

Hot Hot Hot bushwalking in NT.



The sun rises and the rays shine on my face. I wake up and start to prepare my small backpack for 2 days of hiking in the Nitmuluk National Park, just a few kilometers off Katherine in Northern Territory. It's mid-October and it's again a sunny day. I go to the visitor's center to register for the Jatbula – a 66 km trail going from the stunning Katherine gorge to Edith falls – and get info about the track conditions. As I did already many bushwalking tracks in Australia since I arrived, I do think I can make in 2 days but the receptionist tells me it's a hike to be done in 4 days because it's remote, dangerous to go alone and the temperature might rise around 50 degrees in the shade at this time of the year. She calls the ranger and asks me to go the ranger's office. There, the ranger in chief – a big and tall shaped German woman I imagine was called 'Greta' – comes out and starts arguing with me: "People died on this track, it's the warmest period of the year¹, you should not go alone and you tell us you want to do the track in 2 days when people do complete it in 4 days minimum, where do you come from?"

- I honestly say: "Euh, Belgium"

- Ranger: "Are you joking²?"

- Me: "No, but don't worry I have training"

- After 5 minutes of arguing, Ranger: "Well you do it in 3 days 2 nights or you don't go. Besides on the track you have ECDs –Emergency Control Devices- we want you to call us each time you reach one and tell us your position and the amount of water you've left"

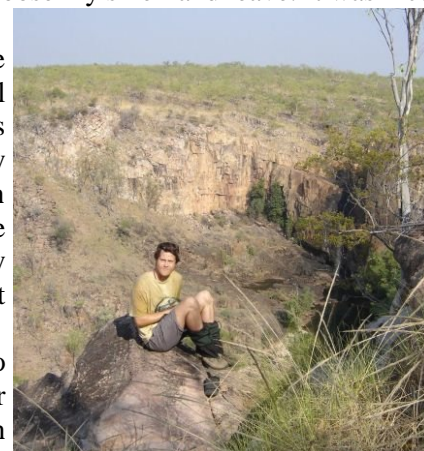
- Me: "Ok, I grab another can of spaghetti"

I started the walk at 9 am and indeed, I never felt so hot in my entire life, 50 degrees in the shade in the early afternoon, hundreds of buzzing flies following me with no escape even after running for 200 meters they were back. Each single step meant a drop of salty sweat and I was drinking around 12 liters per day to kill the thirst. Round noon I find the first campsite and ECD. I did my job properly and the ranger told me to go and stop for the day at the next ECD located at a river stream where I pitched my tent in the shade waiting for the temperature to drop. On the second day I woke up at 6 am and left camp at 6.30, reached the highlight of the track –the amphitheater, an aboriginal art site- where I took a small break in the shade of the cliff. I reached the third ECD at noon and the ranger told me to stop for the day, which



made me angry as I have to deal with the heat and my fly colony. The only way to escape was to dip myself into the dirty pond and apnea for one minute for them to lose my smell and leave. It was nice and warm water with small fishes suck-kissing my legs' skin.

Suddenly, a bigger fish bite me several times quiet painfully like removing hair with tweezers. It took me one hour of several pinches to get it: it wasn't a fish, there were several shrimps biting me in the legs, arms and some managed to enter my underwear and bite my b*lls. I got out of this hell by 7 pm when the sun went down. I now had to fight with the ants that were carrying my cheese out of my backpack, which I left outside my tent. The next morning, I woke up early and finished the walk at 11 am when I realized I didn't see any mammal during 50 hours.



I screamed happily "Humans" to the first tourists who looked at me like I was crazy. I still had to reach my car hitch hiking out of Edith Falls. It took me one hour, then Jason and his 2 friends picked me up and drove me back to the start.



He invited me for supper after I told him my adventures. Jason was working for the Aussie army as "bomb-boy" -like the ballboys in tennis- driving the outback to bring back half blown up bombs for his mates training to bomb targets properly. I left Jason to take Stuart highway down to Alice Springs for new adventures.

More adventures on www.Louis-Philippe-Loncke.com Adventure Photographer

¹ October is the built up, the small season between the dry and the wet, where humidity it's at its maximum and with high temperatures, the feeling of heat can become unbearable.

² Being from Germany, she knows that Belgium is not a country where hiking is an outdoor activity where walking in remote dangerous areas is common. The country is almost half of Tassie, with 10 millions inhabitants. So for a walk of 50 km, you'll cross 2 highways and pass 5 villages in the Belgian Ardennes.