

## Willis's Walkabouts Bushwalking Guide: PDF Version

**It is absolutely essential that you read this document as soon as possible after receiving it.**

If you don't want to do that, please cancel your booking and go with another operator. You have seven days from the time you receive this to request a full refund with no cancellation fee.

Please note, this version is not as easy to read as our actual booklet. It is missing all of the illustrations but it does contain all of the most important material. It is also more up to date than the printed one. If you would like the printed version, please let us know and we'll post it straight away.

**The absolute minimum level of fitness you need for our **easiest** trips is to be able to comfortably walk 10 km (6 miles) in 2½ hours while carrying an 8 kg (18 lb) pack.**

You will never have to walk this fast on any of our trips, but your ability to do so is a good indicator of whether or not you are fit enough to cope with the conditions you will encounter."

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## INTRODUCTION

It is extremely important that you read all of this booklet. It contains vital information such as what to bring and planning your travel arrangements. There are two things to remember above all others.

1. The less you carry, the more comfortable you'll be carrying it. (Your pack should weigh about one third less in the tropics than it would in a cooler climate.)
2. It is almost impossible to drink too much water. Those who drink early and often are going to cope with the climate much better than those who do not.

## I. WHAT TO BRING

This section is especially important for those who have had little or no previous bushwalking experience. Unless you are particularly strong and of well above average fitness, your pack should weigh no more than 25 to 30% of your ideal body weight. (Women should generally try to stick to the low end of the scale.) For example, if you are not overweight and weigh 60 kg, your pack should weigh no more than 15-18 kg. If you weigh 70 kg but should weigh 60, the pack weight should be the same as if you actually did weigh 60. When weighing your pack you need to remember that your share of the evening meals will weigh about 2 to 2½ kg for a trip of five days, more if you are carrying food for a longer period. If you are having your breakfasts and lunches provided, they will weigh a similar amount. An easy way to weigh your pack is to weigh yourself both with and without it and find the difference. People who are accustomed to carrying particularly heavy packs can carry more but even they should make sure that they carry less than they would in a cooler climate. A pack which is too heavy is more likely to lead to injury, accident, sore knees or feet than one which is not.

### A. ESSENTIAL ITEMS — ALL TRIPS

- 1) In your pack: the pack itself, shelter, something to sleep on, something to sleep in, eating utensils, two one litre water bottles or the equivalent, a torch, personal hygiene and first aid gear and your food. Weigh your pack before adding anything else.
- 2) You should wear: boots or shoes, socks, a shirt with a collar, shorts or trousers, underwear, a hat, gaiters. Nothing else is essential.

**Pack.** A good comfortable pack is your single most important piece of equipment. It needs to have a frame, either internal or external. If your own pack has proved comfortable elsewhere, it should be suitable to use in the tropics. If you are planning to buy a pack, it is important to try it on fully loaded before you buy it to make sure that it fits you properly. An ill-fitting pack can cause a great deal of unnecessary discomfort.

**Shelter.** During the dry season in Kakadu and the Kimberley (May through October), tents are not necessary. If you do want to use a tent, the ideal situation is to share it with someone. Free standing tents are best as some campsites will be on flat rock ledges where it is impossible to use tent pegs. (You can, however, always peg a tent out with rocks and lightweight rope.) The best tents for tropical conditions are "mossie domes" -- free standing, fully enclosed, with walls of 100% fine mesh netting. Add a fly and they are also good in wet conditions.

A good, lightweight, nylon mosquito net weighs less than a tent and provides protection from dew as well as mosquitoes. The addition of a lightweight tent fly will make it weather proof. During the

Build Up season (Oct-Nov) a good option is to carry a mosquito net and use your tent as a refuge in case of rain. Even during the height of the wet season, a properly pegged out fly and mosquito net can be more comfortable than a tent which is designed for a colder climate. (Setting this up is, however, notably more difficult than setting up most tents.) During the dry season, a fly can be considered as insurance rather than as a necessity. The total weight of your shelter or your share of a shelter should be 2 kg or less.

**Something to sleep on.** Air beds tend to be more comfortable than foam mats as they even out bumps better than anything else. Thermarests seem to rank somewhere in between. Both airbeds and thermarests can be used to float packs, something which is done on many trips. Nylon coated vinyl airbeds weighing up to about 1.2 kg are the best compromises between weight and durability.

(The cheap plain vinyl ones are very unlikely to last out a trip and heavy rubberised fabric airbeds weigh too much.) If you do use an airbed, make sure that it weighs no more than 1.2 kg. Check to see that the ground is clear of anything which might puncture it before you set it down. Never leave it inflated in the sun. The increased air pressure caused by the heat is likely to cause it to burst.

Foam mats weigh less than airbeds and have the further advantage that punctures are not a worry. Ground sheets are always useful, essential without some sort of sleeping mat. They also help protect air beds and thermarests from punctures.

**Something to sleep in.** In Kakadu, a sheet or lightweight blanket is generally sufficient from October through April. At other times, a lightweight sleeping bag is recommended. Temperatures in Kakadu have been known to drop below 10° C in June and July. The Kimberley is somewhat colder. A suitable sleeping bag should weigh no more than 1½ kg.

**Eating Utensils.** Everyone needs a bowl and a spoon. If you wish to keep your weight down to an absolute minimum, the bowl can be used as a cup. A cup and a knife will be useful for most people. A plate and a fork can be considered as optional extras. (Forks are, however, very good for things like spaghetti.) Metal bowls and plates often become too hot to hold comfortably. We recommend sturdy plastic instead.

**Two one litre water bottles.** These are absolutely essential. (In the Red Centre, you need to be prepared to carry up to four litres, six litres if there is to be a dry camp.) They will not have to be filled all of the time, but will be needed for crossing from one creek system to another. Having two bottles instead of one larger one ensures that you will still have water if one bottle gets broken. If care is taken, soft drink, some cordial bottles and wine bladders can be used satisfactorily. Most of the plastic cordial etc. bottles found in supermarkets can crack easily unless well protected. Wine bladders can be used if they can be protected in some way. Hard plastic is better than soft. Most plastic soft drink bottles work well.

**Torch.** A small one is sufficient, but it is a must. On long trips you should bring a spare set of batteries (have it brought in with the food drop or left with the vehicle) and an extra bulb or two. There is very little twilight in the tropics. In the Top End, it will normally be dark by about 7 p.m., a bit earlier in the Dry and a bit later in the Wet. You will be up for at least a couple of hours after dark so you will need the torch to get around. It is really a nuisance to those who have brought torches to have to keep lending them to those who have not.

**Personal Hygiene and first aid gear.** You will need toilet paper (no need for a full roll), a toothbrush, toothpaste (use a small tube), sunscreen (choose one that gives a high degree of protection, is water resistant and not too greasy), insect repellent (choose one which contains at least 18% DEET), personal medication, aspirin or similar if you are prone to headaches, additional

protection if you are prone to blisters. (See also "antibiotics" in section B3 near the end of this chapter.)

The guides have a reasonable amount of anti-blister material, but their supply is limited and for emergency use only. Popular remedies such as 'Moleskin' and 'Spenco Second Skin' do not work as well in hot, humid conditions as they do elsewhere. The best we have found is breathable (not waterproof) Leucoplast. Band-aids may be useful for small cuts, but they are almost useless when it comes to treating blisters. If you feel a hot spot developing, **stop immediately** and treat it then. Do not wait for it to turn into a blister.

Bring a trowel for burying excrement (shit) or borrow ours. Contact lens wearers should bring the necessary sterilising agents, including a small billy if they need to be boiled. Optional extras include things like a comb or hair brush, ear drops, eye drops (but only if they can be stored in high temperatures), vitamin pills, needle and thread, something to prevent chafing. (Anti-chafing powders do not work well in hot, humid conditions.) Soap is never necessary. Leave soap and deodorants at home. If you have 1 kg or more of personal hygiene and first aid items, you have too much.

**Food.** Willis's Walkabouts provides your evening meals. These are based mainly on pasta, rice or beans. All will contain substantial amounts of vegetables. Most will include fish or meat — these can be omitted for vegetarians. We do our best to ensure that the meals are both nutritious and tasty. Take care with your share of the evening meals. Keep it dry, out of the sun and don't crush it in your pack. Those providing their own breakfasts and lunches should consult the food section in this booklet.

**Footwear.** Sandshoes or runners are enough for some people if they are in new or near new condition. However, all trips involve some rock hopping and many people have found that thin soled shoes of whatever type are not satisfactory. Those who prefer such footwear usually choose shoes with good, thick, shock-absorbing soles. Good hiking boots, however, can prevent sore or fallen arches and sprained ankles. The extra support that boots provide can be particularly important on long trips when packs are heaviest.

Some of the new non-leather hiking boots are particularly good. However, both spear grass and spinifex can penetrate all but the heaviest boots so be prepared for the occasional stop to remove them. Leather boots or shoes, if well broken in, are quite suitable. Please be careful bringing your old favourite boots on one last trip. Our guides have repaired many boots which weren't up to the task. Be warned that Willis's Walkabouts has seen many boots and runners disintegrate very quickly. This is true of both cheap and expensive makes. There is no particular brand which we are able to recommend wholeheartedly. A spare pair of lightweight shoes is excellent insurance on the longer wet season trips. If in any doubt, choose boots. If you are planning to wear boots on the trip, make sure that they and your feet are well broken in. Bad blisters can easily ruin a trip.

Whatever you wear should be able to breathe and let sweat evaporate. Teva sandals or similar may be used around a campsite and can be used as emergency shoes. Thongs are not recommended as they can be positively dangerous when climbing rocks, as is necessary around many campsites.

**Socks.** One good pair is enough if you keep washing them. A second pair can give the first time to dry and can add extra padding to overlarge boots.

**Collared shirt.** The collar helps protect you from the tropic sun and decreases the need for chemical

sunscreens. Long sleeves are hotter but offer protection from the sun and scratches. It should be loose fitting for comfort and coolness.

**Shorts or trousers.** Shorts are cooler but trousers offer more protection from scratches and the sun. They are essential on Red Centre trips. Some people develop rashes from pushing through the tall grasses. If you think you might be so affected, you should wear trousers. Both shorts and trousers should be loose fitting and lightweight or they may be too hot for comfort. Tight shorts or trousers are likely to cause chafing, especially in wet conditions.

