

Mt Hart & the Lower Isdell River: July 4-25 1999

The date above was the last time we offered a Lower Isdell walk beginning and ending at Mt Hart. They now can drive us part way and have a helicopter that can give us still more options. Read these notes carefully and you'll see how one major change has affected all our Kimberley trips since then.

About two thirds of this trip covers a route that we walked in 1995 and 1997. The first trip was one of the best walks I (Russell Willis) have ever done, not easy but highly rewarding. It also came closer to a perfect route choice than on any other exploratory trip I'd ever done. The route takes us through beautiful gorges, lush valleys and a variety of vegetation. For those who take the time to look, there are lots of birds and a number of Aboriginal art sites. The description below is an anti-clockwise loop. The 1997 trip ran in the reverse direction and was equally rewarding. The guide will decide which direction is more appropriate at the time the trip begins.

Section 1: Mt Hart to Isdell River: July 4–14

As the trip has been extended to three weeks, we will arrange a helicopter food drop at the midway point. The trip begins with a drive from Broome to Derby to leave the food drop. (Anyone wishing to start in Derby rather than Broome will be picked up at this time.) From Derby we drive to Mt Hart Station. After a drink stop at the homestead, we drive 4 more km to the beginning of the walk on the Barker River. If we have two vehicles, one person will accompany the guide while we drop a vehicle off at the end of the walk. The rest of the group can relax at one of the pools. Car shuffle done, we plan to go a few kilometres that afternoon.

The next day is likely to be a long one as we make our way over a plateau and down to an unnamed tributary of the Isdell River, known locally as Verdant Valley. The distance from our first campsite in Verdant Valley to the Isdell River is only a couple of kilometres longer than the distance between our first two campsites. In 1995, it took us three days to cover it. Parts were rugged, but not as rugged as this sounds. We spend half a day exploring a side creek and the main gorge was far too nice to rush. There was one point where we had the choice of floating packs for about 100 metres or doing a strenuous climb up out of the gorge. The unanimous decision was a pack float. Come prepared.

Our first stretch along the Isdell itself was generally fairly easy going with some interesting rolling rock forms along the way. A day and a half brought us to the first of what are called the Twin Creeks. Magnificent! We spent the rest of the day just relaxing and ambling around enjoying the scenery. The following day, one kilometre cross country brought us to the second of the Twin Creeks. Far too nice to rush, so we spent the rest of the morning here before doing the hour's walk to the Isdell River Gorge. The views from the edge of the gorge were so magnificent that we spent nearly an hour there before beginning the strenuous climb down to our campsite.

We spent the next day and a half following the Isdell River, mainly in the gorge but occasionally having to climb up and around a pool we didn't wish to swim through. Many words come to mind, but none of them would do the area justice. This brings us to the furthest point we reached on our previous trips and our food drop. The helicopter which brings in the food drop will bring in those joining us and take out those leaving us at the end of this section.

Notes on section 1. This trip is longer than the one on which the description above is based. With an extra three days, we will move at a somewhat slower pace and add in a number of side trips without full packs. Some of the side trips will go to areas we have not visited before.

Accommodation at Mt Hart is not included for those doing only section one. However, we may be able to arrange this if those people want to spend a night there.

Section 2: Isdell River to Mt Hart: July 14–25

After a rest day exploring the area near our food drop and enjoying a few luxuries that come in which we don't want to carry, we continue the exploratory part of the trip, following the main Isdell Gorge quite a bit further than on either of our previous trips and possibly stopping to explore one or more of the side creeks we didn't have the time to visit on previous trips. The map shows far more interesting places than we can hope to explore. Those who take part in this expedition will help us decide which ones to visit.

From the Isdell, we plan to walk up another small creek which we follow to its headwaters. This should be a short cut back to an area we visited on previous trips. The day we do this will be mainly exploratory. It may be easy, it may not. Be prepared for whatever might come.

