

Litchfield - Gregory Explorer: May 16-29, 2021

Completely updated 16 Aug 20

This trip is for adventurous people who wish to explore the unknown. The two parks might not sound unknown, but unknown they are.

Section 1: Litchfield National Park: May 16-22

Located less than 150 kilometres from Darwin, Litchfield National Park is a wonderful area full of permanent springs and waterfalls. Although the northern part of the park has been developed for intensive day use, most of the southern part remains an almost untouched wilderness. No more than one in a hundred park visitors goes anywhere near where we will be walking. Not one in ten thousand would go where we will do our walk. The tourist map at right shows what we mean. It doesn't even show the creeks we will walk along: Tableland Creek, Surprise Creek, Mistake Creek, Red Rock Creek and the east branch of the Reynolds River.

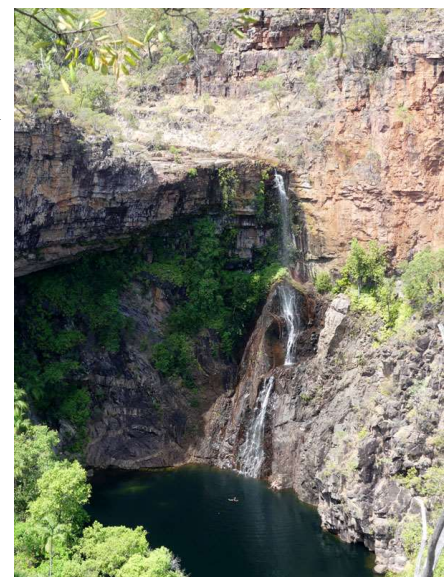


Our final itinerary will depend on a variety of factors including, the fitness, interests and wishes of the group, the amount of water present, the state of the 4WD track through the southern part of the park and the number of participants. If possible, we will do a vehicle shuffle and a through walk. With a smaller group and if some tracks are closed, we might have to do a loop. The description which follows is the route we have used since 2018.

We begin near the Lost City, or if the 4WD track to Tjaynera Falls opens early, we cut a few km off the first day's walk and begin from there. In either case, we camp at a beautiful spot not far above the main falls. It's such a magnificent spot that we'll stop there no matter how early we arrive.

The serious walk begins the next morning as we do a short climb and head south toward a tributary of the East Reynolds. Some groups get there by lunch, but it's such a nice spot that we stop for the day.

From there, we continue south, crossing the main branch of the East Reynolds. Crossing will almost certainly require a wade. The next stretch is one of the driest of the trip so we will need to carry enough water to get us to camp that evening. Our normal camp is in a large area where you have the choice of camping on sand or on rock. Plenty of pools and cascades for a swim.



High view, Tjaynera Falls. The five people in the photo give you an idea of the size.



Litchfield campsite

There are a number of ups and downs as we make our way from one creek to the next. We walk



Enjoying one of the many clear, tropical pools

through gorges, patches of monsoon forest and open woodland. Swims are frequent as we stop to enjoy the many pools we find along the way.



Final campsite, Tableland Creek



Photo stop, upper Tableland Creek

Finally there is Tableland Creek, the largest creek in the southern part of the park. Pool after pool, waterfall after waterfall, swim after swim, it is a magic spot. Most of the walking is fairly easy but there are likely to be a couple of ups and downs along the way. From our final camp, it is only about

an hour to where we meet the vehicle.

At the end of the walk, we drive to Katherine where those doing the full trip spend a night in accommodation. Those leaving the trip at the end of this section have the choice of being dropped off in either Pine Creek or Katherine.

Maps. The 1:50 000 Prospect Hill map covers most of the route. A small part lies on the Mt Tolmer and/or Rum Jungle maps. The 1:100 000 Reynolds River map covers it all.

Section 2: NE Judbarra/Gregory National Park: May 23-29

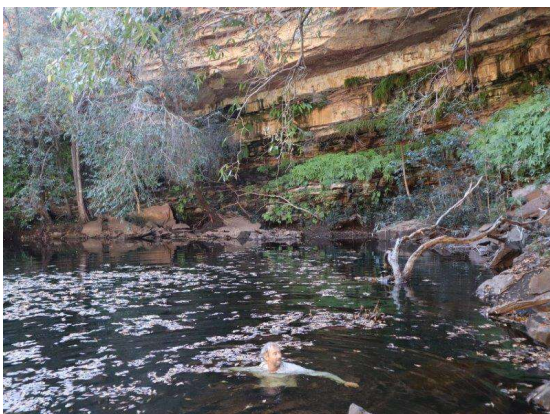
Gregory is one of the largest yet least known national parks in the NT. It lies about halfway between Katherine and Kununurra and contains several creek systems where large permanent pools and shady rock shelters can be found in the depths of sheer, red-walled gorges. The southern and western parts of the park area paradise for four wheel drivers. (They also have some interesting bushwalks.) On this trip, we will stick to the northeast corner, highlighted on the map at right. It may look small, but you need to remember that the road distance from Katherine to Victoria river is 200 km.

You can find more information about the park at <https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park/find-a-park-to-visit/judbarra-gregory-national-park>



The park info says no swimming. True enough near the tracks where most people go, but swimming is safe along most of our route.

On this trip, we plan to do a loop along Matt Wilson and Ryan Creeks in the northeast section of the park. This area contains some of the most spectacular cliffs in the park. We do not visit it on any of our other Gregory trips. The beginning of the walk depends on the level of the Victoria River. If the river is low enough to walk across at the old crossing, we will do so and save a half day's walk. If not, we have to start from the Katherine side of the Victoria Bridge and walk from there.