**Underwear.** This can be washed and dried at a lunch break. Some people prefer to do without underwear, especially in wet conditions.

**Hat.** Absolutely essential as sun protection. A good wide brim is best. Felt and straw hats keep their shape better than cloth ones in rain. Straw will, however, eventually disintegrate on a long wet season trip. Cloth absorbs perspiration and keeps the sweat out of your eyes. Straw hats are the coolest. Please remove your hat at art sites to prevent the possibility of inadvertent damage to painted surfaces.

**Gaiters or 'seed socks'.** These are leg (or sock) protectors which fit over the bottom of your legs and over the top of your shoes or boots. They protect the lower leg from scratches and protect your socks from seeds, especially important at the end of the Wet. They are cooler than trousers while still offering good leg protection. Lightweight ones which are easy to put on and take off are best in the Top End. We have a limited number of cotton and synthetic gaiters for hire. We recommend gaiters to all walkers for both comfort and protection against cuts and abrasions which are susceptible to infection.

**Travel Insurance.** This can be considered essential. If you are forced to cancel a trip at the last minute, you could lose your entire fee. If you were injured, you might be liable for the cost of the evacuation. This could easily cost up to \$3000, conceivably more. If you dropped an expensive camera or other piece of equipment into the water, you could lose hundreds of dollars. Any travel agent or insurance broker can sell you a policy. However, read the conditions before you purchase any travel insurance policy. Some policies do not cover wilderness evacuations of any type. **Be warned.** No travel insurance policy sold in Australia will cover an evacuation which could have been covered by medical and/or ambulance insurance. On the other hand, medical and ambulance policies are unlikely to cover most non-emergency evacuations. To be absolutely safe, you need both types of cover.

## **A2. EXTRA ESSENTIAL ITEMS — RED CENTRE AND PILBARA**

**Shelter.** In central Australia and the Pilbara, rain is unlikely but it can happen at any time and, unlike the Top End and Kimberley, it can be cold. Tents are strongly recommended.

**Rain jacket/Windcheater.** It is often quite windy in central Australia. A windcheater can add greatly to your comfort without adding much to the weight of your pack. Having a good, lightweight raincoat on a rainy day can make the difference between being reasonably comfortable and dangerously hypothermic. Consider it an insurance policy. (In an emergency, you can cut holes for arms and head in a garbage bag and use this as a raincoat.)

**Sleeping bag.** Winter temperatures in the Pilbara have been known to drop to freezing. Nights in the Red Centre are often well below freezing. A good sleeping bag is essential in these locations. See the climate charts (Chapter 11) for further information.

**Thermal underwear or sweater.** You are unlikely to need anything heavy, but an extra layer of insulation is necessary in the evenings at camp.

**Footwear.** We strongly recommend boots on our Red Centre trips where the spinifex is stronger and sharper than the northern varieties.

**Gaiters.** Heavy duty gaiters are an absolute must on Red Centre trips.

## B. NON-ESSENTIAL ITEMS

**Money.** Every trip makes at least one stop both going to and coming back from the walk. Most people like to purchase cool drinks or 'junk food', especially at the end of a long trip. Unless you are trying to make certain you don't give in to such temptation, carrying some money is going to make your return journey more enjoyable. Keep your money with you, not in your pack, during the drives. It is generally difficult to get into your pack during the drives.

**Garbags.** Packing your gear in a garbag inside your pack will ensure that it remains dry during rain and during pack floats. Using two or more garbags allows you to keep wet things separate from dry ones. A garbag over your pack at night can protect it from rain or a heavy dew. Although not as sturdy, garbags can sometimes replace a pack liner during the Wet.

**Bathers.** In public places such as at Gunlom, Twin and Jim Jim Falls, you will need to wear something while swimming. Your clothes or underwear can be used instead of bathers. Elsewhere, you need wear nothing at all. Whatever you choose, you can be sure that there will be plenty of time for swims. Swimming in the many pools is one of the things which make the trips so enjoyable for most people.

**Towel or sarong.** A large towel weighs too much. A small one or a sarong is sufficient to dry yourself after a swim. Or you can just drip dry. Sarongs also make good camp attire and can be used as bedding. Chux cloth can be used as a towel.

**Change of clothes.** One is sufficient as what you wear can be washed and dried daily. A clean T-shirt can be comfortable to wear in camp and can be worn while your walking shirt dries. If you must have more than one change, have the clothes brought in with a food drop or left with the vehicle if it is remaining with your trip.

**Raincoat or Poncho.** a lightweight raincoat or poncho can protect both you and your gear but, if you do bring one, remember that it will be quite warm and you are likely to sweat so much that you quickly get soaked anyway. Most local bushwalkers do not bother with rainwear even at the height of the wet season. However, an active monsoon trough or cyclone can produce rain that lasts for hours or even days. The raincoat may not keep you dry but it will keep you warm. (If you choose not to bring such a garment, some people find that wearing nothing is warmer than wearing cotton.)

**Fly veil.** Wide mesh designs keep flies away from your face almost as well as tight mesh and offer more ventilation. Flies are usually not a great problem, but they can become so, especially in the Centre and from October through march in the Top End and Kimberley. Some people seem not to be bothered. Others want all the protection they can get.

**Camera and film.** Most people like to take pictures. A few camera fanatics discover that they are carrying far too much gear for comfort. Others are used to the extra weight and are willing to do without other things. If you bring a camera in the wet season, be sure to bring something in which it can be kept dry while floating your pack or during rain. Make sure you know how to expose for the

low light situations encountered in shady gorges. Keen photographers might also wish to carry a lightweight tripod.

**Sketch pad & drawing materials.** There will normally be plenty of time to relax and do a bit of drawing if you wish.

**Foam Pad.** A small piece of the kind of foam padding used in sleeping mats makes a nice seat and can also be used as extra padding for your pack.

**Day pack.** On many trips, we may set up a base camp for an extra day somewhere just to rest and explore an area in some depth. A day pack can also be used to store items within your pack. The trip notes will tell you how useful a day pack will be on the trip you have chosen.

**Map and compass.** These make it easy to follow your progress. If you do not wish to carry them, you can always refer to the guide's maps. Willis's Walkabouts has maps for sale. See Chapter 13.

**Diary & pen or pencil.** If you like to keep a record of what you've done.

**Binoculars.** A lightweight pair can be well worth the effort of carrying, especially for bird watchers.

**Umbrella.** On wet season trips, a small collapsible umbrella can offer good camera protection when taking pictures in the rain and can make it a bit more comfortable when sitting around in the rain as may happen during some breaks. A few people use them as sunscreens while walking in open country.

**Fishing line.** Fishing is now prohibited in all of the best bushwalking areas in Kakadu. However, some of the other trips, especially in the Kimberley, offer good fishing. Any fishing gear should be as light as possible.

**Swim goggles.** In the Dry, most creeks are crystal clear. Some people enjoy exploring underwater. A mask weighs too much.

**Books.** on many trips, especially during the hotter months of September through December, you will have time to relax and read. Keep the weight of anything you bring to a minimum — others are likely to bring books too so sharing is usually possible. Keen birdwatchers or plant enthusiasts might wish to bring an appropriate field guide.

## B2. ADDITIONAL ITEMS — RED CENTRE AND PILBARA

**Wet suit.** Don't laugh. We have not yet had anyone who has been able to swim through some of the Macdonnell Ranges gorges. For most of the year, the water in these gorges is much too cold to be safe for swimming any great distance. An airbed would make it possible to explore these gorges. A wet suit would make it almost comfortable. One of the potential highlights on the Hammersley Ranges trip is the all day float through Red and Joffre Gorges. The water is bitterly cold so a wet suit is strongly recommended. Even a Tasmanian experienced in liloing Tasmanian Rivers found that a wet suit made the day much more enjoyable.

## B3. ADDITIONAL ITEMS - MAJOR EXPEDITIONS

**Complete change of clothes.** On trips such as the Kimberley Coast Explorer your clothes and/or footwear can wear out before the end of a trip. By having a spare set brought in with a food drop, you will be prepared if this happens. Anything not needed can go back with the aircraft or vehicle which brings in the drop.

**Antibiotics.** Anyone can get an infection. Any infection is potentially serious in the tropics. On a long trip where you have no chance of obtaining medical assistance, you might wish to ask your doctor to prescribe an antibiotic which you could take if an infection developed. Having such a prescription could make the difference between comfortably completing a trip and having to be evacuated.

Willis's Walkabouts guides are not medical practitioners. It is illegal for us to give you antibiotics; we cannot recommend any particular one. If you are unsure whether or not your trip qualifies as a major expedition, ask us. If you wish to carry an antibiotic, consult your doctor.

### C. THE FINAL CHECK

Once you have added in everything you would like to bring, reweigh your pack. If it is heavier than the recommended weight (25 to 30% of your ideal body weight), discard some of your optional extras. A pack which is too heavy can ruin an otherwise enjoyable trip. People have got by on as little as 9 kg for 8 days. Anyone who has had little previous backpacking experience should aim to keep their total weight under 15 kg.

## II. BUYING EQUIPMENT AND PRE-TRIP TRAINING

If you are buying equipment, there are three rules to follow which will make your trip much more enjoyable.

1. Try it on before you buy. Try packs fully loaded. Walk around the store, don't just stand still. Advice from experienced bushwalkers or the sales staff in specialist camping stores can be very helpful.
2. Wear it. Bring nothing you haven't worn before. Go on an overnight bushwalk. If you cannot do that, at least go for a 5 to 10 km walk with a full pack, wearing any new boots or boots that you haven't worn for a long time.
3. If you have a new tent or mosquito net, put it up before you come on the trip. Put it up somewhere where you can't peg it out. Learn how to cope with any problems beforehand. It's too late once you've started the trip. Extra lengths of lightweight cord can be helpful. (Venetian blind cord is ideal.)

If you have never carried a pack for any distance, a bit of training can work wonders. Go on overnight bushwalks if possible. If not, go for several walks carrying a full pack and wearing the footwear you intend to use on the trip. We strongly recommend that you try carrying your pack over some rough, broken ground - a rocky creek bed or along a rocky section of the coast for example. Rock hopping gets easier with practice. There is no way to know how you will cope without actually trying it.

