

# Centralian Highlights: 11 April - 1 May 2027

**List price - \$6795 + Expenses.** For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts)

**Summary.** This trip consists of a number of walks ranging from a few hours to a few days. We visit a number of different parks. Which ones we visit will be decided based on the conditions at the time. This trip involves a lot of driving, some of which is on tracks like the one in the photo at right. It is so different to most of our trips that we ask you not to book before you have read these notes in full.



Rest stop, Davenport track

## Itinerary

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

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

### Section 1 Darwin to Alice Springs: 11-20 April

**Day 0** **No pre-trip meeting?** We will be passing through the town of Katherine where you can get last minute supplies so we may not have a pre-trip meeting for this trip. You **MUST** notify us where you will be staying well before departure.

**Day 1** 7 to 8 a.m. pick up from your accommodation if you notified us where you are staying a week or more before departure or if you made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from in front of the Tourism Top End Visitor Centre on Bennett Street.  
Drive to wherever. Accom along the way, probably Renner Springs.

**Day 2** Into the Davenport Ranges. Day walks, camp overnight.

**Day 3** Davenport Range, then drive the Binns Track toward the East Macdonnells.

**Day 4-9** Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs on others. Options as described in the notes.

**Day 10** Final day walk. Drive to Alice Springs. Overnight in Alice. Those doing only section one finish here.

### Section 2 West of the Stuart Highway: 20 April - 1 May

**Day 10** Those beginning with section two need to meet the group in Alice Springs.

**Day 11** Drive west, begin first walk, probably carrying overnight pack.

**Day 12-20** Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs on others. Options as described in the notes.

**Day 21** Finish walk. Return to Alice Springs. Drop off at your accommodation late afternoon. Trip ends.

**Day 22-23** Or day 22-24. Optional free drive back to Darwin, 2 or 3 days, your choice. **This trip cannot run unless we have at least two drivers for each vehicle returning to Darwin.**



Day walk from Boggy Hole track

## *Now for the details.*

The trip will begin and end in Darwin. It will also be possible to finish in Alice Springs. Without at least one driver in both directions, the trip will not take place. The following itinerary assumes that all the main tracks will be open by the time we start. If some tracks are closed, we'll substitute whatever else may be available.

### **Section 1 Darwin to Alice Springs: 11-20 April**

We begin with a very long drive south toward Tennant Creek. We will probably stop at Renner Springs, a bit over 800 km south of Darwin. You can choose to camp have a room.

Not far south of Tennant Creek, we turn off toward the Iytwelepenty / Davenport Range National Park. The Davenport Ranges are on the border between the wet tropics and the arid lands. They don't get a lot but do get fairly reliable summer rains. Also the occasional winter rain. It was a good water source for the local Aboriginal people. The two main places to visit are Whistleduck Creek and Old Policeman's Waterhole. Depending on conditions and permission, we might do a short overnight walk at Whistleduck and a walk of a few hours at Old Policeman's. We'll camp one or two nights somewhere in the park. The campsite shown at right is away from the main one. If we stop there, we should have it to ourselves. When we first visited the minor campsites in 2021, we thought there was potential for a longer walk than we've done before. We plan to check it out this time.



Policeman's Waterhole campsite, Davenport Range, April 2021

The track we use to leave the park is a real 4WD experience. We will spend a lot of time in the vehicles but we will stop for rests and views whenever it seems appropriate.

For more information about the park, see

<https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park/find-a-park-to-visit/iytwelepenty-davenport-ranges-national-park>

On a previous trip, we'd heard about Tower Rock, now known as the Mac & Rose Chalmers Conservation Reserve. This was the first NT Conservation Reserve created by a private donation of land. We stopped in (we needed our own water). We had the park to ourselves. Our only regret was not having a bit more time to enjoy it. You can find more info about the reserve at



Sunset, Tower Rock campsite



Trig point on Tower Rock walk

<https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park/find-a-park-to-visit/mac-rose-chalmers-conservation-reserve>

From here, we plan to follow the 4WD Binns Track into the East Macdonnells.

## • The East Macdonnells: 4-6 days

Arltunga is an old mining settlement where some of the buildings have been restored. There is a short walk, not really a track to a semi-permanent waterhole in Joker Gorge. You might even be able to have a dip. On one recent visit, the Macdonnell mine site was set up so you could actually climb down into two of the mines. Very cool compared to outside. For more information about Arltunga, see <https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park/find-a-park-to-visit/arltunga-historical-reserve>



Arltunga



Russell Willis in Joker Gorge

If someone wants to do a drive instead of a walk, it is possible to do a short through walk from Old Ambilindum to Arltunga. We may decide to spend a night at Old Ambilindum which has a variety of accommodation options from camping through to semi-luxury. For more info see <http://www.haleriverhomestead.com.au/home/> (This was closed in 2022. Not sure if it will be open in 2023.)

Ruby Gap is at the end of a long 4WD track, the turn off for which is near Arltunga. The track is rough and slow but the rewards are there. If conditions are good, we may drive in and spend two nights doing a long day walk up and back through Glen Annie Gorge in between.



