



North By NORTHWEST

It doesn't get much better than a trip to the Kimberley.
Here's a taste of what this epic Aussie region can dish up

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA BLOFFWITCH





The Munja Track just screams adventure!

Whether you're a 4WD first timer or a seasoned enthusiast, the Kimberley has

it all. But before you pack your truck and make a beeline for the Gibb River Road like most, read on as there's a stack more to see in this region. The Kimberley is a 4WDer's mecca if you've got an adventurous streak and love a challenge. One thing's for certain, this place is pretty well twice the size of Victoria, so one visit's just not going to be enough.

BROOME

It doesn't matter whether you arrive in the Kimberley from the east or west, you're going to end up in Broome at some stage. Broome is a holiday destination in itself; it's diverse and its got a stack load of things to see and do. Although don't stay for too

long as the dirt tracks will be calling. Refuel, wet your tyres on Cable Beach, and restock your supplies before hitting the dirt.

DAMPIER PENINSULA

There's something special about this Peninsula. Where else do you get a backdrop of rich red cliffs set against pristine white sands that flow into the brightest of blue seas? It's like the colours of the Aussie flag were based on this place.

The Kimberley has some of the best coastline in Australia and you'd be hard pressed to find a bad sunset along here; and who wouldn't want to camp along those high clifftops when you can find a quiet camp and have it all to yourself.

Towards the tip of the Peninsula you reach Kooljaman, where you can lap up some resort style



accommodation if you're craving some mod cons. We prefer their simple beach shelters that overlook the bay. It's a cracking view and one of our Kimberley all-time favourite places.

The east coast of the Peninsula at Cygnet Bay has the oldest pearl farm in Australia. You can't visit here without taking a high speed boat ride to the Sunday Island group of islands to get your blood pumping. With the massive Kimberley tides, it's here where you'll get to experience them first hand as the whirlpools they create chuck you around like you're in a washing machine. It's serious fun.

WINDJANA GORGE & TUNNEL CREEK

These two attractions really need no introduction, you just gotta see them. The almost 100



Everything is bigger in the Kimberley



***IT'S A 4WDER'S MECCA
IF YOU'VE GOT AN
ADVENTUROUS STREAK***



Don't underestimate the terrain out here, be prepared for anything





How's this for a gorge!

metre high walls of Windjana Gorge are something else, and if you haven't seen many freshwater crocs you can get up really close without getting too personal, as it's croc central.

Tunnel Creek is an experience in itself. Grab yourself a good torch and some amphibious shoes and prepare yourself for an epic adventure through this 750 metre limestone tunnel. You'll be wading through water anywhere from ankle to chest height and there's aboriginal art around the place outside if you look hard enough.

GIBB RIVER ROAD

There's no hard and fast rule for where you should start your Gibb River Road trip, so use Derby or Kununurra to restock and refuel before heading out. You can get both fuel and supplies along the Gibb, but Murphy's Law says that whatever it is you'll want, they're not gonna have it. So best to get it beforehand. Derby has a bundle of history and you'll be happy you dropped in a line at the jetty, and the sunsets aren't too shabby either. Kununurra has a bundle of attractions close by and makes a great place to base yourself.

If you've been chafing at the bit to get onto the Gibb River Road, don't be too disheartened when you find the start of the road from both the Kununurra and Derby ends is tarmac for a while. With a little patience, the fun will soon begin when you hit the dirt. Air down and get ready to visit a bucket load of spectacular gorges along this 660 kilometres stretch of road.

The western section of the Gibb will take you through the stunning Napier and King Leopold Ranges and there's a load to see along this bit. The eastern section is just as good as the west with stations like Home Valley and El Questro. At just these two places alone you could easily spend a week. And you can't cross the Pentecost River without taking 'that' photo, even if you have to cross back and forwards a few times to get it right!

Sure you can drive from one end of the Gibb River Road to the other in a couple of days, but why come all this way if you're going to miss out on all the good stuff. Visiting just after the wet as the road opens, the gorges are at their most spectacular

with stacks of wet fun for swimming and water crossings.

