

Bungle Bungles in the Wet: February 6-19, 2022

Although we had had permission to run a wet season trip into the Bungle Bungles when the park is closed to the general public since 2000, we never received the bookings we needed to run the trip until 2008. We knew it was going to be good. We didn't realise how good it would be until we'd done it. Whether or not we get as much rain, we can be sure that it will be hot; it will be humid; **it will be spectacular!** (We got relatively little rain in 2010, substantial rain in 2011 but not as much as in 2008. Three weeks after our 2011 trip, the area received record rain. The weather will do what it will do.)

This is the only time of year when you have any chance of seeing the Bungles waterfalls and creeks flowing. The average temperatures are barely higher than those we encounter on our April trips. The pools are deeper and more comfortable for swimming. There will almost certainly be so much water that you



Aerial view of Piccaninny Gorge on the flight in.

creek is going to rise.)

Our exact route will be determined by the amount of rain we get. We plan to spend the first week and a half exploring Piccaninny



Cathedral Gorge and Falls. Situated only about one km from the car park, Cathedral is one of the most heavily visited sites in the park. Those who visit in the dry season never see the falls and see, at best, a tiny fraction of the water we see in this photo.

will be wading a fair amount of the time.

At this time of year, the road is closed and the airstrip can't be depended on. Even if we were able to use the airstrip, it is about 10 km from where we normally start our walks, no dependable water or shade until near the end. We solve the transport problem walk by flying some by helicopter from Kununurra and driving the rest to Turkey Creek (Warmun) and ferrying them in from there. This worked well on our last three trips. It also gives you some incredible scenic views.

The Piccaninny catchment is very small. Water levels can rise and fall incredibly quickly. We **know** where it is safe to camp and where we can get out of the way if we are hit by a flash flood. (The Piccaninny catchment is small enough so we always get enough warning to move if the

creek is going to rise.)

The tributary 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. 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.

At the end of the first part, we return to the car park and collect the food we stashed there at the start. This allows us to include a few little luxuries that would be too heavy to carry otherwise. During the last half week, we hope to explore a different area below the main gorge.



Walking up Piccaninny Creek. Those who come in the dry season would not find a single drop of water in this part of the creek.



Piccaninny Creek in flood. A few hours earlier, the water in the right of the photo was two metres lower. Our camp remained high and dry.

In some years, the floral displays are spectacular. In others, they are much less so but there will always be something in bloom. . We spend the next four days exploring the area with its many large pools and interesting gorges. As on the first section, there may be some day walks where you do not need to carry a full pack. Whether or not this is the case will depend on the interests and abilities of the group.



Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 5.

Climate Level 5. It will be hot and it will be humid.

The average daily maximum is 36°C (97°F). There is a good chance that the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F) at times. The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is very likely but not certain.

On average it rains every third day, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. Occasionally, it might rain for days at a time. (This makes it somewhat harder to walk but it also makes the waterfalls more spectacular and keeps it relatively cool.)

Occasionally, it might not rain at all over the course of the full two weeks.

This makes it substantially hotter than normal. In 1998 when Darwin and Katherine both had record rainfalls, the Bungles had a near record low. We cannot predict how wet it will be but we can be sure that there will be places to swim along the way.

Terrain Level 2-4. The long walk up the Piccaninny Gorge, mainly over pebbles and sand can be quite tiring for many people. Going beyond our first base camp, done with full packs on many trips, requires some clambering over large rocks and includes edging along at least one narrow ledge.

Most of the day walks involve clambering over large rocks. Some include steep climbs and pushing through thick spinifex. Some people find this very difficult, even without full packs. Although this difficulty is often more psychological than physical, it can be very real. 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.

We must follow watercourses as climbing up the domes themselves is not permitted because of their very fragile nature. If there is too much water, some gorges may be impassable.

It may be necessary to float your pack for a short distance. See the notes for details.

Little 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.

