

# Drysdale River National Park No. 2: July 3-17, 2022

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

For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts)

**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 never need to carry all your food. It will include an exploration of an area we've long dreamed about as well as our first visit to Petrogale Falls in many years.



Coming in to land on the Drysdale

## 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 2–14** Bush camping, carrying full packs most days. **See the important note at the end.**

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

## *Now for the details.*

**Update by Russell Willis.** When the 2021 Drysdale 1 became fully booked with a wait list, I decided to see what else was possible, as there is a question as to whether or not we can do our normal Drysdale 2 route. I spent some time studying the map and have come up with a variation that will allow us to explore an area I've been wanting to visit since 1992. It will overlap Drysdale 1 by 2-3 days and will include the most spectacular part of that trip. The two trips will be different enough so some might wish to do both.

Earlier is better but WA Parks no longer allow anyone in before 15 June as they feel that they need to burn it every year and won't let people in until that is done. Our float plane operator now has only one place where they can safely land and take off. This means that the flights in and out will all be landing on the same pool a couple of km above Solea Falls.



Aerial view of Solea Falls

Drysdale is the largest and least accessible park 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.



Blue winged Kookaburra

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. Using amphibious aircraft is by far the best way to get there. This trip will consist of two loops of unequal length. We'll decide which comes first closer to departure.

The area through which we walk contains one of the highest concentrations of Aboriginal rock art that we have ever seen in the Kimberley. We will certainly spend many hours exploring some of those sites. Who knows, with so many sites in the area, we may even discover some we haven't seen before. 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.

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.

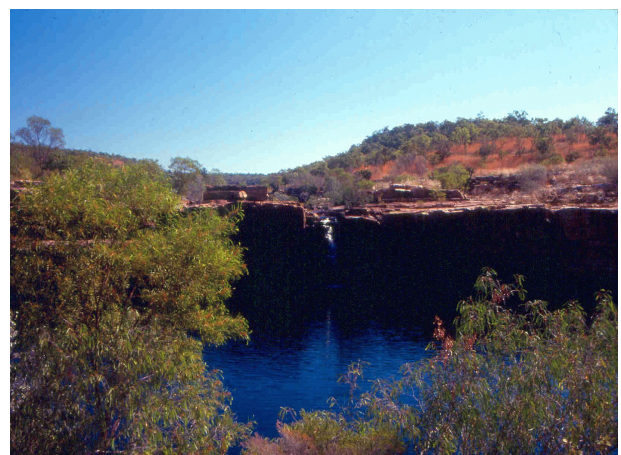
**Loop 1.** Johnson Creek joins the Drysdale not far above Solea Falls. The lower parts of the creek flow through open woodland, an environment very different from that through which we have been travelling. We will take our time and stop to have a close look at the birds and the vegetation at various points along the route.



Barramundi can be found below Solea Falls.



Johnson Creek above Petrogale Falls



Petrogale Falls in a dry year

As we move upstream, the hills close in and the pools become larger. The going becomes a bit scrubby and progress becomes slow, but we are rewarded at Petrogale Falls where we find a large pool and a five star camp site on the flat rock ledges above the falls, a beautiful place for relaxing and fishing. It normally takes a day to a day and a half to reach Petrogale.

From Petrogale, we do a day walk up the creek through some interesting gorges.

Next we head overland to the main tributary of Johnson Creek, passing through some unusual vegetation — almost unique in that it had escaped the ravages of the fires which have destroyed fire sensitive species throughout most of the north the last time we visited. Northern cypress (*Callitris intratropica*), a species which appears to be close to extinction in Kakadu could be found in abundance. It may not look unusual, but we can go several years without encountering small *Callitris* like the ones shown here.



Young callitris





Waterfall, unnamed Drysdale tributary

Depending on time, we may follow the tributary down to Johnson Creek or we may explore new ground as we work our way to a point further south on the Drysdale than we have ever been before. We finish back at our food drop.

**Loop 2.** We repeat a very short bit of Johnson Creek, then turn off and head north to a smaller unnamed tributary of the Drysdale. In 1992 (pre GPS), one of my guides and I were exploring part of this creek and came across an interesting feature we've never managed to find again. We have visited the lower parts of this creek on day walks on previous trips. This time we will be approaching it from upstream with plenty of time so, hopefully, we'll find the site. And, as with the first loop, we should have some day or half day walks without full packs.

We follow it down to the Drysdale and follow the Drysdale back to Solea Falls on the opposite side to the one the first group walked. From Solea, it is a short walk to the pick up point where we began.

### 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 likely to be some stretches of moderately thick scrub. On the final leg to Solea, there may be some rock hopping and some scrambling over large boulders. Above the falls, the terrain gets easier once more. As part of this walk will be new to us, we can't say for certain exactly what we will find.

**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.



Grevillea wickhamii, one of many flowers in bloom at this time of year

**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.

**Packs** **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry 8-9 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent. We do, however, recommend a mossie net if you don't bring a tent. You might not need it, but better safe than sorry.

**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. In deference to the wishes of the traditional owners, we do not publish any art site photos unless we have specific permission to do so.

**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 until you are above Solea (most of this trip). If in doubt, ask the guide.

**Lowlights** Signs of cattle in some places. Carrying up to 9 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, Johnson Creek, Mazzarol and possibly a short section on Wallis Peak.

## Notes

A day pack is very useful on this trip.

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.** 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.

**Air North** is the main airline currently operating into Kununurra but if you are coming from Perth or Melbourne, it's worth checking Virgin Australia as well.

The prices are out of date, but the map at right shows where we hold our pre-trip meeting.

**Important final note.** The float plane dropping us off can no longer drop us off where they used to. This means that we have a choice of repeating one 6-7 km stretch along the river three times or carrying the food for the full two weeks.

After careful consideration, we decided it would be easier to carry it all and have a few relatively short days early on when the packs are heaviest. Doing this should allow us to have a couple of two night camps from which we do day walks without carrying our full packs.



Monitor lizard

