

Super Special Offer: Green Centre: 13-29 April 2017

Updated 23 March. Central Australia had incredibly good rains in December and January. This means that the **Red** Centre will be **Green** and that there should be a spectacular wildflower display. I couldn't resist so I've put on a special Green Centre trip, similar to the special trips I put on in 2010.



N'Dhala petroglyph

While it will be a great trip, it will also be very different to most of the trips we offer. Please don't even think about booking until you've read these notes in full.

The trip will begin in Darwin and finish in Alice Springs. It will also be possible to drive back to Darwin at the end of the trip. Without drivers in both directions, the trip will not take place. The following itinerary assumes that all the main tracks will be open by the time we start. If some tracks are closed, we'll substitute whatever else may be available.



We begin with a very long drive to somewhere south of Tennant Creek where we turn off toward the Davenport Range National Park. The Davenport photos here are from



Russell Willis at Whistleduck Creek, Davenport Range National Park, Sep 2011



Old Policeman's Waterhole, Davenport Range National Park, Sep 2011

2011 – good but not anywhere near as wet as this year.

We can choose to camp by the road or stop in accommodation in Tennant Creek on that first night.

I didn't have time to have a really good look around in 2011.

We'll take a bit longer and camp the night somewhere in the park.

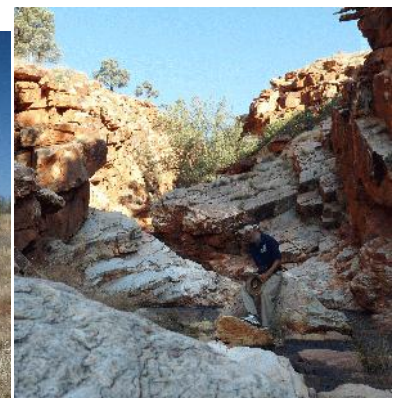
From here, we plan to follow the 4WD Binns Track into the East Macdonnells.

• The East Macdonnells: 3 days, 2 nights

Old Ambilindum and Arltunga. Arltunga is an old mining settlement where some of the buildings have been restored. There is a short walk, not really a track to a semi-permanent waterhole in Joker Gorge. You might even be able to have a dip. When I was there, the Macdonnell mine site was set up so you could actually climb down into two of the mines. In one case, down one shaft and up another. Very cool compared to outside.



Arltunga



Russell in Joker Gorge, Sep 2011

If someone doesn't want to do the walk and is happy to do a drop off, it is possible to do a short through walk from Old Ambilindum to Arltunga. I did it as a return in 2011. We may decide to spend a night at Old Ambilindum which has a variety of accommodation options from camping through to semi-luxury. For more info

see <http://www.halriverhomestead.com.au/home/> and/or <http://www.settlerstrail.com/old-ambalindum-homestead>

N'Dhala Gorge has a pleasant day walk. For those interested in Aboriginal rock art, there are a number of petroglyphs. With several sets of eyes, we should be able to spot more than I did on my last trip.



N'Dhala petroglyph

Some of the best walks in the East Macs are in the Trepkina Gorge Nature Reserve. The longest is the Ridgetop Walk. Easy if you have two vehicles or some people who choose to do a shorter walk and meet you at the end. Otherwise it's a final few km along the gravel road at the end. The two photos here were taken on the Trepkina Ridgetop Walk in September 2011. I would expect more water this year.



We will stop at Jessie and/or Emily Gap on the way back to or through Alice. Emily Gap has one of the best bits of Aboriginal rock art in the region.

Heading west, we pass through Alice Springs where we can purchase additional supplies. We may go straight through or we may spend a night in town depending on what people would like to do at the time.

We have a number of choices for the western part of the trip. We can't tell you which combination we choose until we know what the road conditions are and have talked to those who book early. We can tell you that we will choose from among the following. None of the options are particularly strenuous but some are definitely more strenuous than the others.

• **Ormiston Pound & Bowman's Gap: 1½ to 3 days**

The shorter version is a must. We follow a marked track into Ormiston Pound, set up camp near a waterhole and walk without packs to Bowman's Gap where we find one of the largest permanent waterholes in the Centre.



