

# Draft Notes: Gibb River Rd Gorges: June 14-28, 2020

This draft is based on our 2018 notes. We know there will be some changes but we are not yet certain what they will be. While we cannot yet give final details, we can say that the trip will include some of the following. Some are things we have done before. Some will be new. The trip will be divided into two sections, Kununurra to xxx, 9-16 June and xxx to Mt Elizabeth and then fly Kununurra, 16 - 23 June. At this point, we cannot say where xxx will be.

On previous trips, we have driven all the way from Kununurra to somewhere near Barnett Gorge, a very long drive. We'll definitely have at least one stop before then.

We will include some of the following – we can't include them all in a mere two weeks. Which ones we choose will depend on permissions and on what we believe is the best combination. As we already know that the connecting Charnley trip will run, we can say that we will finish at the Mt Elizabeth campground, ready for a flight back to Kununurra the next morning.

The following list is east to west. As above, we will double back to get to Mt Elizabeth so the order will be different.

- Cockburn Range
- El Questro
- Barnett Gorge
- Manning Gorge
- Galvans Gorge and the Upper Isdell Gorge
- Charnley River Wilderness Camp
- Mornington
- Bell Gorge and Falls
- Lennard Gorge
- Windjana Gorge

Now the details.

**Cockburn Range.** While we can't do the one week walk we used to do, we can do a one night above Emma Gorge. The photo at the right shows the view from our campsite at sunset. It is one of the most spectacular camps we can have. But getting there and back isn't easy. There are steep climbs at the beginning and end of the loop that takes us there.



This is the campsite at the top of a waterfall, two levels above Emma Gorge. The views are amazing.

**El Questro.** For the past two years, we've had to substitute walks on El Questro for part of the walk we used to do in the Cockburn Range on our Kimberley Highlights trip. The guide and clients thought it was great. We haven't decided which, but we will almost certainly include one or two nights at El Questro along with an overnight walk or some day walks. The El Questro self-guided hikes page, <https://www.elquestro.com.au/explore/activities-and-experiences/self-guided-hikes> gives you an idea of some of the possibilities.

**Barnett Gorge.** Hundreds of people visit Barnett Gorge every year but very few do it the way we will. A relatively short (less than 3 km) walk from the car brings to a campsite near the top of the



Upper Barnett swim stop



Wunnumurra Falls and pool



gorge. We set up camp for two nights. The next day we do a return walk to Wunnumurra Part Wunnumurra art Gorge on Mt Elizabeth Station. There is some reasonably good Aboriginal Rock art in Barnett Gorge. The paintings at Wunnumurra are spectacular, possibly the best we will see on the trip.

**Manning Gorge.** The Aboriginal owned Mt Barnett roadhouse and Manning Gorge campground is only a short distance from Barnett. If we stop there, we do the walk to the waterfall at the top of Manning Gorge, a particularly pretty but fairly heavily visited spot. You can be lazy, play the tourist and stick to the marked track or you can do what some of us did on our last trip and lilo or walk back along the gorge. It's not only beautiful, it's almost untouched.



**Galvans Gorge and the Upper Isdell Gorge.** Galvan's Gorge, the smallest and most easily accessible of the gorges along the road, hardly a gorge at all. It is, however, the starting point for a walk which will take us

[Swimming down Manning Gorge](#)



[Upper Isdell gorge sunset swim](#)



[Upper Isdell campsite – no crowds here](#)

to something really special, the upper Isdell Gorge. A short, easy walk of about 5 km takes us to the top of the gorge. If we stop here, we expect to spend two or three nights exploring both with and without packs as we wander through a magnificent bit of country that will remain forever unknown to non-walkers.

**Charnley River Wilderness Camp.** We have never been there but from what we understand, we need two days to do the place justice. We'd have to stay in the campground, but we can use that as a base to visit Grevillea Gorge, Dillie Gorge, Donkey Hole and Lillie Pool. Getting to Lillie might be a bit difficult, but we could have it to ourselves if we do go there. The best info and photos I've found is on the Kimberley Australia website,

<http://www.kimberleyaustralia.com/charnley-river-station.html> – well worth a look.

**Mornington.** The Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary is owned by the Australian Wilderness Conservancy and managed for conservation values. To get an idea of what is on offer, we recommend you visit the Mornington pages on the Australian Wildlife Conservancy website. Go to

[www.australianwildlife.org/AWC-Sanctuaries/Mornington-Sanctuary/Mornington-General-Description.aspx](http://www.australianwildlife.org/AWC-Sanctuaries/Mornington-Sanctuary/Mornington-General-Description.aspx)

Mornington is 100 km off the main Gibb road, far enough so we may not make the visit if we can't do what we have been able to do in the past: a two night walk in Sir John



[Day walk from Sir John base camp](#)



[Sunset at Sir John camp](#)



[Dimond Gorge canoe trip](#)

Gorge (walk to camp, day walk, walk back out) and a one day canoe trip at Dimond Gorge. (The canoe trip includes some walks to great view points.) They offer other things such as a guided bird or ecology tour, Lake Gladstone and an evening information talk. If we get permission to do the Sir John walk, we'll check out the other possibilities and choose the best on offer.