One 73 year old who had never carried a pack wore a full one while walking his dog at night for

several weeks before the trip. He easily outwalked people half his age. \

**Note.** Some people who read the preceding paragraph read the "73" and ignore the training. The point is that if you haven't done anything like this before, some training would be very useful. Preparing yourself by getting used to your pack and by making sure your footwear is well broken in will make the trip much easier and more enjoyable for you.

### III. FOOD

#### EVENING MEALS

Willis's Walkabouts provides three-course evening meals as well as the necessary cooking utensils. You get soup or entree, main course, dessert and coffee, tea or herbal tea, with milk and sugar if you wish.

The main courses are based on rice, pasta, potatoes, beans, and fresh or dehydrated vegetables. Many meals contain dried meats or fish, generally in relatively small quantities, more as a flavouring than as a base. We prepare many of our own dried foods and do our best to ensure that the meals are both nutritious and tasty and that there is plenty for everyone.

Willis's Walkabouts guides take pride in their ability to cater for vegetarians and people with other dietary restrictions. If you have any special dietary requirements, please make sure that you fill in the food questionnaire on the registration form as accurately as possible. We take your answers seriously. If you leave the section blank, we must assume that you will be happy with anything and everything we prepare. If you say that you do not eat meat and/or fish, we will organise vegetarian meals. Every year we find a few people who normally eat meat who have decided that their trip would be a good opportunity to give it up for a while. They see the meals we offer and want to change their mind. It is, alas, too late. All our meals are prepared well before departure. You cannot change your mind once the trip has begun.

#### BREAKFASTS AND LUNCHESES

**Willis's Walkabouts does not normally provide breakfasts and lunches** but will do so for anyone willing to pay the additional fee. Providing your own breakfasts and lunches ensures that you will have the foods you want in the quantity you want. Providing your own is cheaper and, for most people, more satisfactory.

The provision of breakfasts and lunches is done primarily as a service to those of our clients who, for some reason, are unable to find the time to prepare their own. If you choose to have Willis's Walkabouts provide your breakfasts and lunches, the guide will normally provide you with a selection of items and ask you to take what you want. We will not make the final decision for you.

#### PLAN ALL MEALS BEFORE DEPARTURE!

People sometimes come with far too little or far too much food. This can be a real problem on a long trip. Before you go, you should know what you will be having at each and every meal you are providing during the trip. Unless you are carrying your own stove, your lunches should not require cooking. During the wetter times of the year, you should be prepared to have at least some of your breakfasts cold as well.

The most common breakfast foods consumed by Top End bushwalkers are muesli and porridge. Common lunch foods include bread, dry biscuits, salami, tinned fish, cheese, fruit (dried or fresh), spreads for the bread or biscuits (peanut butter, jam, hummous, etc), nuts, etc. We provide black tea and boiling water for breakfast. If you want anything else or if you are an especially heavy coffee or tea drinker, please bring your own.

On those trips which are divided into sections, it will always be possible to store a limited quantity of food and equipment during the walks. To keep the weight you carry to a minimum, sort your food into parcels corresponding to the sections.

If you are not sure how much to bring for your breakfasts and lunches, keep a record of everything you eat, not including evening meals, for a period of at least two weeks and use this as a guide. If you are unable to do this, a minimal, no-frills menu could be the following (quantities per day). 90-100g muesli (mix in milk powder if you want it), 5-6 small biscuits (e.g. Vita-Wheat) or 3-4 large ones (e.g. Ryvita) plus enough salami, cheese or whatever to go with the biscuits. Add a small quantity of dried fruit and/or nuts if you want to snack between meals. (Most people find that they do want such snacks.)

Whatever you bring, remember cans and jars weigh much more than dried food. Repack anything in jars into lightweight plastic containers. (Screw top containers are normally the best.) You **must** carry out all your non-burnable and plastic rubbish. Plastic should not be burned because of the toxic fumes it gives off. (Some types of clear plastics may be burned in a hot fire. Ask your guide before putting them into any fire.) Tiny bits of foil left in the ashes of a fire can attract small birds - and kill them.

**Never** leave your perishables in the sun either in or out of your pack. Most of the foods mentioned below will go off if left in the direct sun for too long.

#### FOODS FOR BUSHWALKING IN THE TROPICS.

**Breakfasts.** Muesli and porridge are the two most popular dishes. If you choose porridge, you will probably have to do your own cooking. You might wish to consider adding a little dried fruit or substituting polenta for a change.

**Bread vs Biscuits.** Bread can last several days and can make a nice way to start a trip. Pita bread keeps better and lasts longer than normal bread. Both weigh more than biscuits. Vita-wheat, Ryvita and similar biscuits are recommended.

**Salami.** Hard salamis, not wrapped in plastic, generally keep quite well, up to two weeks in even the hottest weather. Soft salamis, however, do not keep anywhere near as well and are not recommended.

**Cheese.** Ordinary cheeses last a few days but often go soft and oily in the heat -- most unappetising. Small tins of brie and camembert keep well until opened. Hard cheeses like romano last well. Gouda, edam and a few other cheeses get soft but do not become oily. They can keep for up to two weeks. (If you want to be sure, leave a piece of the cheese of your choice in an unrefrigerated container for a few days. Pre-packed romano, gouda, edam etc such as is found on supermarket shelves does not last as well as the ones found in good delicatessens.) Processed cheese lasts almost indefinitely. Tasty, coon, cheddar and the like keep very badly and should be avoided. Removing cheeses from plastic wrappers and rewrapping them in butchers paper plus foil helps keep them in good condition.

**Tinned anything.** Things in tins, e.g. sardines, tuna, herring, etc., keep well. Burning the tin will remove food scraps and sterilise it. Crushing it will make it smaller. But you still have to carry every tin out to the vehicle. The same goes for anything in a jar - except that you can neither burn nor crush them.

**Spreads and dips.** These make your dry biscuits taste much better, but try to pack them in some sort of lightweight container before you start. Possibilities include powdered hummous, peanut butter, tahini, cheese spreads, jams, vegemite, etc. Mild mustard goes well with cheese. Neither butter nor margarine is suitable for tropical conditions.

**Fresh fruit and vegetables.** Oranges keep very well. The peels, however, do not rot and need to be burned each evening. Some apples carry well, granny smiths being among the best. Carrots and cucumbers keep well. Many people enjoy them at lunch. Capsicums and green tomatoes can keep several days if you can keep them from being bruised. Both fresh fruit and fresh vegetables can make your diet much more enjoyable. However, remember fresh fruit and vegetables are heavy. The lighter your pack is, the more comfortable you will be.

**Note.** Protect fresh fruit and vegetables from bruising and carry them in breathable cloth bags or wrap them in newspaper instead of plastic in order to maximise the time they keep. It is illegal to bring fresh fruit and vegetables or honey into Western Australia. Trips entering W.A. from the N.T. will always allow you enough time to purchase fresh supplies.

**Scroggin.** Fruit and nut mixes, trail mixes, etc. are popular snacks.

**Chocolate.** Melts and can even go off. (Chocolate is not a problem on Red Centre trips during the cooler months.) Carob keeps much better in the heat. If you want to bring chocolate, bring something coated like m&m's or smarties.

**Drinks.** There is little water pollution in the Top End. You can generally drink the water in all the creeks we walk along in those areas. It might, however, be necessary to boil or otherwise purify drinking water in some parts of the Red Centre, especially in drought conditions. If you wish to bring something to flavour your water, remember strong sugary or salty drinks actually rob the body of water and make you thirstier. The only drinks we can recommend for day time use are water, weak tea and dilute electrolyte replacement drinks. (There are many such drinks on the market, eg Staminade, Iso Sport, etc. We have no particular recommendation as to brand, just to use them sparingly.) If you have special requirements (e.g. Caro) other than the normal coffee, tea and herbal teas we provide after the evening meal, please bring your own.

**Salt.** People living in the tropics do not need extra salt. Their bodies have adapted to the climate, as will yours within 2 or 3 days. Our meals contain all the salt you need. If you really crave more salt, you can add it to your meals but you need to be aware that taking excessive amount of table salt can upset the mineral balance in your body. If you like a lot of salt in your food, please bring your own.

**Calories or Kilojoules.** Your body normally uses a fair amount of energy just keeping you warm. Since it won't need to do this as much, you will probably find that you will want to eat less than you would on a similar walk in a colder climate. However, if you are not accustomed to doing much exercise and don't know how much you would normally eat on a bushwalk, you may find that you want to eat more than normal.

#### **IV. WALKING PLAN**

On average, you can expect to walk between five and seven hours per day. This can mean covering anywhere from two to twenty kilometres. **All trips** require reasonable fitness and a few require above average fitness. If you cannot easily walk ten kilometres on flat ground in two and a half hours while carrying an 8 to 10 kg pack, you are probably not fit enough for any of our trips.

Most trips cannot be set out in a highly detailed way. The lack of trails ensures that there will be some variation in the route each time. As each party must travel at the pace of the slowest person, it is inevitable that some groups will travel at a slower pace than others. A slow group might have to take a short cut while a fast one might get an extra side trip, an extra lay day or simply more time to enjoy the swims and the views. Navigation is based on 1:100 000 or 1:50 000 topographic maps. In

the Red Centre, we must sometimes rely on 1:250 000 maps.

None of these give the detail necessary to pinpoint a position with 100% accuracy all of the time. They are, nonetheless, more than adequate for getting from one campsite to another. (Our experience in using GPS units suggests that either they sometimes fail to meet the 100m accuracy their manufacturers claim or that the maps we use are not always accurate to that degree.)

On some trips, particularly exploratory ones, the guide may not be able to give you an 'exact' location at all times. This is usually a situation caused by the lack of a definitive landmark. If you find this particularly disconcerting, you should probably consider an alternative trip. Exploratory trips can be exceptionally easy, exceptionally difficult or anywhere in between. There is no way to be certain in advance.

Even more than in the north, Red Centre routes are governed by the availability of water. We will almost always camp reasonably close to a waterhole but, unlike the north, we may not encounter any other water during the day. The water may need to be boiled or otherwise purified before drinking.

