

Kimberley Coast: Faraway Bay to Lower Drysdale: 27 March – 6 April

List price - \$3695 For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/prices.shtml

Summary. This trip visits little known but spectacular waterfalls, all seen at or near their wet season best. We also visit numerous Aboriginal art site and finish in a flight in a float plane.

This is one of our most ambitious expeditions. Those taking part need above average fitness, the ability to swim at least 100 metres and a sense of adventure as we trek off into the unknown. But be warned, trips like this are always subject to change due to weather or other conditions.

Itinerary

Day 0 **This is the day BEFORE departure.**
Pre-trip meeting, 6 p.m., outdoor area, Kimberley Croc Motel. **This meeting is important.** This is when we will arrange the food drops and the pick up details for the following morning.



Photographing the art RW

Day 1 We get picked up from our accommodation early in the morning, drive to the airport and board the flight to the Faraway Bay airstrip. When we land, we begin our walk, heading west toward the Drysdale River. Bush camp.

Day 2-10 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days

Day 11 Float plane flight from Drysdale River to Kununurra arriving mid to late afternoon. Drop off at your accommodation.

Now For the Details

Almost every time we have done this section, we have made major changes to the route. This trip will be no exception. The description below should be considered as a basic outline, not as an exact description of what we will find.



Monitor Falls camp

TD

From the airstrip, we head roughly north toward an area with a number of interesting Aboriginal art sites and middens as well as some wonderful sea views. We spend the afternoon exploring without packs.

The following day, we move a short distance to a small waterfall which plunges into the sea below. Again there are a number of interesting art sites and a good walk without packs in the afternoon. Sitting at the top of the cliffs looking down the bay at sunset is truly magnificent.

We spend the next two or three days working our way to a major north-south creek. The terrain is a mix of flat and easy plus some very broken rocky country. We have never managed to take the same route twice. Back in the early 1990s before we had a GPS, one group found a major art site which we have never seen since. In 2012, we had a really good look in the area where we thought it should have been. It wasn't there. Now that we have ruled out most of the possibilities, we have a good idea where the site may be. It's a little bit out of the way, but, it's close to a larger creek than the one we camped on in 2012, so, if the group is interested, we'll have another go at finding it.

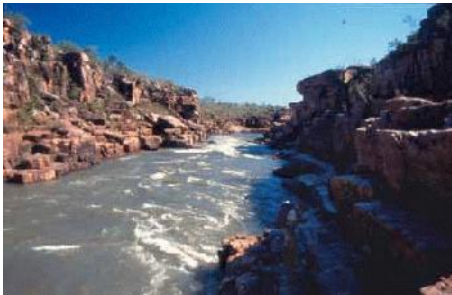


Twin Falls

TD

Once we arrive at the north-south creek, nameless on the map, we'll spend a full two days working our way down past the many huge pools to where it plunges over a tall waterfall into Glycosmis Bay below. A couple of hundred metres away, a second creek plunges over a second waterfall, hence the name Twin Falls (photo previous page).

If we get here in time to spend two nights, we'll have the choice of doing an interesting walk down to a beach below or a drier walk to an area which we have been told contains a good concentration of Aboriginal art sites. Either walk takes most of the day.



Lower Drysdale Gorge, 1995 RW

From here, we head up the smaller creek and work our way to the top of the lower Drysdale River Gorge. We may choose to follow a route we have used before or we may choose to explore further afield in the hope of finding something more interesting. Whichever, we choose, we will eventually enter a labyrinth of broken sandstone which borders the Drysdale – the largest river in this part of the Kimberley.

We then follow the Drysdale down through the lower gorge where flood debris 20 metres up on the cliff tops gives mute testimony to the awesome force of the Drysdale River in flood.

The last kilometre takes us through some of the roughest terrain on the entire trip and brings us out to our final camp, a nice sandy spot just above a fishing camp.

On the final morning, the float plane arrives and takes us back to Kununurra. The flight takes about 70 minutes and gives you very different views of this part of the Kimberley.

Maps. 1:50 000 Drysdale, Sanz, Raff. 1:100 000 Drysdale, Rulhieres & a corner on King George

Notes

This is a major expedition. Although we will be carrying a satellite phone, if a serious accident were to occur, it could easily be several days, perhaps more, before help could be obtained.

Although we will be averaging less than ten kilometres per day, some of the areas through which we will be travelling are quite rugged. This, combined with the need to carry up to 11 days worth of food, makes good physical fitness absolutely essential.

Besides the above average fitness, you need the ability to swim, a sense of adventure and a desire to explore one of the least known wilderness areas in Australia. You do not, however, need to be a superman or superwoman. Some of those who have done previous trips were in their mid to late 60's, a few had never done a walk longer than three days. They all enjoyed the trip.

The trip includes a lot of rock hopping with a full pack on and even a bit of clambering over large boulders. Anyone who has done some off-trail rock hopping is unlikely to have any problem with the terrain. However, we strongly recommend that anyone who has never done any off-trail rock hopping find some place where they can try it and see how well they cope. Most people cope reasonably well right from the start. A few have serious difficulties which are impossible to overcome quickly.

As the trip should include a number of day-walks, you should bring a day pack or bum bag.

