

# Kimberley Highlights No.1: May 18-31, 2014

## Section 1: Purnululu (Bungle Bungle) National Park: May 18-24

In mid 2003, Purnululu joined the list of Australia's World Heritage locations. Here's what the Department of Environment and Heritage has to say. "Famous for the 45 000 hectare Bungle Bungle Range, with its huge expanse of striking banded beehive structures, sandstone cliffs and towers, Purnululu has been listed as an outstanding landscape that is a superlative natural phenomenon, revealing the history of its formation over hundreds of millions of years. Purnululu National Park has such outstanding universal natural values that it enriches the world and should be conserved for the benefit of all people. Before 1982, when aerial pictures were first released, it was virtually unknown except to pastoralists, scientists and the local Aboriginal community. It is now seen as one of the scenic jewels of outback Australia."

There are many tours which will take you to Purnululu. No other tour will allow you to experience as much of the park in as intimate a fashion as ours.

The start of our walk is about 330 kilometres from Kununurra, the last 80 kilometres of which is a 4WD track. The drive takes most of the day but we should arrive in time to walk the first few kilometres up Piccaninny Creek.

The next day we continue upstream to a base camp about 12-13 kilometres up Piccaninny Gorge, where sheer red cliffs are silhouetted against the clear blue skies of the dry season. Piccaninny is by far the largest gorge in the Bungles. We spend three or four nights there using the days to explore the many fascinating side gorges. These gorges offer a variety of delights — some are palm filled, some are very narrow and require swimming, some have caves which require the use of a torch. There is at least one gorge that allows us to reach a high point. (We cannot climb to the actual top as climbing up the domes themselves is not permitted because of their exceptionally fragile nature. We can, however, follow watercourses as far as they will take us.) No words can do justice to the beauty of the area. The only way to appreciate it is to come and see it for yourself.



Where would you rather be – here with a small group or in a dusty campground with dozens of others?

This section finishes with the drive back to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 2 have a night in budget accommodation included in the cost of the tour.

### Terrain and difficulty

**Overall** Level 3.

**Climate** Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30°C, average nighttime minimum is 14°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is unusual but we have had moderately heavy rain in June on two occasions since 1986.

**Terrain** **With packs** - level 2-3. The long walk up the Piccaninny Gorge, mainly over pebbles and sand can be quite tiring for many people. Walking through the upper reaches of the gorge requires some clambering over large rocks and includes edging along at least one narrow ledge several metres above the creek bed. On some trips we do this with day packs, on others we carry full packs and make our base camp beyond the first rough section. flat,

**Daywalks without packs** - level 4: includes serious boulder scrambling, steep climbs and at least one walk through a cave.

The climb up one gorge is particularly strenuous. Very few groups have had every member reach the top. If you don't wish to do the rock scrambling, you need to be prepared to relax and enjoy their surroundings while the others continue. Keen birdwatchers often find this especially pleasant. Some people become uncomfortable in the absence of the rest of the group. Please keep this in mind when choosing this trip.

**Vegetation** **With packs** - level 1: minimal vegetation

**Without packs** - level 2-4. Some walks include pushing through sharp and/or sticky spinifex, gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.

**Hours** You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.

**Packs** **Pack weight:** level 3 = one week's worth of food plus stove fuel. However, you do not normally carry a full pack on three of the days.

<b>Art:</b>	Two minor sites, may not be seen by all groups.
<b>Campsites</b>	Mostly on sand, might include rock ledges on some nights.
<b>Swims</b>	Generally very cold and not much water but there are always some pools. If you get past the difficult part on one of the walks, there is a compulsory swim of about 30 metres through a small section of the gorge.
<b>Lowlights</b>	Helicopters intrusive most of day, aircraft early and late.
<b>Highlights</b>	Incredible and spectacular gorge scenery; each gorge very different from the others.
<b>Wildlife</b>	Birds are often a highlight for those who sit quietly and watch. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
<b>Fishing</b>	No
<b>Map</b>	1:50 000 Bungle Bungle or 1:100 000 Turkey Creek..

**Notes for Section 1.** Those who wish to do a half hour helicopter flight over the Bungles will have an opportunity to do so either on arrival or just before departure from the park. Which time we choose depends on when we arrive. (In May 2011, prices for helicopter flights began at \$215.)

The track into the Bungles normally opens in early April. Exceptional weather can, however, close it at any time. If the road is closed, the group will have the choice of paying extra for a flight or going somewhere else.