Centralian mountains are much higher than their northern counterparts with climbs of 7-800 metres instead of 1-200 metres. The views from the tops are fantastic and well worth the effort. However, the complete lack of trails or tracks leading to the tops of the peaks makes the climbs much more difficult than similar climbs along tracks. We will not normally do the climbs with full packs but you will need a daypack to carry at least three litres of water on any day walk.

In addition to the variations mentioned above, major changes may be made to the advertised routes because of extreme weather conditions or closure of certain areas by the relevant authorities. In 1989, for example, a large area of Kakadu was closed during a search for a party of lost and poorly equipped bushwalkers.

We will try and get reasonably early starts, but bear in mind that it does not get light as early as it does in a southern summer. On wet season trips, it is likely to take longer to pack up than it does in dry conditions. Getting an early start means that you will enjoy cooler walking and that you are more likely to encounter wildlife. The guides have more to do so you may be ready before they are. If so, please be patient.

The guide will normally outline the day's walk either in the morning before departure or the evening before. Occasionally, he or she may forget to do so or may have done so when you were absent. If you are unsure of the plan for the day, please ask.

Our pace is normally restricted to that of the slowest individual. However, where we are following creeks in an area where there is no real chance of getting lost, people may be allowed to walk at their own pace and the group may be able to spread out a bit. Anyone who is not confident that he or she can follow a creek needs to let the guide know before the group spreads out.

A few people walk so slowly that holding the group to their pace would make it impossible to do the scheduled walk, possibly endangering the group by causing unscheduled dry camps. In our first fifteen years of operation, we were forced to evacuate ten such people at their own expense.

While walking, keep enough space between you and the person in front so that you will not be hit by branches springing back. Except where you have been specifically told that you may amble along at your own pace, NEVER let the person in front of or behind you get out of sight. If you do lose sight of the person in front or behind, call out immediately and loudly so that the group will stop and allow everyone to catch up. If you have to drop out of line for any reason, shout out loud and clear. If the group does not stop, keep walking until you can get your message across.

Do not assume that someone knows you need to stop until you see the members of the group actually stopping. It is equally important that you do not race out in front of the group. ***Failure to heed these guidelines could make you responsible for the cost of a search and rescue operation.***

It would be rare for any of our trips not to include at least some rock-hopping. This involves the need to stride from rock to rock while carrying your full pack. Travel along a creek bed is often easier than remaining on the bank and being obstructed by vegetation. Rock-hopping requires the development of a confident walking style and people unfamiliar with it will find that a couple of days pass before they are performing well. You will be surprised how quickly you become proficient.

Lunch is normally a reasonably long break. Depending on the season and the group, it may vary anywhere from 45 minutes to 3 hours -- occasionally as little as 30 minutes or as long as 5 hours. There will be a number of shorter breaks at various times. The harder the going, the more often the breaks. If you feel that the guide is not calling breaks often enough, please let him or her know. For some groups, a break once an hour is more than enough. Others need a break every 30 to 40 minutes. How tired you are is not always visible. Please let the guide know if you feel you need a break.

Swimming is an integral part of every trip. If it weren't for the near constant availability of beautiful swimming holes, bushwalking in the tropics would not be so attractive. Local bushwalkers spend so much time in the water that some people have suggested that the Bushwalking Club should be called the Bushswimming Club. In addition to the swims at rest stops, it may be necessary to swim flooded creeks on wet season trips and, on some trips, you may have the option of floating your pack through a gorge. A leisurely pack float can add a whole new dimension to the trip and is a real highlight for some people.

Out in a wilderness, away from the general public, many people prefer nude swimming. Willis's Walkabouts is neither in favour of nor opposed to this. Based on past experiences, most groups will consist of a mix of those who prefer to wear bathers and those who prefer to swim in the nude. Whichever you prefer, we ask you to be tolerant of those who prefer otherwise.

Technical rock climbing is not done on any Walkabout trip. Willis's Walkabouts guides do not consider themselves to be 'rock climbers.' Most of these trips have been done by people of all ages from the early teens to the early 70's. Certain sections have proved to be a bit difficult for some, but all those who were willing to accept help where necessary have had no major problems. There are some people, however, who have much more difficulty than others when it comes to scrambling over boulders and along rock ledges. If you believe that you are such a person, please let us know in advance so that routes can be modified if necessary. Please note that almost all walks contain a considerable amount of 'rock hopping' while following creek beds. A few walks require you to scramble over boulders the size of houses. (Freezing Gorge in Kakadu is an excellent example of this type of terrain.) It is not possible to avoid this. People who have never done anything like this before may find it somewhat difficult. If you have done little such rock hopping, a good general rule is that the larger the rock, the less likely it is to move when you stand on it.

It is interesting to note that some technical rock climbers who are accustomed to using ropes and safety aids for most of their climbing consider some of the rock scrambling we do to be too difficult for beginners. On the other hand, experienced bushwalkers who seldom, if ever, climb with ropes notice no more than a moderate difficulty.

Scrub bashing is never as difficult as it is in certain other parts of Australia, e.g. the Queensland rainforests or parts of Tasmania. However, long grasses (which in extreme cases can grow more than three metres tall) can make walking difficult. The grasses do not become a problem until well into the wet season (mid February on average). They gradually get worse until sometime in April then, as they die and dry out, they become less and less of a barrier, usually disappearing entirely in a dry season bushfire.

We have seen so many variations in what people consider difficult that our grading system can only be a rough guide. One person might be able to walk long distances over flat ground at a rapid pace while finding it hard to rock-hop up a creek. Another might find the rock hopping easy but be unable to keep up a rapid pace out in the open. Someone else might find it very difficult to walk along a ledge that most people don't even recognise as a potential problem.

If you do not have much overnight bushwalking experience or if you are not particularly fit, you should ask for our trip notes and carefully consider the apparent level of difficulty before choosing a particular trip. Try going out for a day and walking up a rocky creek bed while carrying an 8 to 10 kg pack. If in doubt, contact Willis's Walkabouts with your questions. If you have made a booking which you decide is inappropriate, it is often (but not always) possible to transfer your deposit to another trip.

### **Walking in the Wet**

For those who can accept conditions as they are, wet season walks are especially rewarding. You see the land when it is green and covered in flowers. You see the waterfalls when they actually look like the promotional photographs in tour brochures. But what is it really like?

Usually you'll have some rain, often heavy, every day or so. The rain seldom lasts more than an hour at a time. Heavy cloud cover gives the most pleasant walking conditions. (On average, January through March have fewer direct hours of sun than any other month, but even then there is an average of just over six hours of direct sun each day.) When the sun shines, it's hot and humid -- but not as hot as many think. In northern Kakadu, temperatures reach 35°C more often in April and September-December than in January. February and March have fewer 35° days than peak season August.

When it falls, rain brings welcome relief. On sunny days, if our schedule permits it, we look for shady spots near pools to while away the heat of the day.

Occasionally, when there is a monsoon trough or cyclone in the area, sustained heavy rain can fall on and off for days on end. This is when it may be cool enough for you to want a raincoat or shell. This is also when waterfalls are at their most spectacular. Such heavy rains may cause flooding that can force us to alter our route or timetable. Cyclonic winds, however, almost never affect the areas where we walk.

### **Walking softly**

Willis's Walkabouts believes that everyone who visits the special areas which we go to has an obligation to 'walk softly.' This means following animal paths when they are available, not tramping through the wildflowers when you can go around them, taking special care when visiting aboriginal art sites, e.g. removing hats which might brush against the paintings.

It means following all the personal hygiene instructions in Chapter 8.

It means collecting only fallen, dead wood for camp fires. (Standing trees may provide a home for small animals. Fallen wood will burn in the next bush fire.) It means not pulling up plants to clear a site for your tent or bed unless your guide has specifically given the OK. (You're welcome to pull up all the introduced weeds you want.)

Sunscreens and insect repellants are pollutants. You should use the minimum amount necessary and never put more on just before you stop for a swim.

## **V. TRANSPORTATION**

Although all our trips are walking trips, it is necessary to travel long distances to get to the walking areas. A three hour drive to get to a walking area is an exceptionally short one. On the other extreme, you may have to drive for two days before reaching the destined area. You need to be prepared for these drives. Keep your money, lunch and whatever else you may need with you, not tied in a pack on the roof rack. You can make the drive more interesting for yourself by paying attention to the often subtle changes in vegetation and topography and keeping an eye out for birds and animals.

Distances in the Kimberley are the longest of all. To cut down on travel time, we charter light aircraft to bring us to some of the outback airstrips. These airstrips have not been placed there for the convenience of bushwalkers. Even after a one or two hour flight, you may still have a drive of up to half a day before you reach the walking area.

Our own vehicles are all four wheel drives which may be driven by our clients. None is new. All of them are serviced as regularly as possible but they can be out for up to six weeks or more without a break (as when we are using the Mitchell Plateau airstrip for a connection point). Please be aware that such vehicles may not be as clean and tidy as your guide might like and as you might expect if the trip were to commence from our base in Darwin.

Because of the seasonal nature of our business, one or two of our vehicles may go out only a few times during a year. We need them at times when it is almost impossible to hire extras. To maintain a fleet where none of our vehicles was over three years old would force us to raise our prices by 50%. We would rather give you the best possible value for your money. Under harsh conditions, a breakdown can occur with even the most modern vehicle so if this happens, please be patient, relax and enjoy the bush around you.

## **VI. TRAVEL CONNECTIONS AND PICK UPS**

Never schedule connections on the same day that a trip starts or finishes unless specific arrangements have been made in advance. It is, for example, most unlikely that you would arrive in Darwin in time to catch a plane on the same day that a trip finishes.

If we are notified a week before departure (or at the pre-trip meeting the night before departure), we can pick you up from wherever you are staying in town. If not, we will pick you up from one of our central meeting places: in Darwin, the Transit Centre on Mitchell Street; in Kununurra, the Visitors Centre on Coolibah Drive; in Alice Springs, the Todd Tavern on Todd Street.

Pickups normally begin about 8 a.m. Depending on where people are staying, it could be 9 a.m. before the last person is picked up. With large groups, it is often necessary to place packs on a roof rack. Ensuring that all packs are well secured takes time. Please be patient.

We believe that it is better to take the time needed to ensure that no pack comes off on a rough road than to rush to get away a few minutes earlier.

