

Mitchell Plateau No. 2: July 23 - August 6, 2023

2022 List price - \$5995 – the price will rise, we're not yet sure by how much

For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts

Summary. This trip consists of two separate walks either of which can be done on its own. You fly in to the Mitchell Plateau airstrip and later take a helicopter between sections. Lots of waterfalls, lots of swimming, a variety of Aboriginal art sites and beautiful campsites you share with no one but your walking companions.

Itinerary: Mitchell Plateau No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change

Section 1 Lower Mitchell River and the Western Gorge

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 for everyone doing the first section, 6.00 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 Very early morning pick up as arranged at the pre-trip meeting. Fly to Mitchell Plateau. Transport to start of walk. Begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 2–6 Bush camping, carrying full packs most days.

Day 7 Food drop and flight to Donkins Creek. Those finishing here fly back to the Mitchell Plateau airstrip by helicopter and from there to Kununurra in a light aircraft.

Section 2 Donkins Creek and the Upper Mitchell River

Day 7 Those beginning with this section catch an early morning charter flight from Kununurra to the Mitchell Plateau airstrip. Helicopter to meet group.

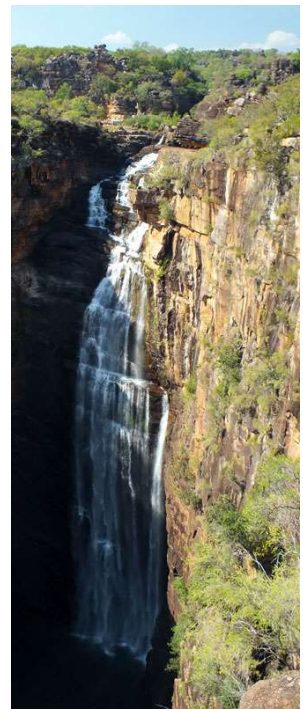
Day 8-14 Bush camping carrying full packs most days.

Day 15 Finish walk. Transport to airstrip. Fly to Kununurra morning, arriving in time to connect with afternoon flights to southern capitals.

Now for the details

Bounded by the spectacular gorges and valleys of the Mitchell and Lawley Rivers, the Mitchell Plateau (Ngauwudu in the local Aboriginal language) is one of the most species-rich areas in WA. The vegetation is dominated by a rare mixture of fan palms (*Livistona eastonii*) and eucalypts and contains some of the largest pockets of monsoonal vine forest in the Kimberley. The region is home to more mammal species than have been collected from any other similar-sized area in W.A. One of these, the monjon (a rock wallaby formerly called the warrabi) was not photographed until 1985. (We have seen a number of monjons on our trips.) Over 220 species of birds have been recorded in the area. If you'd like an example of the birds you might see, see

www.bushwalkingholidays.org/pdf/mp-birdlist.pdf



Donkins Falls, the tallest single drop waterfall in the park



Tawny frogmouth family



Bradshaw or Gwion paintings

The Mitchell Plateau has one of the two highest concentrations of Aboriginal rock paintings we have found in the Kimberley. (The other is the Drysdale River.) We visit examples of all styles including Bradshaw (Gwion) and Wandjina. There is so much art that almost every trip finds at least one site we haven't visited before. Some sites are recent, almost certainly 20th century. Some are ancient, almost certainly predating the pyramids of ancient Egypt.

Section 1: Lower Mitchell River and the Western Gorge: July 23-29



Aerial view of Big Merten (left) & Mitchell Falls, May. There won't be as much water in July, but it will still be spectacular.

The trip begins with a flight from Kununurra to the Mitchell Plateau airstrip. From there we will take a helicopter to the Mitchell River.

We will spend the rest of the week exploring the Mitchell River below the main falls and the Western Gorge, a shadier and narrower gorge than anything else we encounter on the trip.

The lower falls on the Mitchell is little known but just as spectacular as the main Mitchell Falls. We will probably spend two nights there, exploring the nearby Aboriginal art sites and doing a day walk through the lower gorge to the tidal rapids formed where a rock bar blocks the



Swim stop, lower Mitchell Falls

river. At very low tides, you could walk across with dry feet. When the tide changes, the water swirls back up the river with a rush and the bar disappears. (The display is not as impressive during neap tides.)

On day seven, a helicopter (or two) brings in our food and those joining us for the second section and flies us to Donkins Creek just above the main falls. Those finishing with section one are flown back to the Mitchell Plateau airstrip where a light aircraft returns them to Kununurra.

Section 2: Donkins Creek and the Upper Mitchell River: July 29 - August 6



Moving between sections

A helicopter will pick us up from wherever we finish the first week's walk and take us to Donkins Creek. By using a helicopter for a food drop and to transport us across some difficult terrain, we include most of the highlights without a lot of the hard work.

We set up a base camp near our landing point and spend the rest of the day exploring the nearby rock shelters and the area above Donkins Falls which plunges over 100 metres into a narrow gorge. The following day we do a long loop walk down into the gorge below the falls and back. (Donkins Creek and nearby Donkins Hill were named by Philip Parker King in 1819. Mr Donkins provided the tinned meat which made King's voyage much more pleasant for the participants than earlier voyages had been.)

