

Russell's Light Wet Special: February 10-18, 2013 Updated 24 January

The Top End wet season is **spectacular** and, more importantly, **enjoyable**. This is, in many ways, **my favourite time of year**. This trip is a combination of every short walk that I enjoy doing myself. I enjoy them all so much that I agreed to run the trip for as few as two people at no extra charge. Sadly, all those who booked the second section were forced to cancel so this trip represents the first section of the original.

We begin with the 500+ km drive to Victoria River. We should get there early enough to do the short escarpment walk before dinner and a bed at the roadhouse.

We'll spend the next day doing some short walks, seeing some of the waterfalls that only flow at this time of year and visiting one of the largest Aboriginal art sites in Gregory National Park. We then move on to Timber Creek where we do a short trip to a lookout near town. We may stay in Timber Creek or we may continue to Kununurra across the border in the Kimberley. If we go all the way, we'll have a bit of extra time on our hands – not to worry, there's plenty to do.



Late afternoon view from the Gregory escarpment walk



Hidden Valley swim

We'll spend the afternoon of the day we arrive exploring our own Hidden Valley near town, stopping to view some Aboriginal paintings and enjoy swimming in a lovely pool, well used by the locals on the weekends. On a weekday we may have it to ourselves. We spend the night in accommodation as we continue our acclimatisation.

It wouldn't be a Russell Special without a bit of exploration. Local people often visit places like Black Rock Falls and Middle Springs just to the west of the town. We'll be a bit more ambitious and do a loop

walk across the top joining the two. Local bushwalkers have told me about it. I've looked at the map. It looks interesting. This will be the first time I've done it myself.



Upper falls, Middle Springs



On the Ord near the start of the canoe trip

The final part of this section is done in canoes. From Kununurra we are driven to Lake Argyle where we put the canoes in the river just below the main dam. The next five days are spent doing a leisurely paddle back to Kununurra, stopping to do a few day walks up into the hills through which we are passing. Every one of the side walks has one or more waterfalls and plenty of time for swimming. We may make one camp in a bush spot and the other two in formed camps with some shelter or

we may spend all three nights in the formed camps.

Above Spillway Creek, the water level is virtually constant through the entire year. Below Spillway, the water should be fast flowing but manageable at this time of year. As we will be going downstream, less effort is required than at other times. Previous canoeing experience is not necessary. If the Ord is flowing too fast below Spillway Creek, we can arrange for a larger boat to pick us up at that point.



Russell Willis on one of the side walks on the canoe trip, January 2010

We plan to get picked up about ten km before the normal pull out point, avoiding the hottest and hardest part of the paddle. We spend the final night in budget accommodation in Kununurra.

On the final day, you can choose to fly back to Darwin or join us for the long drive. We expect to arrive in Darwin sometime after 7 pm on the last day.

Notes.

Unlike our other trips, **the price does not include accommodation or evening meals while we are in accommodation.** (It does, however, include the evening meals where we are camping out.) This allows you to choose what type of accommodation you want (we can book it for you) and evens out the costs of the restaurant meals which can vary markedly for different people. It also allows us to offer you the lowest possible price.

Incredibly severe flooding could close the Ord below Spillway Creek even to power boats. If this were to happen, we would be unable to do the canoe trip.

In spite of the new bridge over the Victoria River, exceptionally severe flooding could mean that we can't get through the highway between Darwin and Kununurra. It's very unlikely but you need to be prepared, just in case.

Terrain and Difficulty

- Overall** Level 2 – you don't need to carry a full pack except for very short distances from the canoe to the campsites on the Ord section.
- Climate** Level 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid. There will be some nights in air conditioned accommodation. The average daily maximum is 35°C (95°F). If we get a spell of relatively dry weather, the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F). The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is almost certain. On average it will rain every second day, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. Occasionally, it might 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.) Occasionally, it may rain very little. This makes it substantially hotter than normal. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.
- Terrain** Level 1-4. This trip has it all, from easy marked trails to off-trail rock scrambling and a couple of short but sharp climbs. If you have never done this before, you may find this fairly difficult. Much of the walking is through open woodland with a spear grass understorey. The waterfalls on the side creeks that flow into the Ord are at their best at this time of year. Our walks include steep climbs, rock hopping and some scrub bashing. The rewards are beautiful pools and waterfalls which we will almost certainly have to ourselves. These walks are optional. You may relax in the shade near the canoes if you prefer. Anyone who does not regularly do any off-trail bushwalking 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 1-4. 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 early it is unlikely that there will be much.

Hours	Generally 4-6 hours, not including breaks. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 1 – your only overnight carries are canoe to campsite.
Art	We visit several art sites., including some major ones.
Campsites	Three canoe camps. The other nights are spent in accommodation.
Swims	This is the best time to see the local waterfalls, many of which flow only during the Wet. There will be a chance for several swims per day. Many of these will be in pools we have all to ourselves.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can force a change of itinerary.
Highlights	Several waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine. Lack of the tourist hordes of the dry season.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. The Ord canoe trip may give you a chance to see one or more freshwater crocodiles but they are harder to spot at this time of the year than during the cooler months.
Fishing	Possible in the Ord River on the canoe section. Not possible elsewhere.
Maps	The 1:50 000 Sullivan Creek map shows our full day Gregory walk near Victoria River. 1:50 000 Burt Range (the first hidden valley) 1:50 000 Burt Range, Carlton Gorge & Deception Range for the canoe trip.

Itinerary: Russell's Wet Light Special

Note 1	Day 0 is the day before departure.
Note 2	This itinerary is subject to change if weather conditions are extreme.
Day 0	Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn Darwin, 122 The Esplanade. Note. There are two Holiday Inns next to each other on the Esplanade. The meeting is in the taller one, closer to the roundabout at the end of the street. This meeting is important. If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.
Day 1	Drive to Victoria River. Short walk in the late afternoon if time permits. Overnight at the Victoria River Roadhouse motel.
Day 2	Exploring the area near Victoria River & Timber Creek. Overnight at Timber Creek or Kununurra.
Day 3	Finish drive to Kununurra. Visit the hidden Hidden Valley near Kununurra. Overnight at the Kimberley Croc.
Day 4	Black Rock to Middle Springs walk.
Day 5	Bus to Lake Argyle, begin canoe trip down the Ord. Bush camp.
Day 6-7	On the Ord, overnight at fixed bush camps. Side walks to waterfalls.
Day 8	Pick up from Zebra Rock Gallery, return to Kununurra. Overnight in Kununurra.
Day 9	Drive back to Darwin, arriving sometime that evening.