MUNJA TRACK

For a serious 4WD adventure that is an absolute playground for an action enthusiast you can't go past the Munja Track. It's insane! Pick up a permit from Mt Elizabeth Station to travel the 225 kilometre track which ends at the coast at Walcott Inlet. In a nutshell, this track's got it all. Your wheels will definitely get wet through the numerous river crossings and you'll be locking those hubs in, switching to low range and rock crawling a plenty as you negotiate those gnarly jump ups - and that's when you've got a track to follow.

But it gets better. There are black soil plains which you'll cross where the mud is thicker than you know what, and you'll experience some jaw dropping scenery and some of the best indigenous art in the Kimberley. Now if that doesn't float ya boat, nothing will. Did someone ask "is there fishing?" You betcha! The inlet fills and almost empties daily, making it a fisho's paradise. Big barra are just



You have to get 'that' photo

hanging out for a bit of rod action. But you'll be up against the local competition as the crocs are cunning. The Munja Track demands respect and it will swallow up the ill-prepared. But when you achieve something like the Munja, it puts you on a high. If you're craving for a hard core track and you've got a week up your sleeve to do it, you just can't go past this one.

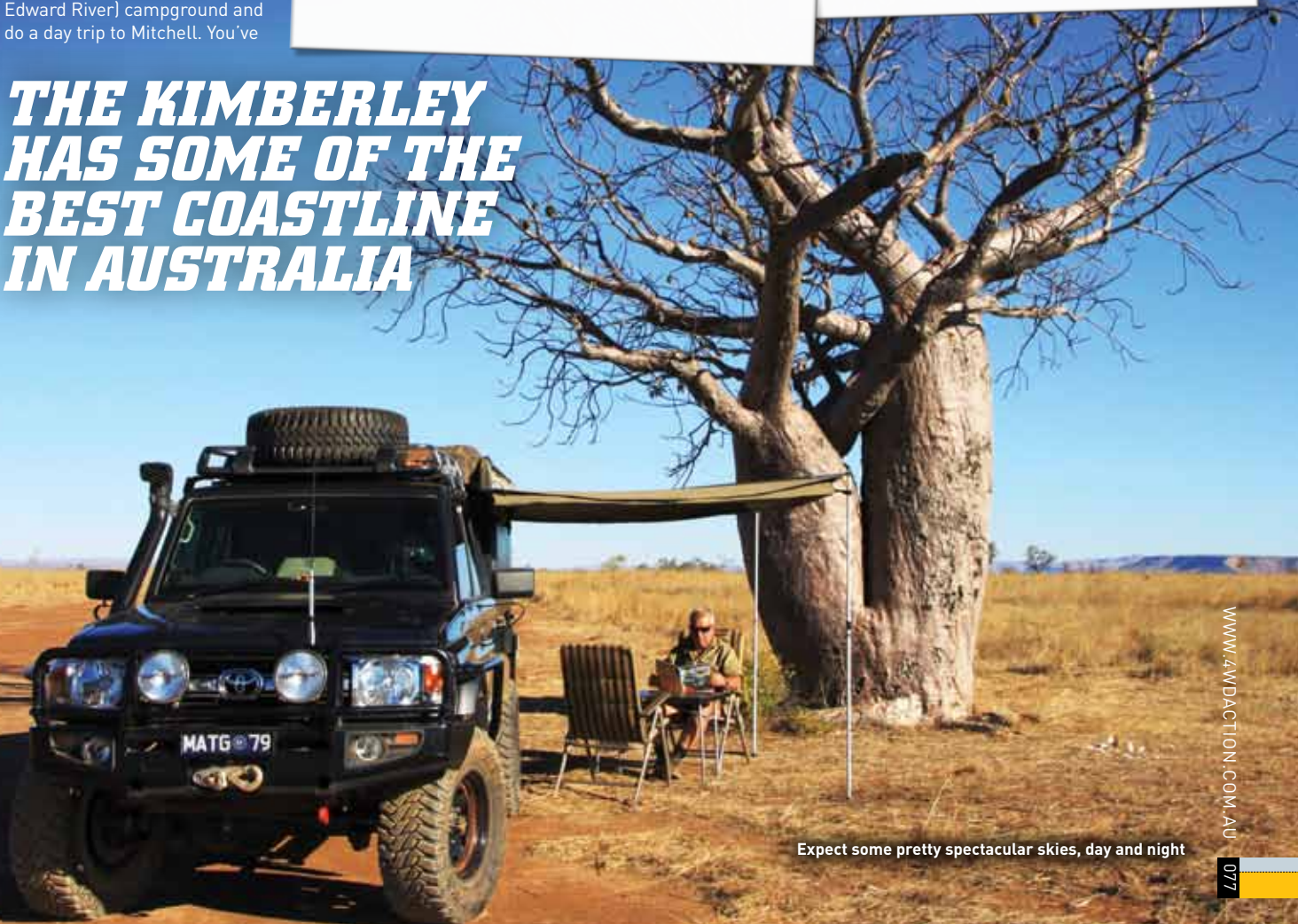
MITCHELL FALLS

Around halfway along the Gibb, turn off and head up to Mitchell Falls and Kalumburu. The Mitchell Falls track loves to kill tyres and trailers, so don't be in any hurry. From the campground, stretch your legs and walk the 2-3 hours to Mitchell Falls. Keep your eye out for some unique aboriginal art and you'll definitely want to cool off at one of those welcoming swimming holes. Chopper flights to and from the falls run on a regular basis, so why not see them from the air on the way back. Mitchell Falls campground can be regularly full so consider basing yourself at Munurru (King Edward River) campground and do a day trip to Mitchell. You've



Be prepared for plenty of red dirt

THE KIMBERLEY HAS SOME OF THE BEST COASTLINE IN AUSTRALIA



Expect some pretty spectacular skies, day and night



also got to check out the sensational indigenous art sites close to Munurru.

KALUMBURU & THE CARSON TRACK

This place is a fisho's mecca. They love it so much here that they almost have to get kicked out before they'll leave. But if you want some 4WD action and you're ready to step things up a little, grab a permit and tackle one of the local tracks. The Carson Track starts 20 kilometres south of Kalumburu and passes through the abandoned Oombulgurri Community finishing up by Home Valley Station. This track