On the third day, we break camp and head upstream through a small gorge. The walking here is slow with a number of small climbs and a substantial amount of rock-hopping. It is so rugged that four km often takes a full day.

The gorge is, however, quite pretty and there are a number of pools where we can stop for a swim and/or to look at whatever birds may be in the area.

Another day's walk brings us to another wonderful campsite in a small gorge. The following day we break out of the rugged country and cross back to the Mitchell River watershed, stopping to explore some of the small creeks where we saw the most wildlife on earlier trips.

Eventually, we reach the Mitchell River itself where we hope to visit another gorge and waterfall no hint of which exists on the topographic map of the area.



Upper Mitchell River campsite



Having a swim in one of the larger tributaries of the Mitchell River

We spend the next couple of days working our way along the Mitchell River to the main Mitchell Falls. Depending on when it was last burnt, some of the terrain along this section can be as slow as anything we encounter in the two weeks. There are numerous Aboriginal art sites, some of which require small detours. Which ones we visit will depend on the speed and interest of the group. As always, there are many inviting pools so there are ample opportunities for swim stops.

When we reach the main falls, we join the marked trail and walk out to the Mitchell Falls car park, stopping to visit Big Merten and Little Merten Falls along the way. A short walk on the final day brings us to the car park where we meet the

transport that will take us to the airstrip from which we fly back to Kununurra.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Average daytime max 30°C, average nighttime min 10-12°C. It has been known to drop to near freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

Terrain Level 3. Although most of the walking is relatively easy, the trip does include substantial amounts of rock hopping. Some short sections will be quite rugged. People without bushwalking experience are likely to find it more difficult than those who have had such experience.

Vegetation Level 2-3. Can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. It is likely that you will spend some time pushing through some fairly thick scrub or grass. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. It may be necessary to push through thick spinifex in some places.

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 6 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.

Art This is one of the richest areas for Aboriginal art in the Kimberley. We visit many sites in a number of different styles.

Campsites Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are very unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites. You may not see anyone else at any of them.



On a day walk near the lower Mitchell Falls



Flat rock campsite

- Swims** Good pools at every campsite. Many opportunities for swimming each day.
- Lowlights** Helicopter noise in the lower Mitchell Gorge. Possibly poor shade at one or more lunch spots.
- Highlights** Waterfalls and beautiful gorge scenery. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites. Helicopter flight.
- Wildlife** You see a variety of birds along the river and have a good chance of spotting freshwater crocodiles. You may see large crocs below the tidal rapids on section one.
- Fishing** Excellent along much of the Mitchell, possibly OK along some of the smaller creeks.
- Maps** 1:50,000 Donkins Hill (most of the trip) & Mitchell River (short bit near the lower Mitchell Falls).



The biggest barramundi ever caught on one of our Mitchell Plateau trips

Notes

It is a condition of our permit and of the permit for any private bushwalkers that everyone in the group familiarise themselves with the terms and conditions listed at <http://www.wunambalgaambara.org.au/visitor-terms-and-conditions.htm>

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. Supermarkets are open to 8 PM, 7 days, so you should have time to do some shopping before the trip.

If only one to three people are doing only one section, we may bring them in or out on a scheduled tourist flight rather than on a charter. This may require a slight change to our schedule.

A day pack is useful.

Some items may be left in the vehicle or at your accommodation in Kununurra during the walk.

You should have a package containing your breakfasts and lunches for the second half of the trip ready for us to leave with the helicopter pilots when we arrive at the Mitchell Plateau. It **may** be possible to leave a small amount of your food for the second half of the trip in cold storage with the pilot.

Crocodiles and swimming. We have never seen a large crocodile anywhere in the area where we will be walking. However, we once met someone who told us that he had seen a large crocodile below Mitchell Falls. There are large crocodiles in the lower reaches of all of the major and some of the minor rivers in the region. There is no barrier to their travel below major waterfalls. We recommend that you restrict your swims to side creeks and small pools unless your guide tells you otherwise.

Helicopters are expensive. Seven people cost us the same as four. Rather than charge a high price which would cover us for four people, we prefer to offer the trip at a reasonable price with a surcharge for a group of four. If only four book, they will be given the choice of paying the surcharge, transferring to another trip or receiving a full refund.

Both sections include visits to a large number of Aboriginal art sites. If you have no interest in these, you need to be prepared to relax on your own while the others are visiting the sites.

Anyone doing only section two who has not notified Willis's Walkabouts where they will be staying before the departure of section one, will have to contact the airline to confirm arrangements. They will need to contact us for the airline flight details well before departure.

Air North, the main airline operating into Kununurra uses relatively small aircraft and may or may not be able to take excess luggage. If you are going to have excess, best to organise this well in advance.

The map at right shows where we hold our pre-trip meeting.