Walking into Ormiston Pound



Having a swim at Bowman's Gap



Ormiston Pound campsite

With so much water, it is unlikely that we'll be able to walk back through Ormiston Gorge so it is likely to be in and out the same way. Worth noting that in 2010, some chose to float their packs through rather than do the extra walk. The water will be cold but not as cold as it was then.

The longer option would include shifting camp to near the base of Mt Giles, then doing a very strenuous and steep day walk to the top of Mt Giles and back.

• **Birthday Waterhole, Brinkeley Bluff and Hugh Gorge: 1-3 days**

The 4WD tracks into Birthday Waterhole and Hugh gorge are among the roughest in the West Macdonnells, so rough that we had to change one of our West Macdonnells walks when we could no longer get reasonably priced local transport. This time we will have our own vehicle – or vehicles.



Birthday Waterhole track, note the angle of the vehicle.



View from a high point near Brinkley.

Hugh Gorge is one of the most spectacular gorges in the ranges. I don't have a digital photo to include so I hope to be able to drive to near the gorge, set up camp and do a long day walk through, perhaps looping back through a different gorge.

• **Palm Valley: 1 day**



The two photos at left were taken on our special Green Centre trip in 2010. The first shows people trying to keep their feet dry on the marked trail. The second shows us walking in the open beyond the main Palm Valley walk. If we do this, we may stick to the normal

loop or we may do the extended loop that takes us way beyond Palm Valley, over a ridge and back down another small gorge to the main creek. That's what we did in 2010.

• **Boggy Hole Track: 2-3 days**

The Boggy Hole Track is one of the NT's best 4WD experiences. It can, however, get shut by particularly wet conditions. The two best walks along the way are half a day above Boggy Hole and a full day into Circular Valley, cut out by the Finke River which has since changed it's course. If we do the walk into the hills behind Boggy Hole, we will probably have to wade back across the river as we did in 2010.



The four photos above were taken on the Boggy Hole track. The first shows driving through the water that we are almost sure to encounter. The second shows the group crossing the Finke below Boggy Hole after the day walk. The last two were taken in 2008, a drier year where we did the walk to Circular Valley. The last one shows the views. The second last shows a bit of just how rugged parts of the walk are.

• Watarrka National Park: 3-5 days

Kings Canyon is a tiny part of the large Watarrka National Park. This is potentially the longest pack-carrying walk on the trip but, even here where we shift camp every night, it will be possible to drop your pack and do short walks without it. The longest walk is from A to B so we can't include it if we have only one vehicle. In any case, time might be a limiting factor.