**If you are doing only a part of a multi-section trip, you will probably have to make your own way to and/or from a connection point.** For most kakadu trips, this is Cooina. Read the trip notes carefully to make sure you know where and when you will have to meet or leave the group.

Those people doing a single section of a trip should be aware that the connecting times will always be somewhat indefinite. The people you are meeting may have to do a fair amount of both walking and driving beforehand. Different groups walk at different speeds. Things like flat tyres can happen. Please be patient.

People joining a Kakadu Circle trip from Cooina may need to be particularly patient. The vehicle which will pick you up may be being used as a part of another tour and may have to drive all the way in to Twin Falls and back out again before picking you up. Such a pick up can easily be 8 p.m., occasionally even later. We can normally give you an idea of the approximate pick up time about a week before departure. If it's going to be late, you might as well relax and enjoy your surroundings, the nature Walk and the Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

## **VII. HEALTH, DEHYDRATION AND BUSHWALKING IN THE TROPICS**

Much of the information given here is based on the talk of Dr Geoff Thompson, a representative of the Australian Sports Medicine Federation (N.T. Branch), given to the Darwin Bushwalking Club. Dr Thompson is one of a few people in Australia to specialise in sports and exercise in humid tropical conditions. Dr Thompson has read the dehydration and heat stress sections of this chapter and endorsed the views expressed herein.

### **DEHYDRATION AND DRINKING**

In the tropics, no one can reach the same physical peak of performance that they can achieve in a cooler climate. There is no month in Kakadu where a majority of the days will not reach at least 30° C. (See Chapter 11 of this booklet for climatic details). Fortunately, there is no need to exert yourself to the same degree as you would in a cooler climate. Packs are lighter. Beautiful swimming pools are plentiful. Why rush? Relax and enjoy it! Anyone who is reasonably fit can manage an extended bushwalk anywhere Willis's Walkabouts operates provided they do not become dehydrated.

Exercise produces heat. The body loses heat through sweating. When it is humid, sweat evaporates more slowly so heat is lost more slowly, causing a rise in body temperature. This in turn makes you sweat more. Increased perspiration is good, provided that the fluid can be replaced as fast as it is lost. Your body can absorb only about one litre per hour. It is easy to sweat more than this. If you don't have a drink until you feel thirsty, you will have built up a fluid debt that is unlikely to be completely paid off until the end of the day.

The answer to this potential problem is simple. Drink early and often. Have a big drink before breakfast. Have another before you start out. Have a drink at every break. Have plenty at the end of the day. **Drink water.**

Many people are under the mistaken impression that their bodies need more salt because they are sweating more. When a person moves to a tropical climate, their body immediately begins to adapt itself to secreting less salt in the sweat. Most of this adaptation occurs in the first few days. 90% is complete within a week. If you can allow yourself a couple of days in or near your departure point before a trip, your body will be well on the way to adapting itself to the climate before you start.

In very dry air such as you find in central Australia, you lose water every time you exhale. You do not need to be visibly sweating to be losing an incredible amount of water. It is almost impossible to drink too much. Not drinking enough will, at best, leave you overtired and uncomfortable; at worst, it can kill.

Drinking anything other than water or perhaps weak black tea can actually be worse than not drinking at all. The addition of salts and/or sugars to a drink delays the absorption of water from the stomach. Highly concentrated salty or sugary drinks will actually cause water to be absorbed from the blood into the stomach — the last thing you need. We have, however, found that some people seem to benefit from drinking **dilute** electrolyte replacement drinks like Staminade, especially in the early stages of a trip before their bodies have had time to acclimatise.

Snacking is a well-accepted and enjoyable part of bushwalking. However, before you pop a few lollies into your mouth, you should know what they will do to you. First, they form a concentrated sugar solution in your stomach. This causes water to be absorbed from the blood into the stomach. You get a bit dehydrated. Next, you get a burst of glucose entering your blood stream. This may give you a bit of quick energy, but your body over-reacts to this excess and 20 minutes later, your blood sugar level will be lower than it was before you had the lollies. Better snacks include things like: fresh fruit, sandwiches/rolls (obviously not to last long), biscuits and spread, unsweetened muesli slices, dried fruit and nuts. Make sure you have a drink every time you have a snack.

If you find yourself in a position where you need energy but cannot face anything more than simple sugars, it means that you have not eaten properly beforehand. Have a lolly and a drink but try and improve your intake of complex carbohydrates the next day. You'll feel better for it.

The most important thing you can do before coming on a Walkabout is to make sure that you are reasonably fit. Fit people sweat more and earlier than unfit people. This helps keep their body temperature down and helps prevent heat stress. Age and lack of bushwalking experience are not necessarily barriers to taking part. A 65 year old lady who had never carried a full backpack came out on a 16 day trip and enjoyed it immensely. She was, however, used to walking long distances and was of above average fitness for her age.

## HEAT STRESS

Heat stress can be very serious. There are a few things you should be aware of to ensure that if you do suffer from heat stress, it will be no more than a very mild case.

Wear a hat to keep your head cool. Wear clothing that breathes and makes evaporation easier.

**Drink lots of water - early and often.** If your urine is a dark colour (except first thing in the morning) or if the volume is less than a litre per day, you are not drinking enough. Headaches and feeling tired are usually the first symptoms of dehydration. If you feel like this, let your guide know. You need a rest and a drink. If possible, get in a pool and cool off. (The swims are one of the things that make bushwalking in the Top End such an enjoyable experience). Catching a small problem early will prevent it from becoming a major one.

If you think you are suffering from even a mild case of heat stress, let your guide know. Pushing yourself will only make it worse. If you are especially thirsty, you needed a drink an hour earlier. Have a rest and sip a bit of water every two or three minutes. You may need to drink nearly a litre before setting off again. Drinking too quickly, however, may aggravate your problems.

If you start to feel faint, dizzy, weak or nauseous notify your guide immediately. You are in urgent need of a rest, a drink and cooling. If you were ill and running a fever less than a week before the trip, let your guide know. You are especially at risk. Never push yourself to a state of undue fatigue. Finally, for family groups, keep a close watch on children below the age of 12 or 13. They have a poor heat tolerance in comparison with adults so you need to watch them and ensure they drink plenty of water.

## SUNBURN

The sun is considerably stronger in the tropics than in more temperate climates. The average maximum UV rating is labelled "extreme" on weather reports. You should bring a good sunscreen, preferably factor 15+ or better and water resistant. Wearing a hat not only keeps your head cooler, it prevents sunburn on the face. Do not sunbake for long periods. Sunburned shoulders or back can make carrying a pack extremely uncomfortable.

## TETANUS AND OTHER INFECTIONS

Many things grow very well in the tropics. These unfortunately include some of the micro-organisms which cause infections. Tetanus is particularly serious -- over half of those who actually get the disease die. **Make sure you have a current vaccination.**

If you do get a cut or other open injury, clean it and put on some antiseptic (Tea tree oil and betadine are especially recommended. Tea tree oil has the additional advantage of repelling flies for short periods.) Do not use creams. Allow it to stay as dry and as well ventilated as possible. (Air tight dressings increase the likelihood of infection in most cases.) If you suspect an injury is becoming infected, let your guide know. He or she will always have a comprehensive first aid kit. Early attention to potential problems is most important in the tropics.

## HAY FEVER AND OTHER ALLERGIC REACTIONS

If you know you suffer from hay fever, make sure you bring the appropriate medication. Hay fever tends to be more of a problem during the dry season than at other times. If you suffer any sort of allergic reaction, let your guide know immediately. Antihistamines are more effective if they are administered as soon as possible after the reaction has begun.

If you are allergic to bee stings or anything else you might encounter in the wilderness, please bring the appropriate medicine.

## VIII. PERSONAL HYGIENE

Except in some popular areas accessible by vehicle, almost all of the water you encounter is unpolluted enough to drink without treatment. It is important to keep it that way. Do not scrape uneaten food into the water - bury it or burn it. NEVER use soap or shampoo in the water. Unless you have some sort of chronic skin complaint, neither soap nor shampoo is ever necessary. Those few people who do need to use soap or shampoo should fill a billy with water and do their soaping and rinsing well away from water supplies.

**Always bury your excrement (shit) and toilet paper well away from any watercourse and the path along which you will be walking.** If you are not sure where you will be walking, ask the guide. Whenever possible, go at least 200 metres from any campsite or watercourse. If you wish to burn your toilet paper, bring it back to the camp fire. Burning toilet paper has been the cause of more than one bushfire. You can reduce your paper usage with the use of natural materials such as suitable leaves or small stones before a final cleanup with paper.

Some soils are harder than others. If you do not have a trowel, ask the guide for one or use a stick or stone to dig a hole. In rocky country, you can always pick up a rock to make a hole and replace it afterwards. Excrement should always be buried about 15 cm (6 inches), deep enough so that it cannot attract flies. This aspect of behaviour in the bush is vital. **If you are not willing to make the effort to dispose of your wastes properly, do not consider coming on any Walkabout.**

Used tampons and sanitary napkins should be burned in a hot fire or carried out, not buried. If buried, a goanna or other animal is likely to dig them up, attempt to eat them and choke to death. There have been some recent advances in washable napkins; please contact our office for a specific information sheet on these environmentally sound alternatives.

Foil lined papers do not normally disintegrate completely in a camp fire. Small pieces of burnt foil have proven attractive to small birds which eat them. Eating small bits of foil often results in a slow and lingering death. Please carry out all foil.

If you are a smoker, carry a small bag or tin for your cigarette butts and used matches. These may be burned later in a hot fire. (If the fire is not hot enough, the filters will smolder and give off poisonous fumes. You might wish to consider substituting roo your own or non-filter cigarettes for your normal brand during the trip.) Smokers should be aware that some people object to cigarette smoke and should conduct themselves accordingly. Heavy smokers who don't exercise regularly are unlikely to have the necessary stamina to do many of the trips.

If you volunteer to help with the food preparation, make sure your hands are clean before handling any food.

## IX. DANGER AND ACCIDENTS

Accidents are probably no more likely in the bush than in the home. Their consequences, however, can be much more serious. If you were to have an accident requiring a medical evacuation, it is reasonably likely that it would be at least 24 hours before you could be brought to medical aid. On the longer, more adventurous trips, it might be several days. If you were physically capable of moving yourself, it is likely that you would have to walk to the nearest point from which an evacuation could practically be made. All guides have had some first aid training, but none is a medical practitioner.