- Vegetation** Level 1-4. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understory. Some short sections of grass may hide a broken rocky surface where you will have to be particularly careful. There may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. Some of section two is on trails where the vegetation is not much of a problem.
- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours, not including breaks. A few days might be longer.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 4 you carry food for the full two weeks. Your share of the evening meals will weigh 4 to 5½ kg. Fortunately, there will be many times when you are not carrying your full pack.
- Art** We have found only a few small art sites in the Bungles.
- Campsites** Mix of flat rock ledges, sandy beaches (if not flooded) and grassy ground. Due to the possibility of flash flooding, our campsites on this trip will be chosen with **safety** rather than comfort as the first consideration. Even so, there may be some nights where you need to be prepared to pack up and move if the water rises above normal flood levels.
- Swims** This is the best time to see the local waterfalls, many of which flow only during the Wet. There will be a chance for several swims per day. Almost all of these will be in pools we have all to ourselves.
- Lowlights** Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can force a change of itinerary. Thick spinifex can be a hassle.
- Highlights** Wet season waterfalls. Good swimming. Spectacular views. Waterfalls that appear and disappear as you watch. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can scarcely imagine.
- Wildlife** Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals, but, in 2008 guide Russell Willis saw more water monitors than he'd seen on all the trips he'd done in the previous three years combined. Sadly, the arrival of cane toads has resulted in a decrease in the number of monitors.
- Fishing** Not possible.
- Photos** **For a better idea of what it will be like, we recommend that you have a look at the report one of our clients on our 2021 trip posted on the Bushwalk Australia website. <https://bushwalk.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=49&t=33589>**



Notes

We strongly recommend that anyone interested in this trip have a good look at all three of our **Walking in the Wet** pages beginning with <https://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/the-wet-season>

Rain is very likely at this time of year. It is very important that you pack well enough so that you can keep most things in your pack dry, even if you have to pack a wet tent or other wet items. A pack liner is essential at this time of year. Garbages are not satisfactory.

Be prepared to float your pack. This may or may not be necessary but it is essential to be prepared. Your pack liner should keep the contents dry. A good pack cover can keep the outside dry during a float. As shown at right, in 2008, most of the group were content to wade and scramble up the bank but one intrepid soul decided to stick to the water.

You will be wading a lot of the time. You need footwear that is appropriate for this. In 2008, some people spent days walking in strong sandals, others had running shoes or similar. We strongly recommend that you bring something besides boots.



We may choose to split the trip into two equal halves and repeat part of the walk. This was what the group did in 2011.

Piccaninny Creek can rise and fall quite rapidly. We may have to simply sit and wait. In 2008, heavy rain one afternoon almost kept one group of day walkers from getting back to camp that evening.

Depending on when it last burned, the spinifex can be a real problem. Long trousers or no, we strongly recommend heavy duty gaiters.

This trip is so different to our dry season trips that there will be an exploratory component.

Safe camp sites are limited. Longer day walks and covering some of the ground multiple times is the only way we can be sure we won't get a flood in the night.

Maps. Turkey Creek 1:100 000 or Bungle Bungle 1:50 000 topographic map.

Itinerary: Bungle Bungles in the Wet

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Day 0 Fly to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Connections to the eastern states are normally made through Darwin. Pre-trip meeting for everyone doing the Bungles section, 6:00 p.m., outdoor area, Kimberley Croc Motel. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 Pick up between 6.30 and 7 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. Fly to the Bungles. Start walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–13 Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs at other times, exploring gorges. Collect food drop on day 7 or 8.

Day 14 Return to Kununurra. Drop off at your accommodation.

Important Note **Air North**, the main airline currently operating into Kununurra uses relatively small aircraft and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg on a few flights. Unless special arrangements have been made, if you are flying to Kununurra and your baggage weighs more than 13 kg, it may not get on the plane with you. (This would be very unusual but it is possible.) Contact Air North for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4000; Fax: (08) 8920 4095; email: airnorth@regionallink.com.au **Virgin** has some flights from Broome and/or Perth.