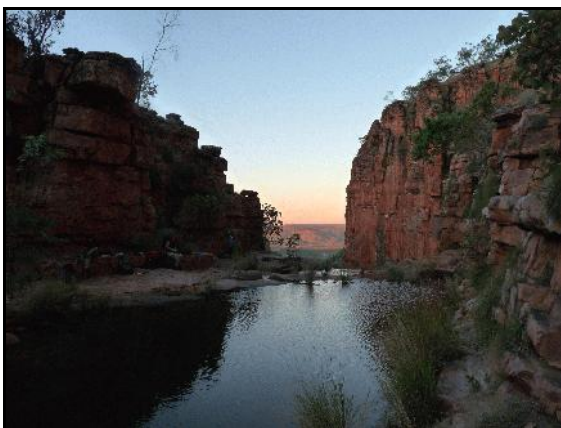
As we wish to allow as many people as possible to combine the Bungles with one or more other sections, we may limit the number of places available for those wishing to do only this section.

## Section 2: The Cockburn Range: May 25-31

Bounded by the King and Pentecost Rivers, the Cockburn Range is a relatively small plateau surrounded by massive cliffs. The view from the road has been described as the "most hauntingly beautiful" in the Kimberley. The interior is even better. The heavily dissected plateau hides deep gorges and spring fed creeks which flow long after the larger rivers in the surrounding countryside have dried to a few isolated pools.

After years of doing north to south through walks and loop walks from Emma Gorge, we finally tried using a helicopter drop off in September 2004. **Wow!**

**Using a helicopter** allowed us to visit more of the most interesting points than we had ever been able to get to on a one week trip before. It allowed more time for swimming (always a good idea in the tropics) and allowed more of the walk to be done with day packs. It cut out a long and somewhat tedious drive as well as the least interesting part of the original walk. It also gave everyone some fantastic views of the Cockburn gorges that could not be obtained in any other way. Needless to say, we've been doing it ever since..



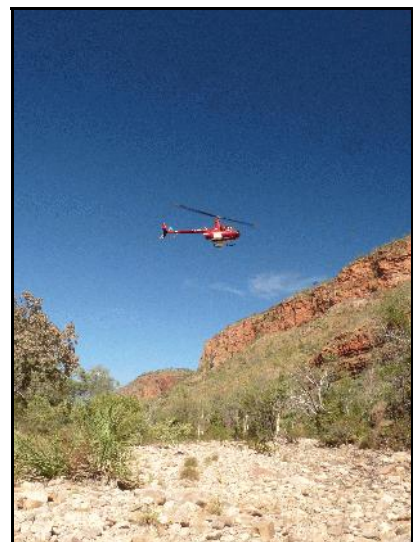
This is one of two campsites at the top of a waterfall. The views are amazing.

The drive from Kununurra to Emma Gorge where we leave the car and catch the helicopter is less than 100 km. After a final cool drink, we fly deep into the heart of the Cockburns where a massive gorge system dominates the landscape. As we move south through the range, we find more gorges, pools, Aboriginal art sites, pockets of lush vegetation and an abundance of birds.

Each gorge has its own special character. Sometimes we carry our full packs, other times a day pack is enough. How much we explore will be determined by the speed and wishes of the group. Some wish to see as much as possible. Others wish to travel at a more leisurely pace allowing them to relax and enjoy their surroundings.

Our walk finishes with a steep descent to the Emma Gorge Resort. After a cool drink from the shop, we drive back to Kununurra. Those continuing on to section 3 have a night in budget accommodation included in the price.

**Notes for section 2.** The local fire pattern means that the vegetation can vary so much that a route which is extremely difficult one month may be dead easy the next.



If there has not been a recent fire, you may have to push through some long sections of thick grass where there is rough ground underneath. This was the case in June 2004 where it was so rough that what should have been a highlight was more like an endurance test for some of the group. On the other hand, if there has been a recent fire as was the case in September 2002, it may be so easy that you go through faster than expected. Most years, the conditions are somewhere in between.

