

Charnley Explorer June 27 - July 18, 2021

List price - \$3995 For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/prices.shtml

Summary. This trip takes you to one of the most rugged, scenic and isolated areas in the Kimberley. It is divided into two walks: a shorter easier one to start; a longer, harder one afterwards.

Transport makes it impossible to do only one of the walks.



Climbing out of the Charnley gorge, photo R Lukacz

Itinerary

- Day 0** This is the day **BEFORE** departure. Travel 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 6.00 p.m. Kimberley Croc Motel. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.
- Day 1** Pick up 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 possibly as early as 7 a.m. Drive to Mount Elizabeth. Overnight at the campground if we drive, continue to the walk if we fly.
- Day 2** If we had to drive to Mt Elizabeth, drive to Bachsten Camp. If we flew, start the walk.
- Day 3-6** Bachsten walk, camping from packs.
- Day 7 or 8** Finish walk at Bachsten camp. Overnight at camp.
- Day 8 or 9** Drive from Bachsten to the Brockman River, stopping to visit Aboriginal stone arrangement on the way. Walk to the Calder and spend the afternoon exploring the lower Calder.
- Day 9 or 10** Walk to the Charnley.
- Day 10 or 11** Day walk to the tidal area on the Charnley.
- Day 11 or 12 -17** Walking along the Charnley and exploring the side creeks.
- Day 18** Begin walk back to the Calder River.
- Day 19** Finish walk to the Calder River. Camp on the Calder or walk to cars and begin drive.
- Day 20** If not already done, return to vehicle and begin drive to Mount Elizabeth, stop at Wren Gorge on the way. Visit art sites not visited on the way in.
- Day 21** Finish drive to Mount Elizabeth where we camp the final night if catching a flight the next day. Or continue driving toward Kununurra if we have to drive the whole way.
- Day 22** Early morning flight to Kununurra, or finish drive, arriving in time to make afternoon connections to Darwin that day. Contact us to be sure if you wish to make a same day connection.

Now for the details.

If the Gibb Road trip which precedes this runs, we will fly to Mount Elizabeth Station where we will meet our vehicle. If the Gibb trip does not run, we will have to drive from Kununurra. This takes a full day so we would spend the first night camping at Mount Elizabeth.

At Mount Elizabeth Station we collect the key which will let us through the locked gate and onto the track which leads to our walk. Although the total distance is only about 150 km, the drive is very rough – some short sections are so rough that it may take ten minutes to cover one kilometre. We will, however, have the occasional stop for a stretch or to look at some of the art sites along the way. We will try to make it all the way to Bachsten camp but may have to camp somewhere along the track. The two photos give you a taste of what’s involved in the drive – the longest, slowest drive we do on any of our trips.



Not the easiest section of track but far from the hardest.



Note the tilt on the car.

The next day, we finish the drive to a small safari camp near Bachsten Falls and spend the rest of the day exploring the surrounding area. That’s nice enough but there is much better a bit further. We will do a five night, six day loop down the creek below the falls, through a pass to another creek, up a gorge to another waterfall and finally back to where we began. We’ll use what we learned on our previous trips to make this one even better.



Bachsten Falls 1 – the one 4WD tours see

The walk will visit a number of Aboriginal art sites, including two very spectacular Wandjina sites. For those who are interested, the fishing should be excellent.

We may spend two nights at the campsite shown below right as we have done in the past or we may simply make the other days shorter.

We plan to spend the final night of this section At the safari camp where we can enjoy hot showers and cold drinks.

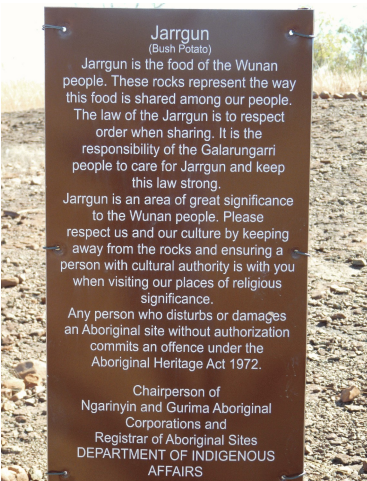
From Bachsten, we drive another 35-40 km to the Brockman River and the start of the walk. On the way in or out, we stop to visit Wren Gorge and more paintings as well as an interesting Aboriginal stone arrangement.

From where we park the vehicles, a short walk of about one km downstream brings us to the much larger Calder River, hitting it at a point where it passes through some particularly interesting rock formations. We spend the rest of the day exploring the lower Calder without full packs.

The following morning we walk to the Charnley. The walk is about nine km. This will probably be the longest distance we cover in one day with packs on this section. The terrain is moderately easy but it can be hot.