[Bell Falls](#)

**Bell Gorge and Falls.** Bell Gorge where a series of waterfalls drops down into a long gorge. Depending on how we are going for time, we have the choice of doing a half day walk and moving on or putting on our packs and walking down to camp in the gorge next to one of the many beautiful pools, well away from the 4WD campers. (Camping is not permitted in the area visited by day-walkers.) You don't need to walk far to get away from the 4WD tourists. If we do the walk, we can go down and back along the easier western side or we can do a loop, down the east and back the west. The views are better on the loop, but it is substantially more difficult and requires lowering packs on rope at one point.



**Lennard Gorge.** Although it is only a few kilometres long, Lennard Gorge is bounded by the highest cliffs we encounter on the trip. We plan to carry our packs well away from the vehicle to a secluded camp site well away from the 4WD visitors. From there we do a long day walk. Just how strenuous that walk will be will depend on just how much the group wants to do. Our normal walk takes us along a ridge and down to the end of the gorge, returning



Lennard camp sunrise, less than 1 km from the walking track



Rock scramble, lower Lennard Gorge. Great walk but not easy.



Looking down into Lennard Gorge on the loop walk.

either along the opposite side or by swimming through. (Those who had lilos and swam through on the last trip which did so thought it was one of the real highlights of the trip – sheer rock walls dropping more than 100 metres into a gorge less than two metres wide in places. The swim is, however, very cold.) A much more ambitious possibility is a walk to the top of nearby Mt Herbert, one of the tallest peaks in the Kimberley.

**Windjana Gorge.** Windjana Gorge is a popular spot on the tourist route. On some visits, we've seen a greater concentration of freshwater crocodiles than anywhere else in the Kimberley. If we can get



Windjana. Everyone is looking at something, lower right.



What everyone was looking at in the photo at left.

permission to do the scenic walk through to the very end of the gorge as we used to do, we may include Windjana in this trip.

### Terrain and difficulty

**Overall**

Level 2.

**Climate**

Level 3. Generally dry, average daytime max low 30's, average night minimum 14-18°, but can get below 7°C on occasion.

### Terrain

Level 2-3. Some flat, some steep, some rock hopping. A complete mix. Much of the harder terrain is done with daypacks and much is optional. The walk at Lennard Gorge (probably done without full packs) includes a very steep section which some people find quite difficult. **How hard it is depends on how much you want to do.**

### Vegetation

Level 2. Can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt.

Most of the walking will be fairly open but some will be through thick grasses including spinifex. Gaiters or long trousers and seed socks strongly recommended.

### Hours

Generally 4-6 hours walking per day.

### Packs

**Waterproofing.** If you want to do one of the optional gorge lilo trips, you need to be able to waterproof your daypack.

**Pack weight** - level 2. You never need to carry more than three nights food.

### Art

There are minor sites all through the trip. The best is a big Wandjinna site at Wunnumurra Gorge.

<b>Campsites</b>	Mix of sand, rock ledges and campgrounds. Some bush sites excellent, some less so. Campgrounds can be fairly crowded, more so when close to the road than when further away.
<b>Swims</b>	<p>Good to excellent in most of the gorges and much enjoyed by those from cooler climates. Water temperature may be on the cool side for those used to hot climates.</p> <p>The swim through Lennard Gorge provides you with wonderful views which cannot be obtained in any other way. It is, however, long and cold. For safety reasons, there should be at least one airbed for every two persons or one thermarest for one person doing the swim.</p> <p>If you wish to do this swim, you will need to bring an airbed.</p> <p>Wearing thermals during the swim can help keep you warm and allow you to take the time to enjoy this spectacular area. If some members of the group wish to do the swim and others do not, the guide will have to assess the situation and decide whether or not it is safe for a small group to do the swim on their own.</p>
<b>Lowlights</b>	Sharing campgrounds with a lot of people. Long drives.
<b>Highlights</b>	Tremendous variety of gorge scenery – each gorge has its own special characteristics. Great swimming.
<b>Wildlife</b>	<p>The Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary, a protected area, is noted for its birds. It may be possible to do a short guided birdwatching walk. Best to bring binoculars if you are particularly interested in birds.</p> <p>We may see freshwater crocs in some places.</p>
<b>Fishing</b>	Not great, but possible in some of the gorges.
<b>Maps</b>	<p>The main maps used on this trip are the Kimberley tourist map and the 1:50 000 Isdell (Bell Gorge), Mt Herbert (Lennard Gorge), Messmate Creek (upper Isdell which extends onto Divide hill and Moll Gorge), Barnett Range (Barnett Gorge), Mt Barnett (Manning Gorge) and Mornington (Diamond and Sir John Gorges – Sir John extends onto Glenroy and Warton) topographic maps.</p> <p>The 1:100 000 Isdell (Bell Gorge) and Richenda (Lennard Gorge) maps cover the same areas plus some of the surrounds. The 1:100 000 Packhorse Range covers the upper Isdell. The 1:100 000 Glenroy and Lerida maps cover the Mornington area.</p>

## Notes

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. There will be time to do some shopping in Kununurra. Coles is open to 8 or 9 hours; Tuckerbox (the other supermarket) from 6 am to 7 or 8 pm every day.

