

Finke Gorge National Park: July 19-28, 2009

Thousands of people visit Central Australia's famous Palm Valley every year. Only a tiny handful take the time to walk more than a couple of kilometres from their vehicles. Still fewer put packs on their backs and walk back in time, away from all signs of our civilisation, back into a landscape which still hints at what the Centre was like long before the present arid conditions developed. Willis's Walkabouts is the only tour operator who will take you off the tracks to places that you can only reach on foot on an overnight walk in this park.

We have a number of choices in the Palm Valley area. Some are day walks which take us through a variety of interesting rock formations. One is a longer loop lasting two or three days. This takes us through the palms and pools of Palm Valley and out into much more open country. From here, we cross to a deep gorge system and work our way back to where we began. It may be necessary to carry water for a day and a half on one part of the trip. Despite the lack of trails, the walking is relatively easy. We will have plenty of time to stop and explore some of the side gorges, climb the hills for the spectacular views and even to enjoy a swim if the weather is warm enough. Unlike most of the relatively permanent pools in central Australia, the shallow spring fed pools along Palm Creek heat up in the sun and are quite pleasant for swimming.

Palm Valley is only a tiny part of Finke Gorge National Park. We see much more as we drive south along the 4WD track which follows the Finke River, stopping here and there to do a number of interesting day walks as we explore the small gorges and waterholes and enjoy the flowers and birds along the way. Three of the many possibilities are a walk along the Finke River, a walk up Deep Creek near Boggy Hole and a walk to Circular Valley.

If we have two vehicles, we may do a two to four day walk along the Finke River between Palm and Ellery Creeks. If not we will walk in from the Ellery Creek end and do a loop along the sandy bed Finke and up into the nearby hills. Waterholes, rugged cliffs, wildlife and spectacular views from the hills make this a particularly interesting and varied walk.

In very dry years, Boggy Hole may be the only waterhole along this section of the Finke. As such it is a refuge for the fish which swim out to repopulate the more ephemeral waterholes in good years. Hidden behind Boggy Hole is Deep Gorge. Our loop walk up the gorge, onto the hills and back into the valley is one of the nicest day walks in the Centre.

From the air, Circular Valley is one of the major landmarks of the region. From the 4WD track, it is nothing. From our campsite, a day walk up to the rim gives one of the most magnificent views in the region.

Our drive along the 4WD track continues past Running Waters, the last of the Finke's major permanent waterholes, to Illumurta Springs.

Note. Although rain is infrequent in the Centre, rains can close the Finke River track for weeks at a time. If the track should happen to be closed, those same rains will have filled every small waterhole in the park allowing us to explore the many fascinating gorges in the northern part of the park which are too dry to visit at other times.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Overall we rate this as level 2.

Climate Level 1. Average daytime max 20°, average nighttime min 4-5°. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely.

Terrain	Level 2. The different walks offer very different terrain. Palm Valley Area. Lots of flat rock for half of the trip. A bit of soft sand and rock hopping along creeks. Finke River walk. Lots of soft sand, some rock hopping and moderately steep climbs. <i>Other walks.</i> A few steep climbs and some rock hopping. Deep Gorge. Lots of boulder scrambling and a very steep climb near the start, easier after that. Done without packs. Circular Valley. Some moderately steep rock hopping up a dry creek combined with some fairly flat walking.
Vegetation	Level 1-2. Based on past experience, the scrub should seldom be a problem. This can, however, change from year to year and there may be some sections of fairly thick scrub or spinifex which will slow our progress. We strongly recommend you bring gaiters.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 2-3. You never need to carry more than 3 days food. You need both a sleeping bag and a tent. Although rain is unlikely, it is possible and if it comes, it will be cold. You need to carry rain gear. The group may need to carry a stove and fuel for some nights. (If conditions are not too dry, small campfires may be permitted.)
Art	Minimal but there are a couple of sites..
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
Swims	Swimming is likely to be possible but very cold at some camp sites.
Lowlights	Tourist crowds at Palm Valley. Long drive back to Alice Springs at the end.
Highlights	Great variety of landscapes and vegetation. Spectacular views.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but you are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Might be possible at Boggy Hole but not recommended.
Map	1:250 000 Henbury.

Notes

This trip costs less than our other trips because we do not provide the transport. You can bring your own vehicle or join in hiring one or more large four wheel drive station wagons. We expect that the cost of hiring one vehicle (up to five passengers) should be between \$1300 and \$1600.

We hired vehicles on the trip shown in our Finke 2008 Photo gallery. We recommend that you look at the gallery before booking. The vehicles are shown in several of the photos. Copy the link below into your browser and you'll go straight to the page.

www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/html/finke08gal.htm

The outline above is subject to change depending on the availability of water and the fitness and the interests of the group. Exceptional rains can make some roads impassable. Exceptionally dry conditions can make some walks almost impossible. Flood waters can deposit or remove sand, completely changing the nature of some camp sites. It is never possible for us to be 100% sure what we will find in a particular place until we get there.

Water supplies are limited. We may find as little as one waterhole per day. In drought conditions, that water may be muddy or green with algae. Boiling makes it drinkable. If you are not prepared to drink this kind of water, this is not the trip for you.

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

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

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

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

Those doing more than one section of the trip will have to carry only what they need for each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks. Limited supplies are available at Kings Canyon between sections.

Central Australian weather is highly variable. Although rain is unlikely, it is possible. At this time of year, normal daytime temperatures reach the mid 20's to low 30's, but extremes can go over 40°C or not get out of the teens. Nighttime temperatures average 10-15°C but can drop below freezing. You must be prepared for anything.

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

The **only** maps available for some of the areas where we will be walking are at a scale of 1:250 000. This scale shows only major features making each trip more exploratory than would otherwise be the case.

Interested in birds? You can download a bird list written by one of our clients on this trip some years ago. Copy the link below into your browser and you'll go straight to the page.
www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/finkwat97_birdlist.pdf

Itinerary: Finke Gorge National Park

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

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

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting at 6.30 p.m., venue to be advised. This meeting is important. If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 8 a.m. pick up from your accommodation if you notified us where you are staying a week or more before departure or if you made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from in front of the Visitor Centre in Gregory Terrace.

Drive to Finke Gorge, begin walk, carrying full packs.
Bush camp.

Day 2–9 Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs on others.
Includes long drives in a 4WD vehicle some days.

Day 10 Finish drive to the main road and return to Alice Springs. Drop off at your accommodation late afternoon.