Photographing one of the main Bachsten art sites



Campsite above Bachsten Falls 2

We should get to the Charnley mid to late afternoon. The final descent can be tricky.

The Charnley is one of the most spectacular, but least accessible rivers in the Kimberley. The lower section goes through something like 30 km of continuous gorge. There is a wealth of Aboriginal art in a variety of styles showing that this has been a special place for thousands of years.



Crossing the Calder



One of the rougher sections midway between the Calder & Charnley

Walking along the Charnley is always slow and often not easy. We are likely to have to float our packs one or more times. How many and how long the floats are depends on the water levels which can vary dramatically from one year to the next. The photos below show you what you need to be prepared for. This is as bad as it gets.



Having shown you as bad as it gets, we need to emphasise that much of the walking is easier as shown by the photos below.



On our first short visit to this part of the river in 2001, we found that we had to climb up out of the gorge on a number of occasions. In 2002 and 2009, we had groups who were better at rock climbing so we didn't need to climb out at all. Most of the climbs out aren't particularly difficult, but thick spinifex on top can make the walking there very slow. Whether we have to climb or not will depend on the group. In 2018, climbing up was so hard at the top and where we came down that we opted for more pack floats.

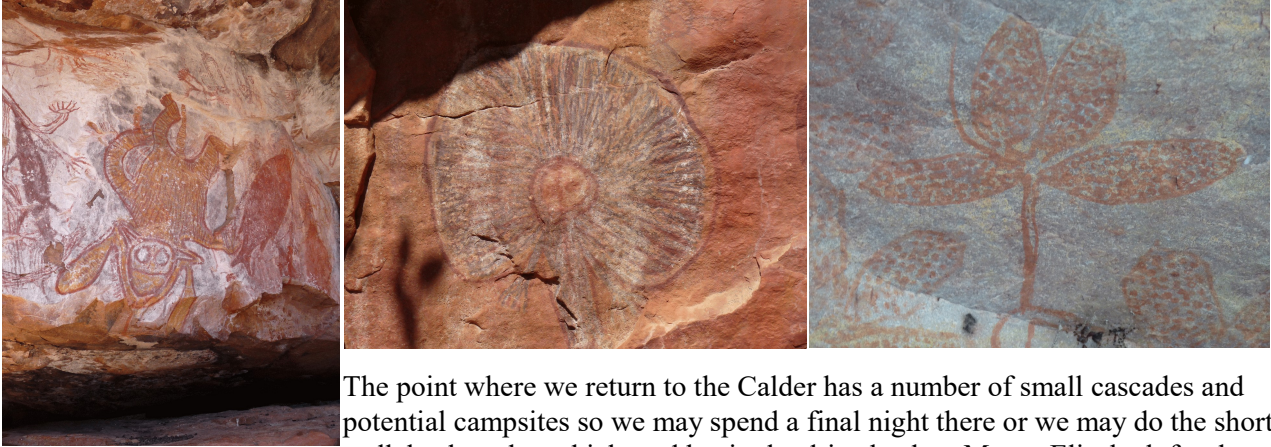


No big packs here – on a day walk on one of the Charnley's smaller tributaries.

In order to explore the area properly, we will do a number of day or half-day walks, the first of which will be down the Charnley to near where it empties into Walcott Inlet. Other walks will be along some of the larger tributaries, all of which were flowing in July or August on all of our previous trips into this area. Our aim is

to cover about 10 km moving upstream with packs, then do another daywalk further still, before following another tributary stream back toward the Calder. Our previous experience shows that following this particular creek is much easier than any of the other possible paths. We will probably take two days to do this walk.

Everywhere we go, we find Aboriginal rock art, some of which is different to anything we've seen elsewhere. Those who are interested in the rock art can have a wonderful time at the sites. Those who are not as interested can relax next to a nice pool while the others visit the sites.



The point where we return to the Calder has a number of small cascades and potential campsites so we may spend a final night there or we may do the short walk back to the vehicle and begin the drive back to Mount Elizabeth for the flight back to Kununurra if the Mitchell Plateau trip scheduled to follow this is running. If not, we drive.

Terrain and difficulty.