Mobile phones do not work in the areas where we operate. We carry satellite phones and PLBs on all trips. Even with a satellite phone, there is no way to guarantee that it will work when needed. Geographical location, atmospheric conditions and the exact location of the communications satellites can sometimes disrupt communications. Even if we were able to establish immediate contact with the appropriate authorities, it might still be a day before help could arrive. **If you have an accident that is serious enough to require immediate hospitalisation to save your life, you will die.** This is, of course, just as true on most country roads throughout Australia as it is off on a bushwalk.

The way to minimise the possibility of accidents is to take care at all times. Although a pack which is too heavy can cause dangerous overbalancing, almost all of those accidents which have occurred on Walkabouts trips have occurred at campsites or lunch spots when the individual concerned was not wearing a pack and did not take due care. You can avoid accidents but only if you are careful at all times.

Finally, you must consider the possibility that the sole guide in a small group could become incapacitated. The guide will always go over the route on the maps for anyone who is interested and who understands how to use them so that at least some of the group are familiar with where they are and the shortest route for assistance. It is most unlikely that the guide will become incapacitated, nonetheless, you need to consider the small possibility that you could find yourself in a wilderness with no guide.

**Anyone who has read this and who then decides that they do not wish to participate in the trip for which they registered will have their money refunded in full provided that such a decision is made within 7 days of receiving this booklet.**

## **X. FLORA AND FAUNA - A BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

If you come out expecting to see large numbers of big, native animals such as still exist in parts of Africa, you are doomed to disappointment. The only large animals you are likely to see during the day are introduced ones such as cattle. Most of the animals which live in the areas covered by this booklet are small and nocturnal. If you keep this in mind and look out for what really is there, you will discover one of the richest and most fascinating ecological areas in Australia.

### **Kakadu and the Kimberley**

There are many distinct environments in the region. Some of them, mangrove swamps for example, harbour a wealth of wildlife but are far from pleasant places to go bushwalking. Most of our walks take part along creeks, in lowland eucalypt forest, on the sandstone plateau and in occasional patches of monsoon rainforest. Keep your eyes open and you can enjoy the many subtle and not-so-subtle changes in the environment as you walk along.

The flora in Kakadu is one of the richest in Australia. Well over 900 species have been identified, more are waiting to be named. No matter when you come, you will always find dozens of different flowers in bloom. Stop and have a close look. You may see the tiny native bees as they go about the job of collecting nectar and pollen. You may find beautiful, iridescent jewel beetles. You may see spectacular bright orange and blue Leichhardt grasshoppers. These were first described by Ludwig Leichhardt during his explorations in the 1840's, but not described by modern science until the 1970's.

Sit quietly at a rest break. Look around you. Small skinks dart over the ground, curling their tails as they search for insects. Watch tiny, one centimetre long frogs hop around the pools. Sit very still and a frog or a skink may climb your leg in search of a fly.

Listen to the sounds that surround you: water trickling down a small creek, a gentle breeze rustling the leaves, a calling bird. Over a third of the birds known in Australia have been found in Kakadu - more than 280 species. Perhaps you will be lucky enough to hear a flock of honey eaters as they flit through the trees in search of their food. Perhaps it will be the quiet call of a single bird. Or perhaps it will be the droning of thousands of cicadas as they seek to attract a mate in their brief lives above ground.

Bring swim goggles and have a look at the underwater world. Tiny prawns hover in small pools. Small fish of a dozen different species may inhabit a single pool. Perhaps you will see a freshwater tortoise. If you are very lucky, you may see a freshwater crocodile. (This is much more likely in the Kimberley than in Kakadu.) The large estuarine crocs that might see you as a potential meal live down on the floodplains in areas where we do little or no walking. But play it safe. As crocodile numbers increase, so too does their range. If there is any doubt in your mind, ask your guide whether or not it is safe to swim in a particular pool.

Compared to the rest of Australia, modern man has had relatively little impact on the environment in Kakadu and the Kimberley. Sadly, the pressure is on and every year it increases. Introduced weeds like salvinia, mimosa and hyptis are a constant threat in Kakadu. Although seldom seen, wild pigs are everywhere, digging up the landscape in search of food. Still worse is yet to come. Every year, the cane toad continues its inexorable march north. Already it has reached the southern border of Kakadu. As cane toad numbers increase, scientists expect a drastic decline of some species followed by a gradual return to a new equilibrium. No one knows what the final result will be.

## **The Red Centre**

The central Australian environment is totally different from that in Kakadu and the Kimberley. Here both the plants and animals must be adapted to survive long periods of drought. Overgrazing has denuded much of the landscape. Rabbits have destroyed more. The harsh climate means that an even greater percent of the animals are nocturnal and unseen. Yet, despite the harshness and the damage, there is still a wealth of things for the careful observer to enjoy.

As in the north, there is always something in bloom in the Centre. But here the flowering is more closely tied to the rains which can come at any time of year. If you should be lucky enough to arrive shortly after a heavy rainfall, you will discover a landscape covered in flowers, so many that you will scarcely be able to believe that it is real.

It is more likely that you will arrive when the land appears relatively barren. Look closely at the plants. See what adaptations they have made to survive the long periods without water. Look for the signs of the animals that come out in the night. Sit quietly beside an oasis and watch and listen to the birds as they come in for a drink. With little water available, each pool is a precious resource, a place where you will almost inevitably see something come in for a drink if you sit quietly for long enough.

## **The Pilbara**

The Pilbara environment is different again. Although not quite as arid as the Red Centre, it may not get a single decent rain for several years. On the other hand, parts of the Pilbara have been known to get up to 100mm of rain in a single day. As with the other regions, most of the animals are nocturnal. If you want to see what is there, you have to slow down and accept the environment at its own pace.

## **Places To Visit For More Information**

There are a number of places we can wholeheartedly recommend that you visit in Darwin and Alice Springs. Several are free.

The Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences in Darwin has displays about the environment and about Aboriginal culture. Some people wander through and see all they want in an hour. Others may spend five or six. It's well worth a visit.

There is only one place left you can go where you can be sure you will see a representative sample of the animals which inhabit the Northern Territory. This is the Territory Wildlife Park, located about 60km from Darwin. Here you can see the nocturnal animals in something resembling their natural habitat. You can walk through an aviary and watch the birds flying around you. You can walk through a transparent tunnel under an artificial billabong and watch fish swimming by, above and alongside. If you don't have your own transport, there are a number of tours which will take you there.

The Olive Pink Flora Reserve in Alice Springs is one of the town's least known accessible attractions. For someone with an interest in the flora of central Australia, it is one of the best. There is a visitor centre with a display explaining the origins, adaptations and uses of many interesting plants. There are several walking tracks along which you can see a variety of local plants. One of the tracks takes you to the top of one of the small peaks in the Sadadeen Range giving you views of the town and ranges beyond and an Aboriginal interpretation of the landscape. A visit to the reserve before you begin a trip will enable you to understand some of what you will be seeing during the walk.

The Alice Springs Desert Park on Larapinta Drive on the western edge of the town contains both a botanic garden and habitat-based displays of desert wildlife. It also has Aboriginal guides who explain some of the things you see.

As well as providing a pleasant way to view the landscape, the bicycle track from Alice Springs to Simpsons Gap has a number of good interpretive signs and provides a good introduction to the central Australian environment.

The bicycle track from Darwin to the East Point Reserve brings you past the museum, along the shore of Fannie Bay and out to the reserve where the Parks and Wildlife Commission has set up a nature walkthrough the mangroves. If you go there early in the morning or late in the afternoon, you will see far more agile wallabies than you are likely to see in the wilderness.

## **Recommended Reading**

A small book such as this one can give you only a taste of what you may expect to see. There are many good books on the market that can give you more, so many that we cannot single out any particular reference and say that it is 'the must'. We can, however, make several recommendations.

(We have the books marked \* for sale at normal retail prices.)

\* **Kakadu**; Ian Morris, 1996, Steve parish Publishing, softcover 224 pages, colour

Highly readable and wonderfully illustrated. Hundreds of excellent photos show you the eight main environments in each of the six seasons. No other reference gives you such a good idea of what there is to see in the different parts of the park at the different times of year. Possibly the best single reference about Kakadu.

**Kakadu, Natural & Cultural Heritage and Management**; Australian Nature Conservation Agency, 1995, North Australian Research Unit - Australian National University, softcover, 318 pages, some colour plates.

Excellent reference for those who want a detailed picture of the park. Topics covered include the Aboriginal heritage of the park, regional history, flora, fauna, physical environment (the geology section is the best relatively simple explanation of park geology that we've seen), fire management and the issues of managing the park for the competing interests of the general public, the scientific community and the Aboriginal traditional owners. A good book to read before, during or following a trip to Kakadu.

\* **Wildflowers of Kakadu**; Kym Brennan, 1986; self published, softcover, 127 pages, colour.

The best plant field guide for kakadu, arranged by landscape type, e.g. sandstone plateau, coastal plains, etc, and further subdivided according to when the plants are in flower. The photos are excellent. The descriptions with the photos help in identification. It includes brief descriptions of the different plant communities.

\* **Fauna of Kakadu and the Top End**; Denise Goodfellow, 1993, Wakefield Press, softcover, 102 A4 size pages, black & white, many illustrations.

This covers 120 species of mammals, reptiles and frogs. The drawings show skeletons, tracks and scats (droppings) as well as live animals. It is highly readable, an excellent book to bring on a trip or browse through at your leisure.

**Archaeology of the Dreamtime**; Josephine Flood, 1983, revised 1989, 1995, reprinted 1996, Harper Collins, softcover, 328 pages, mostly black & white, some colour plates.

Perhaps the best general reference on Aboriginal Australia before the arrival of white men.

**Field Guides to Australian Birds**. There are three excellent guides on the market: Slater, Pizzey and Simpson & Day. Slater is probably the easiest to carry in a pack.

**Native Plants of Northern Australia**; John Brock, 1993, Reed, hardcover, 355 pages, colour.

The most complete reference to native plants of the Top End. It begins with a complete reference of the plant communities followed by a reference table showing which plants are found where. The main section is alphabetical by genera. Photos often show leaves, bark, seed pods or other distinctive features as well as flowers.