Walking through Glen Annie Gorge

N'Dhala Gorge has a pleasant day walk. For those interested in Aboriginal rock art, there are a number of petroglyphs. With several sets of eyes, we should be able to spot more than one person might on their own.



N'Dhala petroglyph

Some of the best walks in the East Macs are in the Trepahina Gorge Nature Reserve. The longest is the Ridgetop Walk. Easy if you have two vehicles or some people who choose to do a shorter walk and meet you at the end. Otherwise it's a final few km along the gravel road at the end. The two photos here were taken on the Trepahina Ridgetop Walk in September 2011. Some years have more water, some years less. We will stop at Jessie and/or Emily Gap on the way back to or through Alice. Emily Gap has some of the best Aboriginal rock art in the region.



## Section 2 West of the Stuart Highway: 20 April - 1 May

We have a number of choices for the western part of the trip. We expect to do the following but can't be 100% sure until we see what the conditions are like at the time.

### • Ormiston Pound, Bowman's Gap & Mt Giles: 2½ - 3½ days

If conditions are right, we'll do something we haven't done for many years and include a walk to the top of Mt Giles for one of the most spectacular views in central Australia. We follow a marked track into Ormiston Pound, set up camp near a waterhole near the base of Giles. The next day we go to the summit and back. If time permits, we then carry our packs to a waterhole near Bowman's Gap. This is followed by a daywalk without packs to Bowman's Gap where we find one of the largest permanent waterholes in the Centre.



Walking into Ormiston Pound



Having a swim at Bowman's Gap



Ormiston Pound campsite

To return to the vehicles, we have two choices. If water levels are low, we may be able to do a loop walk. If they are high, the choice is float packs or back the way we came.

Hugh Gorge is one of the most spectacular gorges in the ranges. If we do the walk, we'll drive to near the gorge, set up camp and do a long day walk through, perhaps looping back through a different gorge.

### • Boggy Hole Track: 3-3½ days

The Boggy Hole Track is one of the NT's best 4WD experiences. It can, however, get shut by particularly wet conditions. The two best walks along the way are half a day above Boggy Hole and a full day into Circular Valley, cut out by the Finke River which has since changed its course. The photo at right shows driving through the water in a wet year. In some years, the vehicle stays dry. The photo at the far right was taken in a drier year where we did the walk to Circular Valley. It shows a bit of just how rugged parts of the walk are.



Map check on a daywalk, Circular Valley in the background

There is a waterhole not too far below the top of the walk. We hope to collect water on the way, carry it to the top and enjoy a night in one of the most spectacular campsites in the Centre. The photo at left was taken on a day walk and is near where we hope to camp.

## • Watarrka National Park: 3½ days

We begin before we actually enter the park. We leave the Boggy Hole Track and turn onto the Giles Road where we turn right and head toward Kings Canyon, stopping at Kings Creek Station where we plan to do the nearby late afternoon Karrke Aboriginal cultural tour. We were so impressed when we did it in April 2021 that we felt we had to include it again. See <https://www.karrke.com.au/>



Explaining a painting on the Karrke tour

Kings Canyon is a tiny part of the large Watarrka National Park. In keeping with the wishes of the Aboriginal traditional

owners, we will base our walk on the Giles Track, making only minor detours to have a look at interesting things we find along the way.



Once on top, the track is fairly flat

The Giles Track is a little known gem. Most people take two days. A few walk it in one. We plan to spend four so that we can take our time and appreciate all it has to offer. If time permits, we will include the more famous Rim Walk at Kings Canyon as well.

On the final day, we finish the walk, have lunch at the resort and drive back to Alice Springs via the Mereenie Loop road.

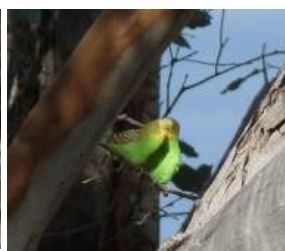
## Section 3 Optional Return to Darwin: 1 to 3 or 4 May

In order for this trip to run, we need at least one extra driver if we use one vehicle. At least three if we have two vehicles. It's all bitumen so 4WD experience is not necessary. However, the vehicles are manual transmission so all drivers need to be able to handle that.

We have the choice of flat out for two days, or taking three so we can have a bit more time to enjoy the things we pass along the way.

## Flora and Fauna

After major rains, the desert springs to life. Flowers are everywhere. The small animals that live in the vegetation are often more active and easier to see. The photos below give you a taste of what it can be like. All were taken on our September 2010 Green Centre trip.



**Notes. This trip is different. Please do not consider booking unless you have read and studied the following notes carefully.**

- a. The vehicle or vehicles we will use are 4WD Toyota Landcruiser troopcarriers with three rows of forward facing seats or a twin cab Toyota HiLux. They all have manual transmission. We cannot run the trip without extra drivers.
- b. The trip will not run unless at least two people want to drive down from Darwin to Alice Springs and at least two people want to drive back. The drive back will take at least two days.
- c. There are a number of places where we may stay in accommodation or in a paid camp ground. As we cannot be sure which they are, camping and accommodation fees are not included in the price of the trip. We will almost certainly stay at **Kings Canyon Resort** in Watarrka. See <http://www.kingscanyonresort.com.au/> . You can choose whether to camp or stay in accommodation. We don't all have to choose the same thing.