Judbarra/Gregory swim

The terrain here is more open and flatter than in Litchfield. There are lots of boabs. In 2019, the group saw numerous freshwater crocs. Somehow they have coped with cane toads better here than in Kakadu or Litchfield. While they are crocodiles, unless you actively provoke them, they are harmless.

As we work our way up the valley, we sometimes drop our packs and do an exploration of a side gorge.

Eventually, we climb up out of the Matt Wilson Valley and cross the plateau heading west toward Ryan Creek. We find a number of high, shallow gorges on the small creeks that feed into Ryan Creek.

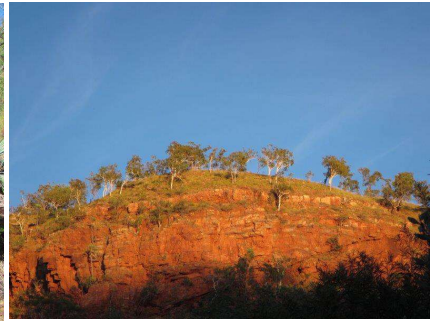


Matt Wilson campsite

Some of the walking is fairly easy. Some has thick scrub and is quite slow. Gregory is much drier than Kakadu or Litchfield so there aren't a huge number of waterholes on the small creeks, but occasionally we even find a small flowing waterfall like the one shown below.



Once we reach the main creek, the going gets easier and the views more spectacular. As we continue the gorges get deeper. Walking on the top is fairly easy but some of the side gorges are deep enough so that we have to drop down to the main creek or contour well around. There isn't a lot of difficult terrain, but as the middle photo below shows, there is some.



Eventually, we return to where we began, climb into the vehicle and begin the 530 km drive back to Darwin. (Some groups prefer to finish on the second last day and camp en route to Darwin.)

Maps. 1:50 000 Ryan Creek and Sullivan Creek or 1:100 000 Hogarth and Gregory Creek.

Terrain and difficulty – both sections

Overall Level 3+.

Climate Level 2. Average daytime max 32°C, average nighttime min 17-20°C. It can, however, drop below 10°C. Generally low humidity. Rain is unlikely but possible. We recommend that you bring a tent or mosquito net with a fly or at least a plastic sheet for shelter if we do get an unseasonal rain.

Terrain Level 3. There is a fair bit of up and down on section one, less on section two. Much of the walking will be along relatively flat terrain on the top of the range or along creeks. There will be some rock hopping. There will be a few relatively short but steep climbs. As the trip is partly exploratory, we can't be 100% sure that we won't encounter some rougher terrain than expected.



Going downhill in Litchfield

Vegetation Level 2-4. Varies from year to year depending on when last burnt. In May, most of the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. Based on past experience, we expect some sections of thick scrub and or spinifex which will make some days much harder than others. There are always flowers in bloom.



Kapok bush, Litchfield



Grassy area, Judbarra/Gregory



Photographing a Kurrajong, Gregory

- ours** Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry 6 days food on each section. You need a light sleeping bag. We recommend a tent or mosquito net with a fly or plastic cover.
- Art** We may visit some art sites on both sections but the art we have found previously has not been as plentiful or as well preserved as much of what we have found in Kakadu and parts of the Kimberley.
- Campsites** Mix of sand, grassy areas and rock ledges. Most sites are good; some are excellent, some no more than average. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.
- Swims** Good pools at most campsites and lunch spots in Litchfield. Good swims in the smaller pools in Gregory but some of the larger pools could contain large crocs. Ask your guide before swimming in the larger pools.
- Highlights** Beautiful gorges, walking on Aboriginal land which has remained virtually unchanged since before European settlement.
- Lowlights** Carrying food for a week. We may encounter thick, sticky spinifex and/or ground hugging vines that make some of the walking difficult.
- Wildlife** Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. Litchfield is better for birds than Gregory or most of Kakadu. Gregory is excellent for freshwater crocs and agile wallabies. The 2019 group saw many great bower birds. You are unlikely to see many other large animals.
- Fishing** Possible in some places.



White faced heron, Litchfield

Notes on both sections

Both sections are intended to be run at a reasonably leisurely pace so that we can have a really good look at the areas we pass through. It is, however, likely that there will be some long days when it will be necessary to cover a considerable distance. Those taking part will need to be fit enough to do this.

Although we intend to run each section as a single long walk, conditions beyond our control might mean that we have to split one or both sections into two shorter walks.

Those doing both sections have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

One or both sections of the trip might include a day or half-day walk. You should either bring a day pack or be prepared to use a full size pack on day-walks.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the journey.

Crocodiles and swimming. Most of the creeks along which we walk present no problem. There are, however, a few places in the lower reaches of some creeks where large crocodiles could conceivably present a danger. Please ask the guide before you swim in any large waterhole.

Itinerary: Litchfield Gregory Explorer

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Litchfield National Park

Day 0 **Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street, the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 8 a.m. pick up. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street.

Drive to Litchfield. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc.
Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Return to vehicles. Drive to Katherine. Those ending with this section may choose to get off in Pine Creek or they may continue to Katherine, arriving in the late afternoon. Greyhound offers twice daily bus services to Darwin from Katherine and Pine Creek. We recommend booking in advance. Please check the bus timetables when you book.
Those continuing spend night in budget accommodation in Katherine.

Section 2 Gregory National Park

Day 7 Those beginning with this section have the option of meeting the group the night 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 the group will be staying. Greyhound offers daily bus services between Darwin and Katherine.

Day 8 Section two begins. 7.30 to 8 a.m. pick up at the Katherine Visitors Centre on the corner of Lindsay Street and the Stuart Highway for those beginning with this section.
Drive to Gregory and begin walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 9–13 Bush camps, carrying full packs. We may choose to return to the vehicle on the final night.

Day 14 Return to vehicles if we have not already done so. Drive to Darwin via Katherine. Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon or early evening.