- Overall** Level 4. Bachsten section level 3, Charnley level 4.
- Climate** Level 3. Average daytime max 30-32°, average nighttime min 14-16°. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely. Higher than normal temperatures in 2018 pushed the climate toward level 4.
- Terrain** **Bachsten** Level 2-3. Although there are some rough parts, there is a substantial amount of flat, easy walking.
Charnley. Level 4. This trip has a bit of everything. Lots of rock hopping and scrambling, flat rock, boulders, sand, thick scrub, open woodland and almost anything else you can name. There will be at least one pack float, maybe several depending on water levels. Some days will be long and fairly hard but we there should be short, easy ones as well.
- Vegetation** Level 2-3. Vegetation can vary dramatically from year to year. This may make the trip easier or harder than we expect. While we were there in August 2001, a major fire came through on the south side of the gorge. This made the walking easier in 2002. On our last three trips, the vegetation was somewhere in between. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. It may be necessary to push through thick spinifex in some places.
- Hours** Level 2-3. Generally 4-6 hours. The first full day's walk is very long and may take 8 hours not counting breaks. On some days, you need carry your pack for only a couple of hours after which you can rest or explore without packs.
- Pack weight** **Bachsten.** Level 2, you need to carry 6 days food.
Charnley. Level 4. You need to carry 12 days food.
 The other nights will be near the car so you won't need to carry that food.
 In all sections, you need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
- Pack float** (Section 2). All but one of those on the 2002 trip and all on the 2009 trip chose to float their packs for a short distance rather than climb out of the gorge. In 2018, water levels were higher so there was no choice and we had to do several pack floats. You must be prepared for this. There was also an optional swim of up to one km with daypacks on the last day in the gorge.

Art We visit a large number of art sites. Many are in a style we haven't found elsewhere.

Campsites Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.

Swims Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.

Lowlights The long, rough drives. Carrying food for two weeks.

Highlights Beautiful gorge scenery. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites. Exploring the side creeks without packs.

Wildlife You see a variety of birds along the river and have a good chance of spotting freshwater crocodiles. You might see big crocs in the tidal section of the river we visit on a day walk. You are unlikely to see many large land animals but you can be lucky. We spotted the dingo at right on the 2009 drive in. We spotted others in 2018.

Fishing Excellent along the Charnley.

Maps. The 1: 50,000 Artesian Range covers most of the Charnley walk. We will probably do small amounts on Munja as well.

Notes.

The flights at the beginning and end of this trip depend on our connecting trip.

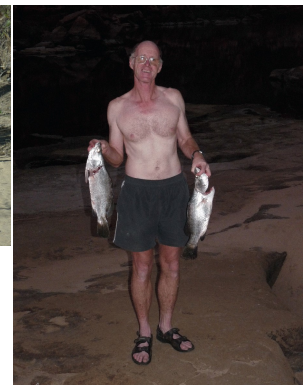
If one or both doesn't run, we will have to drive in one or both directions.

Make sure you keep a water bottle with you during the drives as it is unlikely to be easy to get into your pack. If we have to drive to or from Kununurra, keep some money with you as well as it may be possible to buy cold drinks.

Where we have two vehicles, one or more of the clients normally drives one of them. Due to the extremely rugged nature of the Munja Track, we cannot allow anyone who has not had extensive 4WD experience to drive these sections. This may mean limiting the number of participants or having the guide drive across the rough section and walk back to take the second vehicle through.

Insects. We found that the flies were more of a nuisance than normal in 2002. That was the case on the Bachsten section in 2018 but not so much on the Charnley. Given the variation, be safe and bring a fly veil. On the other hand, there were so few mosquitos that some members of the group never bothered to set up their tents or mosquito nets. This varies from year to year.

Crocodiles and swimming. Our 2002 group saw one large estuarine (saltwater) crocodile in the tidal area near the end of the Charnley. None of our groups has seen any further upstream. They all saw numerous freshwater crocs, usually a good indication that the large and dangerous ones are not present. However, there is no barrier to estuarine crocs moving upstream along the Charnley below major waterfalls. We recommend that you restrict your swims to side creeks and small pools unless your guide tells you otherwise.



Optional accommodation extras.

- **Mount Elizabeth.** The drive to Mt Elizabeth is a long one. You might want to relax at the end of the trip. Staying in their accommodation would make it easier to get an early start the next morning. This would cost an extra \$150 per person and would include dinner & breakfast. (The actual cost is higher but we may include the dinner anyway.) If the Middle Isdell trip at the end of this is running, we will spend the final night at the Mount Elizabeth campground. Accommodation is available as at the beginning.
- **Bachsten Camp.** If you don't want to camp, there are some basic cabins available. We had both dinner and breakfast there in 2018 – both meals were outstanding, all the more so given the remote location.

Air North, the main airline operating into Kununurra uses relatively small aircraft and has a baggage allowance of only 13 kg on a few flights. Please check the baggage allowance when you book. If your baggage weighs more than the allowance, it might 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 4001;

email: reservations @airnorth.com.au

If you are coming from Perth or Melbourne, it's worth checking Virgin as well.