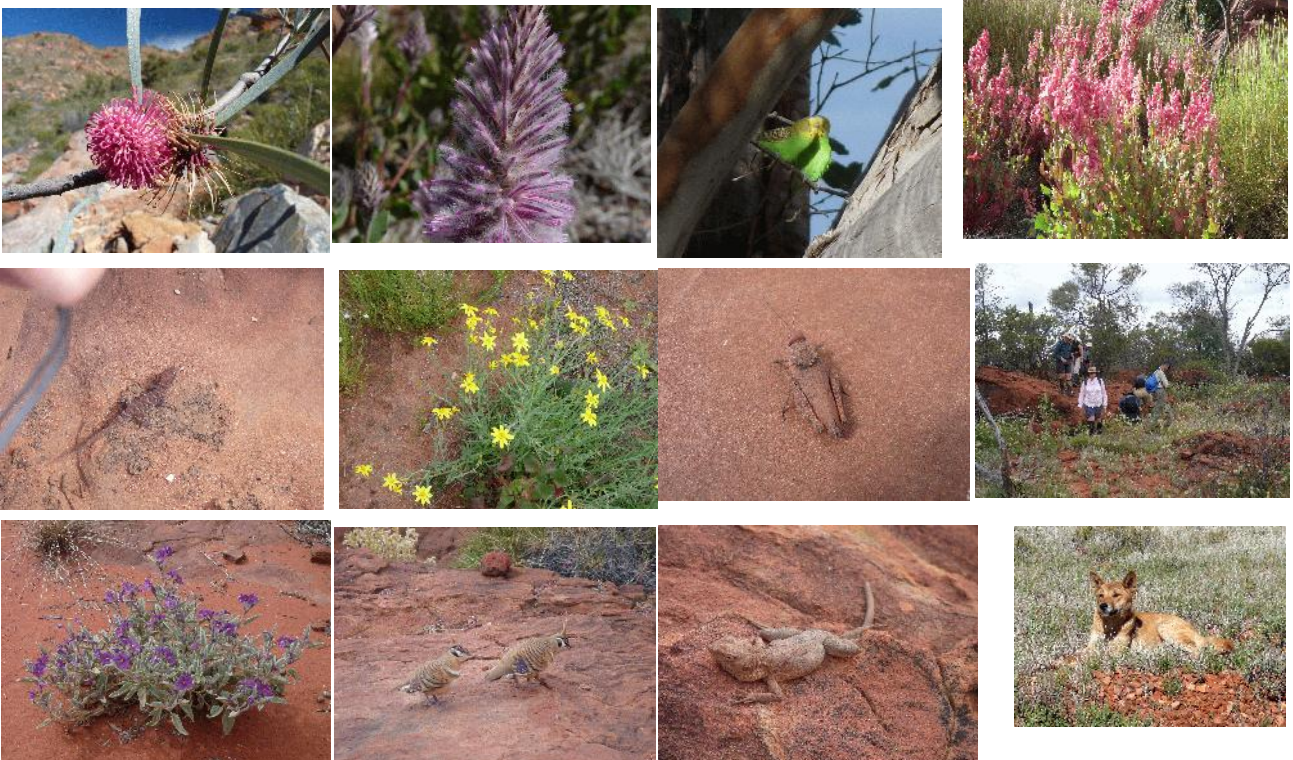
The walk begins with the steep climb on the marked trail to the top of Kings Canyon. We leave the trail where it crossed Kings Creek and walk up into some amazing rock formations. We visit another deep gorge, then turn and come down another creek, usually dry in its upper reaches, before rejoining the Giles Track where we either return to the start or continue to where it finishes at Kathleen Springs. The photos below were taken on our 2010 Green Centre walk. While we don't expect it to be quite as wet, you do need to be prepared.



The three photos above were taken on our 2010 Green Centre trip. The first was at a campsite on upper Kings Creek. We don't normally camp this close to the water, but there was so much water we had no choice. The centre photo shows how easy some of the walking is once you've done the big climb at the start. The final photo was at a rest stop on a grey, drizzly day. While blue skies are more likely, you do need to be prepared for rain.

Flora and Fauna

After major rains, the desert springs to life. Flowers are everywhere. The small animals that live in the vegetation are often more active and easier to see. The following photos give you a taste of what you can expect. All were taken on our September 2010 Green Centre trip.



Notes. This trip is **different. Please do not consider booking unless you have read and studied the following notes carefully.**

- The vehicle or vehicles we will use are 4WD Toyota Landcruiser troopcarriers with three rows of forward facing seats. They all have manual transmission. The super special offer applies only to people who can drive them or to couples where one of the couple can drive.
- **More exploration?** I have never done most of the Binns 4WD track. Rather than go straight to Alice Springs after the Davenport Ranges, I might want to follow the Binns down into the East Macdonnells, creating a longer section one, beginning section two on the 18th or 19th. That decision will be made in consultation with the first three people who book beginning in Darwin.
- This trip cannot run unless some of those who book are willing and able to drive the vehicles.
- While it will be possible to join the trip in Alice Springs, there will be no discount for doing so.
- The trip will not run unless at least two people want to drive down from Darwin to Alice Springs and at least two people want to drive back. The drive back will take at least two days.
- There are a number of places where we may stay in accommodation or in a paid camp ground. As we cannot be sure which they are, camping and accommodation fees beyond the standard NT Park camping fees are not included in the price of the trip. In addition to Old Ambilindum, places we might consider paid camping or accommodation include a second night in Alice Springs and
 - **Glen Helen**, near Ormiston. We might even be able to add in another walk there. See <http://www.glenhelen.com.au/>
 - **Kings Canyon Resort**, Watarrka. See <http://www.kingscanyonresort.com.au/>
 - **Kings Creek Station**, just outside Watarrka. See <http://www.kingscreekstation.com.au/>
- If we decide to stay at one of these places, you can choose whether to camp or stay in accommodation. We don't all have to choose the same thing.
- If people don't want to take an extra day off, we can leave a day later on Good Friday. Airfares, however, will be more expensive.

Super Special Price – \$500 + expenses.