### **Special Price – \$6795 + expenses.**

Our standard discounts apply. See [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts)

Running the trip on a share expense basis the last four times it's run worked well enough so that we are doing it again. **No expenses are included.** This will keep the overall cost as low as possible.

You will have to pay camping and accommodation fees, a share of fuel, \$15 per evening meal cooked on the camping sections plus a share of 40 cents per km to cover some of the wear and tear on the vehicle or vehicles. **The vehicle(s) has to come from and return to Darwin, so everyone pays the same whether or not they get off in Alice Springs.**

Depending on how many nights we spend in accommodation and on your choices on those nights, our estimate of the total expenses is somewhere between \$900 and \$1300 per person. It was about \$800 on the last trip but will definitely be more this year.

### **General Notes**

As a safety measure, it may be necessary to carry 2–3 litres per person on some days. We will, however, plan to camp near water every night unless we decide to camp on a high point to enjoy the sunrise and sunset views.

Refillable wine bladders are a good way to carry extra water. They should be used as an addition to rather than as a replacement for your normal water bottles.

Centralian spinifex is particularly sharp and can penetrate most lightweight shoes. Strong boots and heavy gaiters are recommended.

As the trip will include a number of day-walks, you should bring a day pack or be prepared to use a full size pack on day-walks.

You will have to carry only what you need for each walk. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle(s).

Central Australian weather is highly variable. Although rain is unlikely, it is possible. One of our groups even had a bit of snow. Normal daytime temperatures reach the mid to upper 20's, but extremes can go to the high 30's or not get out of the low teens. Nighttime temperatures can drop to near freezing. You must be prepared for anything.

It will be possible to do some shopping in Alice Springs between the East and West sections. If you want to do some shopping before the trip, Coles and Woolies are both open late.

**You need to keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you in the car during the drives** as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the day.

The relatively new 1:100 000 West Macdonnell National Park maps and the 1:100,000 Watarrka map are the best available maps of some of the areas where we will be walking. One side is a standard topographic map; the other is an aerial photo. The combination is far better than anything that was available before.

## Terrain and difficulty

**Overall** Level 2-3. You shouldn't have to carry a full pack for any great distance. Moderate distances on the Ormiston and Watarrka walks. You may need to carry it other times as well.

**Climate** Average daytime max high 20s C, average nighttime min 10-15°C. Night temperatures can drop to near freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely but possible, you **must** be prepared.

**Terrain** Level 2-4.  
Even if we choose the easiest possible routes, the pack carrying portion of this section will include several moderately steep climbs and some rock hopping. Day walks can be quite long and quite steep. One of the possible day walks includes a very steep climb where you may need to use your hands to help pull you up.



Watarrka dunes

**Vegetation** Level 1-2. Varies from year to year depending on when last burnt. Vegetation presents very little problem. In some areas the spinifex may be dense enough to make heavy gaiters and long trousers essential.

**Hours** Generally 4-6 hours of actual walking. A few days on the day walks might be longer.

**Packs** **Pack weight** - level 2-3. Depends on which walks are included. Even on the longest walk, you will need to carry only 5 days food. You need both a sleeping bag and a tent. You should also carry rain gear. The popularity of some of the campsites means that firewood may be scarce so we will carry a stove and fuel.

**Art** Some in the East Macdonnells, maybe elsewhere. Not a lot.

**Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges and maintained campgrounds. In some places, we will camp next to the vehicle. Most sites are good to excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at some of the campsites.



Ruby Gap campsite

**Swims** Swimming is likely to be possible in a few places. The water should be cool, but not as icy as in June and July.

**Lowlights** You are likely to see other walkers in a few places and will almost certainly meet some fairly large groups at the more popular spots like Ormiston Gorge and Kings Canyon.



Ormiston swim

**Highlights** Spectacular mountain views. Deep gorges. Wildflowers and waterholes.

- Wildlife**      Birds are always present but you are unlikely to see many large animals. If you keep your eyes open, you have a good chance to see rock wallabies in some of the gorges.
- Fishing**      Not good but conceivable at Boggy Hole and Bowmans.

## **Want more info?**

We prepared a series of four short videos, total length of less than 12 minutes, when we were advertising the 2021 Centralian Highlights trip. The special offers at the end of two of them were only valid then but the rest of the info is just as relevant today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OJ-4WJI4RQ&list=PLSfNhnYyJZXk976KgvVJlqqrxtPKsJj56>

## **Final note on the return to Darwin**

Our preferred option is three days. We would spend the first night either at the Devils Marbles Hotel or in the Devils Marbles campground. This allows us to see Karlu Karlu (Devil's Marbles) at its best, sunset and/or sunrise. The second night would be in Mataranka. This allows us to go to the hot springs first thing in the morning before the crowds arrive. We've now done this on several trips. All agreed it was the best possible way to enjoy the area.