can be a wild ride. There's also the old Pago Mission track which can be tough, that ends close to the pristine beach at Honeymoon Bay.

KARUNJIE TRACK

This is another cracking track that you should have a go at. It's an old stock route that starts out of Wyndham and stops by the Pentecost River. It's not maintained and doesn't get a lot of traffic, but it has some simply amazing scenery as you drive close to the Cockburn Ranges. Track conditions vary – anywhere from a two wheel track and the occasional jump up, to the eerie moonscape looking mudflats and

river drift sand sections. The fishing at the Pentecost River can be awesome, but don't become croc fodder as there's plenty there, so be croc-wise.

PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK

They're pretty strict on only allowing capable 4WDs and single axle trailers in this park as a few water crossings are required along the entry track. As soon as you hit the track from the highway, the scenery is pretty awesome. I'm not sure what happened with Mother Nature when creating the beehive dome formations, but she did a hell of a job. The sun dazzles the rock formations so it's a photographer's paradise. Be prepared to leave your truck and hike to the many gorges or take a helicopter flight for a bird's eye view.

WOLFE CREEK CRATER

Whichever way you get to the Kimberley, take a detour just out of Halls Creek to visit the

magnificent Wolfe Creek Crater. The view from the top of the crater's rim is awesome. If you're feeling energetic, take a walk into this 850m wide, 300,000 year old crater for a completely different perspective.

LAKE ARGYLE

Lake Argyle's only a short hop, skip and jump from Kununurra and deserves a stop. You won't be able to fathom the sheer size of this place from the water's edge, so book yourself on one of the many boat tours. You'll be absolutely blown away with its sheer size once out on the water.

SUMMING UP

It's difficult to find anything negative to write about the Kimberley. It's an adventurer's paradise and your biggest issue is finding the time to fit it all in. There's something special about the place and we put it down to that red dirt. Once it gets in your veins (and your truck, and every nook and cranny of everything else you possess), it sucks you in good 'n' proper, and one visit just isn't enough. We might be biased, but we reckon the Kimberley's got everything!

But you can't be complacent up here. There are rollovers, trucks get broken and tyres get chewed up and spat out. But with preparation and knowing your limits and the capability of your truck you will enjoy what will be the trip of a lifetime.