**Wildflowers of Inland Australia;** Ann Urban, 1990, reprinted 1993, Portside Editions, softcover, 240 pages, colour.

The best field guide to the plants of central Australia. Hundreds of colour photos arranged by family so flowers which look similar are grouped together. The scientific and common names in the index make it easy to look up individual plants by name.

**Journey in Time;** George Chaloupka, Reed, hardcover, 256 pages, colour.

Chaloupka, the NT Museum's Aboriginal art expert, has spent more than thirty years getting to know the Aboriginal people and studying the Aboriginal rock-art of the Top End. The book traces the development of the different art styles through thousands of years of changing climate. It contains nearly 300 colour photographs plus information about the landscape and Aboriginal stories associated with the area.

**Story About Feeling;** Bill Neidje, 1989, reprinted 1996, Magabala Books, softcover, 180 pages, many illustrations, black & white.

Born sometime between 1911 and 1913, Bill Neidje is one of the few remaining kakadu traditional owners from his generation. In his own words, he tells of the Dreamtime, his life and his land.

**The Centre;** Penny van Oosterzee, 1991, Reed, hardcover, 176 pages, colour.

The subtitle, "The Natural History of Australia's Desert Regions" says it all. An excellent description of all aspects of the nature of the area. Excellent photographs by Reg Morrison. (Recently reprinted)

**The Kimberley, An Adventurers Guide;** Ron & Viv Moon, (2002 edition). Reprinted and updated regularly. Designed mainly for 4WD travellers, this still contains the best general information on the Kimberley we have seen.

## **XI. CLIMATE**

### **Top End and Kimberley**

There are seasons in the Top End and the Kimberley. They are not, however, the same seasons that one finds in southern Australia. Even in the coldest month, July, most days will reach a maximum temperature of at least 28° C in the Top End. Even at the hottest times, you are unlikely to encounter a temperature of 40° C on any of the Walkabouts trips.

Although many Europeans can distinguish only two seasons: Wet and Dry, anyone who has lived in the region can easily distinguish a third, The Build Up. The Aboriginals of the Top End could distinguish six. These seasons were defined by the arrival and departure of the monsoon rains and by the flowering or fruiting of certain plants. They were not defined by dates on a calendar. The following descriptions are for the seasons in Kakadu.

**December - March: 'Gudjewg' The Monsoon Season.** This is the real Wet season. Waterfalls and rivers are at their most spectacular. Most of the bush tracks are closed to vehicles due to boggy conditions and flooding. It is likely that it will rain on most days, sometimes quite heavily. These rains usually come in the form of heavy downpours which last anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. It is unusual for a really prolonged rain to set in (an active monsoon trough being the main exception). Whatever the temperature, the humidity will make it feel even hotter. Fortunately, there is often good cloud cover which makes it a bit cooler. In terms of average daily maximum temperatures, off season February and March are actually cooler than peak season August and September. A bushwalker is inevitably going to be wet most of the time (probably from sweating and swimming as often as from rain). Due to the relative warmth of the air and water, getting wet is not as uncomfortable as it would be in a cooler climate. If you can manage to keep some dry clothes for the evenings, you might even come to enjoy the weather. For those who want to see the awesome force of the monsoonal floods, this is the best time to visit.

**March - April: 'Banggerreng' The Knock Em Down Storm Season.** The probability of rain gradually decreases. The temperature rises briefly before cooling off as the Dry approaches. The first dirt roads and tracks open up to vehicles. Generally dry weather and still abundant water supplies make this the best time to visit many areas.

**April - June: 'Yegge' - The Cooler But Still Humid Season.** Rains are infrequent but heavy storms may occur. On a few rare occasions, cyclones have been known to occur as late as early May. Smaller creeks stop flowing while the larger ones become clear and begin to slow down. Tracks continue to open up. The first areas become inaccessible due to lack of water. If you want to experience a taste of what wet season water flows are like without the rain, May is the ideal month to come.

**June - August: 'Wurrngeng' - The Cold Weather Season.** This is the typical dry season, characterised by warm days and cool, crisp nights. It is most unlikely that it will rain on most trips. Jabiru (in Kakadu), for example, has had only two heavy rainstorms in July since records have been kept. (One did, however, last for 4 days). The days will be warm and sunny, but the nights may have a distinct chill. Down near Katherine, temperatures of 10 degrees or less are possible at night in the middle of the dry. Most small creeks and even some of the major ones cease to flow. No river runs at anything but a gentle pace. Most people consider this to be the ideal climate as far as comfort is concerned. Virtually all four wheel drive tracks are open by August.

**August - October: 'Gurrung' - The Hot Dry Weather Season.** Although heavy storms have been known to occur, they are infrequent and local. It generally remains dry but the temperatures begin to build up. Only a few creeks and rivers continue flowing and most of these flow only near springs.

**October - December: 'Gunumeleng' - The Pre-Monsoon Storm Season.** This is what locals call the Build Up. The temperature and humidity gradually build up as the first thunderstorms arrive. Huge flocks of magpie geese and other wildlife congregate around the remaining water. On the average, the weather reaches its most uncomfortable extreme around November. Even those who are fully accustomed to the climate restrict themselves to short, easy walks near water. A walk that would be done in 3 days in June or July stretches into 4 or 5 days as the heat forces people to seek shelter for hours at a time in the middle of the day. More than at any other time of the year, a good knowledge of the available water supplies is absolutely essential.

Seasons in the Kimberley are similar, but the wet season is shorter and hotter while the dry season is cooler and longer.

## Central Australia and the Pilbara

Central Australia and the Pilbara have a very different climate from that further north. The seasons are similar to those in southern Australia. Spring and autumn provide hot days and cool nights. Winter offers mild days and cold nights. Summer is so hot that we do not offer walks at that time. The normally very dry air means that the stars are incredibly clear, more so than almost anywhere else in the world. Daily temperature variations are often 15° to 20° C. Rainfall is fairly evenly dispersed throughout the year. It is, however, highly variable. In some years it may not rain at all. In others there will be floods.

### A Final Note

Averages tell only part of the story. Global warming theories predict that we are likely to see more extremes. In the six years ending with the 1999-2000 wet season, Darwin recorded the four wettest years on record plus the eighth wettest which had more rain days than had ever before been recorded. 1996 was one of the driest years on record in Alice Springs; 2000 was one of the wettest. Extremes like these may simply be random variations. They might, however, be signs of things to come.

### Climate Tables

The tables in this section have been included to give you as complete a picture as possible of the weather conditions you are likely to encounter. Our climate information is based on the Department of Meteorology records in Darwin. These are not always complete. In Alice Springs, Darwin and Kununurra the recording sites have been changed, making recent figures not 100% comparable with the old ones. The longer the records have been kept, the more accurate the long term averages will be.

By examining the charts which follow, you can get a good idea of what to expect at any time of year as well as the likelihood of rain. For example, you can see that in Jabiru in January, the temperature rarely goes over 35°, it almost always does go over 30, it normally only goes down to 24° at night, it usually rains about 2 days out of 3 but it may rain only one day in 2 or almost every day.

**Note.** For all locations, exceptionally heavy rains some years inflate the average rainfall figures. Past records show that total rainfall reaches the "average" less than half the time.

**Darwin** (56 years of records) shows you what you will encounter when you arrive and is included for comparison. As an indication of the incredible variation which is possible over a short distance, during one wet weekend in February 1997, the official Darwin recording station at the airport recorded 194 mm of rain. Less than 5 km away, an official substation showed 298 mm over the same period.

Most of the best bushwalking areas in Kakadu National Park lie on a line between **Katherine** (117 years of records) and **Jabiru** (26 years). The Kakadu climate can, therefore, be taken as an intermediate between them.

The climate in Keep River National Park, the Isdell River area and in most of the places along the Gibb River Road is almost identical to that in **Kununurra** (50 years). Temperatures in Kununurra have been known to reach 36°C or more in every month, 40°C or more in September through April and 44°C or more in October through January.

**Turkey Creek** (32 years) is the closest weather station to the Bungle Bungles.

The **Mitchell Plateau** (17 years) is both cooler and wetter than anywhere else in the area.

**Kalumburu** (53 years) is the weather station closest to Drysdale River National Park.

Alice Springs (56 years) is the only weather station with long term records in the Red Centre. The original Alice Springs weather station was at the post office, a relatively short distance from the current weather station at the airport. (The two stations were both in operation during the period 1941-87.) The total average annual rainfall recorded at the airport was 2% less than at the post office but the average number of rain days was 50% higher. This shows just how much variation is possible in central Australia.

**Wittenoom** (43 years) is typical of the Pilbara areas where we walk.

	Avg Daily Temp		Avg No. Days Over 35°	Lowest Temp	No. Days of Rain			Avg (mm) Rainfall
	Min	Max			Avg.	High	Low	
<b>Darwin</b>	<b>56 years</b>							
January	25	32	0	20	21	29	10	419
February	25	31	0	17	20	26	4	342
March	24	32	0	19	19	26	3	312
April	24	33	1	16	9	20	0	100
May	22	32	0	14	2	11	0	20
June	20	31	0	12	1	5	0	1
July	19	30	0	10	0	3	0	1
August	21	31	0	13	1	3	0	6
September	23	32	2	17	2	7	0	16
October	25	33	2	19	6	18	0	72
November	25	33	2	19	12	20	2	141
December	25	33	1	18	16	23	4	235

<b>Jabiru</b>	<b>26 years</b>							
January	25	34	9	21	22	29	14	347
February	24	33	6	21	21	28	11	332
March	24	33	6	20	20	26	13	318
April	23	34	12	16	7	14	2	66
May	22	33	4	14	2	7	1	11
June	19	31	0	10	0	1	0	1
July	18	32	0	9	0	5	0	3
August	19	34	7	12	0	3	0	4
September	21	36	21	12	1	4	0	9
October	24	38	28	14	3	7	0	27
November	25	37	24	19	12	22	4	158
December	25	35	16	21	16	22	9	211