A day pack is particularly useful on all sections of this trip.

You never have to carry more than you need for the walk you are doing. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

You should always keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives as you cannot easily get into your pack during the journey. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks and ice creams at several stops on each section.

It is a good idea to have a change of clothes and a towel to take advantage of the hot showers at the campgrounds.

**Be prepared.** This is a bushwalking trip. Although this is one of our easiest trips and none of the walks are particularly long, almost all the walking is off-track. People who have never done any off-track walking are likely to find it more difficult than those who have had such experience.

**Driving.** There is more driving on this trip than on any of our others. The vehicles we use are registered as self-drive hire cars. All are manual transmission Landcruiser troopcarriers with three rows of forward facing seats. If the group is large enough to require two vehicles, the participants will have to do all of the driving of one of them. Even if we have only one vehicle, the guide may want someone to drive if he or she is feeling tired.



Crossing the Pentecost River near the Cockburn Range.

## What do our clients say?

The following comments were provided by Lorraine Billet from Adelaide who did the 2003 Gibb Road Gorges trip just after having done a long walk in Kakadu with the Adelaide Bushwalking Club.

**“Highlights** – definitely the variety within the gorges. I'm surprised that you don't get more people interested in this trip – it suited us well, after Kakadu and my knee problem. We always wanted to do the Gibb River Road but didn't have a suitable vehicle and certainly wanted to do more walking than the average tourist. Maybe it is not challenging enough for the macho walkers, though the gorges can be so.

“Since I have been back, I have been asked what was the main differences between the ABW Kakadu walk and the Willis Walkabouts trip in the Kimberley and which one was better. My reply was the Kimberley was better – we visited 10 gorges – we drove to them all – some of which we then walked between 100m and 5Km to a base camp from which we then did a long day walk, so most of our time was spent in good scenery.

“On the other hand, in Kakadu, there was a lot of walking in flat, high-grassed country between the much fewer gorges, so less time was spent in scenic conditions – and in the Kimberley, the gorges were more spectacular with deeper and much larger waterholes – and, of course, the packs were much lighter.”

*After reading the above, we can't resist adding a comment about Kakadu. With almost 30 years experience walking in Kakadu, we believe that our routes are the best that the park has to offer, almost certainly better than what you would choose if you decided to walk on your own without consulting anyone who has had a lot of experience walking in the park. Now here's a quote from Peter Blackband from Sydney, another participant in that same Gibb Road trip.*

“The time since the Gibb River Road trip has given an opportunity to reflect on those 15 days in the Kimberley. I think that trip is excellent - you cover so much that the private tourist sees and those travelling with tour operators, but additionally, we saw so much more and often that was the best to see. Walking away from the 'end of the road', base camping and day walking took us to so much more than all the other tourists ever see. A great trip and one that I recommend most highly to any person who has had some experience in the bush but wants to experience the Kimberley.”

## 2020 DRAFT Itinerary: Gibb River Road Gorges

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

**Note 2** This itinerary is a **DRAFT**. At the time these notes were written, we had not been able to finalise which places we would visit or the order in which we would visit them.

**Day 0** Those beginning with section one travel to Kununurra. There are daily air and bus services between Kununurra and Perth and Darwin. Most connections to the eastern states are made through Darwin.

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 1-7** Driving walking and camping.

**Day 8** Those finishing here fly out from wherever we are. Those joining, fly in. Continue the trip

**Day 9-13** Driving walking and camping.

**Day 14** Finish walk and drive to Mt Elizabeth. Overnight in the campground.

**Day 15** Fly back to Kununurra.

**Important Note** **Air North**, the main airline currently operating into Kununurra uses some relatively small aircraft with an official baggage allowance of only 13 kg on a few flights. See the Getting Here page on our website or contact Air North for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4001; email: [reservations@airnorth.com.au](mailto:reservations@airnorth.com.au)  
If you are coming from Perth or Melbourne, it's worth checking Virgin Australia as well.

**Pre-Trip** Our pre-trip meetings are at the **Kimberley Croc Motel**. (Formerly called Kimberley Croc Lodge as shown on the map here.) For those joining after section one, we will try and have a pre-trip meeting the night before you start, 6 pm at the Kimberley Croc Motel.