So if you've been thinking about visiting, remember it's an ever changing place. So think no more, just get out there and do it! *AWD*



Find some shade, relax and take it all in



There's plenty of places to get your truck's feet wet



Check out the view at Wolfe Creek Crater!



FACT FILE

WHERE:

The Kimberley is located in the far north west of Western Australia with general entry points being either Broome or Kununurra. Up the west coast, the Great Northern Highway leads to Broome and Kununurra. If you're coming from the eastern states, travel the Victoria Highway leading out of Katherine to Kununurra. Alternatively, consider some dirt tracks off the Stuart Highway like the Tanami Road and Buchanan Highway.

INFORMATION:

The Kimberley is one of the most iconic Australian destinations with stunning landscapes that lure adventure seekers from everywhere. At over 420,000 square kilometres, the Kimberley offers spectacular scenery, swimming, fishing, bushwalking, Aboriginal rock art, and 4WD adventure.

CAMPING:

Free camping opportunities are available throughout the Kimberley including the Dampier Peninsula, the Gibb River Road, outside Kununurra, Halls Creek, and along the Great Northern Highway. For paid camping, you can't go past Middle Lagoon (Dampier Peninsula), El Questro, Home Valley and Bell Gorge (Gibb River Road) and Munurru (King Edward River). Prices range between \$11 and \$25 per person per night.

FACILITIES & AMENITIES:

Facilities can vary. Middle Lagoon; flush toilets, showers. El Questro; showers, flush toilets, water, washing machines. Home Valley; showers, flush toilets, water, washing machines. Bell Gorge; solar showers, flush toilets, water, firepit. Munurru; eco toilet, firepit. Where fires are permitted bring your own firewood.

WHAT TO TAKE:

Pack according to where you'll travel. If you're planning to be remote, be self-sufficient and take all supplies including water and extra fuel. Take plenty of recovery gear, basic spare parts, additional spare tyres and a repair kit when travelling the rougher tracks. Having an air compressor is also a must.

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL:

Sections of the Kimberley can be travelled all year around. Areas such as the Dampier Peninsula, Gibb River Road and Purnululu National Park are subject to weather conditions and get closed during the wet season. They generally open during May, although the Munja Track generally isn't open until July. Other than the Munja Track, the best time to visit is from May to the end of September when day temperatures are milder. Nights in the Kimberley can get down to single digits during winter months.

FUEL & SUPPLIES:

Fuel and supplies are readily available from the major Kimberley towns. Along the Gibb River Road fuel is available at Imintji (Diesel only), Mt Barnett Roadhouse, El Questro, Drysdale River Station and Kalumburu. LPG is currently available at El Questro only. Basic groceries are available at Imintji, Mt Barnett Roadhouse and Drysdale River Station. Minor mechanical and tyre repairs can be handled at Over the Range Tyres, 50km east of Imintji.

TRIP STANDARD:

Rate the trip A through to E grade, with A meaning only suited to vehicles with an extreme level of off-road modification and E meaning perfectly suited to all types of 4WD vehicles. The Gibb River Road itself is maintained and suited pretty well to all 4WDs. Tracks off the Gibb can vary greatly as individual station tracks are the responsibility of the landowners. The Munja and Carson Tracks could be rated as a B and Karunjie as a C. If tracks are still wet, conditions can be very tough. Vehicles should be modified with off-road tyres and raised suspension, and a winch wouldn't go astray for the remote tracks.

RESTRICTIONS AND PERMITS:

You will require a vehicle access permit and camping permit for your stay at Purnululu, Bells Gorge, Munurru, and Mitchell River. These can be organised at the individual National Parks or at the Parks' offices at Kununurra and Broome or the Halls Creek Visitors Centre. Single axle trailers are only permitted in Purnululu. A permit is required to visit Kalumburu (\$50) which can be organised at the Community Office when you arrive. Also visit the office for a permit to travel the Carson Track. A permit for the Munja Track (\$100) can be arranged at Mt Elizabeth Station.

CONTACTS:

WA PARKS & WILDLIFE

PH: (08) 9168 4200

OVER THE RANGE TYRES

PH: (08) 9191 7887

MT ELIZABETH STATION

PH: (08) 9191 4644

KALUMBURU COMMUNITY OFFICE

PH: (08) 9161 4300

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



This map available
in digital format
hemamaps.com

