

Drysdale River National Park No. 1: June 19 - Jul 3, 2022

List price - \$4695. Includes amphibious aircraft in both directions.

Updated: 9 December 2021

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Summary. This trip takes you into one of the most beautiful and least accessible national parks in Australia. It is divided into two walks so you only need to carry food for one week at a time.



Arriving on the Drysdale River

Itinerary:

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change

Day 0 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 p.m., Pre-trip meeting, 6 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 Early morning pick up from your accommodation in Kununurra as arranged at the pre-trip meeting. The pick could be as early as 4.30 a.m. Float plane flight to Drysdale River. Deposit food drop. Begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 2-8 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 9 Return to food drop to collect food for second section. Bush camp. See notes at end.

Day 10-14 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 15 Fly back to Kununurra early morning. Trip ends. Drop off at your accommodation.

Now for the details.

Drysdale River National Park is the largest and least accessible in the Kimberley. There is no public road leading to it. There is no airstrip inside it. This inaccessibility is the key to one of the park's main attractions — few introduced pests and an ecology that remains relatively undisturbed in comparison to much of the rest of Australia. The park is a paradise for birdwatchers. It is usually easy to spot freshwater crocodiles in the pools below Solea Falls. Fishing is excellent, at its best below the falls. It's a bush paradise. Getting there is the problem.



Aerial view of Solea Falls



Enjoying the shade on a day walk up Forest Creek

The cost of helicopters is prohibitive. Driving takes the better part of two days each way. Fortunately, we can still land a float plane about 10 km south of Solea Falls and do a loop walk from there.

We plan to head cross country from near where we land aiming for a point on the Drysdale about 8 km in a straight line. From there we head cross country for another 6½ km in a straight line. The terrain is rough in places but we come down Forest Creek (photo at left) so we may camp and explore a bit more from there. We should hit the river somewhere near the campsite shown on the next page.

There is so much to see that it is likely to take several days to do

the next 10 kilometres as we take time out to enjoy the variety of vegetation, gorges, beautiful pools and Aboriginal paintings. While the area through which we will be walking contains one of the highest concentrations of Aboriginal rock art that we have ever seen in the Kimberley, in deference to the wishes of the traditional owners we do not include any photos of the paintings.

With so many things to see off the main river, we spend a substantial part of the first week exploring with daypacks. The Drysdale itself is wide and open, but some of the smaller creeks take us into dense patches of monsoon forest, a very different environment to the main river. One we may include requires crossing the Drysdale River at the rapids shown below.



Sandy campsite, lower Drysdale



Crossing the Drysdale on a day walk

Keen fishermen and women might find it worth bringing a collapsible rod or hand line. There are barramundi below Solea Falls and a variety of other fish above. You are not, however, likely to catch much on the smaller creeks once you get away from the main river.

Solea Falls marks a transition as we move back out of the lowlands onto a low plateau. After a night at Solea, we continue up the Drysdale to Planigale Creek.

Some of the group will have to do a long day walk from here to collect the food drop.

We follow Planigale upstream for some days, then turn back east and return to the pool where we began.

Planigale is a lovely little creek, pool after pool, art site after art site, with the occasional waterfall along the way. On one trip, a



Barramundi can be found below Solea Falls.



Group at Solea Falls. This was a particularly wet year. Solea always flows in June, but not always this well.

family of brolgas put on quite a show, allowing us to get quite close before they moved on. Brolgas or no, as with all our trips, there will be time to enjoy the wildlife, the flowers and all nature around us.



Brolga in Planigale Creek

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Average daytime max 30-31°C (86-88°F), average nighttime min 12-15°C (62-68°F) – averages hide the extremes, it can get close to freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

Terrain Level 2-4. The start of the walk is relatively flat and easy but there are some longish stretches of soft sand. As we continue toward Solea Falls, the terrain becomes more difficult with lots of rock hopping and some scrambling over large boulders. Above the falls, the terrain gets easier once more.

Hours Generally 4-6 hours. On some days, you need carry your pack for only a couple of hours after which you can rest or explore without packs.

Vegetation Level 2-3. Most of the vegetation should be fairly open but it is likely that there will be some thick scrub to push through. It is not likely that there will be much. Scrub conditions vary dramatically from year to year so we can't say how much you will encounter.

Packs **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry 8 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.

Art This area contains one of the greatest concentrations of Aboriginal rock art in the Kimberley. We plan to spend time visiting some of these. Those who have little interest in Aboriginal art should be prepared to relax near a pool or just watch the birds while others are visiting the sites.

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 above Solea Falls, smaller pools below.

Crocodiles and swimming. We have never seen a large crocodile anywhere in the area where we will be walking. Some local people have told us that there are only freshwater crocodiles in this portion of the Drysdale River. However, we have met someone who told us that he had seen a large crocodile. There **are** large crocodiles in the lower Drysdale. There is no barrier to their travel below Solea Falls. We recommend that you restrict your swims to the side creeks and small pools in the Drysdale when you are below Solea. If in doubt, ask the guide.

Lowlights Signs of cattle in some areas. Carrying 7 days food.

Highlights Solea Falls. Remote wilderness. Perfect weather. Good swimming. Large numbers of well preserved Aboriginal art sites.

Wildlife You see a variety of birds along the river and have a good chance of spotting freshwater crocodiles, tortoises and a variety of lizards. You are unlikely to see many large land animals.

Fishing Excellent in some places, little chance in others.

Maps 1:50 000 Mount Connelly, Wallis Peak (short section), Johnson Creek (possible very short section)

Notes

A day pack is very useful on this trip.

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Bringing fresh fruit, vegetables or honey into WA is illegal whether you come by road or plane. (You cannot even bring in boxes or other containers that once contained fruit or vegetables.) Bags are checked both on the highway and at the airport.

Transport. Due to changed river conditions, we have had to move our landing site well upstream of where we used to land. This means that some of the group will have to do a 12-15 km return walk to collect the food drop. The others can relax near that night's camp.

Exceptionally late rains could make it unsafe for the float planes to land. If, for any reason, they cannot land, we will be unable to do this trip.



Calytrix extipulata, one of the common flowers at this time of year



Planigale Creek campsite