And be prepared for another wonderful valley. Sandy camp sites, Aboriginal art, easy walking, nice monsoon forest. It was great. This branch brings us almost back to the southern Twin Creek. We found plenty of water and large pools in both creeks even near their headwaters.

At this point we have two choices. If one of the station tracks is open, our final full day's walk brings us over the plateau and onto a creek which crosses the track where we will have left our vehicle or arranged for the leaseholder to meet us. If the track is no longer passable, we would then have an 18 kilometre walk back to the homestead so we might choose to change our route and cross back to the headwaters of the Barker River which we would follow back to where we began.

We spend our last night at the Mt Hart homestead, enjoying a final dinner in the homestead dining room. We finish on Sunday morning with an early morning flight back to Kununurra, arriving in time to make a 10.30 a.m. flight connection.

Terrain and difficulty. Some of the terrain is quite rugged. Although some of those who did the 1995 trip were in their 60's, all were highly experienced bushwalkers. We do not recommend this trip to people who have not done any off-track walking unless they consider themselves to be exceptionally fit. The terrain includes a considerable amount of rock hopping. However, there is also a considerable amount of relatively flat and easy walking. There are likely to be a couple of relatively short sections of thick scrub. If it were not for the need to carry food for the full two weeks, this trip would rate as level three.

Maps. 1:50 000 Barker River & Mt Humbert or 1:100 000 Matthew.

Notes

The vehicles scheduled for this trip are the ones we plan to use on our Bungles — West Kimberley trip which finishes in Broome. If that trip takes place as scheduled, we should be able to provide a ride from Broome to Derby the day before departure. If that trip does not take place, we will drive out from Kununurra.

Similarly, the vehicles are scheduled for the Richenda Explorer trip which follows in the program. If this trip does not take place, we will drive back to Kununurra at the end.

If neither of the connection trips runs, we may be able to fly to and from Kununurra. Depending on numbers, there might be a surcharge for this option.

There are daily bus services to and from Broome, Derby and Kununurra. Contact Greyhound-Pioneer for current information. All three are connected to southern capitals with daily flights. Kununurra has better connections than Derby. Broome is served by both Ansett and Qantas. Kununurra and Derby are served by Ansett only.

We may do the walk in the opposite direction to that described.

A day pack will be useful on this trip.

Bring a couple of garbags to waterproof your packs if we do a pack float.

The helicopter bringing in the food drop is expensive. If only four or five people book, they will have the option of paying a surcharge for the helicopter food drop or carrying food for the full three weeks.

You will need some money to buy drinks at Mt Hart probably less than you think. The homestead prices in 1995 and 1997 were more than reasonable.

There are large fish in the Isdell and possibly some of its tributaries. If you like fishing, we recommend that you bring a lightweight fishing line — not too light, some of the fish are too big for a really light line.

Crocodiles and swimming. There are almost certainly large estuarine crocodiles in the lower reaches of the Isdell River. Do not swim in any large pool unless your guide has indicated that it is safe.

Itinerary: Isdell River and Mt Hart

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

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

Section 1 Mt Hart to Isdell

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting. 6 p.m., Broome. Venue to be advised. This meeting is important. If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

If the trip begins in Kununurra, the meeting will be at 6 p.m. in the Beer Garden at the Hotel Kununurra.

Day 1 Pick up between 7.30 and 8 a.m. Pick up is from your accommodation 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 Broome Tourist Bureau.

If the trip begins in Kununurra, the pick up from the Kununurra Visitors Centre.

Drive or fly to Mt Hart. Vehicle shuffle if we drive.

Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–10 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 11 Food drop. Those finishing here fly back to Mt Hart in the helicopter and back to Kununurra in a light aircraft.

Section 2 Isdell to Mt Hart

Day 11 Those joining us fly from Kununurra to Mt Hart and take the helicopter to the food drop point.

Day 12-20 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 21 Return to vehicles. Drive to Mt Hart homestead.

Day 22 Early morning flight to Kununurra. Trip ends.