## **Terrain and difficulty**

<b>Overall</b>	Level 3.
<b>Climate</b>	Level 3. Usually very dry, average daytime max 30-31°C, average nighttime minimum is 15-16°C but can get down below 5°C. Rain is very unlikely.
<b>Terrain</b>	<b>With packs</b> - level 3. The walk in or out at the north end is across a flat plain. In the range, most of the walking is relatively flat with moderate rock hopping. There are a number of short, steep climbs and one or two places where floating your pack may be easier than carrying it up a hill or along narrow ledges.
<b>Terrain</b>	<b>Daywalks without packs</b> - level 3-4. The optional side trips includes serious boulder scrambling and steep climbs.
<b>Vegetation</b>	Level 2-4. This can vary dramatically from year to year. There is normally little thick scrub but there may be some sections of thick grass and/or spinifex, gaiters essential, long trousers recommended.
<b>Hours</b>	You normally walk 4-6 hours per day.
<b>Packs</b>	<b>Pack weight:</b> level 3 = one week's worth of food.
<b>Art:</b>	The Aboriginal art sites we have found are widely scattered. Two of the best sites require somewhat strenuous climbs and are not visited by all groups. Those who have the energy for the scrambles should be able to see some particularly good sites.
<b>Campsites</b>	Mostly on dry river bed and rock ledges. May include a grassy site.
<b>Swims</b>	Generally fairly cold. There are a many good pools and most camp sites will be next to a place where you can swim. Floating your pack is easier than trying to carry it around at least one of the pools. You should bring two or three garbage bags to waterproof the contents of your pack for this.
<b>Lowlights</b>	Occasional helicopters overhead. Thick grass if present.
<b>Highlights</b>	Spectacular gorge scenery. Great views of the plains below.
<b>Wildlife</b>	Birds are always present but may be hard to spot. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
<b>Fishing</b>	Possible only at the very north end of the range and unlikely to be particularly good there.
<b>Maps</b>	1:50 000 Mt Cockburn or 1:100 000 Erskine.

## **Notes for both sections**

Day packs are particularly useful on both sections.

Keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you during the drives, especially going to and from the Bungles, as it may be difficult to get into your pack before the vehicle has stopped for the day.

Those doing both sections will have a chance to do some shopping in Kununurra between sections. (Both supermarkets are open fairly late.) You should allow extra money for this. (Cold drinks are almost irresistible.)

Those doing more than one section will have to carry only what they need for each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in Kununurra. It may be possible to leave a few small items in the vehicle.

For those doing both sections, the price of the trip includes budget accommodation in Kununurra between sections. Motel type accommodation is available for an extra charge.

Restaurant meals are included in the price of the trip where you spend the night in town accommodation. Your drinks, however, are not included in the price.

To take advantage of the hot showers in Kununurra, you should bring a towel and some clean clothes.

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.

**Special note.** It is very likely that we will be able to provide free transport from Darwin to Kununurra before the start of the trip. We **may** also be able to provide transport from Kununurra to Darwin at the end. Please contact us if you are interested in this.

## **Terrain and Difficulty — General Information, both sections**

Rain is very unlikely, but it is possible. If you wish to keep your pack as light as possible, leave your tent fly at home. If you wish to be absolutely certain that you won't get wet, bring it.

Almost 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 on our website, [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au](http://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.

## **Itinerary: Kimberley Highlights No. 1**

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

**Note 2**            **This itinerary is subject to change.**

### **Section 1        The Bungle Bungles**

**Day 0**            Pre-trip meeting for everyone doing the Bungles section, 6.00p.m., outdoor area, Kimberley Croc Backpackers. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

**Day 1**            Pick up between 7.30 and 8 a.m. Pick up is 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.  
Drive to the start of the walk.  
Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

**Day 2–6**        Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs at other times.

**Day 7**            Return to vehicles. Helicopter flights if not already done. Drive back to Kununurra.  
Late afternoon drop off at accommodation for those finishing here.  
For those continuing, overnight in backpackers. Opportunity to do laundry and shopping. Bring towel and toiletries to take advantage of hot showers.

### **Section 2        Cockburn Range**

**Day 7**            Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where they will be staying.

**Day 8**            Morning pick up for those beginning with this section. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you will be staying at least a week before section one departs. Otherwise pick up is from in front of the Kununurra Visitors Centre sometime between 7 and 8 a.m.  
Drive to Cockburns. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

**Day 9-13**        Bush camping. Carrying full packs on most days, day packs at other times. There will be several half to full day walks without packs.

**Day 14**        Finish walk at Emma Gorge Resort. Drive to Kununurra. Drop off at accommodation.

**Important Note**        **Air North** (part of Regional Link), the main airline currently operating into Kununurra uses some relatively small aircraft with an official baggage allowance of only 13 kg on some flights. See the Getting Here page on our website or contact Regional Link for more details. Phone: 1800 627474 or (08) 8920 4000; email: [airnorth@regionallink.com.au](mailto:airnorth@regionallink.com.au)  
**Skywest** offers a limited number of flights between Kununurra and Darwin or Perth. Their aircraft are larger. Worth checking.