<b>Katherine</b>	<b>117 years rain</b>		<b>48 years temperature</b>					
January	24	35	17	17	15	26	3	233
February	24	34	13	17	13	26	4	212
March	23	35	14	14	10	23	0	165
April	20	34	10	11	2	10	0	33
May	17	32	1	7	1	8	0	6
June	14	30	0	3	0	4	0	2
July	13	30	0	3	0	3	0	1
August	16	33	4	5	0	3	0	1
September	20	36	20	10	1	7	0	6
October	24	38	29	11	3	13	0	30
November	25	38	27	17	7	17	2	87
December	24	37	25	17	12	22	4	195

	Avg Daily Temp		Avg No. Days Lowest Over 35°	Lowest Temp	No. Days of Rain			Avg (mm) Rainfall
	Min	Max			Avg.	High	Low	
<b>Warmun (Turkey Creek)</b>	<b>32 years</b>							
January	25	37	22	19	14	27	6	170
February	24	36	18	18	12	20	3	152
March	23	36	20	16	10	20	5	125
April	20	35	17	12	3	7	0	17
May	18	32	5	7	1	7	0	10
June	14	30	1	3	1	5	0	3
July	12	29	0	1	1	4	0	6
August	15	32	6	4	0	2	0	1
September	19	36	19	7	1	4	0	6
October	23	39	28	12	4	9	1	21
November	25	39	27	16	7	16	2	60
December	25	39	27	17	9	16	4	86
<b>Mitchell Plateau</b>	<b>17 years</b>							
January	23	33	6	18	20	29	11	394
February	23	32	4	18	20	24	14	345
March	22	33	4	17	18	26	13	303
April	19	33	3	10	6	13	0	41
May	14	32	1	5	2	7	0	25
June	11	30	0	2	1	5	0	5
July	10	30	0	2	0	2	0	6
August	13	33	2	4	0	2	0	2
September	17	35	12	8	2	5	0	12
October	20	36	22	9	5	11	2	52
November	22	36	22	13	11	16	2	128
December	23	35	14	19	14	22	10	186
<b>Kununurra</b>	<b>50 years</b>							
January	25	36	20	14	15	27	8	173
February	24	35	13	16	16	23	9	210
March	24	36	19	13	12	25	3	129
April	21	35	19	10	3	8	0	23
May	18	33	8	8	1	8	0	9
June	16	31	0	6	0	2	0	2
July	14	30	1	4	0	5	0	6
August	16	33	8	3	0	1	0	1
September	20	36	24	11	1	3	0	2
October	23	38	29	12	4	11	0	27
November	25	39	27	15	7	15	1	77
December	25	38	27	14	10	16	5	104

	Avg Daily Temp		Avg No. Days Lowest Over 35°	Lowest Temp	No. Days of Rain			Avg (mm) Rainfall
	Min	Max			Avg.	High	Low	
<b>Alice Springs 56 years</b>								
January	21	36	21	10	5	12	0	43
February	21	35	16	8	5	13	0	41
March	17	33	9	6	3	9	0	33
April	13	28	1	2	2	7	0	16
May	8	23	0	-3	3	10	0	16
June	5	20	0	-5	3	7	0	15
July	4	19	0	-8	3	3	0	14
August	6	22	0	-4	2	8	0	10
September	10	27	1	-1	2	7	0	9
October	15	31	7	1	5	10	0	20
November	18	34	13	4	6	14	0	25
December	20	35	18	10	6	14	0	37
<b>Wittenoom 43 years</b>								
January	26	40	28	17	9	16	3	97
February	25	38	23	15	9	18	0	97
March	24	37	24	13	6	11	1	61
April	21	33	9	11	4	9	0	23
May	16	27	0	6	4	11	0	34
June	13	24	0	1	3	11	0	31
July	11	24	0	2	2	8	0	14
August	13	26	0	3	2	8	0	11
September	17	31	3	7	1	7	0	3
October	20	35	18	7	1	3	0	3
November	24	38	26	12	2	9	0	9
December	25	40	29	17	5	12	0	39
<b>Kalumburu 53 years</b>								
January	25	34	14	21	18	26	8	335
February	24	34	10	14	17	25	4	305
March	24	34	13	14	15	28	6	208
April	21	34	13	0	6	12	0	56
May	18	34	8	7	2	9	0	20
June	15	33	1	2	0	5	0	5
July	14	33	1	0	0	5	0	5
August	16	33	7	4	0	2	0	0
September	19	34	19	8	1	4	0	5
October	22	36	27	11	3	8	0	24
November	25	36	27	18	8	17	1	76
December	25	37	25	18	12	21	7	153

## XI. EQUIPMENT HIRE

Willis's Walkabouts has a limited amount of hire equipment available on a first come, first serve basis. **All damage must be paid for.** Failure to take due care can be very expensive.

Charges are as follows (November 2003). All prices are subject to change without notice.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Minimum Charge (7 days)</u>	<u>Cost per additional day</u>
Tent/Mossie Dome*	\$30-40.00	\$2.00
Backpack	\$20.00	\$1.50
Down Sleeping Bag	\$25-30.00	\$2.00
Silk sleeping bag liner	\$ 4.00	nil
Thermarest (¾ or full)	\$20.00	\$1.00
Foam Sleeping Mat	\$ 4.00	\$ .50
Tent Fly	\$ 5.00	\$ .50
Pack Liner (PVC/nylon)	\$ 7.00	\$ .50
Pack Cover	\$ 7.00	\$ .50
Eating Utensils	\$ 3.00	nil
Gaiters	\$ 5.00	\$ .50

\* **Tents.** The list price is for our better tents (including mossie domes). We also have several older tents which are no longer suitable for use in the wet season. These are available at a discount. We have limited numbers of tents. If you get in late with a tent order during our peak season, you may have no choice as to what is available. First in, first served.

**All tents come with a ground sheet.** This must be used to protect the tent floor from damage. Even so, you must always check for sticks, stones and anything else which might damage the tent before erecting it.

**Pack liners** are either PVC coated nylon or heavy duty PVC.(The latter weigh the least.) They are used to keep items inside your pack dry during heavy rain or when floating down rivers. **Pack covers** are PVC coated nylon. They fit over your pack while you are walking and keep it dry during rain storms. There are only available for hire from December through March. Both work well but **both are easily damaged** if they come in contact with sharp objects. Normal wear and tear is acceptable. Damage caused by sharp objects in your pack or by simple carelessness must be paid for.

**Packs** are available in a number of sizes. Please let us know your height at the time of booking a pack to help us select a pack which will suit your build.

**Gaiters** fit over the top of your boots or shoes and socks. They come up close to knee high and help prevent scratches as well as keeping seeds out of your socks.

**Eating utensils** include bowl, cup and spoon. A plate, knife and/or fork can be provided as well if desired.

No **sleeping bag** will be hired out without a liner. Cotton liners are included in the price of the bag. Lighter weight silk liners cost extra as above.

## XII. WILLIS'S WALKABOUTS CATALOGUE

Willis's Walkabouts can supply a number of books and maps for those wishing more information about the topography, flora or aboriginal art in the area. The maps are listed according to the walks. Prices are subject to change without notice.

**Topographic maps** retail at \$9.25 each. They are available at scales of 1:250 000, 1:100 000 and 1:50 000. The 1:50 000 maps give the best detail but they are not available for some of the areas where we walk. The orthophoto maps in central Australia are aerial photos which have had contour lines and other surface detail drawn over the top. They are not as easy to read as an ordinary topographic map but they are often the best maps available.

Every set of trip notes contains a list of which maps are relevant to that walk or walks.

The **Kimberley** and **Pilbara Tourist Maps** are at a scale of 1: 1 million and give a good overview of those two regions. They retail for \$10.00 each.

**Mosquito Nets.** The only reasonably lightweight mosquito nets we have been able to find a so easy to damage that hiring them is not a viable proposition. We have a limited number of new and used nets for sale at prices ranging from \$8 to \$28. We are happy to repurchase the nets at half price **if** they are still in good condition.

**Lightweight Airbeds.** With care, these airbeds will give long service. Unfortunately, many of those who hired airbeds from us in the past did not take due care, forcing us to spend many hours making repairs. For this reason, we no longer have airbeds for hire. We do, however, have lightweight (800 g or less) backpacking airbeds for sale at \$30 each.

**Powdered Hummous.** Imported from Israel. This is a spread for which you don't need a container. Add water to make an excellent spread for your biscuits. We used to be able to supply this, but haven't found it since 2006. If you find a supplier, please let us know as it was very popular.

## 14. FINAL CHECKLIST

1. Does your pack weigh more than 15 kg or 25% of your body weight? If so, is there anything you can leave out. Remember, you have not yet added your share of the evening meals.
2. Do you have the following:
  - Travel Insurance
  - Pack
  - Tent or mosquito net and/or fly
  - Sleeping bag and/or sheet/sarong
  - A sleeping mat or air bed
  - Eating utensils
  - Two one litre water bottles or the equivalent (4-6 litres for Red Centre trips)
  - Torch
  - Good footwear
  - Hat
  - Personal hygiene and first aid gear
  - Your breakfasts and lunches (unless these are being supplied)
  - Warm clothing (Red Centre and Pilbara trips)
  - Rainwear (Red Centre and Pilbara trips)
3. Have you made sure that you are not trying to make connections on the same day that your trip starts or finishes?
4. Are you sure of your pickup arrangements?
5. Remember, if you are not doing all the sections of a multi-section trip, you will almost certainly have to make your own way to and/or from a pickup point that is not where the trip began. If you are doing only part of a trip or a trip, have you made the necessary arrangements to
  - a) get to the pickup point if you are not doing the first section.
  - b) return to a main centre if you are not doing the last section.
6. If you are hiring equipment, have you arranged to collect it or checked that your guide has it at the park ready for you? If you are passing through Darwin en route to your pickup point, don't forget to check with us for any last minute gear hire details.
7. If you are going to Kakadu and joining a trip already in progress, please pay your own park entry and have your guide reimburse you when you meet, or pick up tickets from our office while you are in town.
8. Have you read this entire booklet carefully.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

If, after reading this booklet, you still have questions, please contact Willis's Walkabouts at the address below.

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MILLNER NT 0810  
Phone: (089) 852134  
Fax: (089) 852355  
Email: [walkabout@bushwalkingholidays.com.au](mailto:walkabout@bushwalkingholidays.com.au)