I (Russell Willis) really want to do this trip so I've dropped the price to below break even. That does mean, however, that **no expenses are included**. You will have to pay camping and accommodation fees, a share of fuel, \$10 per evening meal cooked on the camping sections plus a share of 20 cents per km to cover some of the wear and tear on the vehicle. **The vehicle has to come from and return to Darwin, so everyone pays the same whether or not they get off in Alice Springs.**

Depending on how many nights we spend in accommodation and on your choices on those nights, my estimate of the total expenses is somewhere between \$500 and \$1000 per person.

General Notes

As a safety measure, it will be necessary to carry 2–3 litres per person on some days. We will, however, plan to camp near water every night unless we decide to camp on a high point to enjoy the sunrise and sunset views.

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 the 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.

You will have to carry only what you need for each walk. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle(s).

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 high 30's or not get out of the low teens. Nighttime temperatures can drop to near freezing. You must be prepared for anything.

If we do the East Macdonnells, it will be possible to do some shopping in Alice Springs between the East and West sections. If you want to do some shopping before the trip, Coles and Woolies are both open late.

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. This is especially important between sections when you go back to Alice Springs to resupply for section two.

The recently issued 1:100 000 West Macdonnell National Park maps are the best available maps of some of the areas where we will be walking. One side is a standard topographic map; the other is an aerial photo. The combination is far better than anything that was available before.

Terrain and difficulty

- Overall** Level 2-3. You shouldn't have to carry a full pack for any great distance other than on the Watarrka walk. You will need to carry it sometimes.
- Climate** Average daytime max high 20s C, average nighttime min 10-15°C. Night temperatures can drop to near freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely but possible, you **must** be prepared.
- Terrain** Level 2-4.
Even if we choose the easiest possible routes, the pack carrying portion of this section will include several moderately steep climbs and some rock hopping. Day walks can be quite long and quite steep. One of the possible day walks includes a very steep climb where you may need to use your hands to help pull you up.
- Vegetation** Level 1-2. Varies from year to year depending on when last burnt. Vegetation presents very little problem. In some areas the spinifex may be dense enough to make heavy gaiters and long trousers essential.
- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours of actual walking. A few days on the day walks might be longer.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 2-3. Depends on which walks are included. Even on the longest walk, you will need to carry only 5 days food. You need both a sleeping bag and a tent. You should also carry rain gear. The popularity of some of the campsites means that firewood may be scarce so we will carry a stove and fuel.
- Art** Some in Watarrka and some in the East Macdonnells, but not a lot.
- Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges and maintained campgrounds. Most sites are good to excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at some of the campsites.
- Swims** Swimming is likely to be possible in a few places. The water should be cool, but not as icy as in June and July.

Lowlights You are likely to see other walkers in a few places and will almost certainly meet some fairly large groups at the more popular spots like Ormiston Gorge and Kings Canyon.

Highlights Spectacular mountain views. Deep gorges. Wildflowers and waterholes.

Wildlife Birds are always present but you are unlikely to see many large animals. If you keep your eyes open, you have a good chance to see rock wallabies in some of the gorges.

Fishing Not good but conceivable at Boggy Hole and Bowmans.

Itinerary: Green Centre 2017

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Day 0 Wednesday 12 April. No pre-trip meeting. As at least one person will not arrive in time for the meeting, and we will be passing through the town of Katherine where you can get last minute supplies, we will not have a pre-trip meeting for this trip. You **MUST** notify us where you will be staying well before departure.

Day 1 Thursday 13 April. 7 to 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 the Tourism Top End Visitor Centre on Bennett Street.
Drive to wherever. Camp or accom along the way.

Day 2 Into the Davenport Ranges. Day walks, camp overnight.

Day 3 Davenport Range, then drive the Binns Track toward the East Macdonnells.

Day 4-16 Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs on others. Options as described in the notes. We will pass through Alice Springs sometime in this section, probably day 6 or 7. We may decide to stay the night or we may push on to the western section of the trip.

Day 17 Saturday 29 April. Return to Alice Springs. Drop off at your accommodation late afternoon.

For those returning to Darwin, we may leave Alice Springs that afternoon or the following day.

Day 18 On the drive back to Darwin.

Day 19 Monday 1 May. Arrive in Darwin by mid afternoon.