Walking in the tropics can be hard on clothes and footwear. You might want to consider bringing something light as a spare if your main item disintegrates.

It may be necessary to float your pack across a creek at some stage. Be prepared. No pack is totally waterproof. The best way to keep things dry is to place them inside two garbage bags or a heavy duty pack liner, sealed with heavy duty rubber bands, inside the pack.

Beware. Plastic bags on the outside of a pack are guaranteed to leak. Even inside a pack garbags last only a short time before tearing.

Although we carry a satellite phone, you need to be aware that no satellite phone is 100% reliable. If we do need help and have to use a PLB, we can't give information about what has happened. This would mean that the response might take longer and might not be as appropriate.

We expect warm to hot conditions, possibly quite humid at times, with relatively little rain for most of the trip. **However, the weather is completely unpredictable at this time of year.**

Bad weather could delay our departure from Kununurra or pick up from the Drysdale River.

Since 1992, we have encountered the tail ends of four cyclones. The edge of Cyclone Chloe in 1995 poured rain on us for a full week and turned the landscape into a quagmire. In 1998, we didn't get a cyclone, but we did get one incredible overnight storm where we had strong wind and over 200 mm of rain. In all three cases, the rain turned the coastal waterfalls into some of the most spectacular sights ever seen on any of our trips.

Those who were prepared had no real problems. Those who were not felt cold when they were sitting still. You do not need the kind of cold, wet weather gear you would need on a walk in Tasmania. You should be prepared with something like a lightweight rain shell or poncho to keep you comfortable if we encounter unusual weather.

If you like fishing, bring a light weight fishing line. It can be excellent in several of the places we visit.

Warning ! Exceptionally severe flooding can cause route changes and/or delay your return. Have a look at the report one of our clients wrote about our 1995 trip and you'll get a better understanding of just what can happen.

http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/kimcoast_avis.shtml

Map. The 1:1 million Kimberley tourist map covers the entire walk, showing you where you are relative to other places in the region.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 5

Climate Level 4 to 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid.

The average daily maximum is 34°C (93°F). Temperatures over 35°C are relatively common. The average nighttime minimum temperature is 21-24°C (70-77°F). The lowest ever recorded is 11°C (52°F). You are not going to get seriously cold, but if there are strong winds, a light-weight windcheater can make you more comfortable. Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is fairly likely but we might not get a single drop.

On average it rains about one day out of three, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. A late season cyclonic depression might make it 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.) It's just as likely that it won't rain at all. This would make it hotter than normal. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.

Terrain

Level 3.

Some sections of the walk are fairly flat and relatively easy. Others involve considerable rock hopping and are moderately difficult. There are a few steep climbs but these are short and over relatively quickly for most groups. As short as they are, these climbs are strenuous. Some may require using your hands to hold on as you climb up or down. None are technically difficult. None require ropes or other special equipment. There will be some places where you have to step from stone to stone as you walk along the edge of a creek.



In really wet conditions, the rain cannot flow away as fast as it falls so you can be walking through water for kilometres at a time. AD

You may have to float your pack across a flooded creek. **If you can't swim at least 100 m unaided, do not do this trip.**

Even in the boggiest of seasons, the Kimberley has nothing that can compare with the mud of Tasmania. However, if you have a particularly wet year, you may find yourself sinking up to mid calf regularly on some days.

None 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 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 2-3. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understorey. 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.

The spear grass normally reaches its peak in March, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We may encounter short sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass during some portion of the trip, but this late it is unlikely that there will be much.

This is the best time of year for wildflowers. Flower photos, T Dixon, 2011.



Hours

Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.

Packs

Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 11 days food. This will include about 3-4 kg of the evening meals. You do not need a sleeping bag but you do need a tent with a fly.

Art We visit a good number of sites. Some areas have much more than others.

Swims This is the best time to see the waterfalls. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.



Cooling off in a lily pond TD

Camp sites Mix of sand and rock ledges and possibly grass. Most sites should be good to excellent but we have to avoid some of our dry season campsites which could get flooded. You are unlikely to see anyone else anywhere along the route.

Lowlights Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down.

Highlights The waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine.

Wildlife Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. Wildlife photos, T Dixon, 2011.



Blue winged kookaburra



Spiny-tailed gecko

You can see a bird list from our 2009 & 2011 trips at www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/kimcoast_birdlist_2011.pdf

Fishing Mediocre in some areas, potentially excellent in others.

Photos Most of the photos here were taken on our 2011 trip. TD = Tracey Dixon, CJ = Colin Johnstone, AD = Allan Donnelly. Photos labelled RW were taken by Russell Willis on earlier trips.



Jewel beetle

Final Note

These notes are based on previous trips. There may be changes due to the weather or simply because we decide to vary the route a bit.

Looking for Aboriginal art sites is an important part of this trip. We will visit the best sites we have found on previous trips and search for others. Although it is not yet possible to date most of the paintings, existing research suggests that the styles we see will range from early twentieth century back more than 10 000 years. If you are not particularly interested in the art, you might still enjoy poking around the various rock formations or perhaps you would prefer to relax near a pool and watch the birds or have a swim while others go exploring. The choice is yours.