinkable. If you are not prepared to drink this kind of water, this is not the trip for you.

As a safety measure, it will be necessary to carry 2-3 litres per person on most days. We will, however, plan to camp near water every night unless we decide to spend one night in the sand dunes to experience a very different environment.

Refillable wine bladders are a good way to carry extra water. They should be used as an addition to rather than as a replacement for your normal water bottles.

Centralian spinifex is particularly sharp and can penetrate most lightweight shoes. Strong boots and heavy gaiters are recommended.

As this trip will include a number of day-walks, you should bring a day pack or be prepared to use a full size pack on day-walks.

There is a shop at Kings Canyon. You should bring money for drinks and snacks at the beginning and end of the trip.

Central Australian weather is highly variable. Although rain is unlikely, it is possible. One of our groups even had a bit of snow. Normal daytime temperatures reach the mid to upper 20's, but extremes can go to the low 30's or not get out of the low teens. Nighttime temperatures can drop well below freezing. You must be prepared for anything.

You should keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you in the car during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the day.

The **only** map commercially available for some of this area is at a scale of 1:250 000. This scale shows only major features making every trip more exploratory than would otherwise be the case.

Helicopter water and food drop

On our last two trips, we gave people the option of using a helicopter to bring in a food drop at the halfway point and to set out water drops as needed. Both groups chose to pay extra and do so. This worked so well that we decided to make the helicopter drop a definite part of the trip for groups of six or more.

Unfortunately, the helicopter costs the same regardless of the group size so for groups of four or five, we offer the option of paying a surcharge for the helicopter drop or doing two one week loops. The surcharge would be \$350 per person for a group of four and \$200 per person for a group of five.

Note. It should be possible to use the helicopter for transport and do either week on its own. One of our clients did this in 2007. Please contact us if you are interested in this.

Itinerary: Watarrka National Park

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

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

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting at Melanka Lodge at 6.30 p.m. This meeting is important. If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 8 a.m. pick up from your accommodation if you notified us where you are staying a week or more before departure or if you made other arrangements at the pre_trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from in front of Melanka Lodge. Drive to Kings Canyon, begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2-13 Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs on others.

Day 14 Return to vehicle and drive to Alice Springs. Drop off at your accommodation late afternoon.